other ways of telling

UnderCurrents

Journal of Critical Environmental Studies Vol.10 $6

UnderCurrents
tenth anniversary issue

Dear Reader,

It was roundabout ten years ago that a wandering band of Environmental Studies graduate students at York University formed the first UnderCurrents Editorial Collective, with the intention of starting a small annual journal to fill a more-or-less unique niche. This journal would attempt to reflect and augment the diversity and philosophy of what remains today a one-of-a-kind interdisciplinary educational institution: the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES) at York University, Canada. In speaking to the interests of the FES community while providing a vehicle for communicating that perspective to a wider audience, this journal would provide an accessible opportunity for writers and artists from the York community and elsewhere to present what is often their first published work, as well as allowing editorial volunteers to try their hands at running a small magazine. Of course, the exact vision of those founding mothers and fathers is impossible to say; what is mentioned here merely represents what has come to be.

Although many of the philosophies informing the approach of the Editorial Collective over these years have remained constant, it is clear from a perusal of back-issues that each year's offering essentially stands on its own -- so different have been the themes, contributions, and editing perspectives which have mingled from time to time. Each theme has crystallized around the interests of volunteer editors, the complimentary and accidental interplay of submissions, and the timeliness of certain subjects of debate. As a result, each individual issue has become something of an anachronistic snapshot; a limited cross-section of the mind-boggling variety of perspectives interacting at any particular time within the environmental studies community.

And things have certainly changed. Long time readers might note with irony that, while early issues of this journal adhered fairly strictly to a mandate of soliciting and publishing articles explicitly designed to critique mainstream Western conceptions of 'nature,' the word 'nature' does not actually occur in the titles of any of this year's featured pieces. Nor do the words 'ecology' or 'environment,' for that matter. While such inconsistency may at first seem, well, inconsistent, this is perhaps seen as a fitting testament to the multiplicity of perspectives which have sought voice between these pages over the last decade. Herein might also be read hints of the shifting emphases which have characterized a decade of critical environmental thought, wherein substantial reconsideration has taken place concerning what may be talked about under the banner of 'environmental,' and wherein the role of the 'cultural' has achieved expanding recognition as a factor to be weighed in conjunction with the 'natural.' And perhaps such changes might lastly be welcomed as an indication of the (if we might be so bold) maturing evolution of an environmental journal seeking to widen its vision by speaking to a fuller readership of interest within interdisciplinary environmental studies.

That said, the members of the UnderCurrents Editorial Collective would like to take this opportunity to pay homage to history by thanking all of those readers, editors, contributors, providers of funding (especially the Faculty of Environmental Studies, GESSA, Graduate Students Association, and everyone who has come out to our fundraisers), purveyors of advice (past editor and present cool-handed signing authority Joanne Nonnekes in particular), technical gurus (Frances Chan, Computer Co-ordinator; FES; Rick Geater, Computer Services, FES; Dr. Grant Sheng of the York Centre for Applied Sustainability (SCAS) Applied Technology Group; Gustavo Moran, YCAS Research Fellow; Neil MacKay, Computer Co-ordinator, Calumet College; Neil Bowen, Student Network Administrator, Calumet College; and Bryan Tinlin FES Alumni), and various other potentates of plentitude who have in tandem allowed us to mess around a little bit and bring you this, the tenth anniversary issue of UnderCurrents, somewhat pretentiously titled "Other Ways of Telling." It is hoped that you will enjoy. Grace.

Yours truly,
The Editorial Collective

Cover illustration by Derek Evernden

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Founded in 1988, *UnderCurrents* is an independent non-profit journal dedicated to the publication of critical work in the broad field of interdisciplinary environmental studies. Produced by graduate students at the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, the journal publishes work by writers from a wide variety of experiential and academic backgrounds. The journal seeks to openly and explicitly provide space for discussions of 'environment' which move beyond the limitations of traditional disciplinary boundaries, taking into account natural, built, social, and organisational factors. *UnderCurrents* is produced annually by an editorial collective, employing principles of non-hierarchical consensus building in the editing and publishing process.

UnderCurrents
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Plastic trees,
Match-box houses painted pink
Horse-drawn carriages
And shiny rubber flowers.
Orange Aliens
Glimpsing through blue glass
down at them Killer whales.
Up high, looking down to the real reality.
Life beneath the plastic surface.
Boardrooms where dolphins meet
Singing 'bout sea-bed politics
and zebra mussel invasions.
The sea is flat! they proclaim
They know what's going on.

Life is here
Life is in water!
The beginning and the end

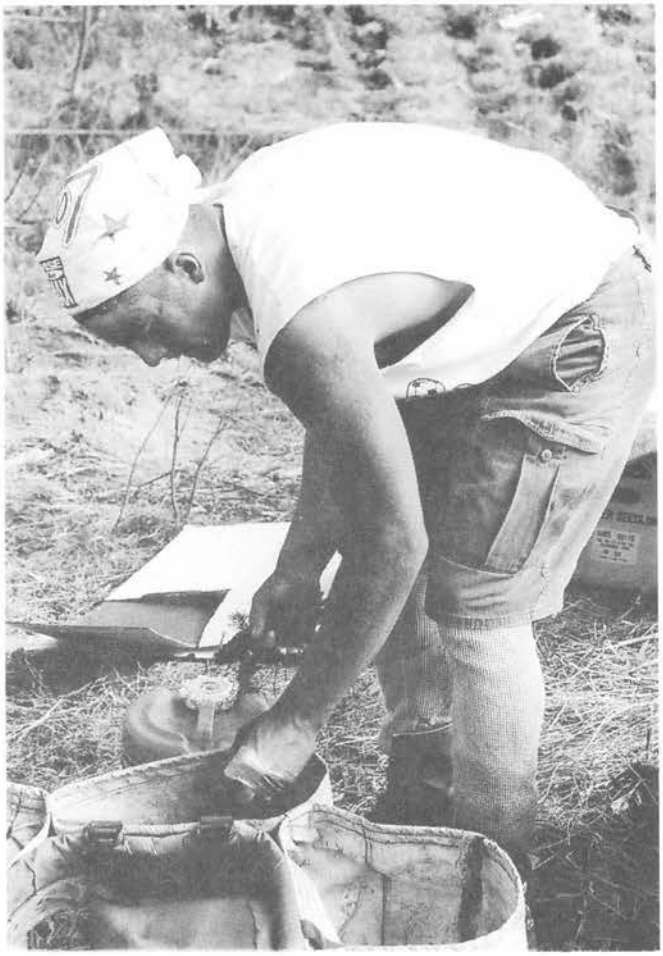
Ask the frogs - kings of land and sea
Travellers.
Life is neither here nor there

"Life is Elsewhere"

June 23, 1997
Gonzales Bay Beach
Victoria, BC

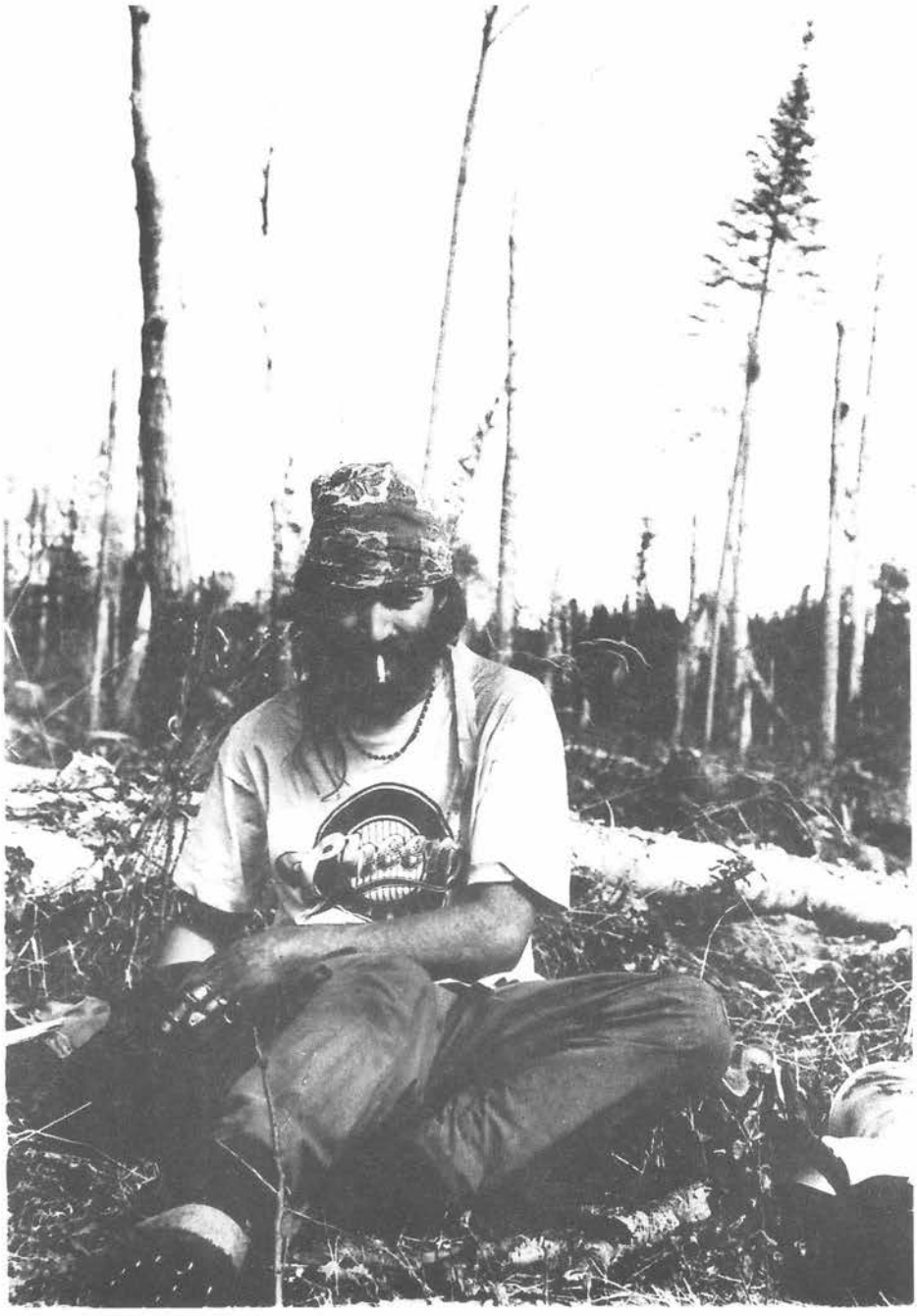
by Lynn Liscio

by Lisa Richardson



At night we sit around the mess tent and even the non-smokers smoke because we need to indulge and the head rush is great after a day of hard work. We share stories. About the land. About the tree prices. About a granite hill which we have to plant tomorrow. About a crazy day a couple of years ago when someone was supposed to plant a quicksand strip out in Alberta. About a woman from BC who planted 10,000 trees in a single day...

We are lured here as though it is the road to the gold mine. Before I planted, stories of highballers pulling in $400-$500 a day resonated louder and longer than those about the bug swarms and sweaty 14 hour days in pesticide clouds. We fill up on dollar signs– I think the management might be slipping greed pills into our oatmeal.



There's a botanist on our crew who keeps a list of the plant species which he sees. Whenever he encounters Labrador Tea, his favourite, he yells out *Leduc Decembers, Leduc Decembers* as though he has bumped into a nursery school friend in the middle of a wasteland. You can hear him from three pieces away.

Cracks around the knuckles are the tree planter's stigmata. It's better to let the skin harden so that the armour coat shields your hands from the soil's acid. I watch some people wrapping their fingers with duct tape during the bus ride to the block every morning. Others holding out a distended ankle or wrist to be taped up like a boxer. The school bus spits out people encasted in silver.

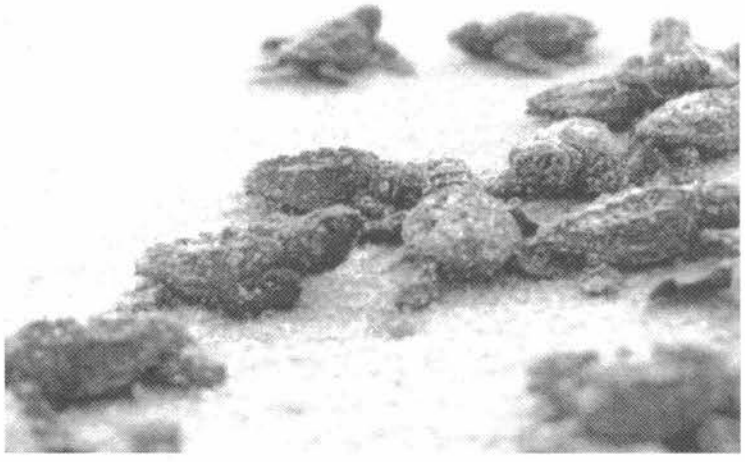
Love Me With Your Own Hands
~ in Brasil ~
by Anuja Mendiratta

Under the sky blue
green wide with banana leaf
papaya fruit dangles
a voluptuous jewel.

You laugh and tease when you catch me
scooping up bits of pineapple
salty fish
rice and beans
coconut cakes
into this hungry mouth
with my agile fingers.
Thinking perhaps
that I do not properly know
how to use my knife with my fork.
Thinking
how easily I disregard
the social conventions by which you choose to live.
Throwing fork and knife
spoon too
out the window
giving in to a child-like impulse
I touch the food as I eat.

Ah...I say
licking a brown finger clean of sauce
can it be so difficult for you to understand
that this *tropical* hot place
does not require such order?
And my *pimenta* hot blood pulses a *samba* ?

Take off your shoes.
Walk barefoot and tai chi-like
over sea-washed rocks
slippery and sharp with barnacles.
Love me like the salty and surprising caress of the wind
blown in by the ocean at dusk.
Wander with me into deep green tangles of vine and ancient fern.
Eat chili hot food with your own able hands.
Let mango yellow drip sticky down
your sun-browned face
for me to lick clean with a passion.
Com paxião.
Live in your beautiful body
and be blessed by these earthy pleasures.
And then
maybe
with the grace of the sun
we could really get it on...

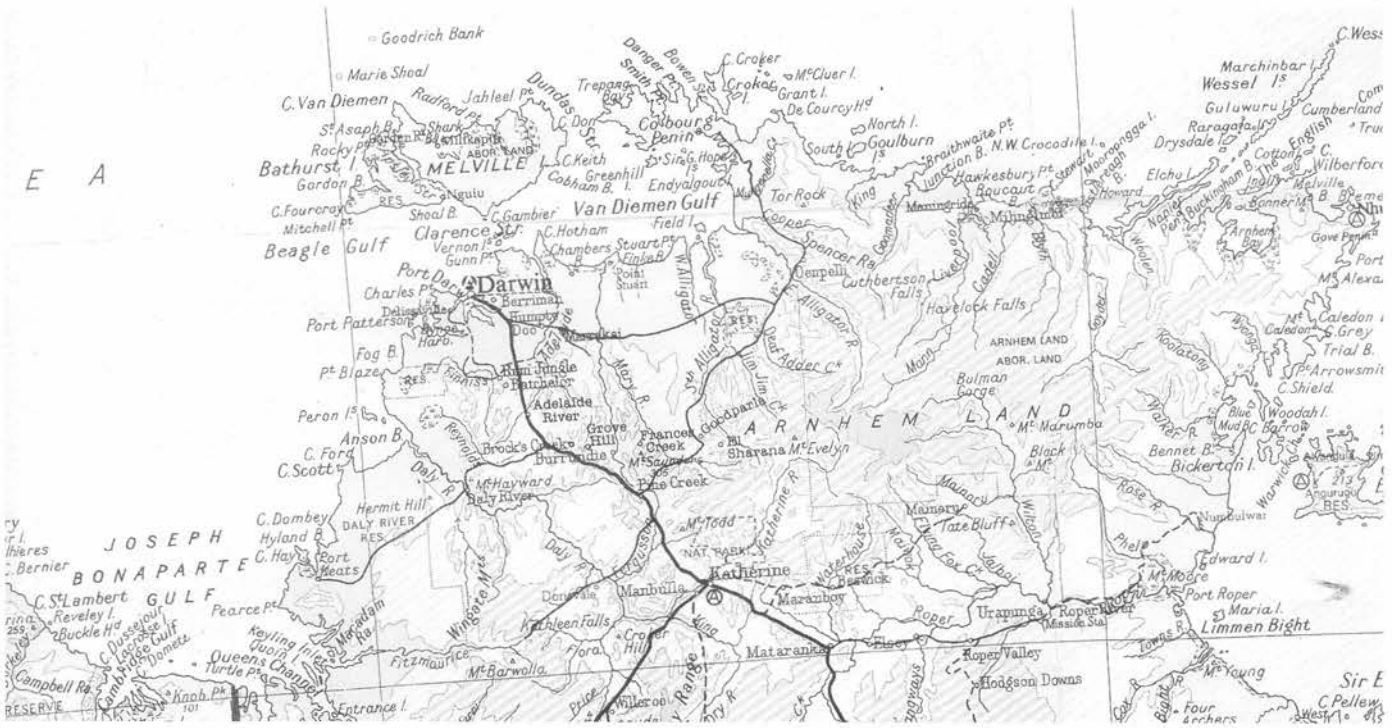


Photograph by Anuja Mendiratta

An Excerpt from Twelve Hours of Light, Twelve of Darkness

by Angus Leech

"It is not down in any map. True places never are."
- Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*



We skittered across landscapes like rocks across pavement, leaving only chalky marks behind to mark our passage, taking with us from each point of contact only a small scar that becomes invisible when wet. Our bodies mixed with places as ground mineral dust. I'm not sure how much I actually remember about that time, how much resides in me as the exaggerated poetry of memory. And I'm not sure why I feel so compelled to set things down now, four years later. As time passes, I seem to lose names and words, retain mostly images; lines of text with less and less connection between them. Fragments ever more difficult to piece into story. Even now, I have to fill in gaps with possible truths, make finer details up, leave some blank for others to imagine. I am afraid that, eventually, months will be rendered to moments only; feelings balanced on the heads of pins. When this happens, it will all be so much a part of me as to have become invisible, and I will have no telling except for motion.

If memory will serve me this once, I recall that it started as a glow on the horizon, and feeling the Toyota flat-bed shake and stutter every time I took a curve. Doc had rolled it a few weeks before, sending it and himself twenty yards down the embankment of an old gold-pit, leaving the yellow edge of the road he had spilled over crumbling like cake. The frame was a little bent, the alignment off, and, driving much too fast along the Arnhem highway toward Darwin, I had to fight the wheel constantly just to keep from drifting into ditches; the bugs of night streaming past the headlights like winged rain, and covering most of the windshield in crusted white and green puss. I remember getting closer, seeing the glow turn from faint yellow to orange in a misty light dispersed along the horizon, refracted in the particulate air of Australia's Northern Territory; an oddly thickened sky. I remem-

ber finally topping a low rise, seeing the deep-red hinge-line of flame only moments ahead, on both sides of the road; watching spindled trees burn motionless like black capillaries under a translucent skin of orange, shedding glowing cinder-antibodies blowing like snow. I recall my head opening wide, the water sloshing in the bowl of my skull steaming off into mist, agitated to whitecaps by air blasting into the cab through the two open windows.

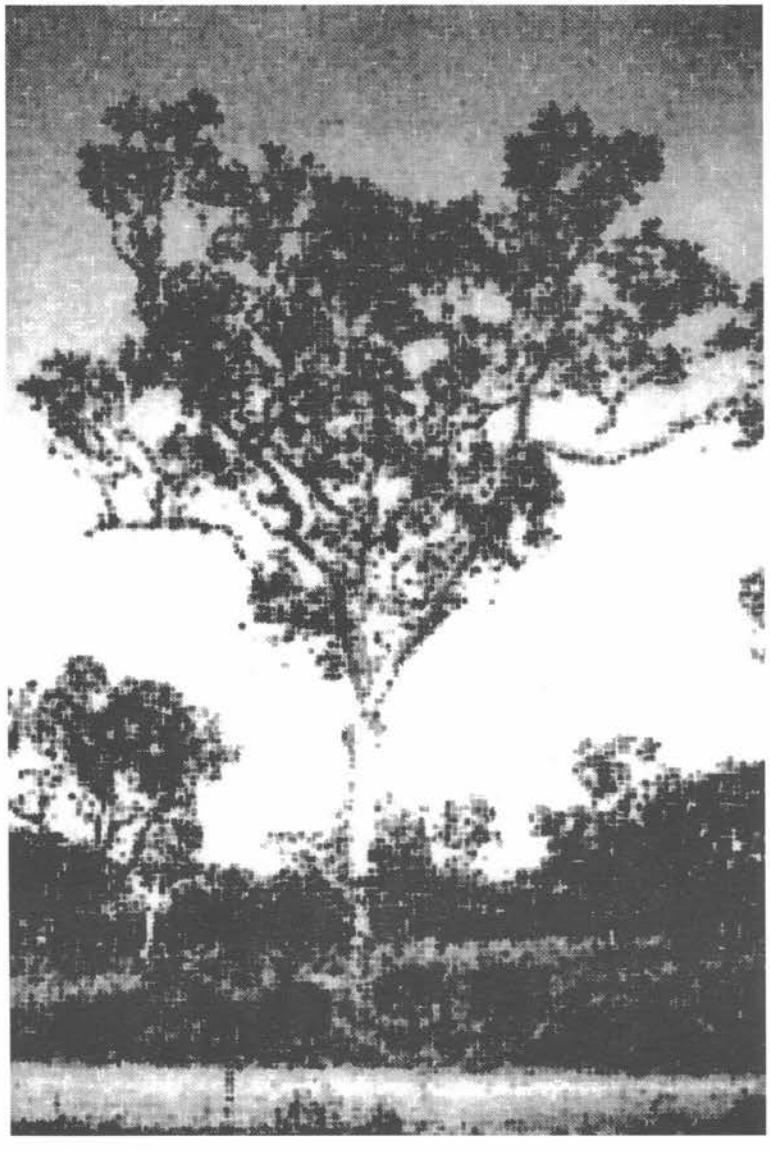
Before I ever went to Australia, a friend of mine who had traveled there explained that most of the time, bush fires just burn the ground, ripping through grasses and undergrowth, but only charring the bases of the trees; leaving them intact, better off than before, with a newly rich soil of ash to mine. That's most of the time. But when there hasn't been a fire in a very long time, things can go differently. Flames fuelled by a glut of tall grasses, dead leaves, detritus, and fallen wood built up over years can reach the canopy, ignite trunks, melt green waxy leaves. Paperbark trees start to atomise, lose their skins, collapse upon hollow centres. And eucalypt gums start to explode. With thick sap in hollow cores heated to the boiling point, they shatter into balls of fire that can travel hundreds of metres, ignite distant patches of savanah, trap fleeing life between advancing dams of flame.

I remember hitting the gas pedal, actually being inside the fire for a long time. The flames were distant, near enough to smell but not feel. The Toyota slipped in like a white minnow, a fluidic bubble. The only sound seemed to be a gentle crackling, a hissing of smoke. There was a different world there, inside the fire, where a different sort of thought would focus itself; I found myself concentrating very peacefully on the flame, hardly watching the road, while my body surely flayed itself with adrenalin. For a time, I entered a place where I had never known water, never held a glass or felt thirst. Later, I found that my hands had been clutched so tightly to the wheel, for so long, they creaked when finally opened.

Bush fires in the Northern Territories are normal, mostly set on purpose, to clear land, to regenerate successional growth. The practice goes back to the Aborigines, who would set fires so that new shoots would grow to attract wildlife. On back roads, miners and ranchers casually drop matches onto lighter fluid squirted from the windows of Landcruisers, speed away without even watching the burn grow in the rearview mirror. It looks so easy, the grass and scrub is so dry in certain seasons, but you have to have the knack. I recall being alone one day and curious, stepping out of my truck, looking up and down the road to make sure no one would come. I lit matches one by one in vain among the tall grass. But they all went out, burned to the nub, and gave forth no conflagration, no cleansing at all.

I saw not another vehicle along that roadway across the gun-powder line, found flecks of white ash which must have flown invisible in the dark air in my hair and clothes upon reaching Darwin. I pulled into town in an anxious frenzy, desperate not to miss the objective that had taken me through so much dark country so fast. Parking the truck, still loaded with supplies and samples, as close as possible, I ran to the air conditioned comfort and pink carnival lights of the Darwin theatre, and stood confused in front of the ticket-wicket. The movie I had come to see, savoured the thought of for a month in the field, had played the previous week, and the alternative cinema festival was wrapping up with a series of local efforts. That night's feature was placeless, coastal; spartan and brooding, shot in black and white. Its soundtrack was almost entirely wind. The title was Broken Highway.

I remember the smell of boiling sap.



Photograph by Susan Hohn

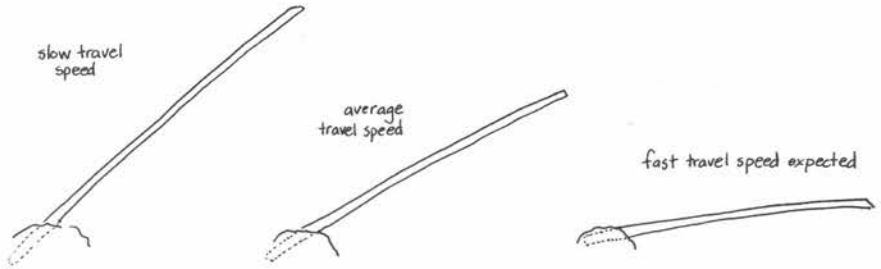
by Zabe MacEachern

Akiagun (Aki-a-gun) is an ancient form of communication adapted for winter travel conditions in the northwoods region. It allows basic messages to be conveyed to travelers using simple, convenient means well adapted to winter weather conditions. Craig MacDonald has written detailed descriptions of Akiagun for the Ministry of Natural Resources, but I learned how to truly hear the messages of Akiagun from two Anishinabe elders who spoke to me about how to track and listen to the land. I had the privilege of working with Robert Wayash and Fred Majors one summer in northwestern Ontario. In the winter of 1998, Robert Wayash passed away during an ice travel accident. During the night of his wake, I felt like I was continually being asked to write about Akiagun; to write about it in the way Robert had explained it to me. Below I try to honor the trapping and hunting skills of Robert Wayash by sharing some of the reading skills he shared with me. Of course, Robert might have just referred to all of this knowledge as common sense in the bush—listening to the tracks and tracking knowledge.

On frozen winter lakes, paper messages are hard to write with un-mitted shivering fingers, not to mention frozen ball point pens. Letters carved in the snow are quickly buried and easily covered over by drifting snow. On the other hand, Akiagun is readily seen from a distance on a lake, lasts months (yet is organic and decomposable), and can be quickly and easily formed using just a knife or hatchet. The messages of Akiagun are placed on the main traveled routes of winter snowshoe trails and convey the fundamental messages of winter travel communication.

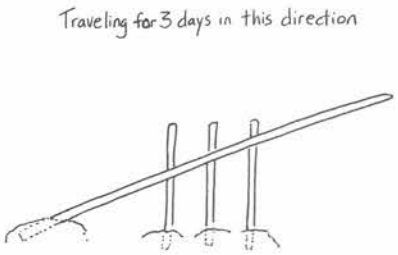
To most people who are accustomed to a phonetic alphabet, the signs and symbols of Akiagun may seem complex and require memorization. But Akiagun messages were once 'heard' because they were 'felt' by an aware winter traveler. Akiagun is heard when the simple representations used in its telling resonate with a personal feeling. For instance:

Artwork by Zabe MacEachern



The direction and speed of travel is quickly and easily read in Akiagun. A stick placed in the snow points in the direction of travel. The stick is always placed and read in the snow from the direction it grows, base to tip. The angle at which the stick is placed in the snow indicates the speed of travel. An expected slow speed of travel due to slushy conditions, a heavy load to be hauled, or a chosen easy pace due to side hunting forages, can be indicated by a stick angled up high as if travel progress is similar to the slow climbing of a hill. A fast rate of travel is indicated by a low angled stick reminiscent of the quicker travel speeds obtained on a smooth, flat terrain.

Akiagun originated in a time before watches and clocks, so the sun was a more frequently used timepiece. Anishinabe children for example, played games which involved the keeping of time. They simply placed a stick vertically in the ground and laid another flat so that the first stick's shadow would match the stick on the ground when the designated time had passed. Like sun dials, watching the shadow move from one side of a stick to the other side represents a period of sunlight occurring during one day. In Akiagun, each upright stick represents the distance that could be traveled during one winter's day of light.



In Akiagun, all the activities of camp life are represented in one simple feature. Setting up a permanent winter camp which will be used for some time involves the act of gathering, preparing, and making camp. Firewood collection and shelter crafting are two basic activities necessary at any camp. The simple act of gathering and attaching some sticks to the top of a vertical stick (used to represent days traveled) tells the distance from a permanent camp.

In Roman times tree trunks used as pillars were purposely turned upside down because people believed this would inhibit the tree's spirit from re-rooting in the building, causing structural damage. In the Anishinabe culture turning a tree upside down is considered disrespectful to the trees. As a result, when trees are cut down for lumber their bottom ends are marked so that after sawing, the lumber can be placed in a structure with its correct end up. As every tree planter knows, only a few minutes of a tree's roots exposed to air can easily kill a plant. To a winter traveler on a frozen lake a tree placed on the ice upside down can be quickly noticed as 'unnatural' and 'disrespectful'. Such a sign draws attention from the eyes used to seeking and noticing the messages given by subtle features of a landscape. It can be heard to say 'something very unfortunate must have happened for someone to have created such a sign'. An evergreen tree placed upside down means that a death has occurred.

Hunters are often well aware of the availability of food resources for other animals. Deer or moose usually graze by eating and moving continually, taking only a few bites from each bush or tree unless the winter snow conditions are harsh and travel is impeded, difficult, or confined. In such cases, a shoreline may be heavily grazed as a hoofed animal seeks to conserve energy by traveling little. Heavily grazed shorelines are like a track left on the land by a harsh winter. Snowshoe travelers may be eating the meat of deer and rabbit, but this meat was created by the grazing of deer and rabbit on evergreens and buds. Thus to a hunter a thick, densely branched evergreen tree placed next to a sign for where a camp is means their is plenty of food available and all is well. In the Anishinabe culture, it is likened to an open door policy, inviting passers-by to visit, share stories, and feast upon the offerings from the land. A tree which looks heavily grazed, because a traveler has removed most of the limbs, imitates an animal confined to an overgrazed area. Hunger and starvation may be occurring in the camp near this sign, beckoning those with food to come and share. A dead tree indicates no food and starvation — death may be coming.

Evergreen trees with broken dangling branches bent upwards, or only removed from one side, indicate that there is an injury or someone is too ill to travel. In Akiagun a very simple yet beautiful representation occurs; the health of a person is told by comparing them to the health of a tree.

While a phonetic alphabet, such as used in the English language, uses abstract symbols in the form of letters to represent sounds, the messages sent through Akiagun seem only one step removed from the winter landscape they are written upon. They are not based upon a representation of a representation of a representation (as a letter symbol is for a sound written on a page, which links it to a syllable, which forms part of a word, which may have numerous definitions in various distant contexts). Reading Akiagun is like tracking; it conveys the messages of how the two footed creatures are living upon the land. To hear the messages of Akiagun, one must have some understanding of the stories told by past generations, stories which serve as a guide for a traveler's sense of awareness and inform her of the subtleties of the land in winter. To this knowledge the present context of a message must be added. The past and present are both necessary to hear Akiagun.

Unlike a text written on pages created from the trees of one region, and possibly conveying a message about the trees in another region, Akiagun is always dependent upon the local winter context. It cannot be removed from the snowy terrain it is written upon. Akiagun does not make sense in the rain forest. It is designed for northwoods travelers, those who have journeyed far on snowshoes. In the spring, Akiagun melts into the depths of lakes and the ancient time of passage. The survival of Akiagun is dependent upon winter travelers in the northwoods who remember how to hear the voice of the snowy terrain, seek the wood from the local forest, remain aware of the messages told in winters' tales, and choose to use this ancient form of telling.

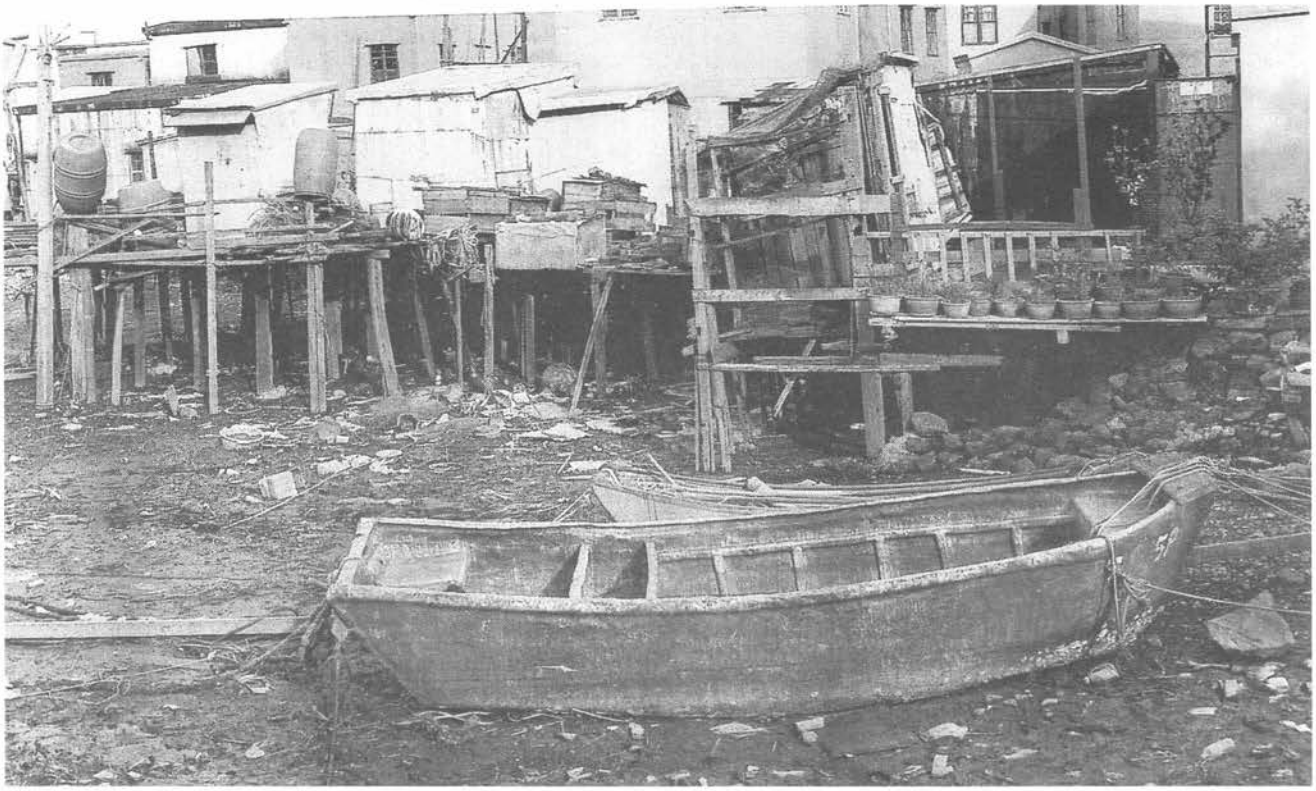
* Notes:

Photographs of Akiagun, and a reference to it in a historical travel journal, is available in the first edition of *Needle to the North*, by Arthur Twoney, Ottawa, Oberon Press 1942.

Macdonald, Craig. AKI-A-GUN, in Nastawgan 1985 #3 pg. 10-12.

Floating Home

by Emily Chan



July, 1994
Tai O, Hong Kong

About the photo: Tai O, an island near Hong Kong is well-known for it's local production of salted fish. Most of the village sits three feet above water - which is hidden by a coat of raw sewage... Is the boat floating? The potted plants keep the peace awesome.

Emily Chan

Telling in Silence

by Stephanie MacLaren

I want to tell you my story.
Pass breath through my lips and weave a sorted spell.
Spelling out the space between us.
Breath from the bones of memory bearing witness to my soul.

So I step up and stand naked in the center,
Fumbling for the path of words that have been laid out for me.
But the words do not betray the story....not mine.
Do they yours?

The words bumble around my lips and tongue.
Eschewing the profundities known to all that have gone before me.
Making known all that has been told to me,
Yet holding no particular allegiance to form least of all to me.

Bearing no resemblance to the hot screams of anguish so necessary in their formation,
Cool words can speak only to the fiction of man.
Wiping clean the dense bush with the scythe of righteous truth,
They would have me pruned.

So I will part with the words.
Breathing them out to the space between us as my sacrifice to you.
Leaving them wanting for your sensing
Where they will dance and mingle with the web of your essence

No longer do they witness the truth of my intent.
Now they are mere flaccid reminders of a once meaningful existence.
Taken up by your story,
They bear witness more to you than anything I had to offer.

My truth is in my silence.
Words swimming, circling, claiming and running.
My words in my silence.
Bearing witness to my soul from which they came.

The truth is in the being not the telling.
Dwelling in the tender clashes of words that make a story lived.
I'll speak no more with their cool words,
But tell my story with the hot passionate words of silence.

Photograph by Mark Haslam

Photograph by Emma Rhodes

Gabriel's Story

by Ian MacRae

I once lived for a time abroad; upon my return to Canada, I was filled with the deep solitude and sense of loss of one who is shorn from language, from culture and place, from familiar ways of living and of perceiving time. A peculiar homecoming: the thrill of arrival, compounded by the warmth of return, pierced by arrows of longing that rove my heart with a nostalgia for remembered dreams. Slowly, of course, this melancholia faded (for me, a passing phantasm: I had returned home, not left it), as new dreams and stories replaced ones that with time—but only with time—became old. I was fortunate one night, sitting alone in a nearly empty, worn-down Toronto movie theatre, awaiting a tattered screening of *Il Postino*, to meet a well-weathered, amicable old Spanish-speaking man; we have gone for many coffees and strolls through parks since, becoming fast friends. This, more or less, is his story—as told by him—in the music of his Colombian Castellano; as translated and transcribed by me, an impoverished (but not poor), starving, *implicated* environmental studies student—the one he has shared with me over this last half year. It is the tale of our culture as told in language, of two great "ruptures" in the European linguistic-cultural formation—the second of which cannot be separated from the inception of the novel. More than anything else, this subject—the novel—(and its spirits of ambiguity, complexity and humour, of scandal and myth, contemplation and time), is the still centre around which, as I was to find out much, much later, all of his words revolve.

In my friend's spirit, with his permission, and without the slightest pretense of effecting the integrity and strength of his conversation, I hope here to share some of my fortune with you.

I will start at the beginning: at the beginning that isn't one. Months after we met, as we walked through Christie Pits one winter evening, the mist of our breathing heavy and still in the cold, crystalline air, I asked what I felt was the most basic of questions: the one I still couldn't understand, "Why—or perhaps better yet, how—can the trace of language tell the story of culture?"

"If each language is a 'world view,' a partial, incomplete, yet powerful and pervasive way of conceiving 'world,' a way of thinking and feeling, a vision of the world that is *other*," he told me, "then by contemplating our own language-as-cultural articulation, as (partial, incomplete) articulation of our collective cultural consciousness, then we might learn many things about our past; a past which, in turn, when brought into the present, has become our selves. Or at least a light to shine on time. More particularly, and of interest to you, in such a way we might learn of human relationships with the non-human other; those relationships which many of your 'enviro-colleagues' seem to see crumbling around their outstretched arms, to dust."

His words that night sliced the still air like ice; two of his phrases stand clear in my mind still, etched as if into glass: "We can't use our minds at full capacity unless we have some idea of how much we're thinking is really thought, and how much is just familiar words running along their own familiar tracks." And then, of poetry, "A poem is as neural as love; the rut of rhythm that veers the mind."[1]

In Kos Diner, on College near Bathurst, where we used to go for coffee after my sessions at U of T's Robarts Library, I would tell him about the environmental "movement", about one of its accompanying philosophies, sometimes called environmental thought, and about the onslaught of fatality which pervades certain aspects of this field. Initially, at least, I did most of the talking, while the old man just sat there, his big bull's chest cloaked in a baggy tweed jacket, elbows propped on table, a shock of salt-and-pepper hair flecking flourescent shadows across the bar. Eyes opaque and darting he contemplated my words, sipped his caffeine, and slowly revealed himself to me as a man of masks. (Instead of Hermes, Giambattista, Franz—these among his many guises—we will use his real name here, Gabriel.) And so, oddly (fittingly?) enough, Gabriel's story begins (again) with an amorphism, a spiritual identity, an illusive mask that is at the same time a real face: "European." An identity, he told me, which extends beyond geographical Europe (to the Americas, for instance, including Canada), and was born with ancient Greek philosophy.[2]

"Are there things characteristic of this identity?" I asked one stark, uneasy November evening, sitting across the formica-topped diner table from him, lighting (another) cigarette in the cold, abrasive light.

Fondling his mug like a long-lost lover, his fingers mashed and stumpy against the yellow, glinting enamel, Gabriel pulled a favourite reference from his bag of literary tricks: Edmund Husserl, the phenomenologist, and his celebrated 1935 lectures on the Crisis of European Humanity.[3] "In Husserl's view," Gabriel replied, "this Greek philosophy, for the first time in history, apprehended the world (the world as a whole) as a question to be answered. It interrogated the world not in order to satisfy this or that practical need but

Photographs by Christine Beevis

because 'the passion to know had seized mankind.'"[4]

Unfurling my hair from its ponytail, I nodded thoughtfully in agreement: this is part of the story I had been taught at FES (Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University), this is the "passion" as the seed that flowered into contemporary science, technology, objectivity ... loss of ... most things of value, I guess, (our rhythms, our biodiversity, our selves, etc.): the epic tragedy that is this Ecological Present, et cetera. A seed whose fruit we have eaten, is inside us, and which has poisoned our soul.

At the same time as he articulated the mythos of 'European' or North American settler culture, there was a notion to which Gabriel always returned: "This is not to negate those American cultures that were here long before our hemisphere's two continents were given their one current name (after an Italian sailor, Amerigo Vespucci) — American cultures, languages, *visions* of world that are, in many cases, still existent, in changeable, changing forms. This, rather, is to name, recognize, criticize,[5] and so perhaps transfigure[6] the present (ecological) moment." This is to state a simple, almost too-obvious truth: "*the overriding contemporary Canadian cultural narratives are European,*" he told me. "Distinctive, heterogenous, *becoming* narratives, certainly, and moving more towards Other narratives every day, especially in the urban centres, but with our languages and systems of law and representative democracy [Gk. *demokratia* < *demos* people + *krateein* rule), with our plastic arts, poetry, the novel and the university, we (as descendents of settlers) are in many ways so much water from the well of this Greek past."[7]

"Isn't this the tyrant of History that shackles us, that limits our futures by over-determining our pasts?" I snap back, adamant and angry; the despots of caffeine and nicotine have enslaved my veins. "Aren't we more than the sum of past mythologies? If not, aren't we then destined only to imitate, to play out the string of an inauthentic existence?"

I remember that instant in its entirety, as if in my memory there sits a speaking mirror. Gabriel, waiting, allows a calming moment to transpire, then soothes me with—of all things—*time*: "The past and the future exist precisely, precisely *now*," he says, slowly, carefully, "in the absolute present, the only fullness in time. Where we imagine; when we remember; where our relationships with and images of past and present and otherness exist. The absolute present is the moment of creation, of memory and imagination, of remembered pasts and imagined futures; of reading, writing, and of change. The present is where the two directions of time—the past and the future—converge. The diachronic and synchronic: the parallel and complementary impulses that obsess poets and set the mythological stage upon which we play out our lives.

"These two attitudes intersect and bifurcate, converge and separate again to form the living fabric that is our culture, our literature." He pauses, breathing deeply. "This, the moment, and these, the impulses, of culture: dynamic, living; these also the times of the novel. Our imitation is authentic. And incomplete."[8]

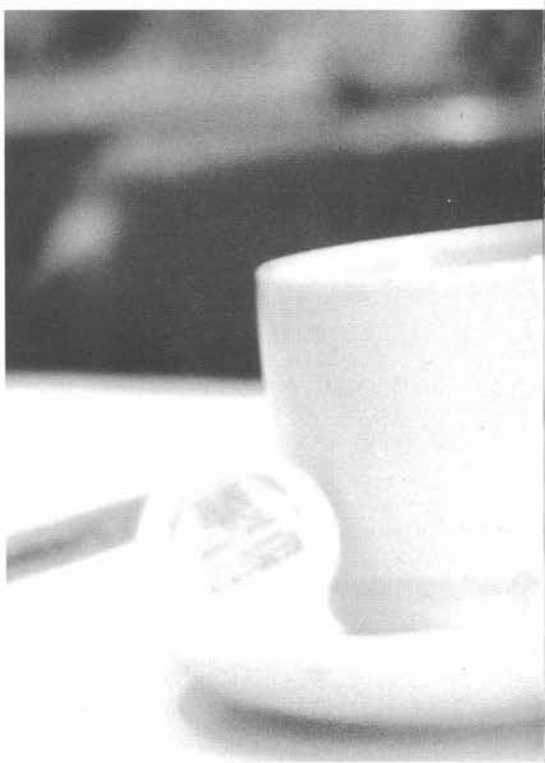
I dare to summarize: Ancient Greece (language and culture), later conjoined with Christianity's mythological universe (children of a book, we are: the Bible), for whatever we think of it all, is an irrevocable—Gabriel says eternal—*presence* in our (European, Canadian) present.

He liked to make this point with an emphatic pound on the formica table, and a quotation from Octavio Paz:

> *what happened did not take place*
> *but is taking place*
> *and silently empties*
> *into another moment that vanishes:*

And so we can see: much of what I transcribe and translate here is one man's personal testimony; it may well have no more value than that. A series of reflections, none of which can be distilled to a systemic theory.

Begrudgingly, over a period of long, cold wintry months, I came to accept Gabriel's perspective. Why, I wonder, looking back now, trying to make some sense of it all, did I take so long? Because, I have come to believe, mine being an "I" obliquely associated to "environmental studies," this "I" was situated in a narrative or mythological framework which tended to see European social-cultural things as not going so well; and so "I" was oriented primarily, eternally, vindictively and angrily and always towards change, resistance, *paradigm* (that ridiculous word) shifts: even, at the ungodly extreme ... revolution. Hence, as perhaps you can well imagine, my angry recoil from Gabriel's long-term view; such deep cultural roots (traced further back still, to North Africa, to Babylonia, and further forward, to Rome, to Islam, to ...) seemed to preclude transformation, change, salvation: my environmental idols. And yet at long last I acquiesced, my petty ideologies beaten down by the stern hand of time—then parried with a thrust of my own: "What of this Greek language/culture/world?" I asked, "What does it tell us about us?"



"Long ago," replied Gabriel, "before this Greek philosophy was even articulated, and in a land far far away, these people who became the deepest root of our past lived in an animate, mimetic, spirit-filled cosmos. Polytheism; a *pre*-literate (not *il*-literate) orality; a human consciousness embedded in a breathing, speaking, sensuous world— from which individual human identities could scarcely be dissociated: these were characteristic of a *poetic* cultural mode, of a *metaphoric* linguistic style. Within the language, the subject and the object were not separate, but rather were linked by a shared energy or power. To sound a name was to evoke potential magic: a word was capable of summoning forces, powers, in the ambient, surrounding world. The mind, and world, as represented in (and articulated by) language, were linked."[9]

"And when you are linked to the trees," Gabriel told me, "when your connection to the life-world out there, which is real and lived and true, is conceptualized (spoken) as real and lived and true, you will not indiscriminately cut down those trees."

"Three points," he said, as I scribed furiously in Spanish: "Although this poetic or metaphoric linguistic-cultural formation long ago ceased being eminent in the 'European' past, it lies there still, here still, in the present, not dominant, but also not dormant; today, everyday, always, the past is taking place in the present, breathed into life by poets, novelists, readers, all speakers: by all of us. All language, evoking the imaginative connection between name and thing, between speaker's consciousness and the non-human world, is metaphoric.

"Nor is this poetic modality in the absolute, 'global' past: cultures and languages and consciousnesses like these of course still exist, ascendant in their own realms.

"The only universality is plurality. Homogeneity means no escape for anyone, anywhere; homogeneity means death. Literature, poetry—according to a critic of your own, Northrop Frye—restores and maintains the metaphoric use of language, our own metaphoric past: our diversity that is plurality that is life.

"It is not too far a stretch," Gabriel insisted, seeing incredulity over his last statement spreading like an untold secret across my eyes: "Without literature, we die. The novel is a way of being free."[10]

Here, because of time - that great tyrant: o enemy of poets!—I am forced to condense Gabriel's story. After the poetic linguistic-cultural modality, he tells me, a long series of changes take place, transitions marked by long ebbs, flows, and two great apogees, peaks, or "*ruptures*" in European culture. Changes, expressed with and recursively related to language, which are inextricably bound to writing, and therefore the alphabet. And so he asked himself the question I could not yet conceive: "From where, then, the alphabet?"

Systems of pictographic representation were invented in China, Mesoamerica, and Asia (think Egyptian hieroglyphs), before 3000 BCE, in which the symbol evoked the image of the signified thing. (In the Chinese, for example, which maintains a pictographic system, "east" is signified by a stylized image (pictograph) of a sun behind a tree.) These systems also included the *rebus*—verbal puns for concepts for which no ready visual equivalent was available, (e.g. belief, represented by symbols for "bee" and "leaf"). These are *phoenetic* scripts, in which what was transcribed in symbol echoed the *sound* of the thing named; with these inventions, *writing* came into being. And along with it, a shift in the human consciousness, from the life-world "out-there," to a greater emphasis on human-made, externalized symbols.

A limiting factor: the world is complex, and phoenetic scripts soon encompassed copious symbols; (in China,[11] G. told me, a 1716 dictionary lists 40,545 written characters). This, in turn, made them difficult to learn and teach, restricting their usage to that of select scribe-castes.[12]

The Chinese is not the European past, however, or only tangentially so; in our line (that is far from straight) Hebrew scribes invented a remarkable new, simplified semaphoric system around 1500 BCE, designing 22 pictographic or *rebus*-style symbols to reflect the 22 verbal, consonantal sounds they had identified. The first character, the Aleph, was a stylized "A," representing an ox-head with horns: the Aleph was the word for "ox." The second character was the Beth, the system became known as the *Aleph-Beth* ... [our own A, B, alphabet ... the past still in the present]. Virtually every known alphabet stems from this innovation.

The Phoenicians adopted the system, and brought it, along with dates and palm oil, to cultures around the Mediterranean, including Greece. Something essential was involved here: translation. The Hebrew symbols were modified, remaining clearly discernible in their new context, but their pictographic or visually symbolic link to the natural world (and to/within the speaker's consciousness) was lost. "A" was no longer "ox." The mouth went more directly to the name, no longer passing as *essentially* through the vessel of the thing. This is the story of our language, a story of translation and essential connections lost, of fitful movement away, always away from any energetic connection between word and thing.

We were to meet at Kos one cold January evening. I was late; Gabriel awaited me in a side booth, barrel-chest puffed like a peacock's, elbows almost worn through on his tweed jacket, visibly perturbed. His wife was ill; she had never fully adjusted to their exile in Canada; he feared a harsh winter might be her last. (School teachers and petroleum union-organizers in Barrancabermeja, along the Rio Magdalena, they had been forced to flee Colombia during the bloody prelude to Samper's 1994 election). I sat down, conscious of Gabriel's eyes staring through me over the formica's burnished glare; I saw his stumps-of-fingers clutching his coffee mug, greedily soaking in its heat; his nose white and stuck to his face like a squashed cauliflower (a result of injury, he never told me how, why?). Eyes black and sharp as swords, opaque and impenetrable as mirrors, he attacked: "My words are momentary. Change never is. Only its apogees—those moments we mask with names—appear to be. In every man are joined all past ages, and the inertia, the errors, the passions, the urgencies of our time, the swift course of history."[13]

He spat out the words of his roaring for hours, agitated and distrurbingly, uncharacteristically, monologically poetic. Unable to get in an edge-wise word, as if in an FES lecture, I nodded into my cup; an hour or so later, coming to, I heard him say: "Initially in Greece the alphabet was an unwanted interloper. Around 800 BCE *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*—long, oral narratives of a world in which embedded in the natural landscape are signs, omens, guides to instruct human behaviour—were transcribed. The written form was at first fragmented and aphoristic: our contemporary prose is a late development; the way we now *speak*, our oral language, is itself dependent upon a *written* verbal form. With writing, the space between name and thing slashed open. The first histories (of Herodutus) were written; the individual (and her sense of a place in history) was dissociated from cyclical being-in-time: a space (dis-embeddedness) between human and "world," as represented in language; a tearing open of time as accelerated, augmented, enhanced in reciprocal relation with writing. Specifically, with the powers of reflection, the ability to separate one's thoughts from one's body and then look back on them, outside yourself, reified; to have frozen time and rendered it separate, out there, back there, external, separate: which is at one and the same time the text's liberating dream and imprisoning curse."

Coming to, I breathed deeply, trying to shake the shrouds of eco-doom from my skull; these meetings were beginning to exhaust me. Too much philosophy; not enough phun. Sipping my coffee, glancing at the door (for what? for whom?), I tried (with the pause of time) to stay his torrent of words. He flowed on, relentless:

"Then came Socrates (469?-399 BCE): oriented more toward the verbal, perhaps able to write little more than his name; followed by his student-disciple Plato (428-348 BCE), tending more towards the written; the richness of their works (a fresh world, seen from new, post-rupture perspectives) and their significant linguistic differences signifies the apogee of our first rupture: from the poetic to an analogic; from a world and language 'this-is-that,' to 'this-is-put-for-that.'[14] Children began to be taught to write in schools; the written form, and the monotheistic God (not gods) of Judaism, then, around 200 AC, of Christianity, became (in the European

spirit) culturally ascendant. The Socratic dialogues, with the orator's rhythms interrupted by continual requests for clarification, were attempts at shocking the poetic-mimetic mind and language out of its metaphoric connectedness and into the new, ruptured, analogic world.[15] A new linguistic- cultural formation emerged: from a mimetic, embedded, metaphoric world, to an analogic world and language; the subject and object—like the speaker's consciousness—at a further remove from nature, concept, phenomena: from the thing named. This, the first rupture of which I speak."

"In metaphorical language the central conception which unifies human thought and imagination is the conception of a plurality of gods. In the analogic, or metonymic mode, this unifying conception became a monotheistic 'God,' a transcendent reality or perfect being which all verbal analogy points to. Indeed, in analogic thinking, monotheism is practically a requirement; as Christian theology gained cultural ascendancy, thought began to take on a deductive shape in which everything followed from the perfection of God. That these traits later belonged to Western science is not the issue; rather, in the process of deconstructing and reassimilating some metaphoric forms to new linguistic-cultural codes, tension was bound to arise, and did, and was reconciled normally through allegory, a special form of analogy, a technique of paralleling metaphorical with conceptual language in which the latter has the primary authority. This was made possible with the invention of continuous prose, the main instrument of thought in the metonymic period, and which, perhaps, culminated in the metonymic universe of Kant."[16]

Anology, in turn, remained the most-operative or ascendant European linguistic-cultural mode (at least, according to Gabriel ... but then the more I translate our conversations, transcribe his thoughts, wander over the gaps in my notes where my words should have been, the more I wonder just what exactly he knows) until the birth of the European Modern Era. When the space within the linguistic symbol cleaved even wider, the subject and object (humanity/nature) rendered (with Kant's Crisis of Representation) completely, conceptually (again, impossibly) separate; when single truths were chased, along with God, from the temple, myths profaned. "'The word *profane*,' said Gabriel, "comes from the Latin *profanum*: the place in front of the temple, outside the temple.[17] At this time *He* became a choice, both a question and an answer; the individual's piety henceforth pertaining only to his subjective universe. The resulting void is filled by the historical and psychological exploration of myths."[18]

"We have jumped ahead," said Gabriel, slowing down now, breathing deeply, drawing his monologue to a close, fingering his cup, gathering his momentum, now seething forward again: "for we speak now of the second *rupture*, that convergence of fifteenth and sixteenth century European social phenomena which tore the old linguistic-cultural formation apart when, when?—was it with Copernicus or Galileo, with Cervantes of Don Quixote, the printing press, or First (American) Contact, when the old, analogic mode could not withstand the ripping and tearing that was the stumbling upon of America, the discovery (because imagined, because desired, because invented, and then named) of the *other* that had no place in the old, analogic equation; when the trajectory of singular, deified Truth reversed the polarity of its slope, turned over at the "hump" of the cultural curve (to borrow from calculus here, at the metonymic max/min point, where slope=0) and the analogical language, which was a sacred language, a verbal response to God's own verbal revelation, everything tied neatly into His universe, could no longer hold. Who knows the moment— was it when on-stage Hamlet uttered "Words, words, words," thus acknowledging that he himself had been written; a self-awareness that seems hardly possible within the epic literary traditions of the metonymic age, when words still coincided with things, when the word was still believed, when everybody knew the endings of the stories and so seeing the end in the beginning — the retelling of the story, and not the telling: a plot configuration that created more repetitive, cyclic, some-would-say earthbound models of time—was practiced in place of the rabid desire to get to the end, to know, to progress, develop, to tell, that marks our time, our linearity, our goal-oriented world, our narrative plot configurations, our ecological ends?[19] Nobody knows 'when' these grossly generalized, still-changing transitions occured, precisely because there is no moment, no single dawn of the European Modern Era.

After two cups of coffee, riding the raging freight train of his own rhetoric, perhaps his disquiet over his wife's poor health finding voice in this roar, how Gabriel rambled on that evening. It was this night, alternatively at full attention, and then at the fading, liminal bounds of interest, that I decided to bring a tape recorder to our next meeting. But he was not done, no, not yet: "The individual was placed now slowly, fully, in historical, linear time; and so autobiographies were written, paintings were signed: the European individual had shouldered clear a space on the stage. There, in the Globe Theatre, in paintings, and in people's *vision* (this is vision as a learned, taught perspective) background had, for the first time, been differentiated from fore: nature was now behind *man*, and dead; *man* was in the foreground, dominant over a dead and deanimated world. Language, responding to and as connective tissue of the cultural matrix, was also rendered separate: the continuous tenses (background) were set into relief behind the preterite senses (foreground: the plot). And this became the accepted narrative mode. 'Paul, *sipping* his tea, *turned* on the stereo, and the party began.'"

"And so the speaking individual (foreground, subject) was rendered separate from the deanimated, dead background (nature, object). And the European individual entered into the fullness of her contemporary being. And began the never-ending struggle to demarcate those new, mythical boundaries of self, ever-shifting, with rights and laws; struggled slowly, and over much time, to legislate himself into a being cleaved separate from the sensate cosmos."

On this note Gabriel was off, again: "All of creation had become an object when the Greeks had been able to cap-

ture it in a metonymic word-cage; a word of which they (unlike earlier humans) were no longer a part: nature. But the world, nature, remained alive. Now, with the European Renaissance (touched off, perhaps, by a recovery of lost languages in Italy, by greater polyglossia, by the excavating of languages which had not God, but humans, at the center of the linguistic universe), the fundamental assumption shifted from the world as alive and death as an anomaly to the world as dead and life as the anomaly. But this nihilistic understanding of the lifelessness of nature was deeply unsettling; the transition, the reconciliation of old verbal and thought modalities to the new, was accomplished, among other things, through the rise of dualism, that precursor and conceptual necessity of contemporary science, technology, loss of ... etc."[20]

Thus "the crisis of modernity" was born.

So that our darkest moments, blending their shadows into an infinity of choices, within a self-enclosed and somewhat paranoid, possessive, individualized sense of self, alienated and disenchanted,[21] become almost pathological.

This, Gabriel's second rupture, in the time called Renaissance, when he insists our own linguistic formation—what he calls the Modern—came into being; here we ruptured from the analogic, metonymic or philosophic to the vulgar, demotic, or scientific mode, in which the priests and scribe-castes speak the same, *formal* language as, say, Gabriel and I, and you: citizens all. The world again rich, new, seen from new perspectives: the glorious, improvised play of Shakespeare, Rabelais, Cervantes, Newton, Galileo, da Vinci, magicians, mechanics, dreammongers all. The will, the imagination, the desire to 'discover' America: the expansion of the power of (first) the Spanish crown, the primal scene of the clash with the Spaniards and Americans, the "magnificent wound" at the base of our American (hemispherical) culture —the knowledge of all that died so that we could be born—marked as it was by a violent eroticism, was allowed to unfold: a still-unhealed rape: the phallus, as well as gunpowder, being a crucial weapon used to subdue.[22]

Gabriel was sitting beside me in a narrow, wooden, graffiti-splattered booth—on this night, in Sneaky Dee's: inexplicably, Kos was closed. We drank draught from tall, cold glasses. The bar was crowded, smoky, the music thumping, his jacket unchanged. A compressed digit fingered the side of his blunted, now-red cauliflower nose, he paused, stilled himself, then let me have it; as he did so, I turned the tape recorder on. "The language-mind," he said (coining his own term), "slowly released from its singular, deitic stricture with this last rupture, was at last free to fulfill the promise of its Greek seed: the world (demythologized: the new myth) could be more completely interrogated, with fewer and fewer social sanctions. But as knowledge broadened, became wider, deeper, slowly, over time, and particularly in the nineteenth century, it also became specialized, compartmentalized, divided into schools and intellectual sects; the 'whole,' that *cosmos* so important in Greece, was torn asunder: the concrete, human lifeworld was fragmented, dissociated from its sensuous, situated, perceiving context: we began to know more and more about less and less. Knowledge, applied, like language, is a tool; these tools were leveraged to exact a greater fare from the nonhuman earth, which consequently suffered large gashes, great scars, and massive explosions called open-pit mines, clear-cuts, and split atoms. Materially, our life became—it is the only word—easier; but a strange, new ataraxic sickness took shape, corroding our souls."

I brushed my long hair back from my eyes, drained my glass, filled it again, drained it again. G.'s remained untouched. In the space of my consciousness liberated by the tape-recorder's whirring, I made googly-eyes at tattooed girls drinking beer. "This is a strange ailment," I heard him say to the tape, much later, "one that condemns us to incessant development and prosperity—by means of which we multiply our contradictions, inflame our sores, and exacerbate our tendencies toward both human and nonhuman destruction. This is development as the dominant cultural narrative of our impoverished age. But at last, in the failures of superimposed belief systems or ideologies; in humanity's unquenchable thirst to be free; and in the manacled state of the breathing earth, the philosophy of progress has shown its true face: a featureless blank. We now know that the kingdom of progress is not of this world: the paradise it promises us is in the future, a future that is impalpable, unreachable, perpetual. Progress has peopled history with the marvels and monsters of technology but it has depopulated the life of man. It has given us more things but not more being."[23]

Over our table the "crisis of modernity" spread its mushroom cloud into the sky.

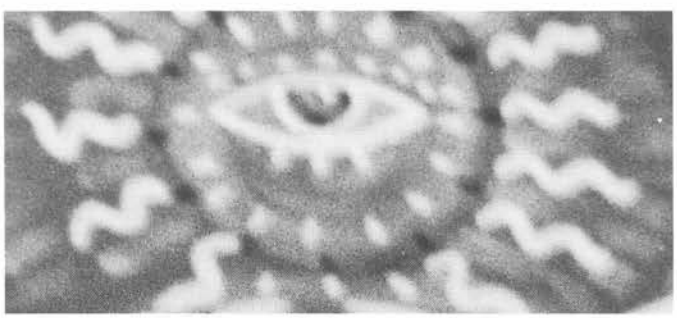
Thus the dominant stream of European humanity, Gabriel's story goes, *forgot how to be*. The seeds of our current ecological strife, long since sown, in our own time have reached full flower.

Mulling this all over now, pausing the tape as I write, I am forced to take G.'s line of reasoning to its logical conclusion and wonder how, with said subject-object gap in our language, our consciousness, our very conception of world, the very ways in which we think and act and are, our being—how, with European humanity dominant over a dead and nonspiritualized nature, can there be any hope? For nonhuman nature, for us? The European linguistic-cultural trajectory has been inserted by Gabriel, and by my FES courses, into a nice, neat, declensionist, apocalyptic narrative: there can be no reconciling our position in the world. The water in the well of our own past has been poisoned.

The tape rolls on; "By the way," I hear Gabriel's booming Spanish baritone say, "the European novel, at this time, was also born."

Born to roam with absolute freedom into the space created by the divorce between words and things, to render all that fell into its orbit ambiguous, playful, humourous, sparing nothing from the suction of its centripetal pull, from its omnivorous appetite in incorporating all previous literary genres and existent speech types, the only literary genre younger than writing and the book. Born to explore, discover, to dance with deadly seriousness in this gap, to investigate the heretofore unknown existential concerns of the new "European" individual: "with Cervantes," (the tape whirs) "the nature of adventure; with Richardson, the secret life of feelings; with Balzac, man's rootedness in history; with Flaubert, the *terra* previously *incognita* of the everyday; with Flaubert, the intrusion of the irrational into human behaviour; with Proust, the elusive past, with Joyce, the elusive present; with Thomas Mann, the role of myths from the remote past that control our present actions,"[24]—et cetera, et cetera, Gabriel droned on, buoyed by his theme, obviously annoyed with the popular music pumping from Sneak's speakers, the four-four time like that of a military parade, marching us without variation toward the homogeneous horizon of our own deaths.

"In short, the European novel—seized by this very same European passion to know, which we cannot deny as part of our own identity—has investigated, one by one, throughout its history (which is comparable to that of an individual artist), all of the existential concerns which Martin Heidegger (Husserl's pupil) identified as being neglected in his monumental *Being and Time*; or, to put it another way, humanity's concrete lifeworld (*die Lebenswelt*), which has been obfuscated by Modernity's myriad masks—in the proc-



ess which Heidegger called "the forgetting of being"—is held, in the novel, under a permanent light."

Yeah, sure. I gulped heavily, paid our bill, and stumbled home confused, enlightened, and dreadfully alone.

The next time I met Gabriel—once again, thankfully, at Kos—his step was light, his cauliflower nose less red, his salt-and-pepper hair freshly cut: clearly he was in a better mood. "Today's subject," he told me, holding court in a another monologue, when dialogue had been his preferred style, and speaking quickly, as if pressed for time, "is humour and the novel. Irony, parody, countless folkloric forms, laughter in endless guises had existed up to this (inception of Modern) time; but humour - a particular species of the comic: *that which renders ambiguous everything it touches,* only came into existence with the Modern Era. The birth of humour," he told me, admitting (even he!) that this seems a bit of a stretch, "is therefore all tied up with the invention of the novel. The preceding linguistic-cultural formations did not permit such utter, modern ambiguity: God had been truth, analogies depended upon Him, epics were not to be questioned; now all this was thrown into question. Questions, spaces ... an uncertainty and complexity that the novel embraces ... ergo ambiguity, therefore humour."[25]

"The first European novel?" I asked him." *Don Quixote,* by Cervantes," he said, "Part I published in 1605."

An absolutely hilarious, infinitely sad novel, in which Don read a lot of old books (romances of chivalry, to be exact), and believes what he reads, believes that the world is based still on analogy, then ventures out into the new, ruptured, ambiguous world, where he ends up doing battle with windmills and cloud-shadows, loving serfs as princesses and assaulting innocent peoples, so great is his deception, so profound is the world's change.

"Nothing is as simple as it seems; every reading is a mis-reading: these are themes of this great novel. It requires a great courage to have as one's only certainty the wisdom of uncertainity: a welter of contradictory truths. This is Quixote's wisdom; born, Dear Reader, in some world that might be Spain, upon the pen and the sword of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra."

That night, as we were parting ways on a thawing spring College Street, Gabriel asked me to read Edmund Husserl's 1935 lectures on the European 'crisis.' In the tone of his voice, in the soft, burgeoning, almost-ecumenical April light, I could sense our time together drawing to a close. "The crisis Husserl spoke of seemed to him so profound that he wondered whether Europe was still able to survive it," he said, as if preparing me for something. "The roots of the crisis lay for him at the beginning of the Modern Era, in Galileo and Descartes, in the one-sided nature of the European sciences, which reduced the world to a mere object of technical and mathematical investigation and put the concrete world of life, *die Lebenswelt* as he called it, beyond their horizon."[26]

I trudged off the next day to Robarts like the dutiful little melancholic page-boy that I am, that I was, and climbed toward the apex of Husserl's apocalyptic pyramid. The more precise the idea, it seems, the higher the phenomenolgoical summit, the more language must be splayed out engross it, to stabilize it with the widest possible base; the more trapdoors and undercurrents-of-ideas the writing needs to anticipate, name, and so subvert, losing the reader as if in a labyrinth. Primary data. I love it.

For Husserl, the crisis was very real, and its founding tenets were principally spiritual in nature, and were only gaining ground in dominating the European spirit, and natural science and its laws of nature were part of the problem, in fact, any solution which this European spirit came up with, as long as it functioned along the rut of its old, familiar tracks, was destined to fail, to reinforce or consolidate the dominant (and implicated) mythos. In the end, though, he saw hope only in the "spirit, which alone is immortal." A hope which "I," at this time, after reading so many Environmental narratives, one of which concludes (to segment a quotation, to represent this complex text simply, unfairly): "What I am saying is that given the dominant perspective which is now moving us toward globalisation of the world economy, I see no hope"[27] ... this was a hope which I could not share.

And so when I sat down that very next evening not too long ago, across the formica table from Gabriel, I couldn't help being all pink-cheeked and proud. I'd read Ray Rogers: *Nature and the Crisis of Modernity*; I'd read Neil Evernden: *Natural Alien*; I'd read John Livingston: *Rogue Primate* and those other deep ecologists; I was ready: the linguistic-cultural events that had haunted our nearly six months of conversation had been cleanly aligned into well-thought out, declensionist, apocalyptic historiography. From his story—with his guidance—I had made meaning! The mind, continually distanced from "nature," as represented in the abyss of the verbal sign; the alienated European consciousness thus able to utilize (destroy) that which it was no longer a part of, until the production of refuse all but equals our culture's consumption, and we are locked into our own solitude, stranded, all alone. We are doomed; *we think and perceive and speak and act in this distanced, alienated, domineering way; this is our science, our dominant cultural narrative: we destroy.*

All of my questions had been answered.

(I didn't yet realize that the idea, notion, story of apocalypse, and the linear time upon which both it and declensionist narratives depend, are based on the "B" -word, the Buh-dup-bup-bup Bible. That book being, like it or not, still the principal skeletal framework of the European mythological universe).

I sat down, the cold diner light now familiar and comforting, and told Gabriel my story. He paused, sipping his coffee, drained it; rolling up a torn sugar packet, he shot it (three-pointer! I thought) into his drained mug, then proceeded to blow my head off: my environmentalist's ideas, marooned on the fringe of culture, isolated from its roots: were sentimental and foolish. More to the point, he said (I have the tape; the technology reveals it):

> I think it would be naive to take the severity of this view of the Modern Era as a mere condemnation. I would rather say that Husserl and Heidegger laid bare the ambiguity of this epoch, which is decline and progress at the same time and which, like all that is human, carries the seed of its end in its beginning. To my mind, this ambiguity does not diminish the last four centuries of European culture, to which I feel all the more attached as I am not a philosopher but a novelist. Indeed, for me, the founder of the Modern Era is not only Descartes but Cervantes.
>
> Perhaps it is Cervantes whom the two phenomenologists neglected to take into consideration in their judgment of the Modern Era. By that I mean: If it is true that philosophy and science have forgotten about man's being, it emerges all the more plainly that with Cervantes a great European art took shape that is nothing other than the investigation of this forgotten being.[28]

"We are the past in the present," he said, his eyes like ice-augurs boring into mine, "to transfigure the present (to change, to resist: activism: your environmentalist's idols) what is required is recognition, revelation, vision: the naming of what is beyond our European mask. It is ingenuous and hypocritical to naively wish that we were something else, to endeavour to end this blood-drenched nightmare that you have told me is our ecological present, without first knowing what the essential oscillation of our true cultural illusion is. But do not be mistaken: our search, never-accomplished, is not for a definition, an identity, a cultural 'character,' but is rather

for something that is more like a movement, a dream—this dream that is our literature. This hypocritical tendency, this inability to understand and question yourselves, is embedded deeply within the North American spirit, and within the popular environmnental movement itself. It is a tendency which impels one to negate those aspects of reality and identity which one considers disagreeable, irrational or repugnant, and which thereby denies your European roots, your own concrete (because embodied) situated truths, mythologies — your role in the ecological present — and thereby isolates your subcultural (environmental) branch within a prison of inconsolable solitude. It is a branch that (its own critics show) has never been successful, and which, as long as it continues to refuse to probe the mythological depths, will never be successful (the roots of this eco-present, part of the broadest cultural moment, are unfathomably long and mythic); a branch, isolated, which will eventually wither and die. While the tree—the strength that you refuse to draw from—will remain. This hypocrisy, turning parts of one's life into a lie, is a mask of the worst kind: one that parades as a learned truth. To change, you and your environmental friends might climb this tree that they are, not run from it, from themselves, from their culture that they themselves have made, and which is destroying the earth."

"The stakes are high, certainly; but the act of the critical imagination, that activity which consists not only in knowing ourselves but, just as much or more, in freeing ourselves, is the act I believe your sentimental environmental

naïveté overlooks. Criticism unfolds the possibility of freedom and is thus an invitation to action. Recognition can function as the core, the trunk, of the environmentalist project to transfigure ..."[29] he raged, roared on and on; then paused, sunk his eyes like bullets deeply into mine: "because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude do not have a second opportunity on earth."[30]

Head bowed over the table, long braids floundering in my mug, I watched his shadow hovering across the formica surface. Slowly, he got up and left me, forever; I watched as he disappeared, vanished into the table-top, as if into a speaking mirror.

In blowing my mind, Gabriel really blew down the walls of my environmental solitude; evaporated the nostalgic sense of loss that I'd felt upon my return to Canada in a mist of condensed dream. Time, he told me, the absolute tyrant, excised and transmuted in the space of reading those lies that tell the truth: fiction. Time, in the novel, compressed, rendered visible, a movement toward meaning: the implacable phantasm of the future and the over-determining dictator of the past collapsed into an eternal, imaginative now. This, the time-space of change, of imaginative responses to this ecological present. The novel, therefore: the ideal vehicle for the reintroduction of the individual into the fullness of her or his own authentic time, and through time, into her or his identity. With the novel, and with Gabriel's story, I have learned to try to be free, like the novel, like the air, a liberated dream. Just yesterday, I cut my hair.

NOTES

1. This notion of "European identity" is taken from Milan Kundera's reading of Edmund Husserl's celebrated 1935 lectures on the Crisis of European Humanity, in *The Art of the Novel*, translated from the French by Linda Asher (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1988), p.3.

2. Edward Husserl, "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man," in *Phenom and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 196), pp.149-192.

3. Ibid.

4. In our age the imagination operates critically. True, criticism is not what we dream of, but it teaches us to distinguish between the specters out of our nightmares and our true visions. Criticism is the imagination's apprenticeship in its second turn, the imagination cured of fantasies and determined to face the world's realities. Criticism tells us that we should learn to dissolve the idols, to be like air, a liberated dream. (325)

5. Rimbaud says: *Jeest und autre*. Paz: "Otherness is what constitutes us. ...I maintain that those realities we call cultures and civilizations are elusive. ...I hardly need to repeat that the other Mexico (Canada) is not outside of but within us: we could not extirpate it without mutilating ourselves. It is a Mexico which, if we learn to name and recognize it, we can someday bring to an end by transfiguring it. Then it will cease to be that phantasm that glides into reality and turns it into a blood-drenched nightmare." (291) The blood-drenched nightmare that our natural world (both human and non-) is now living. Naming...the primordial act of the writer, story-teller, poet.

6. This phrase is an homage to Thomas Mann's essay, *"The Well of the Past."*

7. This paragraph is a combinant of ideas from Carlos Fuentes (on time): *Latin America: At War with the Past* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1985), pp.72-73; from Octavio Paz (on literature) *Convergences and Divergences: Essays on Art and Literature*; and, even, a few of my own.

8. This paragraph drawn upon ideas articulated first by Giambattista Vico and echoed and augmented by Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1990).

9. This latterase is borrowed from the title of Ben Okri's book, *A Way of Being Free* (London: Phoenix House, 1997).

10. The Chinese never strayed from their pictographic system (now simplified); many languages in their contemporary linguistic tree use the same system of signs--they can reach other's writing, but cannot understand the spoken words (dialects). Tone, intonation, is what differentiates these languages. Thus I am told there is little sarcasm in China (sarcasm being largely tone-dependent); a void in laughter-producing genres that is filled by an abundance of slapstick comedy. Knock you head getting out of your birth on a train in China, and fellow passengers will laugh long and hard.

11. Much of this discussion comes from David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

12. This last sentence from Pablo Neruda, *The Nobel Address*, in *The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays*, Ilan Stavans, editor (New York: Oxford UP, 1997).

13. Abram (pp.108-109), writes:
Plato was teaching, then, precisely at the moment when the new technology of reading and writing was shedding its specialized "craft" status and finally spreading, by means of the Greek curriculum, into the culture at large. The significance of this conjunction has not been well recognized by Western philosophers, all of whom stand--to a greater or lesser extent--within Plato's lineage. Plato or rather the association between the literate Plato and his mostly nonliterate teacher Socrates, may be recognized as the hinge on which the sensuous, mimetic, profoundly embodied style of consciousness proper to orality gave way to the more detached, abstract mode of thinking engendered by alphabetic literacy. Indeed, it was Plato who carefully developed and brought to term the collective thought-structures appropriate to the new technology.

14. This, and the idea of Eric Haverlock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), as discovered in Abram, op.cit.

15. Frye, 1990, (The Great Code), pp.9-10.

16. Much of the subsequent discussion is taken from Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, and here, from *Testaments Betrayed*, translated from the French by Linda Asher (New York: HarperCollins *Publishers*, 1995), p.9.

17. Martin Heidegger, as quoted in Kundera, 1993, ibid., p.8.

18. Some of the ideas and language of this last sentence are borrowed from Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time" in *On Narrative*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: The Univerity of Chicago Press, 1981), pp.175-6.

19. The ideas and language of this paragraph are taken from Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1992), pp.89-90. This is the text that nudged me in the direction of Vico and Frye.

20. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, p.97.

21. This last phrase is borrowed from Ilan Stavans, *The Latin Phallus*, p.228.

22. Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1985), p.225.

23. Kundera, 1986, p.5.

24. This discussion stems from Kundera, 1995, p.10. Kundera is himself referring to Octavio Paz's "fundamental idea": that humour is an invention of the novel, and was birthed with the Modern Era.

25. Ibid, p.3.

26. Raymond A. Rogers, *Nature and the Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1994), p.173.

27. Kundera, 1986, p.3.

28. The language and ideas of this discourse come from Paz, 1985, op.cit., p.215 & 23.

29. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, translated from the Spanish by Gregory Rabassa (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1978), p.334.

Photograph by Mark Haslam

Hogtown Diary I: Edward the Caterpillar

by Andrew Macdonald

Twice, in late September and again in early October I sojourned to the Don River valley below the Bloor Street (Prince Edward) viaduct. The first time I got lost and skidded down the western side of the valley south of the bridge; the second time I found the stairs flush with its southern buttress. Late September:

Emerge just shy of a culvert on the valley floor,
dart across yellow-lined (park)way,
monkey over a fence and drop down beside a moist bed of reeds,
border of an abandoned rail line.
All vigour and curiosity.
Gingerly slippin' through eye-high cattails, crossin' cut-gravel and twin steel spines:
Union Station curvatures.

Hard path pocked and dusty, courted by wildflowers and waist-length grass,
I'm wadin' through Golden Rod, Queen Anne's Lace, Purple Loosestrife and burrs.
Pace slows, half pluckin' burrs from sleeves half eyein' the tell-tale ribbon of trees lining the bank of a river:
Willow, alder and a meagre smattering of hardwoods bud this tongue of biota stuck between the asphalt strips of the Bayview Extension and Don Valley (Park)way.

Passin' a patch of saplings, nestled in swaths of grass
and reach visible water, reach the Don River.
Tangled locks of vegetation obscure its bank,
Fall current slips by en route to shoreline wharves and industrial marine facilities,
Great Lake Ontario.

Resting, rocking on haunches I contemplate a bee who rummages for nectar.
A halcyon sky drifts over afternoon, buoyed by Sun's shine
Rays slant to the nape of my neck: wax ecstatic;
willin away the motorists' drone:

Most of my urban-slung dreams include pining for fresh water to listen to,
or into which dip a paddle.
For a quarter-century I've lived within walking distance of a river;
suddenly I have a strange sensation
of being ridiculously late for a spontaneous meeting.

Bikers flying low like swallows flicker past the blind of trees on the far bank.

From my position a quick scan captures the breadth of the valley from Danforth-side to Bloor-side, east-side to downtown-side.
Dwarfed by the viaduct's titanic legs and muscular steel webs
like a pebble in the shedded skin of a glacier
I'm gazin' up at a frozen caterpillar spanning this unruly gap.

I try to imagine it isn't there.
Wonder how the valley was perceived by someone living in Toronto before 1918: People crossing flimsy wooden spans or bolted iron bridges in the gut of the valley.
Wonder who (if anyone) lived by the river?
People do now.
(My other trip: unlashed tarp on a shelter; blue tongue ranting with wind in the husk of our metropolis)

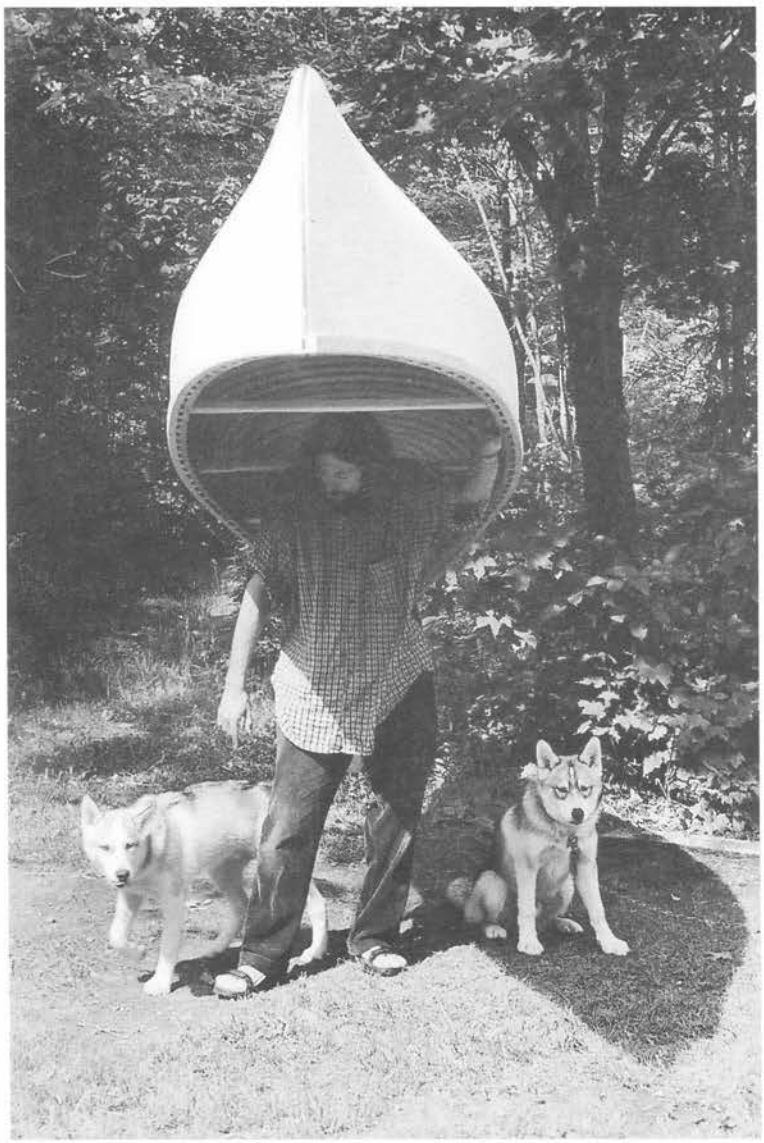
Troddin' upstream beneath willow branch eves,
exposed river bed rises around the footprints,
water spins by the far bank and
F a n s-diaphanous-,
chattering over stony flats,
senses steeper grade and disappears at my heels.
Mud shelf tapers to the river bluff and a path above snakes northward;
in places decayed brickwork lines the inner banks, forming a discreet channel.
The sun's rays jostle with distant branches: Waxen orange perched on inverted roots.

Climbin' now up the shady west ridge, cooler beneath the steep chin of a hillside stubbled with sumack and wildflowers:
knuckles brush the earth- knees bent- churnin'-toes diggin in- calves taught like cords- bloody vessels pumpin, and
CRESTing the shoulder feelin'...

W N E F L

Heaving, akimbo,
hooded eyes trawling the view; head like a sluggish satellite receiving signals through viscous waves of air:
flies swirl around dots on a green pitch;
smoke stacks stuck in shoe-boxes;
copper spine of a steeple;
peripheral signal: sliding light, west in the stomach of the caterpillar

Still cradlin' slim treasure(s) found for a loon at the Victoria College
second-hand book sale,
wisps of valley flora tucked in its jacket.
Dissolve with shadows of a path along the ridge,
homeward,
all vigour and life,
jig and flow,
like molasses accelerating off a spoon tipped slightly.



Photograph by Jen MacLeod

Making Space for Stories: Communities, Narrative and Action

by Angus Leech

> *"...home is not a place only, but a condition of the heart. Barren, frozen, burning, trembling or sinking - it is a house of breath. A living place, ghosted with histories and fused with the bones of our fathers. Loved or hated, home is a part of us, a living cell slowly dividing into memory. An ache, or a warmth; a sound or an echo; a dream or a nightmare."*
>
> - Harry W. Paige, "leave if you can"

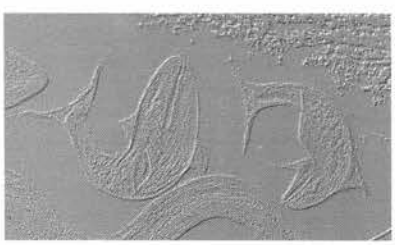
Human communities are inherently, intrinsically storied. The statement is at once obvious and in need of elaboration. That communities are composed of individuals and groups who tell each other stories almost goes without saying. Yet the role of these stories in influencing the interactions, identities and worldviews which exist within, and essentially define communities is a matter for some ponderance, and perhaps inestimable importance.

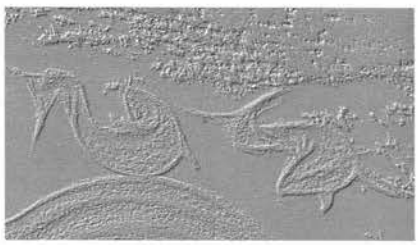
There has, of late, been a virtual explosion of interest concerning the idea of narrative within what are commonly referred to as the 'human sciences' (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997). Participants within fields as diverse as Psychology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Feminist Studies, and History (and, of course, interdisciplinary Environmental Studies) have begun to incorporate heightened concern for narrative methods and epistemologies into their work, and I will draw upon several such authors in the discussion which follows. The purpose here: to illuminate some of the ways in which narrative functions within the dynamics of culture, and to suggest that the inherently storied nature of communities has implications for organising and action. [Note that, throughout this essay, unless otherwise specified, the terms "narrative" and "story" are regarded as equivalent and used interchangeably.]

To start things off, Maines and Bridger (1992) offer some introductory opinions with respect to the narrative character of community, from a social science perspective. The following insights are primarily theirs.

Most authors who have taken up this discussion agree that "narratives are a primary mechanism for transforming the flux of experience and segmentation in social orders into meaningful wholes"(p.363). In other words, we understand the world through stories. They are one principle means of ordering objects, events, facts, and places into meaningful wholes. Stories help us to negotiate and interpret our lives. They are our navigational instruments in a sea of possible realities.

With this general perspective in mind, it is possible to highlight ways in which storytelling is relevant to both group consciousness and that difficult-to-define phenomenon which we might refer to as "community." We learn about society and our status and roles within it primarily through stories. Stories link people, events and time, providing versions of reality which "contribute to the flow of meaning that rests at the heart of any society" (p.366). Stories help to build group solidarity and challenge authority, define identity and distinguish community members from outsiders; they create links, tying us to events, places and other people, weaving messages and values into memorable plots fit to be passed on, fluidly, under breaths or over loudspeakers. Narratives are, above all, essentially collective acts. They are "fundamental aspects of the cultural order," and, following the ideas of Max Weber, "forever interlinked with political and economic orders" (p.364). That is, they are inherently political, inextricably tied to our ideologies, social structures and ways of making a living. Narratives are tools of persuasion, functioning upon the basis of their coherence and believability. In sum, stories are "indispensable to social organisation in that they are one class of practices through which such organisation is created, maintained, or modified" (p.366). As Maines and Bridger finally point out, the role of narrative is so fundamental to social dynamics that "communities cannot exist without stories" (p.366). Julian Rappaport (1993), notes that several scholars have gone as far as to suggest that narrative may in fact be the *defining characteristic* of community.





Considering the above comments, the potential relevance of narrative to community organising and action begins to suggest itself. While the possible applications of a narrative viewpoint with respect to the broadly defined communitarian movement are numerous, I have chosen to begin my own explorations herein by concentrating upon the role of narrative in community-based social action, empowerment and cultural retention. Of the various possible paths of discussion of which I am becoming aware, this seems to be one of the most developed in the literature. While the discussion of community and narrative in the sources upon which I draw has been largely academic (perhaps too academic, considering the topic at hand), my overall intention is to argue that "community narratives" should and do play an essential role within practical approaches to community building and activism.

categories of narrative

In carrying this conversation further, it will prove useful to define and distinguish between some of the main types of cultural narrative. Rappaport (1995) distinguishes *between*

"community narratives", *"personal stories,"* and *"dominant cultural narratives."* While attempts to draw such boundaries are recognised as problematic, the intention is not to invoke absolutes. Rather, it will simply serve toward clarifying the following discussion to be able to speak in terms of some general nodes within the field or spectrum of story, community and mass narratives being of principle interest to the points to be made later on.

Community narratives may be understood as stories that are common among a group of people, potentially being shared through social interaction, texts, and other variable forms of communication, including pictures, performances, and rituals. In general, community narratives tell members something of themselves, their history and views of the future. In earlier work, Rappaport emphasises that such narratives are inherently functional within communities, in that "they communicate to members and others what the community is like, how it came to be that way, and (sometimes explicitly) what behaviour is expected" (1993; p.249). It is this essence of functionality which makes community narratives so relevant, probably necessary to community work, as will be discussed shortly.

Dominant cultural narratives (or 'mass' narratives) are defined by Rappaport as "those over-learned stories communicated through mass media or social institutions that touch the lives of most people, such as television, newspapers, public schools, churches, or social network gossip. These narratives are known to most people in a given society and serve as an influential backdrop against which more localised community narratives and personal stories are told" (1995; p.803). Dominant cultural narratives are those imposed upon communities from external sources and forces, and "for some people, these dominant cultural narratives, even if they are very negative, remain so powerful that despite their own desire to escape from them it is difficult to find alternative personal or community stories to replace them" (1995; p.803).

Personal stories are explained by Rappaport as "an individual's cognitive representation or social communication of events that are unique to that person, for example, one's own life story, organised temporally and thematically." Personal stories do not, of course, exist in a vacuum, but are profoundly influenced and acted upon by the wider narratives with which individuals come into contact. It would seem that they arise somewhere at the interface between individual experience and group consciousness. Rappaport notes that both communal and mass narratives affect people on a personal level, influencing the personalised stories which we use as social maps.

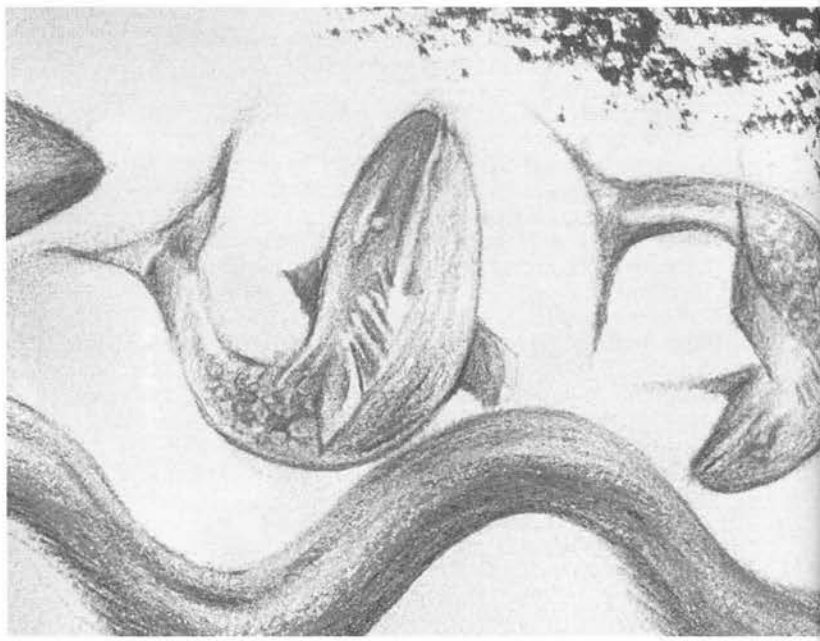
Briefly (so as not to become gloomy), some of the less-positive effects of increasingly uniform, globalised and placeless mass narratives are becoming more widely recognised by those whose concerns gravitate toward the health of people and of communities. As Marcia Nozick (1992) warns, the uniform conformity of mass culture tends toward the destruction of "the authenticity and unique character of our communities along with our feelings of community pride in where we live and our histories." Dominant cultural narratives influence and frequently tend to subvert and disparage localised community narratives, and this erosive relationship should be of no small concern to those working toward communitarian goals. Evident here is a visible need to re-energise locally-based narratives as strong alternatives, or balancing counterpoints, to mass culture. When considered in such a light, the revitalisation of community narratives may be seen as a subtle, yet explicit act of resistance to the colonising discourses of global culture.

But if we are to work toward community-based change, how and why is it important to maintain strong local communal narratives? How do such narratives function in support of community action?

narrative function

In order to indicate their relevance to community action, the functional nature of community narratives must be addressed further. It is important to recognise that initiatives for community action fundamentally incorporate an element of social change - change which occurs on both community and individual levels. Community groups assemble and work towards certain goals which are defined by the values of group members, and the pursuit of such action requires work inspired by a communal perception that some sort of change is necessary and desirable.

To reiterate an earlier point, in many ways, stories function as the glue holding community together, communicating common history, local knowledge, and social guidelines to community members. However, even very traditional communities do not exist in stasis, and stories also have a central role within processes of community change. Indeed, as Rappaport (1995) asserts, community narratives can be a powerful force for generating both personal and social change.



Rappaport relates storytelling specifically to group empowerment, suggesting that the act of listening to stories and helping people to identify, create and relate both their personal stories and their collective narratives is itself an empowering activity. He also casts light upon the relationship between personal stories and community narratives, noting that:

"...people who seek either personal or community change often find that it is very difficult to sustain change without the support of a collectivity that provides a new communal narrative around which they can sustain changes in their own personal story." (1995; p.796)

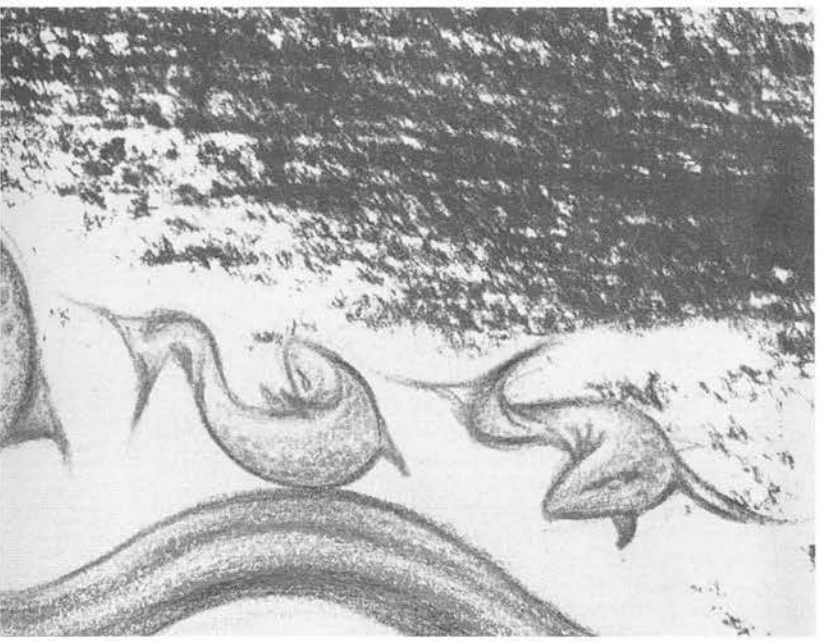
Rappaport contends that "everyone needs a community narrative to support one's personal life story, especially if that life story is being newly created" (1995; p.804). An element of co-dependence between community narratives and personal identity is thus made obvious, indicating that community change is necessarily accompanied by simultaneous changes in the perspectives of individuals, and vice versa. There appear to be firm links here between processes of so-

cial change and what Rappaport (1993) would refer to as "identity transformation," meaning alterations in the identities and perceptions of community members. Where social changes occur, identity transformations at the community and personal level also occur.

If personal and social change are so linked, then the influence of any narrative which affects personal stories is of importance. The above arguments imply that a strong community narrative is necessary for supporting local change; for instance, in the context of community organising. But how does this work? Why are such narratives essential? How do stories underlie and support action, create the possibility for change, and/or motivate people toward resistance?

narratives in action

In addressing these questions, Richard A. Couto (1993) notes that narratives make vital contributions to social movements, and provide a link between local struggles and wider ones. To begin with, stories can help to communicate and maintain a belief in the virtues or values shared by members of oppressed groups, or, to extend the idea to a parallel context, those shared within communities. Couto draws upon the concept of the "community of memory", as developed



by Robert Bellah and associates. This 'community of memory' refers to a collective memory - one perpetuated by storytelling - which nurtures individuals by conveying a moral tradition that reinforces the aspirations of the group. The community of memory creates hope and supports the possibility of future transformative social change. It preserves a sense of dignity and worth, even among heavily marginalized, oppressed and discredited groups.

Second, Couto claims that narratives support social movements by communicating an internal understanding of a group's lifestyle and social condition (based on internal experience), in contrast to perceptions which may prevail within mass culture. Considered in the context of community activism, this suggests that stories help to maintain locally-embedded perceptions of reality as alternatives to those purveyed by mass culture. Community narratives tend to support and validate world-views which value local ways of life, and allow externally derived views to be put into perspective, to be denaturalised. Local stories preserve the uniquely-rooted language, voice and traditions of communities. Butler (1996), in reference to the role of narrative in helping minority Caribbean groups in North America preserve ethnic identity, refers to this general process as "cultural retention." Both Couto and Butler note that the narratives of oppressed groups can operate with incredible tenacity, preserving situated understandings even in the face of extreme limitations upon expression.

In at least these two basic ways, narrative functions to maintain cohesive community identity in resistance to outside influences. Couto, moving further, proposes that narratives actually act to mobilise groups to attempt political change. Social action is not initiated directly, per se; rather, "narratives provide deep and lasting insights into the need and methods of change to individuals who lead social movements or support them despite risks to themselves" (1993; p.61). In a sense, "social movements are possible, in part, because narratives...preserve an understanding of why they are necessary" (p.76). A community's stories also offer members measures of progress and change over time, offering support in matters of hope.

To sum up, community narratives tend to underpin the identity and direction of a community and, to some extent, its members. Where change is sought, such narratives are a major catalyst for making community-based action possible. If strong communal narratives do not exist, then the community is unlikely to be stable, coherent, or viable; goals for change are unlikely to be supported by effective communication among community members concerning reasons and strategies for its acheivement. In the case of such absence, plans for community organising may be dependent upon their ability to address this factor.

Of course, in order for a community's stories to narrate its virtues, offer alternative perspectives, and mobilise members toward seeking political change, these stories must be allowed a space to exist.

free space

Couto (1993) emphasises the need for the creation of "free spaces," defined as "environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of co-operation and civic virtue" (1993; p.59). Put another way, free spaces are environments wherein it is safe for community members to create and communicate community narratives, in order to express local values and maintain alternative understandings.

As noted in the previous section, both Couto and Butler (1996) comment upon the tenacity of communal narratives, even in the face of severe oppression, noting their tendency to move underground in times when overt expression is impossible. Such narratives appear to compress or expand to occupy whatever social space they are permitted. In times of severe repression, such spaces could be restricted to the home, or to individual minds, but as oppressive conditions diminish, change and resistance in part entail the claiming of new spaces for dialogue. As Couto points out, the creation of new free space is itself a political act - a form of action - and permits expanding numbers of people to recognise their ties to a community of memory and initiate strategies for change.

It would seem to follow that, if community action initiatives require community narratives to support them, then they also require free spaces for such stories to multiply and spread. The creation of free space and strong communal narratives can thus be seen as mutually requisite for successful community action.

culture, culture, culture

Given all of this, it seems reasonable to suggest more confidently that attempts at community organising would typi-

cally benefit from (indeed, might in many ways require) the support of strong communal narratives, as long-term group action may not be viable in the absence of stories which function to define communities as cohesive and valid, mobilise members, build solidarity, and otherwise establish values, goals and a vision of how they should be attained. Undoubtably this is an underlying, if often unrecognised factor in many successful organising attempts, and many community activists appear to be aware of this narrative role on some level; my point is not to disparage their good efforts, nor to put down their less successful outings. Rather, I am simply reacting to a seeming imbalance which tends to lie manifest within such activism, wherein emphasis is so often loaded upon 'practical' strategies such as 'community economic development,' while so little attention (at least initially and in most cases) is allotted to the robustness of local culture. Perhaps what is at work here, in part, is the tendency within our Western society to exclude narrative knowledge and what is generally categorised as 'culture' from the realms of authoritative discourse, leaving those geographies safely in the keeping of economics, science, and other such 'rational' modes of thinking. This is a subject for another place and time, to be sure, but one that may serve to situate the reluctance of many who work in community (various wonderful popular educators and others excepted) to address the 'intangible' side of community dynamics - a side which, though perhaps ethereal and impossible to quantify, seems to have the potential strength of super-glue when it comes to the bonds of community.

Indeed, projects initiated without this kind of attention and/or support in some form seem unlikely to succeed. Take, for example, the near multitudes of community initiatives which start with promise but ultimately fail, often because the initiating organisation (however well-intentioned) moves on or falters, leaving little behind in the way of a shared narrative (ie: impetus) to sustain activity. On the other hand, if initiatives are accompanied by strong internal narratives (the discovery or generation of which might have to be nurtured before or during the inception of 'practical' activities), and if these stories are incorporated into the 'community of memory,' then strategies for community organisation are bound to attain a significant degree of longevity in the minds and wills of community members. They will no longer simply be action plans; they will be breathing parts of local lives, sustained by dreams and visions instead of mere bureaucracy.

As endless cases involving indigenous groups, gentrified neighbourhoods, and colonised landscapes have made obvious, to undermine a community's culture is to sap its soul; to prepare the ground for its assimilation, marginalisation, or outright obliteration. Culture (read: story, tradition, experience, history, creativity, symbol, material practice, and hope), if able to persist, forms the fulcrum upon which the survival and resistance of communities faced with adverse conditions rests. Were I to advocate one thing within this piece of writing, it would be that the centrality of 'community culture' (of which narratives are a defining part) become more widely recognised and embraced by community activists, bioregionalists, planners, educational organisations, and anyone else interested in locally-based social change. Such a challenge goes out in particular to community-based environmental activists who, while often doing a wonderful job of paying attention to stream contamination, wildlife habitat, permaculture and air pollution, too often seem to ignore entirely the cultural side of environmental issues, forgetting that it is the stories we tell one another which perpetuate the ability and desire to critique our own behaviour and relate it to the influence of others.

I have tried to lay down a brief explanation of why communal narratives may play a vital role in community action, local activism, and cultural retention. What I have NOT attempted to tackle herein is the somewhat daunting question of HOW this might be approached in a practical sense. Such a task is beyond the scope of this piece, and perhaps beyond my own experience as well. Thus, I will limit myself to a few words of ...

encouragement

In the First Nations community of Wasauksing at Parry Sound, three hours north of Toronto, FES Masters student Brian McInnes is engaged in an ethnolinguistic project. Concerned that the traditional place-based stories and language of his community are disappearing, and with them the keystones of local Ojibwe culture, Brian has been collecting and documenting narratives from local elders. This has been done with the intent of compiling them in a Cultural Atlas of maps and stories which may be used as an educational resource, in the hope of renewing interest among young community members while there still remain elders to pass such knowledge on.

Sylvia Bowerbank (1997) has recently written of efforts in the area of Hamilton Harbour to adopt community place-based oral histories as a valid form of knowledge with respect to local environmental decision making. Free space for the articulation of community narratives is being reclaimed in the form of publications from local artists which explore connections between local identity and ecology, as well as outdoor storytelling events wherein local community members tell tales about their personal experiences in the Harbour.

In many places across North America, community and bioregional mapping projects (maps being themselves a narrative form) are engaged in the process of seeking validation for local perspectives through geographical representation, weaving together ecological information, human history, and local story in a form that may be used to communicate both within communities and without. To offer a home-grown example, Zion Heights Junior High School, as part of a larger project initiated by the North York Board of Education, is using multi-media community mapping as a tool for connecting curriculum to local ecology and history, employing maps (an arguably narrative medium) for the purposes of ecological monitoring, restoration, and illustrating histories of environmental change. The maps are also being used to share stories about local experience and senses of place.

Finally, there are perhaps inklings of a wider narrative project in the works. Storytelling in the form of literature, whether fiction, journalism, ethnography or essays of place, is increasingly being incorporated as a venue for exploring issues of community. This may be essential, for individual communities are not the only places where free space for dialogue needs to be claimed - space in which mass cultural narratives may be critiqued on the basis of the experiences of community members. What is also required is the introduction of challenging counter-narratives with alternative values - such as those novelistic renditions which Sandra Zagarell (1988) refers to as "Narratives of Community" - into the mass cultural narrative stream itself. In other words, free spaces must be claimed not just within communities, but in the realm of mass culture which inevitably influences them.

Overall, incorporating greater concern for narrative into community movements would involve the revitalisation, and preservation of local community stories, and perhaps more importantly, spaces for telling. As community activist Marcia Nozick (1992) suggests, maintaining community culture necessarily entails the reclaiming of our regional social and natural histories - inching back across the spectrum from uniformity toward diversity and polyculturalism, and reconnect-

ing with all types of local heritage. This will require the validation, reinforcement and reinvention of an alternative context for living, and that is a struggle for storytellers.

epilogue

Late afternoon. An old woman and man sit on the porch of their small, rural north Ontario home. The man quietly talks while his wife flips through a series of large, dilapidated photo albums, every once in a while punctuating his rambling banter with a correction or appraisal. They have lived in this spot ever since being married on a warm August afternoon in 1946, and their families have lived here longer. The photos and clippings in the album span several generations, offering breaths of history from last year's fall picnic to her great grandfather's exploits as a fishing guide. Stands of white pine are stripped from rolling hillsides, locks and roads are variously erected, wild rice is planted and churches burn down, and the life of a waterway is sewn out of tattered fragments of remembering. They have come from many sources, these crackling snapshots, from travellers and newspapers, developer's records and relatives passed on; carefully compiled by successive pairs of hands, each belonging to an historian of some skill and affection. Perhaps the local township will find a little money to compile and publish the highlights in a small book next year. That boy from the west branch of the lake came by the other day, saying he already has the thing half-written. It will be no more and no less than a collection of everything certain prominent locals want to remember, everything they want visitors to know, about this little patch of forest green. The old woman's watery eyes hold my own as she closes up the last album. "After all," she whispers, "a lot of things are changing these days." Her husband nods agreement, looking off to the side at some unspecified distant point. "Sure, we seen a lot of changes, allright. An' these days, lots more things are changing. Why, I 'member another time..."

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Photograph by Mia Biasucci

genesis

by Christine Beevis

thoughts, armed with daggers
wage battles behind my eyes --
soldiers riding memories --
multi-coloured horses pave
hooves into the valleys
of my mind

jets of ink wash
over hills and grooves,
flood into
the channels of my veins,
delineating branches, trunks

become a forest,
bleed beneath my fingernails,
choke, struggle to keep afloat in the current behind the rolling ball

emerge victorious,
and print myself into
the fibres
of this page

My Vacation

by Chanda Meek

I mudpacked the back
of a horny trucker
in McReady hot springs.
He moved this way and that
his half moons
cresting the water
"lower — lower back" he pleaded.
He eventually hauled out on shore
to show me his wares
and how fun it'd be
to be his good buddy.
My eyes wandered,
Towards an old biker babe
her pendulous tits and
tattooed ass
a death tree - for the boys
"who went down"
and didn't come back up.
Her tummy was indented
from a long-ago c-section
probably not the birth of the
chihuahua "Sierra"
clutched tightly against her cheery
bright nipples
and laughingly dimpled cheeks.

Photograph by Mia Biasucci

UNDERCURRENT'S BISCOTTI

3 Eggs
1 c. Sugar
1 8g package vanilla sugar, or 1-2 tsp vanilla extract
1 1/2 c. flour
1 1/2 tsp baking powder
currents, chocolate chips, or any other dried fruit
cinnamon to taste

In one bowl, combine the flour, baking powder and cinammon. In another, start beating the eggs (either by hand or with an electric mixer). Slowly start to add the sugar one third at a time, and the vanilla sugar, while continuing to beat the mixture. When the mixture is no longer granular from the sugar, begin to add the flour mixture, 1/2 cup at a time. When the misture is smooth and consistent, stir in the chocolate chips, currents or other dried fruit. Spoon the misture onto a baking sheet and shape into two long logs, each of about 3 inches in width. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes. Take out of oven and cut on a diagonal into desired width and length. Flip the cookies on to their side and bake again for 15 minutes. The longer you leave them in the oven, the harder they will get.
recipe by Joanna Fine

Photograph by Sanj Sathiyamoorthy

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
But merely vans to beat the air.
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will
Teach us to care and not to care
teach us to sit still.

T.S. Eliot

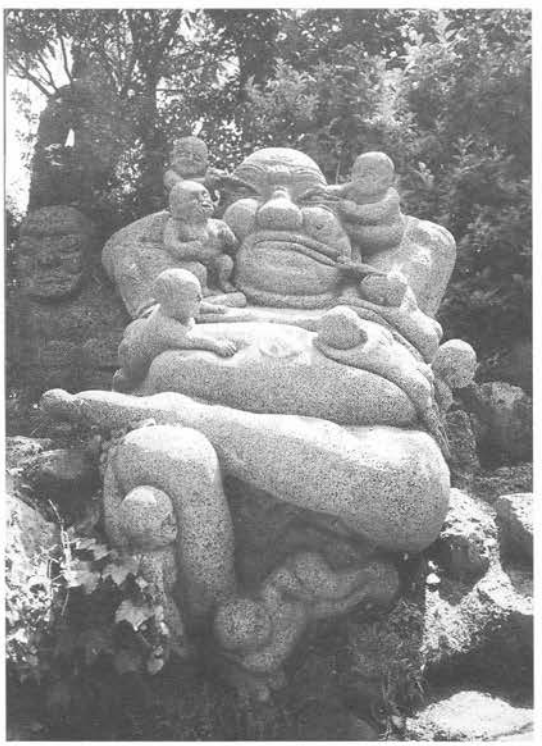
When Your Mouth Says Yes and Your Body Says No: Understanding Body Language in Mediations and Negotiations

by Danny Ciraco

the oldest language in the world

Before language, before writing, before any formalized communication process, there was, and continues to be, nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication, more commonly referred to by its sexier name, body language, is something most people often overlook as a legitimate form of communication. This indifference is ironic since the act of conveying a message is more than 50 percent nonverbal, and some list the figure higher than 90 percent.[1] Most of us do not consciously use the power of observation. We focus so much on verbal and written communication that we engulf ourselves in verbal ballets, forgetting to give credit to our other ways of communicating.

The importance of body language is strengthened by scholars who believe that gestures and speech develop together.[2] Gestures may facilitate activation of words, concepts, ideas, and images that can be used in message construction. A simple illustration is to observe someone on the telephone who continues to use facial expressions and gestures, even though their listeners cannot see them. The reason for this practice is that gestures accompanying speech may assist speakers in retrieving lexical items from memory.[3]



Photograph by Susy Kim

Understanding body language can be especially helpful to negotiators and mediators. My goal for this piece is not to prove that body language can be used as a foolproof way of reading people. Instead, I hope to show the reader the advantages of understanding nonverbal communication. However, we will also learn that body language is limited as a guide for use in mediation, as messages may vary depending on gender, cultural background, and other more general external forces. I will escort the reader through two mediations that I conducted in the Ontario Small Claims Court. I will highlight the nonverbal communication that took place in the mediation sessions and compare them with the settlement rates. The mediation sessions will be used solely as case studies to help contextualize nonverbal communication. The piece will be a compilation of my observations during mediation and not a scientific attempt of quantifying the correlation between body language and settlement. Keeping this in mind it is worth pointing out that my observations are limited to my own personal lens. As an Italian Canadian male, who is studying law at a Canadian university, my observations my be subject to significantly different interpretations than someone from a different social position. Equipped with this awareness, I am encouraged to turn to other studies and sources in the hopes of providing the reader with a richer awareness of ever present nonverbal messages.

Before dissecting body language, it may be helpful to the reader to offer a brief explanation of mediation in the Ontario Small Claims Court. Generally, mediation can be defined as "...the process by which the participants, together with the assistance of a neutral person or persons, systematically isolate disputed issues in order to develop options, consider alternatives, and reach a consensual settlement that will accommodate their needs."[4] The Small Claims Courts at College Park and North York, in Toronto, have adopted a project wherein students from Osgoode Hall Law School gain mediation experience by mediating disputants' cases. The process is voluntary, and while judges may encourage parties to mediate, the disputants have the option of refusing mediation in favour of litigation.

a successful negotiation dressed in positive body language

The first mediation involved a woman, I will call her Ms. D'Agostino, who sued a paving company. Please note that the names of the participants have been changed to protect their privacy. Ms. D'Agostino argued that her driveway was improperly constructed which caused rain to drain toward her side door and into her house. As a result of this imperfection she hired another company to rip out the recently constructed driveway and pave a new one. She sued the first paving company for the cost of replacing the driveway. The plaintiff's daughter accompanied her to court. The defendant, Mr. Jones, was the owner of the business and he represented the paving company on his own.

During the initial stages of the mediation there was a noticeable degree of tension. Before the mediation Ms. D'Agostino admitted to me that she was very nervous because she had never been in court. I explained that mediation is different from litigation and she seemed a little more at ease, however, she did emit a strong sense of discomfort at the beginning of the mediation process. Immediately following the introductions there was little verbal exchange. Ms. D'Agostino sat very erect with her hands folded on her lap. This posture, which included straightening the head from a leaning

position is often interpreted as an indication of disagreement, while a sideways leaning head is more closely associated with agreement.[5] She relaxed her posture once she began explaining what happened, growing more comfortable as we (the mediators) showed interest in her story. When Mr. Jones spoke, however, Ms. D'Agostino returned to her tense position. It was clear that the plaintiff was not comfortable and was not ready to listen to the defendant.

The most interesting aspect of the mediation for me was watching people's postures change, depending on who was speaking. As soon as the defendant began to explain his side of the story the plaintiff's daughter crossed her legs and avoided making eye contact with Mr. Jones. The act of crossing one's legs is often interpreted as a desire to shut someone out.[6] And looking around can indicate a desire to get away.[7] The daughter's action seemed like an obvious rejection of information; an external indication of the desire to shield oneself. The daughter crossed her legs at the knee; whereas crossing the legs above the knee could have been interpreted as a more determined outward show of resistance.

In order to analyze leg crossing, it will be helpful to highlight the different styles of carriage, because simply sitting with crossed legs does not necessarily constitute a closed posture; much of the way this is interpreted depends on how the legs are crossed, as only certain ways of crossing the legs are associated with disagreement. Legs might be crossed at the ankles, at the knee, above the knee, or with one ankle on the thigh. In particular those affectations where the legs are tightly crossed, and form the most "closed" leg position, are typically associated with disagreement.[8] In addition, clamping the crossed leg firmly into position by the hand, has been associated with obstinacy. This pose is the unconscious reaction of someone who is resisting persuasion in a discussion. The gesture says, "My ideas, like my body, are clamped firmly in position."[9] Ms. D'Agostino's legs were tightly crossed, and were indeed clamped firmly by her hands.

Mr. Jones, on the other hand, was more relaxed and sat comfortably in his chair when he told his story. Even though his comments were somewhat condescending, and may have been seen as dismissive of the plaintiff's concerns, his demeanor helped to ease the tension. Mr. Jones was displaying an open posture showing a physical openness that reflects a psychological openness. Open posture involves a lack of muscle tension; tension is often evident in eyebrows, mouth, shoulders, or hands. Connected to openness is the perception of power. Power and leadership are associated with an expansive, casual, and relaxed demeanor.[10] Adopting an open or "plus" face posture — slightly raised chin, raised brow, widened eyes, relaxed mouth — is highly predictive of success in conflict situations of people from ages 4 to 45.[11] The overall indication: Mr. Jones was much more comfortable than the plaintiff and her daughter.

As the mediation continued the tension decreased. The parties began to warm up to each other and Ms. D'Agostino, who was originally displaying notable negative body language, became more comfortable. The parties drew closer to a settlement. Mr. Jones explained that he was interested in settling in order to avoid going to trial. He leaned in toward Ms. D'Agostino and apologized.

Leaning itself can send messages about your feelings. A forward lean is seen as a more positive, empathic posture, while a backward lean is not. Mediators may want to note that in an experiment involving interviewers and body language, forward leaning interviewers were judged as more polite and "flexible" than backward leaning interviewers.[12] Leaning inward is a way to build trust and rapport as are other forms of nonverbal feedback such as nodding the head slowly and maintaining steady eye contact while listening. All seem to signal that you value the information that is being shared with you.[13]

Another form of nonverbal signal is touch. Coupled with his forward lean, Mr. Jones reached out to touch Ms. D'Agostino's hand as he apologized. At first I thought this gesture would create discomfort for the plaintiff, however she responded positively. That moment, I think, was the turning point in the mediation because it seemed to signal that the parties had built some rapport.

Certain studies in fact have confirmed that casual touching can create positive connections between people. For example, in one study male and female library clerks returned library cards to some students by placing their hand directly over the other's palm, making physical contact; other students were not touched. Outside the library, the students were approached by a researcher and asked questions about their feelings toward the library clerk and the library in general. Students who were touched, especially the females, evaluated the clerk and the library significantly more favourably than those who were not touched. This reaction was true both for students who were aware of being touched and those who were not.[14] Other studies of brief touches conclude with similar results; servers who touched diners, for example, earned better tips.[15]

This is not to say that everyone will feel comfortable with touch. According to a study at Oklahoma State University, researchers found that females are generally more comfortable than men with touch, perhaps because women are more likely to interpret touch in affectional rather than sexual terms.[16] The study also found that touch comfort is associated with satisfaction with life, with oneself, and with one's childhood, as well as with self-confidence, assertiveness, socially acceptable self-presentation, and active rather than passive modes of coping with problems. The danger with touching however, is that it may distance the parties in a mediation or a negotiation by creating a power imbalance. The reason for this discrepancy is that the initiator of the touch is seen as the person with greater power if the touch is nonreciprocated.[17] Often these touches are used to influence others and are referred to as compliance touches.[18] In our case study example Mr. Jones may have in fact strengthened the relationship with Ms. D'Agostino simply by touching her hand. Of course if Ms. D'Agostino did not feel comfortable with being touched, that same act may have destroyed the rapport, negatively affecting the negotiations.

Another way people build rapport is through "mirroring," a phenomena which emerged between the parties as the mediation continued. Mirroring involves adopting nonverbal behaviour patterns similar to those of the person with whom you are interacting. Put simply, mirroring does not mean the same posture, but rather a reflection of the posture. When you begin behaving in a way other people are comfortable with, their perception of your similarities tends to increase as well, which may be attributed to our tendency to like and trust people who are similar to us.[19] Also, by moving your body like someone else's you may be able to relate better to them.[20]

The parties eventually agreed to settle and the mediation concluded. In fact, a strong sense of comaraderie developed. An outsider who had not seen them come into the mediation might never have dreamed that these were people at odds. The parties were recreating a positive relationship and Ms. D'Agostino jokingly grabbed the arm of the defendant and told him that he now had to take her and her daughter out for lunch.

a less successful negotiation bruised with negative body language

The second mediation, involving three parties, was more complicated and was not as successful as the previous one. This case involved a private in-house nursing company who sued a ninety year old woman, Ms. Keil, for an unpaid bill. Ms. Keil in turn sued the hospital that she claimed hired the private nurse on her behalf without properly informing her that she would have to pay for the services.

It is worth noting that not all the parties were immediately interested in mediation. Prior to the mediation the lawyer for the nursing company, Mr. Chow, while waiting in the hall, said to the other parties (all of whom were represented by lawyers) that he did not believe in this "mediation stuff." I confronted Mr. Chow and explained that mediation was a voluntary process and that if he did not feel comfortable with it he could opt out and the case would simply be referred back to trial. The lawyer was taken aback by my forwardness, and replied by saying, "We might as well try it — the judge won't hear us for a while anyway." The lawyer's negative comment might be interpreted as "goal setting." Goal setting is defined as acting in a way so as to impress others with an image of who you are and how you can be expected to behave.[21] As it was explicitly made in listening distance of the other parties Mr. Chow's comment, rejecting mediation, may have been a goal setting strategy to convince the opposing parties that he was confident and ready to go to trial. This behaviour may have been intended to intimidate the other parties and encourage them to settle in his favour.

Although I cannot know for certain whether that was Mr. Chow's conscious intention I was fairly certain that this mediation would not reach an agreement. To begin with none of the participants displayed open posture; they were all very formal and rigid. This may have been partly a result of the lawyers' involvement in the mediation; lawyers who consistently steered the discussions towards legal issues and rights, as opposed to exploring a mutually satisfactory resolution. Rigidity was particularly evident in the parties' hands. At the mediation table, one of the lawyers held his hands together in a prayer like fashion, while the other two lawyers had their hands on their lap out of view of the other participants. Hands are often the part of the body that we tend to hide when we feel vulnerable. Showing an open palm is an especially appropriate way to express your trustworthiness. We often show our palm as a friendly gesture when we greet people, shake hands, and ask for understanding.[22] In the mediation the lawyers' body language seemed to be saying that they were either uncomfortable, had something to hide, or both.

When it became clear that the negotiations were not progressing we decided to meet with the parties separately where they confirmed what I had perceived. The parties all felt as though the others were withholding valuable information. One lawyer explained that the others were probably not being as open as one hopes in mediation because they were set on going to trial. In the lawyers' eyes, saying too much in the mediation may have strengthened their opponents' case in court, even though the information revealed in mediation is not supposed to be used in court.

The parties did not discuss whether each others' actions were intentional, nonetheless I thought it would be interesting to analyze their body language to see if they displayed behaviours typically associated with deceit. Ms. Keil's lawyer, Mr. Papadopoulos, argued that the hospital had ordered the private nurse without her realizing that she would have to pay for the service. Mr. Papadopoulos asked the lawyer for the hospital, Ms. Ledgerwood, whether she had any record of the nurse making the phone call to the private nursing company. Ms. Ledgerwood began to shuffle through her notes that sat in her lap, she periodically covered her mouth while speaking, generally appeared tense and stiff with an overall feeling of greater physical restraint, she experienced several awkward pauses in her speech, and often shook her head. Ms. Ledgerwood's actions were similar to those often observed during acts of deception.

It may help at this point to describe different affectations observed in people known to be participating in deception. For example, deceivers tend to be uncertain and vague, nonimmediate and reticent (i.e. they respond more slowly), display greater arousal and lack of composure, and generally make a poorer impression than truth-tellers. Their behaviours also tend to connote greater formality and submissiveness.[23]

With this in mind, let's return our attention to the case of Ms. Ledgerwood. Shuffling papers in the lap may be interpreted as a closed posture. We have natural tendencies to protect our soft, vulnerable organs located in the abdomen, especially when we are in stressful situations. This propensity closes us off to our audience and creates a psychological distance. Standing with your abdomen unobstructed is a more courageous posture, reflecting self-confidence, fearlessness, and a receptive mind.[24] Another obstruction, which Ms. Ledgerwood practised, is covering the mouth while speaking, which may indicate uncertainty, or that one is concealing something.[25]

Ms. Ledgerwood also displayed evidence of increased physical restraint. Commonly, people tend to inaccurately associate an increase in movement with deception.[26] For instance, most people assume lying to be signaled by agitation, fidgeting, and hyperactivity. However, this is not generally the case. Deception is actually more often associated with a decrease in subtle movements of hands, fingers, feet and legs.

When it comes to explaining the correspondence between decreased physical movement and deception, there are two schools of thought. According to one theory, referred to as the "attempted control framework," physical rigidity is caused by over consciousness of one's movements, leading to more calculated attempts to control them. On the other hand, the "cognitive load framework" attributes the decrease in physical movements to the preoccupation of the individual's mind in the cognitive process of lying.[27] The attempt to lie distracts the individual's attention, which results in a decrease in physical expression. Deceptive sources must be careful to produce responses that are not only believable but also consistent with known facts and previous statements, while truth-

ful messages require only that sources recall relevant information and convey it to others.[28] Such cognitive distraction has also been invoked to explain the kind of pauses in speech which accompanied Ms. Ledgerwood's physical restraint. Other frequently observed behaviours connected with physical restraint include: raised vocal pitch, tense vocal cues that signal heightened anxiety, micromentary unpleasant facial expressions, and head shaking. In particular, shaking the head may reveal underlying negative feelings, possibly due to guilt about deceiving or fear of being detected.[29]

Regardless of whether Ms. Ledgerwood was actually lying, the parties seem to have read these deception cues and sensed that she was not being entirely truthful. If deception was involved, the above interpretation of Ms. Ledgerwood's actions should not be taken to suggest that everyone deals with deception in the same way. For example, people who place a high value on honesty may exhibit different nonverbal behaviours during deception compared to those who do not abide by the principle of veracity. Practiced liars and those possessing alternate frameworks of morality—often referred to as Machiavellian personalities—may be more comfortable producing deceptive messages, more experienced with deception, and consequently less likely to hesitate when questioned.[30]

Another type of personality which might be misread by the criteria which have been applied in reading Ms. Ledgerwood's body language is the self-monitor. Self-monitoring refers to an individual's tendency to monitor and respond to social cues while interacting with others. High self-monitors are social chameleons who routinely adjust their communicative behaviour to meet the social protocols of particular situations—and therefore can make exceptional liars. Low self-monitors are less attentive to social cues, less concerned with social appropriateness, and more likely to maintain a constant pattern of interaction across various situations. In other words, self-monitoring affects the production of a control of nonverbal behaviour during deception; while someone with a weak degree of self monitoring may act rigid during deception, a self-monitor may be able to act more casual and relaxed.[31]

The parties in this mediation did not reach a settlement and so their case proceeded to court. Although most disputants in a mediation approach the mediation with uncertainty and sometimes even an unwillingness to negotiate, which is reflective in their body language, the parties in this dispute showed almost no change in attitude. Rapport did not develop and distrust fermented throughout the negotiations.

body language blemishes

Although awareness of body language may provide clues to the unstated dynamics operative in a negotiation this cannot be seen as a foolproof means of evaluating any communicative interaction. The reality is that we cannot create a body language dictionary to define nonverbal cues; there are just too many variables to be taken into account. Someone crossing their arms is not necessarily saying that they disagree, it may just be that the room is too cold for them.[32] We must also remember to consider the situatedness of the receiver's perception. What we as receivers see and interpret is dependent in part on our way of perceiving the world; not all of us have the same map of reality. In other words, body language must be analyzed in context.

Aside from individual differences in perception which arise between members of the same social situation, we must also keep in mind that geographic and cultural environment is a powerful force in determining nonverbal behaviour. By judging body language through our own particular lens we may arrive at a distorted understanding of someone's nonverbal messages. European males for example, typically cross their legs at the knee, stacking one knee above the other; a posture which may seem effeminate to some Americans. American males tend to rest the lower thigh or ankle of one leg on the knee of the other in what has been called the "figure 4 position". Even some American women assume this position when wearing slacks or jeans. Many Europeans consider the American way boorish for men and lesbian behaviour in women.[33] Another example of contextually-specific body language involves personal space. In the United States, most people are comfortable with a personal space of 2 feet, but this zone can be as close as 6 inches in Mediterranean countries, and as far as 3 or 4 feet in Scandinavian countries.[34] The issue of touch can also be contextually specific. For example, French-Canadians, Italians, and Latin Americans are generally more tactile in person than English-Canadians, Germans, and Americans.[35]

Some cultures place more emphasis than others on nonverbal communication. For instance, much Japanese custom incorporates a consciousness of body language to some degree. As an example, to avoid offending or embarrassing others in conversation, some Japanese people will often say what they feel the other person wants to hear (called tatemae) but send more subtle nonverbal cues which dictate their true feelings (called honne). A Japanese manager might politely address an employee's business proposal by saying: "I will think about that," while sending nonverbal signals that he or she is not really interested.[36]

These are only a few cultural and geographic differences, and the distinctions do not stop at culture; there is also the matter of gender. According to data from observational research, a number of nonverbal gender differences have been found. Women for example, tend to smile and laugh more than men. Women are also typically better nonverbal encoders and decoders, especially of facial expressions.[37] Besides these findings based on research, both men and women actually tend to believe that females are better communicators. Women are type-cast as more expressive and involved than men, and as more skilled at sending and receiving nonverbal messages. Men on the other hand are stereotyped as louder and more interruptive, and characterized by more nervous, dysfluent behaviours.[38]

While I feel that body language should always be viewed in context and with caution, and while the array of complications emerging in this discussion may appear daunting, I have not intentionally built a castle out of playing cards in order to blow it down. I do believe that attention to body language does have its merits when it comes to interpreting the dynamics of negotiations and mediation. The two case studies described in this essay help us contextualize the interpretation of nonverbal communication. Although the interpretations of these cases may seem somewhat oversimplified, they clearly serve as illustrations of the ways in which attention to body language may help us to understand the patterns of interactions and communication which emerge during negotiations and mediation. By tuning ourselves into nonverbal cues such as "forward leaning" or "mirroring", we also improve our reception to unstated signals. Of course, perhaps the most important thing to remember is that nonverbal communication is a two way street. While you may be focussed on analyzing someone's demeanor, they may be noting the way you shuffle paper nervously in your lap. So the next time you speak with someone and take a momentary pause to consider what it means when they touch their nose while crossing their legs, with a nervous tic on a Tuesday, remember that they are also receiving your nonverbal cues... and your distraction may be misunderstood.

Notes

1 Richard Klein, "Winning Cases with Body Language," Trial October 1993, at 56.

2 Birdwhistell, 1970; Freedman & Steingar, 1975; Kendon, 1980, 1983; McHeill, 1985, 1992; McNeil & Levy, 1982; Poyatos, 1983, 1992; Rime & Schiarature, 1991 as noted in Judee K. Burgoon, David B. Buller, and W. Gill Woodall, *Nonverbal Communication The Unspoken Dialogue*, Second Edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996) at 170.

3 Chawla & Krauss, 1994; Krauss et all., 1991 as noted in Ibid. at 171.

4 J. Folberg, *Mediation: A Comprehensive Guide to Resolving Conflicts Without Litigation*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984) at 7.

5 Peter E. Bull, *Posture and Gesture*, International Series in Experimental Social Psychology, Volume 16, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1987) at 65.

6 Herald Price Fahringer, "'Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...' Body Language, Intuition, and the Art of Jury Selection," American Journal of Trial Advocacy Vol. 17 at 202.

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8 Supra note 5 at 67.

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10 Constance Berstein, "Winning Trials Nonverbally: Six Ways to Establish Control in the Courtroom," *Trial*, January 1994 at 62.

11 Mary E. Ryan, "Good Nonverbal Communication Skill Can Reduce Stress," *Trial*, January 1995, at 71

12 Haase and Tepper, 1972; *Shiraishi*, 1974 as noted in Supra note 5 at 24.

13 Supra note 11 at 73.

14 Fisher, Rytting & Heslin, 1976 as noted in Mark L. Knapp and Judith A. Hall, *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*, Third Edition (Fort Worth: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1992) at 229.

15 Crusco & Wetzel, 1984 in Ibid. at 230.

16 Andersen & Leibowitz, 1978; Larsen & LeRoux, 1984 in Donald K. Fromme, William E. Jaynes, Deborah k. Taylor, Elaine G. Hanold, Jennifer Daniell, J. Richard Rountree, and Marie L. Fromme, "Nonverbal Behavior and Attitudes Towards Touch," *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* 13(1), Spring 1989, at 4-5.

17 Summerhayes & Suchner, 1978 as noted in Supra note 15 at 235.

18 Ibid. at 247.

19 Supra note 11 at 72-3.

20 Wayne R. Maes, *The Cognition/Affect Linkage and the Unconscious in Cognitive Therapy*, as noted in Supra note 11 at 73.

21 Supra note 11, at 70-1.

22 Supra note 10 at 61.

23 Judee K. Burgoon and David B. Buller, "Interpersonal Deception: III. Effects of Deceit on Perceived Communication and Nonverbal Behavior Dynamics," *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* 18(2), Summer 1994 at 155-82.

24 Supra note 10 at 61.

25 Supra note 1 at 58.

26 Alcert Vrij, Gun R. Semin, and Ray Bull, "Insight Into Behavior Displayed During Deception," *Human Communication Research*, Vol. 22 No. 4, June 1996 at 544-562.

27 Ekman & Friesen, 1972, as noted in Alcert Vrij, Gun R. Semin, and Ray Bull, "Insight Into Behavior Displayed During Deception," *Human Communication Research*, Vol. 22 No. 4, June 1996 at 546.

28 Miller & Stiff, 1993, as noted in James Stiff, Steve Corman, Bob Krizek, and Eric Snider, "Individual Differences and Changes in Nonverbal Behavior: Unmasking the Changing Faces of Deception, *Communication Research*, Vol. 21 No. 5, October 1994 at 562.

29 Buller & Burgoon, 1994; Knapp et al., 1987; Miller & Burgoon, 1982; Zuckerman & Driver, 1985 as noted in Supra note 29 at 161.

30 Exline et. all., 1970 as noted in Supra note 28 at 562-63.

31 Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Snyder, 1974 as noted in Ibid. at 563.

32 Eric Oliver, "'Body Language' Means Elbow Grease," *American Journal of Family Law*, Vol. 10, (1996) at 44-5.

33 Marjorie Fink VarGas, *Louder Than Words: An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication*, (The Iowa State University Press, 1986) at 49, also see Supra note 9 at 153.

34 Supra note 1 at 56.

35 Supra note 33 at 89.

36 Steven L. McShane, *Canadian Organizational Behaviour*, Second Edition, (Times Mirror Professional Publishing Limited: Toronto, 1995) at 173-74.

37 Hall, 1984; Hall, 1978, 1984; Rosenthal et al., 1979 as noted in Nancy J. Briton and Judith A. Hall, "Beliefs About Female and Male Nonverbal Communication," *Sex Roles*, Vol. 32, Nos. 1/2, 1995 at 81.

38 Ibid. at 81. Also see Supra note 15 at 251.

The One Who Heard

by Sean Kane

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller, one for the listener, and one for the one who heard. So goes an Armenian saying – you will hear it quoted often in the great revival of storytelling that is happening today in many places. The teller? The listener? That's easy. They make up the storytelling act. But who is "the one who heard"? I imagine someone who transcends the storytelling act altogether, an insider to what story conveys in its arcs of almost uncatchable truth, someone half inside their oral culture and half out there with the Muse, daughter of the weathergod and the spirit of a mountain. One feels storytellers speaking in code here. Who are they speaking to precisely? What kind of singular individual is "the one who heard"?

First of all, that someone is a wholly mythic person. By mythic person, I mean an individual formed so entirely on the values conveyed by traditional stories that he or she will go out to live their truth. This is stretching the term "myth" a bit, because not all oral literature is myth. But storytellers are the first to assume that the values of the mythtellers pass into the other traditional story-forms, and are kept in suspended animation in them. Mythic knowing passes especially into the wondertale, so in talking about mythic values I mean also, with a spin on them, wondertale values. And I mean to a lesser degree hero-story values, even nursery-rhyme values. They are all mythic. I mean the whole unformulated philosophy of life that is implied in oral tradition. Let us call it mythic, and ask if there is any way we can still go out and live its truth.

What are mythic values? This is an important question in our age of ecology. Most broadly defined, they are the values that evolved from thousands of years of peoples living on the Earth on the Earth's own terms - not in terms of some trajectory of recorded human history. There is an Earth-relatedness in myth that is still echoing in the wondertale.

Myth typically involves two worlds, with a boundary between them. The one world is the world of human ingenuity. The other world is what we can call the Otherworld of spiritual ingenuity. The two ingenious worlds behave quite differently – they have different thinking styles -- but when they meet memorable things happen. Power is passed from one world to the other. The two worlds pursue their own concerns behind their domain-walls, but sometimes they play trick-or-treat with each other: they borrow or steal or exchange or leave gifts, always with the

Artwork by Derek Evernden

fortuitous outcome of ensuring the balanced survival of both worlds – the world of human culture and the world of Earth's nurture.

This double-universe, held together in narrative, means that myths project a basic plot involving passage from one world to the other. Then back again – because it is a prime directive of myth that beings cannot live long in a habitat that is not their own. So the plot may propel a human from this world to the Otherworld to bring back something valuable to humans. That something valuable may be the spirit of a person departed before her time, or it may be knowledge of where the bear is to be hunted, or knowledge of the weather and the right time for planting, or some other divine knowledge. In myth, such passages usually entail an animal guide, or the seeker assuming an animal form, first, in order to cross the boundary, then to negotiate with the animal-spirits. You will recognize this passage across a boundary as the archetypal plot of the shaman's dream-quest or, in agricultural myths, the underworld descent. That plot is still going strong in the wondertale and fairy tale. The goddess of the boundary is still there, though she may be reduced to a talking mouse; the Otherworld deities have been reduced to ogres or witches or trolls. Yet the hero, like a shaman, brings something back, even if it is a princess awakened from a spell. Jack brings back from the sky giants of the beanstalk a harp that sings with a human voice and a hen that lays golden eggs – the gifts of the gods: music and fertility.

Movement between the two worlds can be the other way as well. A spirit-being from the Otherworld comes to live in this human world for a spell, like the goddess Étaíne of ancient Irish literature. She leaves behind the gifts of fertility before she is recalled to her higher duties. Tonight you have heard the music of Faërie, she tells Eochy, King of Ireland, and echoes of it shall be in the harpstrings of Ireland forever. In this telling of the myth by the wondertale artist Alice Kane, Étaíne has "put into one year the joy of a lifetime" -- but she has to go back. In mythic narrative, you have to go back to your side of the boundary.[1]

If this movement through worlds makes up myth's structure, then myth's values are those that help one live completely in the everyday while negotiating with the mysterious Others. I won't sketch a whole ethics of mythic values. You know from traditional stories what they are - a heart for adventure; a sense of one's own singularity; generosity to creatures in need; an openness or exibility or dreaminess or courtesy of mind that you see in the wondertale simpleton; above all, courage and cunning. Mostly, it is not possessing what you have – your name, your identity, your destiny, your spiritual or material wealth. You do not hoard things. The injunction against hoarding is strong in hunter-gatherer myths, which say that hoarding ends spontaneous exchange with an Earth who can usually be trusted to provide. Even in the wondertale, the villains are the ones who hoard – the witch counting her victims' skulls or the troll counting his gold. There are other values too – but these are the well-springs of what I will call a mythic ethical sense. And my question is: can these values -- should these values -- be lived in today's society?

First, can they? And then, should they?

Can they? I say – yes they can! I know this having been raised on myth and wondertale. Now this upbringing may not seem like anything special worth sharing. Probably all of us who write or study literature were raised on the old storybooks. We know the old stories by heart. We are full of their values. But I was a sort of test-case of the captivated listener. That is because I was brought up by Alice Kane and her stories – not only her stories, but stories by my aunt's colleagues in the Boys and Girls' Division of the Toronto Public Library during its golden age (roughly 1920-1980).
Is the golden age of children's librarianship still within the reach of common memory? I hope it is. Alice Kane, honoured in her 91st year by York University at its Spring 1998 Convocation with a Doctorate of Letters, gives us cause to remember – to remember how the librarians worked their complex magic on children. How each librarian was an academic specialist in some branch of literature for children: Alice Kane specialized in the literary wondertale; Helen Armstrong, trained in epic and saga by W. P. Kerr at Edinburgh, handled those narrative forms. These specialists in story would present research papers to each other in the hours before the children came in. Each librarian had to learn to tell three new stories a week, from the best versions available. The librarians had to lay on their backs with the Toronto Telephone Directory on their abdomens, and try to raise it three inches. I'm sure none of today's revivalist storytellers do that! In short, they were, as someone has said, a guild of women artists masquerading as children's librarians.

They were my babysitters. Because my mother was often sick and died when I was young, I was babysat by the staff of the Toronto Public Library Boys and Girls' Division – but chiefly by Alice. I felt like the young King Arthur must have felt, educated by the faerie Otherworld.

Yes, I'm sure they practiced their pernicious theories of oral literacy on me, their captive subject. I believe I was provided with just the right story at just the right age. I'm certain that the storybooks came owing in artfully planned succession. The combined lore and witchcraft of the Toronto Public Library Boys and Girls' Division was tried and tested on my uncomprehending innocence.

For I was the ideal subject, you see. I was the ideal subject for an education in story. That is to say, I was imaginative and alienated. It is the perfect preparation to be the product of myth. I will say something about imagination and alienation later on. But first I must mythify my childhood some more.

I don't want to mythify it excessively – but you should see that not having a mother, and having a father who was powerful and remote, put me naturally in wondertale space. I was the perfect wondertale hero in the making. King Arthur was like me. Odysseus was like me. The children in Grimm and Asbjørnsen and Afanas'ev were like me. All my heroes were like me. I had no other ideal of proper behaviour except to be a hero and transgress the norms of the social. That is what I mean by imaginative and alienated. Never far away was Aunt Alice, or one of that sisterhood from the realm where things come true. In the serendipitous style of the fairy Otherworld, they kept – they still do keep – appearing and disappearing when needed.

So you see? I am a sort of ideal specimen.

What did that total education in story do for me? Well, I learned all about trolls. Do you know about trolls? Even today, you have to learn the rules for dealing with trolls. The fact about trolls is this: they can do only one thing – their own thing – well. They're good at the tasks they do, so you should never try to argue with them on their own ground. They are in charge of monotonous repetitive functions. For example, near the Faroe Islands, Christian Matras says, there is the weather troll who makes all the fog in the North Sea. In George Johnson's translation:

Now it is winter and almost night
and the troll sits and cards batt
in some stone that the winds hug
and sucks man-marrow and chews rag.

And the troll cards and the troll cards
and heaps up gray stuff yards and yards,
wind lays about and slings troll-gray,
and has a feel that is all coal-grey.[2]

Do you hear the monotony of it? They kill you with monotony before they eat you. Trolls are everywhere. You can't move on this planet without running into a troll. The government accountants who reject your income-tax return – they're trolls. The entire management of the modern university from the dean up – they're trolls too. The claims adjusters who terminate your home insurance unless you replace the more than one-quarter of your plumbing which is non-copper – more trolls. The student loans officers at the bank – they're all trolls. The administration of a nursing home for senior citizens – still more trolls! They're everywhere. Sucking the marrow out of your bones and spreading thick gray fog.

And, as I say, you don't argue with them on their own terms, or they just grow more heads. You don't ask them why they think they own that bridge. Instead you say to them something like this: "You want me to pay back my student loan? But look at the guy behind me – he owes more. Get him!" And then the person behind him says, "Me? What about the guy behind me? He owes tons more." You see? You tie them up in their own bureaucratic hunger. You can't cut off their heads because they'll just grow three more – that's what bureaucracies do – but you can get those three heads arguing with each other while you steal away. That's cunning – one of the qualities of the folktale hero. The cultural theorist Walter Benjamin calls it Untermut – under-spiritedness. It is one of the jujitsu-like powers anking tricksterism.[3]

Then there's the other flanking power – courage, Übermut. It leads to over-spirited situations. At the age of seven, I got lost in the mountains of British Columbia. My mother, never happy except in the Rockies, took me to a ghost town in the Kootenays. There, in a cottage halfway up the mountainside overlooking the abandoned silvermines, she collected flowers and wrote poetry in the margins of books. The first night there, we walked along a forest path to the ruined smelting mill, with the river hurtling straight down behind it. "Don't go off the path," she said.

Now, readers of the tale of adventure and transformation will at once recognize these words as a form of the negative injunction or prohibition. In myth, they warn of the boundary you cross at your peril. Prohibitions, of course, exist to be broken. That's what prohibitions are for. I have a homespun theory about this, based on my checkered career as a parent.

The theory is that at any stage of parenting, the parent will underestimate the child's actual age. Simultaneously, the child will overestimate the parent's actual age. The ongoing communication gap that results is called "growing up." "Don't do this," the parent says. And immediately the child goes and does the forbidden thing. He has to find out the meaning of life for himself. She has to earn her own freedom. Because freedom can't be given – the novelist Margaret Laurence used to say that, in relation to leaving a marriage: you can't ask for freedom; you have to take it. Then the child, trapped like Adam and Eve in an infantile paradise, reaches for the one thing that is forbidden. Growth. The freedom to find your own destiny. To freely choose good over evil.

That long night in the Kootenay mountains I learned fear. There is a Russian wondertale about "The Boy who Learned the Meaning of Fear." I learned the meaning of fear that night. I have never really been afraid of anything since – least of all trolls. And I have never felt lost since.

I learned something else too. This came around midnight or so, after I had skirted mine shafts and glacial rivers, learning the meaning of fear. Another outlook took hold. I made a lean-to for myself, right out of the children's book Wildwood Wisdom. I found a small pinetree root that made a perfect club. (The reporter for the New Denver Daily found this poignant: when asked what the club was for, the boy replied that it was in case he met a wolf). Then I slept. In the morning, I climbed the tallest tree and looked around the mountains. There was a logging road down there. Where there's a road, there's people. Remember, the books say, it's not you who are lost, it's your camp that's lost. So I spent the morning moving down through the forest, reaching that road. Pause and be still for five minutes; listen if any animal is around. By some instinct, I turned right instead of left, and walked into town from the direction of the Slocan valley.

I joined the back of the crowd of a search-party that was being instructed by a Mountie. Shot-guns and tracker-dogs.

I survived. You see – I simply became a wondertale hero. I had a trust, which the wondertale gives, that lost children will usually be found, that adventures turn out all right in the end.

I went back to that place of initiation last summer. Sandon is still there – a ghost-town in the mountains. In fact, it was a ghost city; during the silver boom, it had three hotels, several churches, two hundred prostitutes. It was the first city in British Columbia to have electricity. Now, the place is suspended in the timelessness of the mountains: the wooden store-fronts, rusted ore buckets, the sharp smell of minerals in the tailings.

I found the road where the Mountie carried me home to my mother on his shoulders – I remembered how disappointed I was that he was not wearing a scarlet tunic. I found the cottage on the mountainside where my distraught mother waited on the porch. The roof has caved in, and it is covered with moss, but the antiquated refrigerator is still there on the porch. I found the path to the mill. I found the precise place where I left the path to try to take a shortcut home to surprise my mother. And I retraced the first part of that journey I made years ago, when I was seven and crossed the boundary into the forest of the Mysterious Others. I knew every step of the way. I say "boundary" because I became a person of myth as well as wondertale. I crossed from the human world into the dark unknown of the animal powers. In effect, I behaved like an animal there – I trusted my wits and instincts. Perhaps I became a mythic person.

Yes – mythic values can be lived in our time – but you have to be thrown into a certain situation to live them. The larger question is should they? Should mythic values be deliberately lived in our time?

My opinion, for what it's worth, is that we live increasingly in a world very much like that of the folk wondertale. We have to use our wits to survive. We're up against powers that are bigger than ourselves. They are morally ambiguous; things that are bad for you these institutions present as good. Call them corporations and banks; Saint Paul called them "principalities and powers." They make themselves too shadowy to overthrow. Yet their actions are as capricious and arbitrary as any aristocrat riding his horse over your vegetable patch. Beside them, we are little people. Little people from broken families – there are so many broken families again nowadays. When a student asks me, what is a little person, I say: someone who owes the banks a student loan of twenty-four thousand dollars is a little person.

The peasant wondertale counsels a spirit of ironic resourcefulness. Tricksterism, as a way of survival, has no illusions about an apocalyptic overthrow of the powers that be. Instead, tricksterism works within the system, turning its vanities and superiorities to the trickster's advantage.

The myths and wondertales do something else too – and this is a secret that I'm not sure I ought to give away. But this is how the old stories work their magic on the uncomprehending innocent. They seek out the most imaginative and the most alienated among us, and they give that special individual a sense of her own uniqueness. This is the great untold right-under-your-nose secret of literature. I will tell you that secret now. Literature is a subversive elitist activity. Literature is elitist because essentially it involves insiders conspiring with insiders: literature is alienated people with imagination speaking in code for other alienated people with imagination.

Consider how deviously this system of recruitment works.

A young boy, for example, has lost his parents. So many of the oral myths begin this way – with the orphan as hero. He is isolated from the other children playing in the village. He hears a myth about a powerful shaman or a hero who also lost his parents when he was young. That listener will feel picked out especially by that story. He will feel it was meant just for him, and he will go on to live its mythic truth. Or a day-dreaming girl, held in subjection by her older worldly sisters, and seeing her mother's face in the ashes of the replace, hears a wondertale about another Cinderella just like herself. The listener will feel the story was meant privately for her ears. It is just for her alone. The ones without imagination, of course, hear nothing special in the entertainment. They are never allowed to know that a special magic went on just out of the range of ordinary hearing.

In literature, whether it is told or written, there are the tellers and there are the listeners. But, let me quote the Armenian saying again: Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller, one for the listener, and one for the one who heard. There is also and always the one who heard. That singular imaginative and alienated soul is the real one the stories are after. That person will go out and live the truth of story as a hero. If the person lives long enough, he or she will become a storyteller. Thus an elite minority is recruited from generation to generation among the small minority of the human population that is fully imaginative. I mean the small minority in any sub-population – professors or garbage collectors.

This Reception Theory of literature I will call the Anne Shirley theory, because in her empowered singularity Anne "with an e" is one of literature's most typical products. Anne of Green Gables believed that all of literature was meant just for her ears alone. So, of course, does every other avid and alienated imaginer.

Notes

1. "The Golden Fly" in Alice Kane, *The Dreamer Awakes* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1995), 83-92 at 92. This is a retelling of a story of the same name by Ella Young in Celtic Wonder Tales (1910, reissued Edinburg Bh: Floris Books, 1985, 127-141). For the original form of the story, see Sean Kane, Wisdom of the Mythtellers (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1994), 90-101, where the myth is used to illustrate the concept of boundary.
2. "Weather Troll" by Christian Matras, in *Rocky Shores: An Anthology of Faroese Poetry*, compiled and translated by George Johnson (Paisley, Scotland: Wil on Books, 1981), 8.
3. "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov" in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 83-109 at 102.

Editorial Epilogue

(or: the sound of a raindrop rolling down a fern frond and into the eye of a fool)

Although I have been nominated by the Editorial Collective to compose an editorial counterpoint to this year's journal - to offer some sort of synthesis concerning the impulse, energy and vision that went into its compilation - I can hardly hope to articulate singly what has been above all a collective process, other than noting that it has been rather fun. To tell the truth, I don't even remember quite how it all got started, beyond arriving late at the first editorial meeting and discovering (in one of the year's best surprises) that everyone present was, like myself, in some way interested in the confluence of narratives and 'environmental' knowledge. Whatever the beginning, it quickly became apparent that each editor (not to mention each contributor, each reader) had a significantly different take on what this year's theme might really be all about. That said, it nevertheless falls to me to reflect a little bit on what this whole 'Other Ways of Telling' thing is all about, and what possible relevance this seemingly oddball collection of prose, poetry, essay and artwork might have toward the field of environmental studies. To be honest, I have no idea how to write an editorial essay – I hardly ever read them. But details like that should never stand in the way.

I recently read an article written by a well known novelist who admitted that she still felt sheepish about referring to herself as a 'poet.' Poetry, it seems, is nowadays largely cause for embarrassment as opposed to celebration, (em-bare-ass-ment: the word is itself a poem, or at least one waiting to happen). Although I cannot remember them all here, the comment is only one in a noticeable deluge of recent quips from writers, artists, performers, philosophers; in short, storytellers of neopolitan flavours, who have stated, with variable eloquence and forthrightness, the same thing: we (as in we North Americans) do not seem, on the whole, to hold some forms of creative expression in very high esteem (Deluge: the word is itself a poem, or at least one waiting to happen).

Hardly one of the 'creative' pieces you will read herein came without some sort of 'cook's apology.' "*Its just something I do for fun on the side,*" or "*It's not really very good, but I thought it might fit, so...*" Many of the pieces actually had to be aggressively solicited by the editors, as people we knew to be potential contributors were often initially reluctant to submit. I cannot be certain, yet one suspects that aside from the fact that people are generally just beautifully humble beings (and also a bit lazy), part of this has to do with the way self-expression is often received in a North American context. The urge to dream or fictionalize is all-too-regularly scoffed at, singing aloud is likely to convince people in shopping malls that one is insane, and acts of poetics are far-too-rarely celebrated, supported, or encouraged openly. Of course, people do not stop taking photos, making elegant napkin drawings, or writing journals and poetry, and the constant consumption of novels, movies and music makes obvious the need for imaginative sustenance. We just don't tend to advertise, often preferring to keep our heads down; the poetic impulse, so fragile in its fledgling forms, mostly held underground for the sake of peace of mind (perhaps this helps explain why more people write than sing; it's quieter, and you can actually do it in public). When certain persistent (even bloody-minded) personalities do learn through some accident of inclination and opportunity to express themselves overtly, even well, we tend to regard them as different from ourselves, either ascribing them a certain 'otherness' or expertise out of odd reverence, or perhaps just deciding that they are weird. Thus, the act of creative expression, which is supposed to be about communication and community (emphasis on the root 'commune'), can actually become twisted into a source of social fragmentation, when we all could be dreaming out loud.

I for one would tend to side with Wendell Berry[1] when he notes that there isn't (or ought not to be) anything particularly special about poets, artists, writers, in terms of having the market on imaginative knowledge cornered. Talents and opportunities may vary, it is true, but one must question the assumption that there is anything particularly 'other' about the artist's perception that doesn't potentially rest in the minds and hearts of multitudes. Believing so merely carries us farther away from the possibility of understanding their messages as meaningful within the context of our immediate lives, and precludes, aside from rare exceptions, the emergence of our own messages. Creative impulse, narrative knowledge, the appreciation of story and beauty: these things flow within each and every one of us (unless we are convinced to twist a knob and shut off the tap), and the 'creative genius' as expert is just the manifestation of another odd hierarchy of knowledge: a forced specialization in what a society obsessed with the preeminent authority of rational thought can easily sweep into a dusty basement museum display case, dutifully catalogued and labeled 'AESTHETICS.'

Given such a trend, perhaps the recent surge of interest in narrative and poetics, currently quite evident within the human and social sciences in general (and, yes, lately critical environmental studies), might be regarded as something of a small and welcome miracle. Certainly miraculous is the tenacity of the creative impulse in people who are instructed daily that it isn't worth all that much - tenacity evident in the number of creative pieces which are submitted yearly to UnderCurrents, and which we have taken an opportunity this year to emphasize. Just a note, then, of encouragement to everyone who exposed themselves enough to send us some work this year, even those of you who kind of wanted to but didn't - even those out there who don't care if anyone else ever sees or hears the gears of their imagining. Whether it got into print or not (and there was a lot of decent stuff that didn't), the dream-like mind itself is worth a little bit o' celebration.

2 *Other Ways of Telling*: The phrase is weighty, dense with implication (or maybe merely dense); just a hint at the potential complexity might be in order. This is a bit of a cheap trick, I admit, but that shall not deter me...

Other ways of telling?
Ways of telling other?
Telling ways of other?
Ways of other(s) telling?
Telling of other ways?
Telling others of ways?
Others telling of ways?

Already I have gone too far....

3 Narrative ~ *a fancy name for stories. A means of ordering people, things and events, thereby creating meaning. Derived from the Indo-European 'gna' (not to be confused with 'gnaw'), meaning 'to tell' or 'to know.'*

Hayden White[2] notes that narrative might be considered a solution to a general human concern; namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling. In tapping the root meaning of the word itself, the inseparability of knowledge and expression is made clear. To offer an extreme generality, the theme of this year's issue of *UnderCurrents* operates on at least two basic levels. In one respect, 'Other Ways of Telling' has been compiled in order to draw attention to the place of narrative modes and theory (in other words, storytelling of all types) within the production of contemporary and historical environmental knowledge, and to simply provide a sanctioned space for story to relate what only story can. On the other hand, what you have been reading as 'Other Ways of Telling' could just as easily have been called 'Other Ways of Knowing.'

4 *The duende is not in the throat, it surges up*
from the soles of the feet.
It is of blood, of ancient culture, of creative action.
It calls one out.
- Federico Garcia Lorca [3]

O, but Poetry is a Demon. The duende of which this dead poet speaks is none other than the Spanish daemon or spirit of creativity; that earthly essence or quality which Lorca knew intimately as the dark sound of roots pushing into soil - the dancer's rhythm, and the poet's vitriol. Such explanation may seem unnecessarily opaque, unless we realize that poetry, in whatever manifestation, is about that which is essentially un-nameable: that which precedes language, and what hides in the space between words. Gaston Bachelard has written that "[t]he great function of poetry is to give us back the situations of our dreams." The duende is not in the throat because it is an impulse and a dream; a mainline to a form of knowledge more deeply embedded in the subconscious skin and the blood than the intellect; an impulse such as that which curls up out of the floor to entwine the legs and arms and spine, driving the Flamenco dancer to step beyond technique, trancend the cold precision of style, and infuse movement with the flushing thrash of bleating hearts.

5 *"It is unfortunate...that those in the environmental sciences are assumed to be the logical choice as advocates in the environmental movement. In fact, many of the most significant arguments cannot be handled by their lexicon...It's no good passing the buck to ecologists - environmentalism involves the perception of values, and values are the coin of the arts. Environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planning."*[4]

These words, written twenty years ago by environmental philosopher Neil Evernden, may be every bit as relevant today as they were when they first appeared. And they lie at the heart of this Tenth Anniversary Issue of *UnderCurrents*. Indeed, something does seem to have changed since the days of alchemy and wonder, when scientific, spiritual and poetic understandings were openly fused, locked at the lips, inseparable partners in imaginative procreation. These days, the place of story, the telling of experience, is largely consigned to the margins of authority, while environmental decision-making, in particular, is dominated almost exclusively by the language of managemental science. The sacred kiss has broken with a bite, and blood; like Joe Friday would have said: "Just the facts, Ma'am. That's quite a story." But interdisciplinarity entails by its very nature the mingling of patterns of understanding heretofore regarded as separate, and it is hoped that the interdisciplinary nature of these works will contest the fragmentation which has caused storytelling and environmental understanding to become categorized as two different things.

6 *"In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them...We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives."* [5]

William Blake once said that you have to create your own system if you wish to avoid becoming enslaved by somebody else's. To do this, one must become personally skilled in constituting reality. Perhaps one of the principle challenges facing those wishing to contest the contemporary one-sidedness of environmental discourse is to become not only skilled critics, but also storytellers - skilled performers and interpreters motivated to contest the fragmentation of environmental

knowledge on a narrative level. To become skilled in constituting reality is to be empowered to explore changing meanings and shifting perception in a mode which might even reach outside the traditional halls of academe...and wouldn't that be something?

The essays, poetry and prose, artwork and photography which you will find between these pages are all chapters in what I would like to think of as a much larger work-in-progress: the re-assertion of the role of the storyteller in the context of a community of environmental concern. For the most part, these works have come from participants within the community which is the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. Those that do not have been included here because they have been humbly judged as relevant to that community, and because they were really quite good. Some of them have little to do with what has traditionally fallen under the wing of Environmental Studies. Yet each piece speaks in its own way about the ripples of storied meaning that have influenced certain members of this community of students and educators in doing what they do, whether scholastically or personally (and what, after all, is the difference?).

7 (*Something of an Aside pertaining to The Sensuality of Small Things with Exo-skeletons*)

zumbad sobre	buzz above
los dones de la tierra,	the earth's endowments,
familia de oro,	family of gold,
multitud del viento,	multitude of the wind,
sacudid el incendio	shake the fire
de las flores,	from the flowers,
la sed de los estambres,	thirst from the stamens,
el agudo	the sharp,
hilo	aromatic
de olor	thread
que reune los dias,	that stitches together the days,
y propagad	and propagate
la miel	honey,
sobrepasando	passing over
los continentes humedos, las islas	humid continents, the most
mas lejanas del cielo	distant islands of the
del oeste.	western sky.

- Pablo Neruda, 'Ode to Bees'[6]

In emphasizing the telling of stories, this issue of *UnderCurrents* has decidedly taken a swing toward the 'cultural' side of environmental studies. Storytelling is, after all, primarily a fact of human culture, and of community; indeed, storytelling has been called the most human of acts. Yet neither story nor community culture are necessarily species-specific. Honey bees have been recorded enacting elaborate aerial ballets in imitation of the pitch of local landscapes. These dances are performed by scouting workers in order to communicate the location of a new food source to the entire hive. The motions of the bee's bodies relate measured spatial facts in the form of what can easily be interpreted as both a story and a map. Facts of local topography are connected into a whole whose meaning extends well beyond fact; the imminence of hunger and the desirability of food. This means of expression would by any human comparison be regarded as an unquestionably sensual and abstract act of interpretive theatrics, motivated by bodily and emotional need.

In other words: by what is perhaps not an unreasonable stretch of the imagination, bees are capable of poetry. If we are foolish enough to ignore the validity of poetic expression, the bees may have one up on us.

8 "*The ancient Egyptians believed the seat of the soul was in the tongue: the tongue was a rudder or steering oar with which a man [sic] steered his course through the world.*" [7]

Each piece you will read herein tells with a voice. Each voice, in telling, speaks a world into being; the world of a person inscribing her- or him-self as a ripple on the pool of history. As you read these selections, take them in with critical eyes, questioning minds; but above all, ingest them with pleasure. Read, watch, speak words aloud, and in doing so, take the experiences of others under your skin. In listening, become complicit in the telling of stories; navigate the meanderous currents of the River of All Tales, and be not afraid of drowning when the horizons you drift toward suddenly dissemble, reforming in rainbows from fragments of mist. All that is needed to stay afloat is a willingness to hear. Be detractors, delimiters, deconstructors if you will; be 'environmentalists' if you want (Envire-on-mental-ist: the word is itself a poem, or at least one waiting to happen). But beware of what Gaston Bachelard once said: "Nobody knows that in reading we are re-living our temptations to be a poet."[8]

9 Whatever else, bee poets.

Yours truly,
Angus Leech, and the 1997/98 *UnderCurrents* Editorial Collective

Notes

1. Wendel Berry, *Standing by Words*, San Francisco, North Point Press, 1983.
2. Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in: *On Narrative*, W.J.T. Mitchell editor, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981.
3. This excerpt from Lorca is re-quoted from Nick Bantock's book *The Forgetting Room* (HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., Toronto, 1997). More about the duende may be discovered in a transcribed lecture by Lorca entitled "Theory and Function of the Duende," in: Selected Poems, translated by Merryn Williams, Newcastle (UK), Bloodaxe Books, 1992.
4. Neil Evernden, "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy," in: C. Glotfelty and H. Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1996.
5. Ben Okri, *A Way of Being Free*, London, Phoenix House, 1997.
6. This is a fragment of a longer poem taken from Selected *Odes of Pablo Neruda*, translated and introduced by Margaret Sayers Peden, London, University of California Press, 1990.
7. Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines*, New York, Penguin Books, 1987.
8. Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, translated from French by Maria Jolas, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964.

BIOGRAPHIES

Christine Beevis has just finished building her first cedar strip canoe after a year of gruelling work, and wonders how long it will take her to complete her Masters degree in Environmental Studies.

Mia Biasucci regularly entertains delusions of grandeur in and about the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University.

Emily Chan is studying how environmentalism, framed by communities of color, contrasts that of the mainstream movement, in an analysis of environmental activism in America. The photo of Tai O island was taken during her second-ever visit to Hong Kong.

Danny Ciraco is a joint LLB/MES student who is focusing his studies in alternative dispute resolution and negotiations. His interest in body language stems from his desire to dissect the vast spectrum of the negotiation process.

Joanna Fine is completing her Masters degree in Environmental Studies at York University, and trying to make sense of the world through her cooking.

Mark Haslam is a Toronto television producer and screenwriter who dabbles in still photography. His favorite subjects are trees and cows.

Sean Kane is Professor of Cultural Studies at Trent University where he teaches theoretical ecology and oral literature. The piece, especially the first part, is abbreviated from his *Wisdom of the Mythteller* (Broadview Press) which is used as a textbook in many universities across the U.S. and Canada.

Angus Leech is currently pursuing his Masters of Environmental Studies degree at the Faculty of Environmental Studies. Furthermore, he has already said too much.

Lynn Liscio is dreaming of canoeing as she completes a Masters degree in Environmental Studies at York University.

It would be inappropriate to tell you anything about Steph MacLaren, you'll have to experience her for yourself. She'll be there - silent of course - NOT!

Naturally, Andrew MacDonald kneads bread to eat - wye? He says it's just a sense of sublime, of rivers wyld and gastronomic bliss. Un dia le gusteria saberal pan como una carta abierta de la tierra.

Zabe can usually trying to balance the range of activities in her life which take her from remote wilderness areas to York University campus. She is completing a PhD on how we relate to the land through making things.

Ian MacRae is still living in Toronto and goes to spanish language films with Gabriel once a month.

Chanda Meek is currently in her third year of entanglement with the MES beast. She hails from the fair state of Washington in the belly of the capitalist monstrosity otherwise known as the United States of America. She loves to travel, meet intriguing characters and occasionally put it down on paper.

Anuja Mendiratta is on a sojourn to Toronto from a small village in Ohio. Her poetry has been published in several journals and in the Sister Vision Anthology, The Very Inside. In the near future she hopes to cohabit with an orange Canadian cat, who will undoubtedly inspire further writing and other creative mischief.

Emma Rhodes is an Osgoode Hall law student who likes to take photographs to keep sane.

Lisa Richardson has recently completed her Masters degree in Environmental Studies at York University.

Sanjeevan Sathiyamoorthy is an educator at heart. Although he most enjoys teaching and learning through games, he likes the struggle of trying out other ways of sharing ideas. His contribution to this journal is one such attempt.

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– Michael M'Gonigle, Chair, Environmental Law & Policy, U of Victoria

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