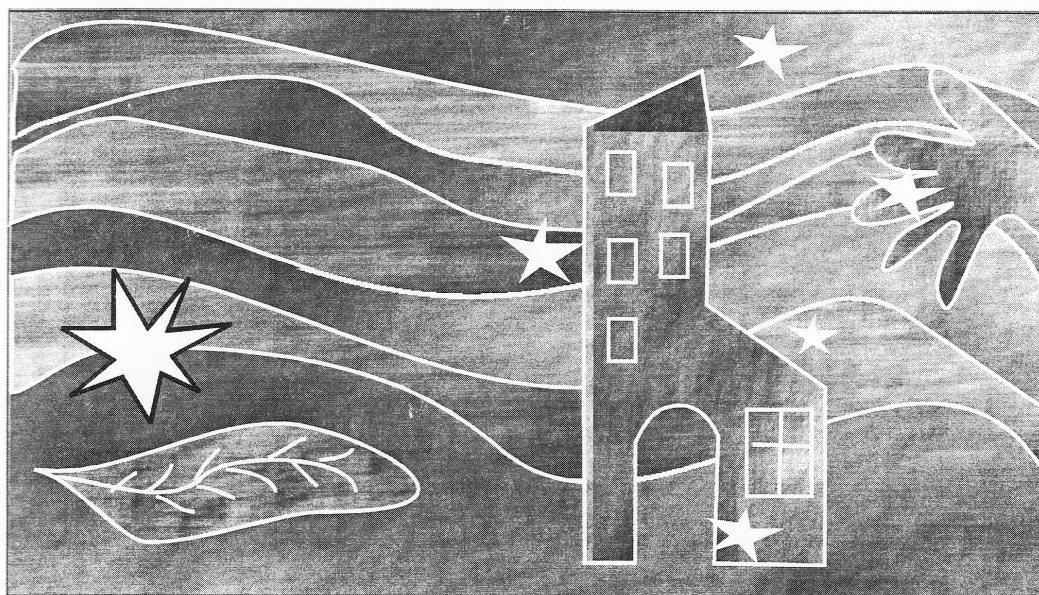


SENSE OF PLACE COLLOQUIUM IV



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ZSUZSANNA SOBOSLAY

SINGING THE BODY/LANDSCAPE ELECTRIC [WHAT'S IN A NAME?]

*Keywords: epistemology, complex inter-relationship, ineffable knowing, vulnerable authority.  
[The author is a shamanic bodywork healer, and has recently moved to Canberra.]*

How many meanings can a place-name have? Historical, hysterical, evasive, valedictory, perfunctory, allusive... Documents from 1838 to the 1960's<sup>1</sup> reveal dozens of statements as to the true origins of Canberra's name, from its being an aboriginal word of place [Caanberra, Kembery, Nganbra, Nganbirra [camping place], to *canbara*, a kind of kookaburra; from the nickname of a blackberry picker ["Old Can-berry"], to an indigenous rendering of the settler's name Campbell, or a corruption of the English Canterbury or Celtic "Canburgh" [Head Town]. The various claims to authenticity seem spurious and difficult to trace; heresy, conjecture, leg-pulling and evasion seem to have equal place. Ainslie, an early settler's drover, recorded "Pialligo" as the given native name of the region, when "paialla'bo" [meaning "I will tell you by and by"] was the reply given him by a tribal inhabitant of nearby plains. "Elusive," said my contact at the National Library<sup>2</sup> [with a great deal of affection]: "as elusive as is the city itself."

A place with a name not as definitively evocative as that of Paris, Amsterdam, or Rome, Canberra perhaps yet has a virtue in that no troubadour has enshrined its features in arch romantic meaning, praising and fixing the association of its name with the city's ordered lips, trim hips, womb-like lake of mystery. Perhaps to some this frustrates. What it *has* done, to this new resident, at least, is highlight the blindnesses with which we can approach Place, what desires we bring to divine its meaning, what we fail to hear in asking questions of habitat and inhabitants too quickly, and in the wrong way. Looking out from my window onto blossoms and bitumen, I await further knowledge.

NOSTALGIA

I used to live in sea-side bush, just north of Wollongong on the NSW coast. I remember its vast beaches, varying rockscapes, mild waters and air; its working-class toughness, its abrupt manners, its histories of exploitation in mining and manufacture; also, its paedophilia ring, the scars it left in the souls of young men, including friends; and the undocumented relationship of this region with its previous, indigenous caretakers which somehow remain as tangible secrets the bush reveals if you walk, humbly, through it. Sometimes I would do shamanic dance training in the forest, and suddenly feel the haunting of murders in the juice of the trees. Perhaps the waters of my body hummed in sympathetic resonance to their hums of grief; past events still reverberating in their waters [as a pool catches the sudden jump of fish]. The sadness I experienced was almost overwhelming--almost, because there was yet a sense of experience and memory proportionally smaller to something vibrant and not grieving. Each tree, still growing, grasping at air, each, and collectively, an ecosystem unto itself, thriving and surviving, conveying messages of growth through its cells, commands to nourish and partake of life, its own highest point communicating to its lowest what minerals it needs to draw up from the soil; and thus, an event/trauma is retained in its flesh, but also surpassed. As in every living thing, time past is present in time future; but somehow, unlike us, with our confusions of regret, loss, nostalgia, trees never seem to forget to breathe.

A kind of training by infusion came into me by working there. As if the air carried messages of the place's history, relationships between people and land, the dialogue between elements as they corroded or passed through each other<sup>3</sup>, teaching me resilience, the courage to listen deeply, and trust more deeply in the continuities of its ecologies than I could ever trust any single human being. At other times, the soil seemed to teach through my feet, like a benevolent jungle worm tracking deep knowing through my blood and entrails via the ground. There was also, often, a sense of perceiving the limits of information I was allowed to know. Like a dose of knowledge of medicinal purpose: that's enough now. At times, I worked with clients, and understood [by the illness in their bodies, by the tensions woven in their muscles and their blood] that they had trespassed into knowledge their bodies were not ready to receive, wisdom they should not have shared [dark mountains in their bellies, heavy histories lodged in damaging proportion in their bones]. Initiation in tribal cultures is generally not a right-of-age, but is permitted when a person has enough maturity or understanding to enter another level of

relationship to the knowledge that already exists in the air around them. Right-knowing means preparedness, incorporating knowledge-in-time; initiations are, in indigenous cultures, very careful processes not given to those who aren't ready.

On returning to the area, I've been astonished to find an intense familiarity with every stepping-stone we'd laid, every tree we'd planted around our former home. Oh, to meet again that dancing pubescent cedar sapling, now an adolescent girl! And yet, nostalgia is impossible. For one, I have been through my own initiations [marriage, children]. These events have changed forever my relationship to the very knowledges that came to me before these events, challenging the way my feet hear the sand, ears smell the beach, the way I negotiate the space between people, between things. This body has so reconfigured that I am of changed substance and sensibility from what I was before: perhaps both more and less responsive, more and less able to hear the water flow in other people's bodies [is this skill a recalling of foetal ability in utero?], of vegetable fibres growing, the DNA of tadpoles echoing in my blood. This is memory and remembering: not a lost history, but a re-living correspondence; once and future time.

The land itself will have changed: how would it now be truly responsive of me to act? The sea having dumped and stolen sand; a few mudslides, a multitude of corrosions, so that each particle of beach and soil will know and show itself differently, its patterns of relationship shifted in relationship to all the other organisms it rubs against. This changed pattern means it, the land, will not let us feel the same way, will not speak the same way, this time round. No matter how ancient, land doesn't tend to yarn like an old salt: each new passing and trespassing becomes a new story, a new intersection with soul.

#### LOVER/LAND

It is hard not to be nostalgic with the familiar and loved, whether that be lover or land. I remember once after a personally traumatic event, I stopped sensing a communality with trees that seemed to continually hand messages to me before. They had been instructors, companions through joys and troubles: a juicy bible passing succinct comments on wonderings I carried as I walked beneath their canopy, dropping them like worms behind my ears. To be sure, what they "spoke" was less definitive "instruction" than a sensation out of which information would emanate or resound: it was rather like hearing pennies drop, or a violin come true to tune; a homing in the middle of predicaments. And to have lost *this*... . I yearned, I blamed, I longed.... but perhaps, they had stopped talking because their messages were all delivered, they had logged-off for a time; my dialogue and homing needed to be elsewhere.

This, too, was nostalgia: presuming a particular kind of openness and relationship would be present all the time, a particular dialogue

**PLACES, EVENTS AND BODIES** may be similar in the way we attribute symbolic meaning to them,

undergoing reverses and inversions as experience and time unfold around and through us.

A bird was caught in a fisherman's net and released almost the moment the fishing boat in which I arrived for my wedding docked at the pier. A double rainbow appeared in the sky as we exchanged rings. Shakespearean omens of luck. And yet, in times of difficulty, how I have doubted my very relationship to a world that could show itself thus as so in-place, and then go so out of kilter. Is the original symbolic interpretation at fault? Or is such difficulty embraced within the symbolic concept of the rainbow's appearance and bird's release? Does symbolic meaning necessarily re-colour with experiences over time?

There are certainly world events which challenge one's knowledge of self and one's world. The four kamikaze planes which smashed into the World Trade Centre Towers, a Pennsylvania field and the Pentagon demolished a whole symbolic order once corroborated in concrete and steel. Does "doing [R]ight, living [R]ight", in such a world, make a difference or not? Is this a world in which one can any longer be said to have a say in events, or not? Can we email-network, group-hum, street protest or politick our way into a world where this sort of thing will not happen any more? There are those who believe America reaped what it sowed; but without getting into that argument, perhaps any faith or belief is stagnant, at least unhelpful, at worst a blocking of appropriate responses, in the face of such an event.

J. Krishnamurti<sup>i</sup> exhorts one to continually assess, examine, follow no nationalism, no *following*. One can suppose that this, too, means "no following" even of one's *own* beliefs, no matter how eclectic or private and non-institutional. Perhaps an organism [no matter how large, or small] in full communication with itself, with, around and outside of itself, needs no attitude to itself beyond this communication. Perhaps any fixing of symbolisation faults the circuit, stuffs the plumbing, snips the wires.

Which function of being has *any* consistency bar that of *responsiveness*: that is, what is this place/situation, *at this very moment*? What are *all* the layers of information *in this moment* to facilitate appropriate response? What can we trust?

RESPONSE-ABILITY:

"Trust our bodies" Carol P Christ writes in an email emissary<sup>ii</sup> following the catastrophic American events. And yet, our bodies may feel the full force of violent reaction, of grief, of retaliation. Can we trust this "fight or flight" response?

The landscapes of our bodies are touched by so many incidences and inheritances of grief, memories of loss, unresolved frustrations, holocausts....; what is the holding-ground for our responses, our responsibilities? Will *something* [Gaia, perhaps], survive us, regardless of our decisions? What are the touchstones to tell us what to do, how to behave and best survive, as a *communal* ecology? What are we answerable to?

## TOUCHSTONES

Christ appended the following to her email, as reminders of what to consider before we act:

### NINE TOUCHSTONES OF GODDESS RELIGION

Nurture Life

Walk in Love and Beauty

Trust the Knowledge That Comes Through the Body

Speak the Truth about Conflict, Pain, and Suffering

Take Only What You Need

*Think about the Consequences of Your Actions for Seven Generations*

Approach the Taking of Life with Great Restraint

Practice Great Generosity

*Repair the Web* [emphases mine]

There is so much in almost each of these words one could debate for the length of one's life. There are moral imperatives and limitations in most of the touchstones; there, are implicitly, a consideration of both individual and collective mores and needs. One is not prioritised above the other: there is an equivalencing of all life forms. The word for me that communicates most strongly is "web". I am thinking that a spider, which only remembers a part of the web, will likely be attacked [or lose its prey] via its weakened guard. The spider's body must know itself, as instinct, as thinking and choosing body, in all directions. It must know--intimately--the field of its own body, and the body of its environment.

As humans, we remember well, we propagate well; we [often wrongly] anticipate the future. But what is missing of the web in our presentness, what is forgotten, insensate, uncaring of itself? Do we know our organs and membranes as well as we do our "selves"? Should we? What are the possibilities of choice, of transformation, we have not exercised? Can we think like mountains, rivers, goats, seas, contiguous to our thinking humanly? We have the document of being all these things in our cell-memory, our DNA; nine months of gestation telescopes the earth's lifetime; foetal development echoes that of all life of all time. Perhaps it is disingenuous to say we don't remember, we no longer know. Perhaps we do, but as quietly as the beach remembers itself, its patterns, rips and flows, as quietly as the spider remembers throughout its dimensions.

This is an idea of a body so different from what we retain in most of our daily interactions: to function with such awareness, it needs re-training to re-member itself. Landscape too is a membered body; landscape and body re-member and echo each other. My body, related to all that exists, in its waters and minerals, memory and action, principles of force and movement, its rhythmic workings, houses all things [and, hence, to paraphrase Jung, it houses all that has been thought, and is capable of being thought,

in the world]. And perhaps that is one of the response-abilities we have to place, events, all human interactivity equally, whether I am at home working with a client, breast-feeding, or in parliament making policy. Give equal honour to all elements and all things, across time.

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## MOTHER BODY

I want to talk about the breast. I want to talk about how, as a woman, my relationship to it, as both idea and actuality, changed as I emerged from a non-maternal stage into mothering. I want to talk about how there is no generic "breast", but rather shifting attitudes to it and actualities of it. They are not always buxom [especially after prolonged breast-feeding has sucked them dry and lack of sleep sags the rest of the body with them towards the ground]; one adjusts to their shape and self-expression, only to have that relationship confounded by another swelling pregnancy. They don't look the same, feel the same, behave the same. Infants even seem to forget their use [or how to use them] once they wean. Like the rest of my body, the way I sense through them, with them, around them, changes, even when I swim or dance. Rather than getting used to *them*, I think I am getting used to *this*.

How does this landscape, my body, want me to act? What are its imperatives, its meanings? How should others relate to it, let alone I myself?

There are certainly imperatives of self-care at this time; there are also external necessities one feels very acutely, a kind of radar which assesses the state-of-being--psychically, physically--of the world around. I am pregnant with my second child; and in this acutely receptive state, am again aware of condescensions and corruptions in attitudes towards the Mother. Acute realisations about balances and imbalances of both internal and external conditions are felt in the skin, nerves and bones.

It has to be this way--perhaps a powerful evolutionary force, sensing right or wrong conditions for the next generation's thriving. It is a condition where self-definition shifts dramatically [along with the breasts, ligaments, and belly] and will remain changing, equally dramatically, long after childbirth: this psychic landscape, the maternal body, reconfigures itself almost completely, and would *speak of itself* in terms relative to its condition. In this condition, perhaps a rose is a Rose no longer. And there is no generic "generous breast", either. After too many years, even breasts get tired of suckling.

My contact at the National Library implied there were risque implications for the attribution, in 1913, of Canberra's meaning as "a woman's breasts"<sup>iiii</sup>. So, it's strange to now live in a place called "breast". Indeed, although one of the most spurious, it is one of the meanings which is generally better known. I wondered why; I have known grown people who turn to suckling under threat of challenge, abdicate their self-responsibility into an infantile response. Is our relationship to our city, our government, our environment, responsible or infantile?

I wondered whether the idea had been appropriated and rhetoricised in Federation rhetoric--chin up, do it for Mother, ironically inverting our relationship with The Crown. To what extent does contemporary "Canberra" [that metonymic yoking of a word to its function] respect, comprehend, or allow for this "meaning"? Is there maternal relationship in our political habits? Does our parliament in any way exhibit a propensity that is maternal--giving superior attention to the needs of its dependents above the needs of its own "body" or incorporation? Or is this "naming" a joke, riddled with misogynist irony?

If in Canberra's anatomy, Mounts Ainslie and Black Mountain are the apocryphal "breasts," then the area stretching from where I live, O'Connor, right through to Ainslie, sits directly in the sternum, protector of the heart. Certainly, there is something interesting in imaging this place: often the first cradle, between-the-breasts is where a first-breathing newborn is usually placed. Placed on the sternum, the newborn's proximate ear hears the familiar heartbeat, a primal contact with *before*, whilst the other ear begins to perceive all those other hearts beating in the world. My body, still three years later, retains this core relationship with my first-born, mediating a multitude of differences between her interior sensing and the "outside." Does Canberra thus so shield me, cradle my knowing?

I have to say I never once experienced my baby daughter's actions as infantile. Rather the opposite: it was as if all knowledge was inherently within her [diluting perhaps more and more as she differentiated and came more and more into language, into the world]. The Taoists say that the foetus holds all knowledge within a span they call "true time"; at birth, one enters a journey into "partial time," and hence partial knowledge. My experience with my daughter was certainly that she knew the world--or, at the very least, that her body was mediator or transmuter of what I needed to know, as well as acting as an exquisite resonator of another way of being--another possible world structure--carrying different mores and relationship patterns; an unrealised potential of the world. As I experienced her instructions on how and when to feed her, her cries entraining me to her varying needs [which part of me listened, which interpreted? Surely not just the subliminal memory of own needs as a child], I also felt and grieved for the hatred in my surrounding world of this "true time" in her flesh and bones. How much my environment hated the vulnerable authority of this small beast, this microcosm, doing its utmost to order her as quickly as possible against this kind of being- and knowing-in-time. I became aware that I experienced the ostensible relationship of authority between us [baby/mother; infant/adult] in inversion to the way our culture is ordered: she the teacher, I the taught. I wondered, do we in turn, as we grow, evolve and change; do we ourselves teach [whoever is our] God? Do our politics, our ecological philosophies, the questions we ask in negotiating these fields, allow for any such parallels?

LAW

Harry Allen<sup>iv</sup> observes a disjuncture between Western ecological and Aboriginal relationship with landscape, which particularly comes to a head in considerations of treatments of and attitudes to national parks, "wilderness" zones, and sacred sites.



Landscape exists in relationship to human activity [Francesca Merlan<sup>v</sup> terms it a difference between participants and non-participant observers], and is not pre-existent to or indeed separable from it.

[Aboriginal people] maintain that the physical and biological world is culturally produced and that continued Aboriginal action and labour is necessary for the life of the countryside. They criticise the restriction of the terms culture and heritage to things that can be seen such as rock art or archaeological sites adding that culture also includes the intangible. Within the *Kakadu National Park: Draft Plan of Management*, however, there is evidence of more restrictive ideas regarding the landscape. Natural and cultural heritage are separated in the "Guiding principles of the park" and they are dealt with in different parts of the planning document.<sup>vi</sup>

Whilst Aboriginal land-relationship is interactive, co-creative and co-responsive, such approaches evident in the *Draft Plan* reveal an approach that is remote, mythologising, and disempowering:

If Aboriginal economic and social relationships are portrayed in timeless, cyclical terms and if Aboriginal culture is presented as being ancient [50 000years old], then the connection with the present is lost. The Dreamtime becomes a time, not a process, and the Aboriginal authorship of the landscape becomes a projection of the past onto the present. The outcome of such a reversal is a system of thought that is not grounded in the reality of the Kakadu landscape. A cultural landscape is transformed into a mythological one.<sup>vii</sup> [p.149]

Aboriginal relationship to landscape is specific, timely, and interactive, intimately connected with daily embodied activity, but not of fixed repetitious definition; thus, as outlined by Merlan, their languages [speaking about, or for a place] will reflect this difference:

When they say something less than definitive about places, or when they appear to change what they say, they may be criticised for their lack of certainty or their readiness to change their story. But one might instead see the lack of definitiveness as part of a tradition of the ongoing determination of meanings *in practices...* . [This] amounts to a *suppleness of tradition which allows and presupposes continuous reformulation of meanings*.<sup>viii</sup>

What if I were to presume an unsupple, pre-formulated relationship to my baby? There are times [particularly when a baby is still very young] when virtually the same cry can index very different things, for example, wetness or hunger. The time of day of the episode will make one more likely than the other; coming to know her better, with deeper and deeper intimacy, will enlarge the field of possible causes [as indeed the number of influences on her sensibilities increase as she comes more and more into world]. In order to respond appropriately, I call on all my intelligence, intuition and perception, all my nerve-endings, all my ability to add to and adjust my knowledge base.

If I were unsupple in my response, what of her landscape, her history, the ineffable in her relationship to coming-into-the-world would I be ignoring? Her growth and expansion-in- and into-the-world encompass so many variables<sup>x</sup>. The complexity is awesome to consider--"mind-boggling, " perhaps; noticeably, we don't tend to say "body-boggling." Perhaps it is *not* as awesome to the lived and living body--which has after all lived *as* water, *as* air, as other organs and bodies, with their own memories<sup>x</sup>-- as it is to the mind. Perhaps our living bodies do know somewhat of response-ability, when they are allowed freedom to sing, when they are fully moving and singing.

*[Let's get our politicians dancing.... .]*

I am struck by Nietzsche's phrase, "Only those thoughts you have whilst walking have any value." The phrase implies an aliveness, a responsiveness, a vibrancy or being-in-motion of the whole body [read: body-and-mind]: measuring, adjusting, observing, partaking [much as a bare foot makes adjustments to the terrain it traverses]. This constant adjustment--vibrant surfaces [and ideas] meeting vibrant others, passing information whilst they themselves sense, move and change--is also a picture of our interior world. Molecular biologist Candace Pert observes that molecular communication, although somewhat statically described in terms of binders, "keyholes" and receptors, looks and behaves in a manner more akin to a buzzing, shifting "dance"<sup>xi</sup>. So both intra- and inter-personal communication is an exchange between constantly shifting [id]entities.

I know as a dancer, I make constant adjustments of breath and motion as I dance. There is no ruler could match the measurements I take whilst dancing. What I usually perceive when I am dancing is an intense correlation of parts and information: I am looking to my liver, at the same time as along my skin, and also through the air around my skin, all my senses intensely listening. I experience a myriad of interactions, as well as sensations approaching interaction: what is the foot *about* to want to do? What is *trying* to prod it to move? This creates a certain amount of *hesitation*<sup>xii</sup> [although I do keep dancing]; but if I wait, work and listen long enough, there is resolution, there is meeting-ground, there is a gesture-in-space. And as with the brook or stream crossing stones, I will never cross the same information twice, but each time with different inflections.

But if I were to ask my body, can it explain what I am about to do? Then I may well be cutting out most of the possible choices it might take. Unless the question allows for fluid interaction, and multiple *contiguous* responses, we risk fulfilling the desire of the question [and failing the desire of the organism, the body's impulse to trace and fulfil its self-knowing], or causing the improvisation to go down a pre-established cognitive path. Either way, we can risk freezing the body of the way it needs to show itself, or is cognising itself: quartering the organism's capacity to respond, self-generate, re-organise, remain responsive and adaptive, interactive and self-managing.

## LAND/BODY: CREATIVE TENSION

Merlan observes Aboriginal responses to the kinds of questions which arise regarding land use or daily procedures in research or court situations. A researcher's question such as "is [an Arnhem land's rock-pool's] Rainbow serpent alive today" may produce a variety of answers from "yes" to "maybe" to "I don't know", as the question is not formulated in a way that is participant to and contiguous with, the lived relationship to the event and event's meaning being questioned.

[The Aboriginal person's] attitude is that, as with all complex processes and events, only time and the unfolding of other events will show the significance of what happened or maybe reveal alternative interpretations or shed another light on things."<sup>xiii</sup>

Thus, a story might be "true" in some circumstances and untrue in others<sup>xiv</sup>. For example, if the Rainbow serpent ["Rainbow"] does not appear to act in a way that meets how it used to respond [to transgression of a place], then perhaps a new law has come into existence. A person might then have to live with the knowledge of this behaviour [although it contradicts previous belief] until circumstance corroborates perhaps another meaning. Thus, whilst some Aborigines, watching white people swim in pools formerly interpreted as forbidden to themselves, might be thinking "Do these outsiders have no law?", others might be thinking "Is there a new law", and "How and to whom does the new law apply: to outsiders or to Aborigines?"

Thus, Aboriginal persons *may have to live with considerable indeterminacy*, and I have often seen people swimming in rock-pools, fishing there, but always with these kinds of ideas in mind, which may become more or less relevant, depending on events. "<sup>xv</sup>

This strikes me as something akin to, but going beyond, a Deleuzian perspective: something even more relative and multitudinous than his and Guattari's idea of a body's "thisness" or hecceity, which accommodates multiple strands and layers of meaning and awareness.<sup>xvi</sup> This perspective seems more demanding, capable of holding an unresolved tension *within the specificity of the organism* much as a strong elastic can be maintained indefinitely stretched over several points for quite a long time. This is not a Deleuzian "body without organs," but a fully-organelled, self-sensing entity, capable of living with prolonged tangible irresolution whilst fulfilling pragmatic daily functions [fishing, living in community].

Against such a mode of living, a question such as "is [something] alive today" divides experience into an artificially segmented sense of time, also isolating the *idea* of "serpent" into a singular embodiment and therefore meaning it may not have, woven as it is in Aboriginal understanding with an ontology such that its death does not presume the end of its ability to exert influence<sup>xvii</sup>. Dead and yet alive? The proposition is confounding only if one removes interpretation from daily events, and only if one takes a sign as having determination that is singular, absolute and fixed.<sup>xviii</sup> Michael Walsh<sup>xix</sup> also elaborates on the metonymic links of words and signs to whole vistas of meaning.

He cites David Wilkins' example of one Arrente hand sign for which there are a number of everyday language counterparts, including *ileye* 'emu'; *kamule* 'camel'; *tywarnpe* 'ironwood tree'; *ilkurte* 'desert cucumber', linked either via their observed similarities of movement [emu and camel], by their actions [emus shelter beneath ironwood], or by one being part of the other's diet [emus and desert cucumber]<sup>xx</sup>. Each sign in itself, of course, pulls with it rich semantic associations and object histories [for example the camel being an introduced animal]. Thus, these metonymic linkings provide a rich living knowledge resource, crossing disciplines of physicality and language, even language and cultural groups:

These networks of associations connect up with people and place in myriad ways that are progressively enriched as one's knowledge develops over a lifetime. Little wonder that an Aboriginal person might appear halting when asked: what is this place? and yields the answer: emu. Taken one way the answer is quite expansive but to the average non-Aboriginal hearer the answer may be quite uninformative.<sup>xxi</sup>

This is working with a dimensionality that is in fact not *impossible* to trace, but would at times be laborious and perhaps of questionable effectiveness to do so.

Walsh further elaborates how an Aboriginal witness's replies in court, which may seem evasive, circuitous, and protective to barrister and judge, may in fact be cryptic "not through ignorance, but through a surfeit of knowledge":

Despite the very considerable linguistic difficulties in public expositions about country, I do not believe it is merely a matter of linguistic competence that can make Aboriginal people often appear halting or inarticulate, *it is a matter of the ineffable and the unspoken*.

The ineffable is not really that which cannot be spoken of but *that which cannot be spoken of readily and quickly*. The non-Aboriginal legal system, despite the best will in the world, all too often imposes a kind of cognitive logjam on any kind of free flow of discourse for the Aboriginal witness. It is not that there are no words--the words just have too much attached to them.<sup>xxii</sup>

Ineffable knowing is part of an enormous world guiding itself: the "participant knower"<sup>xxiii</sup> [here the Larrakia woman witness] sits within this knowledge and can only share it accurately and openly with one who also participates interactively *and non-exploitatively* with the information. One might notice how much of our daily interactions invade or colonise knowing, divulging a lack of trust in the workings of ecologies and systems that basically know themselves in daily practice. Consider for example the way allopathic drugs work in the human body, antibiotics blasting a good number of healthy cells in the attempt to get at target cells which are infected. These drugs do not talk to the body in the way the body talks to itself. [The silence of rivers in an undeveloped landscape, like the conversation between blood and organs, is a kind of roaring, if you learn how to listen.] Most allopathic drugs do not have sufficient specificity.<sup>xxiv</sup> Thus their efficacy is gross, rather than subtle and specific, and may compromise other

systemically related aspects of the organism [usually the immune system, or specific organs]. Ineffable knowing *encompasses* accuracy--even if that accuracy is silent, falls into other modalities.

## BODY/LAND WALKING

*I am walking a path which shifts as I negotiate it. The blood changes, sings, parts of it in key, parts not.*

If I reflect on how I work with a client, I notice I am always using touch, sounding or humming, clicking of fingers, massage of specific and varying pressures...so that the counselling, the dialogue with this body's layered landscape, is significantly multifarious and most definitely encompassed within a systemic knowledge. My [ever-changing] body-mind interacts with another [complex, ever-changing] body-mind: two fine-tuned ecologies come into dialogue, creating a third ecology between them, with a fourth being an overarching awareness of all three ecologies as they pattern around, adjust to and affect each other. Multiply this by all the events and experiences which have affected each participant, and you have a field where it is a joke [or a crime] to presume one defined modality of speech can encompass all that is charted [spoken, felt], not-yet-charted, or about-to-come-into-being.

The evidence of the senses [where mind is also a sensing organ, secreting hormones as well as thought, part of a stream of informations which transmit directly *and in the same form* to different parts and receptors throughout the body<sup>xxv</sup>] is the fulcrum and balance of experience, and a knowledge deeply shared by all organisms of similar history and experience. Perhaps attempting to divulge and dissect this knowledge-of-the-skin is like dividing [us from] the air we breathe, a kind of violation [indeed it is an organismic violation, as the mind is so inseparable from the body]: as David Abram points out, to give voice unnecessarily to some knowledges may violate the "holiness" [holy: OE *halig*, = OS *helag*, OHG *heilag*, ON *heilagr* f. Gmc \**hailagaz* (*hailaz* WHOLE)] of their power<sup>xxvi</sup>:

We should not be surprised that many indigenous peoples construe awareness, or "mind," not as a power that resides inside their heads, but rather as a quality that they themselves *are inside of*, along with the other animals and the plants, the mountains and the clouds.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Thus, to speak definitively is to place oneself, one's being [and hence existence] outside of, things: in Merlan's phrase, to become "non-participant", which is some spiritual practices may be considered sinful: in other ontologies, may simply be removing oneself from the flow of being, altering one's being-in-time in a way that is untenable.

WHAT CONNECTS knowledge and communities of knowledge? Perhaps the intersensory web [which encompasses, but is greater than, language] connects us, and it is a primary mistake to think language *is--or is the primary holder of--the weaving*.

I know when I am working, I trust in language as a tool equivalent to, but *not surpassing*, touch. Thus, I will talk to someone's body [because the body likes to be stroked with the

voice as much as by another's skin]; but at other times, this talk is superseded by touch, or perhaps by a growl or grunt which shifts focus and energy and may do the job of a thousand words. Much as a tiger's growl will elicit a bodily response in the hunter, growls, grunts, clicking, chanting and throat singing can cause immediate and systemic alteration in specific parts of the metabolism. Tibetan monks even say that their throat-chanting connects them to their very being, entering their essential existence [the buzzing of their molecules] via vibration<sup>xxviii</sup>. These modalities of contact are via a *kynde knowing*, a kinship-knowing, <sup>xxix</sup>and not an abstracted one.<sup>xxx</sup> What may happen when one presumes that everything [ought to be] expressible in language is that the ineffable may be cancelled out. Countering this requires a profound sense of connectedness with the *via creativa*--our individuated yet interlinked life-force [Matthew Fox identifies this as our imaginative capacities co-creative with the universe as she makes herself<sup>xxxii</sup>]-in every particle of our being.

## BODY/LAND: WALKING

Thus, different languages arise out of, and in response to, different landscapes, whether these landscapes are geographic, or of the bodily interior. Walsh beautifully illustrates this necessary variability of contact when he explains that

Languages are landed: each language is associated with a particular territory. At the same time, places are empeopled and languaged. Languages are owned by particular groups of people as surely as those groups own particular tracts of country. The spirits of the lands speak particular languages and Dreamtime figures would change their languages as they moved into another country: another territory, another language. The land is often spoken to as people pass through it, but there are some places which *must* be spoken to. Without a senior Aboriginal person addressing the spirits that inhabit places of danger many people will be put at risk. The senior people must address the place in an appropriate analogue announcing the arrival of new people and vouching for their good intentions.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Whether that language is the sound made of the spirit-of-air passing through a cavity in the body, or indigenous tribal languages significantly different from one another, the concept that land must be talked to bears sensing out: what does the land want? How does it need to be spoken of, spoken to? What kinds of questions can we ask that do not shut out its own language, its possible response? As our bodies instantaneously recreate themselves, so too does the land--an interaction between its own upheavals and those beings which cross over/interact with it, visible or invisible, human, insect, animal or vegetable, palpable in their crossings, unpredictable in their passage. Can we leave ourselves open *enough* to respond?

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## FINALE/FOOTNOTE:

As my daughter grows older [and I perhaps less intensely observant, and servant to, her extraordinary presence], it is so hard to remember to formulate questions that leave her response open. *Why? What's wrong?* I say to her tantrums, wanting a cohesive answer [whereas my intuition guides me to reasons usually stretching out over several episodes, and of much subtler substance]. I feel the closure of perspective as my temper rises, tired, pressed with deadlines, and preoccupied... . It is trying and exacting to remain open-ended in the face of such force; but I do become aware how much I presume she is fully verbal. She is only three: sometimes she guesses at meaning, sometimes she shrieks instead. And yet the deceptive allure of her generally advanced verbal agility leads me to presume a kind of total presence of language, an encompassing and matching of experience to words that is surely beyond her years. [And, surely beyond the years of the very oldest sage.] *Mea culpa*. I try to encourage my linguistic brain to climb back down from its plinth; close down the computer, stop writing the essay. It's time we all packed a picnic, found some sunshine, and headed for the beach.

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<sup>i</sup>J. Krishnamurti, *Meeting Life* [London: Penguin Arkana, 1991]; esp. "A Quality of Mind that Know No Separation," pp.123-130

<sup>ii</sup>dated September 13 2001.

<sup>iii</sup>Murphy, p.14.

<sup>iv</sup>Harry Allen, "Conceptions of Time in Kakadu Landscapes," in *Tracing Knowledge in Northern Australian Landscapes: studies in indigenous and settler ecological knowledge systems*, ed. Deborah Rose and Anne Clarke [Canberra and Darwin: NA Research Unit, ANU, 1997], p.148.

<sup>v</sup>"Representing the Rainbow: Aboriginal culture in an interconnected world". *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2000/1&2; p.20.

<sup>vi</sup>Allan, p. 148.

<sup>vii</sup>*ibid.*, p.149

<sup>viii</sup>Merlan, p.21; emphases mine

<sup>ix</sup> including, for many from various cultures, the previous lives experienced by this soul.

<sup>x</sup>There is currently much scientific research into cell-memory --the carrying of information between generations and even species. Cf. in the fields of psychology [Anne Ancelin Schutzenberger, *The Anniversary Syndrome* (Routledge, 2000)] and molecular biology [Candace Pert, *Molecules of Emotion* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1999)] to name but two. The deep ecology work of Joanna Macy also relies on this as a matter of implicit recognition.

<sup>xi</sup>Pert, p.23.

<sup>xii</sup> This might be what an audience perceives of an actor or dancer, particularly in improvisation: an audience, en masse, often holds its breath until a resolution as surprising as it is inevitable reveals itself--a double satisfaction]

<sup>xiii</sup>Merlan, p. 22

<sup>xiv</sup>Notions of consistency and truth-telling vary between cultures, particularly in those which do not isolate a sense of "self" from environmental, ecological, spiritual and/or group identities. For example, in Hindu culture, a person may state they are vegetarian on one occasion and eat meat on another without these events carrying any sense of notable inconsistency or self-contradiction. Aghananda Bharati partly attributes this to the Hindu distinction between an eternal, "higher" or "true" self, and an "empirical" or egoic self, with spiritual value placed more greatly on the former. ["The Self in Hindu Thought and Action," in *Culture and Self: Asian and*

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*Western Perspectives*, eds. Anthony J Marsella, George de Vos and Francis LK Hsu (NY: Tavistock, 1985), pp.185-230.] Cf. George de Vos, "Dimensions of Self in Japanese Culture [*Culture and Self*, pp. 141-184]; and Takeo Doi, *Anatomy of Self: The Individual Versus Society* [NY: Kodansha International, 1986]. Doi discusses the distinction in Japanese culture between *omote* [seen] and *ura* [unseen] behaviours and speech in contexts that are *tatemai* [of group consensus] or *honne* [of private opinion]. Behaviour is seen as appropriate and inappropriate in contexts relative to degrees of intimacy, role and age structures in domestic and work environments, rather than requiring objective consistency of an individual's speech or actions. Most behaviours thus have two "faces": one that is public, and one that is known or acknowledged in relative degrees of personal belief or commitment.

<sup>xv</sup>Merlan, p.24.

<sup>xvi</sup>"Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal," in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* transl. Brian Massumi [London: Athlone Press, 1988], p 275.

<sup>xvii</sup>Merlan, p.24: "The existence of Rainbow 'bones' does not unequivocally spell the death of the creature for...one of the modes of ancestral transformation into landscape is the externalisation of parts of the body by Dreaming beings who may continue to act, create and move." Merlan is referring to the work of N.Munn, "The Transformation of Subjects into Objects in Walbiri and Pitjantjatjara Myth," in R.Berndt [ed], *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology* [Perth: University of Western Australia, 1970], pp.141-56.

<sup>xviii</sup>One could also note here that determining the moments of death and birth are matters of intense disagreement within discrete cultures [when does the foetus come to life? when does the spirit leave the body?], let alone between cultures of different religious beliefs and practices.

<sup>xix</sup>"The Land Still Speaks? Language and landscape in Aboriginal Australia," in *Tracking Knowledge in NA Landscapes*, pp.105-119.

<sup>xx</sup>Walsh, p.110.

<sup>xxi</sup>*ibid.*, p.112.

<sup>xxii</sup>*ibid.*, p.112; emphases mine.

<sup>xxiii</sup>the phrase is mine, not Walsh's

<sup>xxiv</sup>Candace Pert traces a whole history of AIDS research which has ignored evidence as to how infection enters the cell in the first instance, but rather concentrated on identifying the virus and killing it once it had already entered and multiplied within the cell, a process which also destroys the host cell. Pert. *op cit.*, pp.196-208.

<sup>xxv</sup>Pert, *op cit.*; cf. also the earlier Richard Bergland, \*The Fabric of Mind\* [Melbourne: Penguin, 1985].

<sup>xxvi</sup>Abram, p.228

<sup>xxvii</sup>*ibid.*, p.227.

<sup>xxviii</sup>interview with visiting Tibetan monks, Arts Today, ABC Radio National [broadcast October 5 2001].

<sup>xxix</sup>the term is Anglo-Saxon, and can be found in medieval English literatures such as the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

<sup>xxx</sup>Chi'kung, Tai Ch'i and Chinese medicine have quite systematised the relationship of internal organs to elements, seasons of the year, and sound correspondences. Whilst these are effective in general practice, personally I believe that a practitioner needs to be sensitive to nuances and differences from these systemisations within the patient, in order to avoid homogenising and preventing accuracy of diagnosis or treatment.

<sup>xxxi</sup>Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* [Santa Fe: Bear and Co., 1983], pp.229-44.

<sup>xxxii</sup>Walsh, p.115.

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