

Stillness: The dance of creation

Suzanne Maxheleau

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Abstract

Stillness: The dance of creation
Suzanne Maxheleau

The experience of stillness is one which has been studied through meditation and in relation to the dance/movement experience. There seems to be a close correspondence between stillness and the creative or art making process and thus, I postulate that stillness is an inherent part of the creative process. Following a heuristic line of inquiry, I sought to discover the nature of stillness and as it relates to the creative process through my own experiences. In this paper I share my journey through the various stages and realisations which have led me to learn how to further enhance the experience of stillness, to listen to and trust tacit knowledge, and to use art making for its potential to quiet the discursive mind.

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Dedication

In loving memory of my mother Louise Bourassa Maxheleau, who introduced me to the experience of stillness through meditation as a child and was and is still a source of inspiration; my father Gerald Maxheleau with whom I came to appreciate the experience of stillness through nature; and my sister Michelle Maxheleau, who, by how she lived her life, taught me to follow my heart.

Until we meet again.

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Stillness: The Dance of Creation

INTRODUCTION

I believe that we tend to be drawn to what we need whether consciously or not. I think it certainly describes how I came across the topic of this paper. During a particularly charged semester, I had been taking a class which aimed to have us consider the importance of dance and movement in a therapeutic perspective. Encouraged to pay attention to how we move or hold ourselves had perhaps heightened my awareness of the mind-body connection as I encountered my clients. I wondered about my own patterns of movement, fearing at times what I might discover if I could witness these, for it often felt as though my tired awkward feeling body could not effectively participate in the dance of life through authentic movement. Possessed by a frenetic energy, it seemed as though I had allowed myself little time for play. Release would come with sleep, a time when my *spirit* is allowed to dance, which led me to be inspired with *in stillness we dance*. As I further pondered this idea, I thought of those clients I had seen during my practicum who seemed to spend great amounts of energy to stay in constant movement, busying themselves in order to keep painful emotions out of their awareness and thereby maintaining their state of *dis-ease* and constructing their fear of *stillness*, their fear of death.

This is where my investigation started. Because stillness is an experience I am familiar with, that was my gateway into learning to cultivate greater awareness, from which I believe the healing really begins. I have found that I can be my own greatest obstacle or best asset. By trying to control aspects of my life, to make sense of my experiences, I had unwittingly cut myself off from a greater source of knowledge and

inspiration. By trusting and letting go, I have discovered the message and lesson that I was perhaps meant to unfold for myself and others. I had unknowingly been sitting on the edge of stillness for a long time now. It is perhaps the quest of every artist who sometimes finds him or herself starving for inspiration, to experience once again the creative flow. As it often happens, I think all the elements were already there waiting for that moment where they would converge. And perhaps I drew to myself that which was needed to help me make the connections. My first attempts at writing about stillness revealed that it is very difficult for me to do so without talking about my own experience, for it is an area which I feel taps into knowledge held on the edge of consciousness.

As I journeyed with this topic for some time it was becoming clear that my own insights were feeding, revealing and reflecting my search and needed to be incorporated somehow. After reviewing Douglass & Moustakas (1985), Bloomgarden (1998), and Sela-Smith (2002), not only did I realize that the heuristic method of research would allow a creative integration of my musings, personal experiences and research, but that the heuristic process itself seemed to be echoing my topic (which I will discuss further on). This is why I feel that I need to recount my journey of inquiry into stillness to better explain why I believe it to be of particular value and relevance to the creative process and to art therapy. But before I continue on any further along this path of self-discovery, I initially sought answers to my queries on the subject of *stillness* in literature and found supporting arguments which convinced me that this is an area worth investigating as it relates to the art making and/or creative process with possible implications for art therapy.

Stillness

Many art therapists and researchers have argued that their field is largely dependant on other disciplines in defining, justifying itself (McNiff, 1998). Malchiodi (1999), McNiff (1998), Robbins (cited in McNiff, 1998), Wadeson (cited in McNiff, 1998) and others have proposed that there is a need for a more integrative approach or viewpoint which would better articulate what distinguishes the art therapy practice. Is there in fact an artist's way of knowing? Wadeson has suggested that we should perhaps investigate the experience of art therapy through creativity, which she sees as "the essence of the profession" (cited in McNiff, 1998, p. 86). While this area has much to offer and has been the subject of much research, there is little mention of the concept of Stillness, that moment of potential from which creativity emerges and which serves as a bridge between body and mind (Marek, 2001). Stillness might offer a possible alternative frame of reference when looking at the art therapy process; one which I believe can help us gain some insight into the intuitive way of knowing. Some have written on the subject in terms of relaxation, meditation, quiet pause, and silence (Dawson, 2003; Franklin, 2001; Garfield, 1985; Hill, Thompson, & Ladany, 2003). But these terms do not reflect as effectively the contribution of the mind/body connection to the practice of art therapy, and the essence of the experience is often lost.

Stillness, as a concept, is largely misunderstood. Often mistaken for emptiness or nothingness, Caldwell (1995) suggests that this confusion may reflect our fear of death, the ultimate stillness which for many represents a void, chaos. As a result, it would seem that many are driven to move constantly, engaging in control, avoiding the unknown, an area of potential where creativity gestates and from which expression can emerge.

“Stillness is not where everything stops, but rather where it begins” (Horan, 2001).

Stillness has been described as the pregnant pause, the “potency”, the limitless whole, as a fullness and unity of humans in their environment (Blais & Lepage, 2003). It is that place where we begin to have perspective, to recognize the numbness, our patterns, and gain awareness. It is a state which can be achieved when one is able to stop volitional movement (subject to the ego) through the use of an anchor such as keeping ones attention on breath, a mantra, a vibration, a rhythm (which may include movement). This is a difficult thing to achieve in a society where most of us experience a growing number of demands competing for our attention. Could there be some kind of device which might help us, as my mother would say, keep ‘the monkeys out of the tree’?

Authors have described the many ways in which one can encounter/experience stillness, which leads me to believe that there are degrees of relative stillness. One does not need to be physically still to experience some form of stillness. Even when we are seemingly still, our body is alive with movement. From our very beginning from within the womb, we are carried by the rhythms of our mother’s walking, breathing, heart beat, which Caldwell (1995) refers to as autonomic movement or “the song of the cellular self” (p.10). We might further consider movement as providing the rhythm as an anchor for stillness. A long walk can become a meditative experience, and is in fact a recognized meditative practice in eastern traditions (Austin, 1998). Furthermore, stillness, which is known to the field of movement & dance therapy, is described by Gabrielle Roth as the culmination, “the mother of all rhythms”, where our attention is drawn to our inner dance were everything is alive (Roth cited in Horan, 2001). While stillness does not require that we be physically still, it is dependant to what we give attention to.

As Kornfield states, stillness starts as “a non-reactive bare awareness open to anything” (in Austin, 1998, p.126), which is achieved by muting the analytical, judgmental, reasoning functions of the mind. This is a difficult thing to do given the endless chatter that tends to dominate our minds. It requires that we be connected or in tune with all levels of our being. For when unawareness dominates the mind, we are not in touch with our own body signals/messages (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) and all the knowledge and wisdom it holds for us even at the cellular level. And yet, it would seem that this is a chronic state of being for many as we live in a society that tends to dichotomize, in which many look at the mind and body as two separate entities, emphasizing the pleasure-pain cycles (Prattis, date unknown). A more holistic approach, which views the various systems as interconnected tends to be appointed to the private, subjective domain. Yet it is through the experience of stillness that we become aware of these connections and we begin to gain perspective.

Target population

But is the experience of stillness for everyone? On the subject of stillness I have found no clear answers; however, many acknowledge that silence and meditation can be disquieting experiences for some (Hill, Tompson & Ladany, 2003; Medweth, 1997). Eastern and western scholars would agree that the formation of the ego is essential initially to protect and offer security to the developing person, and a functional or fairly healthy ego a prerequisite to the practice of meditation (Medweth, 1997). Those for whom meditation may therefore not be a viable practice include individuals living with schizophrenia, psychotic episodes, borderline personality disorder, and other personality disorders (Medweth, 1997). However, this does not imply that such individuals should

not or can not access some experience of stillness. Could there be more accessible and less threatening ways to experience stillness? These questions may be clarified if we consider them from a developmental perspective.

Developmental perspective

It would seem that the path to wellness for all requires some measure of the experience of stillness. Winnicott (1958) touches on this from a developmental perspective in his article *'The capacity to be alone'*. He elaborates on Klein's statement that the capacity to be alone is dependant on the existence of the good object which is to say that the individual having experienced 'good-enough mothering' has internalized the belief that his/her environment is essentially good (supportive). This comes about when the individual as a child was provided with a safe holding environment in which the parent facilitated the expression of subjective omnipotence and allowed space in between where the latter might be bridged with objective reality. It is within this transitional space that the child can practice being alone in the presence of someone who is available without making demands, his/her immature ego being supported by the care givers' ego. Here the child is able to become unintegrated, to flounder, to simply be (without orientation); thus, allowing him to discover his own personal life. Within this intermediate area of experience transitional objects can transcend their original meaning provided that the parents do not challenge their origin, and transform into broad transitional space where symbolically charged activities and creative living emerges. Winnicott (1971) believed that creative apperception is what makes us feel that our life has meaning without which it would be one of compliance, in short, futile. Having internalized over time an ego-supportive environment the individual is able to do without

the presence of a caregiver and becomes able to actually be alone (although paradoxically in theory there is always someone present).

If we understand that the potential to experience stillness has its genesis in developing the capacity to be alone and is furthermore a precondition for the authentic expression of creativity, it would appear that its experience should come as a natural extension of a person's healthy emotional development. But we are not all afforded the same opportunities in life, and many are born into family situations that do not foster the optimal or necessary conditions for their development. While it would seem that profound experiences of stillness as experienced through meditation would be distressing and an ill-advised practice for some individuals, art making might offer the required distance through symbolic expression to experience the kind of restfulness which results when the mind can be quieted for a while. Furthermore, within a therapeutic setting it offers a transitional experience in which the individual, under the watchful and supportive presence of the therapist, can come to discover and appreciate the creative process, learn to play. In time, by evolving through the developmental stages, they might also develop the ability to be alone, to be still. But is stillness experienced through the art making process? Is it part of the equation? Given that most of my sources (Austin, 1998; Bohm, 1996; Hannaford, 1995; Shear, 1982) acknowledged stillness as a prelude to creative expression or creativity, that they seem to be interconnected, I sought to clarify how the two are related and whether stillness was necessarily experienced through the art making process.

Creativity

Stillness is not the objective but part of the process by which we come to live creatively. If stillness is that place in which we access the kind of non-discriminatory relaxed awareness which allows us to perceive the connection between all things and in which everything is made clear; it is through creativity that it is used or given shape to produce new insight and understanding. Bohm (1996) similarly makes this connection when he describes stillness as “giving simple attention”, which he calls “the primary creative act” from which creativity emerges “not as something that is the result of an effort to achieve a planned and formulated goal, but rather, as the by-product of a mind that is coming into a more nearly normal order of operation” (p.xix). His description also agrees with Kokot & Colman’s (1997) identification of creativity on a continuum which places this essential state of being on one end and the ‘conventional’ state represented by the individualistic social ego on the other, one which tends to be fragmentary.

But how are we to define or understand creativity more specifically? Creativity, as with stillness, is a concept difficult if not impossible to define in words. It is best understood through experience, the effect it produces, and what results from it and from its absence. While attempts to define creativity have often incorporated features of novelty or originality, it is said that creativity is not always entirely intuitive or even radically original but that it reflects intuition and logic; it is a whole brain process (Katz, 1997; and Schain, 1999, cited in Runco, 2004). Furthermore, it would seem, as we have touched upon through Winnicott’s work and as further studies have demonstrated (Amabile & Grysiewicz, 1989; and Witt & Beorkrem, 1989, cited in Runco, 2004), that the emergence of creativity is largely dependant on situational influences, and, as Bohm

(1996) asserts, that “culturally sustained blocks” are the only thing holding back latent creativity or impeding on the “natural agility of the mind” (p.xviii). Having learned conformity from parents, teachers, friends and society, many entertain the belief that creativity is the domain of a select few which possess ‘talent’. And yet, Bohm suggests that what is required for creative works is a creative state of mind which is characterized by whole hearted and total absorption like that of a young child, open to learning, to perceiving anew, which leads to new orders and structures. I believe this attitude reflects something of the experience of stillness through which we begin to shape an understanding of the creative process and the link between the two.

The connection between stillness and creativity becomes quite clear when we consider the experience of undeniably highly creative individuals as exposed by Jonathan Shears' article *The universal structure and dynamics of creativity: Maharishi, Plato, Jung and various creative geniuses on the creative process* (1982). His review of the work of Wallas, Hadamard, Maslow and others has found that creative geniuses in various fields experience “refined and transcendental levels of awareness”, characteristic of stillness and which they view as central to their creative process (Shear, 1982, p.155). When the mind settles down fully while remaining restfully alert, the experience, as described by Maharishi, is of unboundedness or pure consciousness. This same feature is found through the work of Plato and Jung. Plato described the experience of the Form of Absolute Beauty, which he viewed as essential in developing full creativity, self-sufficiency and wisdom. Jung write of it in terms of “... a boundless expanse full of unprecedented uncertainty with apparently no inside and outside, no here and no there, no mine and no thine, no good and no bad...”, one which is beyond all spacial and temporal

references (Jung cited in Shear, p.158). Shear has found, through the works of Maharishi, Plato and Jung, that the experience of unboundedness or stillness is most important for creativity. Autobiographical descriptions of the creative process of creative geniuses further confirm this assertion and also mention features of restfulness, innocence, automatic unfolding, deeper level of consciousness, joy or charm, and beauty or balance. By Mozart's account (cited in Shear), it is an experience which he would come by when entirely alone and of good spirits (i.e. when traveling by carriage or walking), and then the ideas would flow. He did not come by the music in successive parts, but rather would hear them all at once. Poincare and Einstein (cited in Shear) both describe the preverbal nature of their creative thought process in which language seems to play no role. It is, in Poincare's words, a feeling of "beauty and elegance" letting through those "...entities...whose elements are harmoniously disposed so that the mind without effort can embrace their totality..." (cited in Shear, p.165). But beyond perceiving a creative whole, Einstein also describes this experience "...when one feels free from ones' own identification with human limitations and inadequacies..." as one which is associated with an awareness of the unity between all things (Einstein cited in Shear, p.166). Whether one calls it unboundedness, pure consciousness, superconsciousness, or stillness, there seems to be a connection between this experience which is most often associated with meditative practices and peak periods of creativity.

A comparative study by Laurence Nixon (1996) on the *Factors Predispositional of Creativity and Mysticism* would seem to further confirm the close correspondence of experience between meditation and full creativity. Nixon suggests that mystics and creatives share the same temperamental characteristics as well as environmental

circumstances. Nixon identified predispositional factors common to both which include: “emotional sensitivity, a heightened capacity for imaginative involvement, intellectual curiosity, emotional support during childhood, modeling and training, institutional support, and stress or loss in childhood” (p.82). But even though this constellation of factors may not be given to most, Maharishi maintains that an ordinary person can be brought to experience stillness through Transcendental Meditation and furthermore has found that it enhances creativity (Shear, 1982).

Given the similarities, it would suggest that there might be physiological processes which are common to both. Measurable physiological effects have been observed and reported time and time again as a result of involvement in artistic activities or meditation, which have both been found to ease pain, facilitate healing and reduce stress (Longman, 1994). But are there perhaps observable physiological processes such as in the workings of the brain which may reflect similarities in experience between stillness or, by substitution, meditation and the creative or art making process?

There is such evidence which seems to support a correspondence between the creative process and meditation if we consider that the hemispheric activity of the brain during meditation reverts to an intuitive, creative, perceptive mode (Garfield, 1985). It has been found that the two hemispheres of the brain have complimentary functions and engage in subtle dialogues, which travel best across the span of the sub cortical bridge. These “soft messages” or precognitive murmurings, free of spatial and temporal association, nor tinged by language, have been associated with intuitive knowing and found to circulate more freely during meditation as well as during art making. It appears that this “dialogue” is further enhanced by the ability to inhibit frontal lobe functions

(responsible for reasoning) and is believed to play an important role in both meditative and creative processes (Austin, 1998; Bogousslavsky, 2005). This might explain what has been qualified as over-inclusive thinking observed in creativity, or the ability to perceive things anew through stillness. Various studies (Bhattacharya & Petsche, 2005; Bogousslavsky, 2005), which have found diminished activity in the frontal lobe in artists doing a creative mental task as opposed to a control groups of non-artist asked to do the same, might further suggest that the inhibition of the rational discursive mind is made increasingly possible when one becomes experienced at stilling the mind through total absorption in the art making process. The same has been found with meditation, as with most skills we learn, we improve through involvement or practice.

A comparison of studies on the electrical output of the brain during meditation and during an assigned task of mentally creating an image may also suggest similar processes at work. From numerous studies, Austin (1998) brings forth a few soft generalizations from findings of EEG readings (electroencephalogram – measurement of electrical output of the brain) recorded during meditation, notably: readings show an increase in amount or amplitude of slower alpha waves (8-12 cycles per second – facilitated by persistent attention, it has been found to occur during non-visual thinking and is associated with a global feeling of increased wellness) in the early stage of meditation, and during the second deeper stage of meditation it is the even slower theta waves (4-7 cps) that predominate. Similarly, a study by Bhattacharya & Petsche (2005) recorded increases in alpha rhythms in non-artist performing the task of mentally creating an image, and increases in the even slower Delta rhythms in artists performing the same task. While I did not find mentions of Delta rhythms in Austin's book, Bhattacharya &

Petsche have identified functional correlates similar to those of Theta rhythms (usually associated with drowsiness, follow a more rhythmic regular pattern in meditation as the individual remains alert) and furthermore that an increase in Delta waves have also been recorded during the mental recollection of emotional scenes from personal experiences. But should we even make such a comparison and can we legitimately consider meditation as a substitute for all possible experiences of stillness? If we understand that in stillness there is a quieting of the discursive mind (as in meditation), and is therefore a question of how we focus our attention, we might also consider the experience while walking as a correlate. A study has found that alpha rhythms are largely predominant in Soto Zen Monks engaged in walking meditation, whereas no alpha waves were recorded in a control group of graduate students during the act of walking (Austin, 1998). And as for the task of mentally creating an image, what is not seen through this study is the possibility of a breakdown of various stages of creativity and associated physiological processes which may be at work during this task. Although I understand that these comparisons are not conclusive, I believe however that they do demonstrate the potential of an area of research which shows great promise in further elucidating the relationship between art making and stillness.

There is also evidence of experiential nature that further suggests a relationship between art making and stillness. Marek (2001) suggests that the art process can be seen as an “extension of our body in relationship to the world”, one which helps us gain access to memories encased in our bodies even at a cellular level (p.61). It would seem to facilitate that deeper connection which is experienced through stillness. Franklin (2001) makes a convincing argument when he suggests that meditation and art are neighbours,

both considered self-referential processes. In both there is a lost sense of time where subject and object are no longer separate, one becomes totally absorbed in the present moment in which focus and attention are heightened while engaged in an intentional action which connects us to the whole and reveals personal truths. However, what would seem to distinguish art is the safe distance which it provides to encounter the perceived chaos in stillness.

The closest art therapy research I have found relating to stillness looks at meditation, relaxation and silence as potent methods of heightening the art therapy process. While these are useful points of references, around the time I was searching I had found little on the subject of stillness more specifically and art, physiological responses during art making, and neuroesthetics (a future field proposed by Zeki, 2001, which would study the neural basis of artistic creativity). However, it would seem that there has been a growing interest in these areas, and as a more recent search revealed, newer studies have since come out.

Rationale for research

The aim of this exploration into the nature of Stillness and as it relates to art making is to shed some light on what I believe is an important aspect of the creative process. I suspect that stillness fosters the emergence of insight in both the therapist and client, thus contributing to the healing process through art therapy. It is that inner space not limited by time or space where, if we can quiet the mind for a while, let go of our obsessions (distractions), we begin to gain perspective, to access an 'unboundedness' (Bohm, 1996) which is a precondition for the emergence of creativity. Furthermore, given the similarities in experiences, it would seem that stillness might very well be part

of the art making process. However, this may be dependant on the quality of attention or absorption in this creative process. While, as we have seen, there is some empirical evidence which would seem to support the connections I have made here, I feel this relationship between stillness and the art making or creative process needs further elaboration. For I believe it may hold a different kind of understanding into how we might enhance the art making experience for ourselves and for others.

Research question

What is the relationship of stillness to the art making or creative process? From this guiding question a number of subsidiary questions arise, which might help to clarify this relationship.

Subsidiary research questions

- a) How can I come to experience Stillness?
- b) Is stillness experienced in varying degrees?
- c) Given the range of experience of stillness, for example, how does movement relate to Stillness as a possible indicator, anchor or distractor?
- d) What aspect(s) of the art making process facilitates the experience of Stillness and vice versa?
- e) What are some of the obstacles that may prevent me from experiencing Stillness?
- f) What can my relationship with Stillness tell me about myself?

Methodology

It took me a while to realize that this research project was evolving along a heuristic line of inquiry. Actually, it took one supervisor and two of my colleagues/friends for whom it was obvious and who encouraged me to explore the

possibility. As I reacquainted myself with this method of research, not only did it become clear that the heuristic process was one I was already involved in, but that there would be quite a bit of cross over between the topic and the process. Both are processes which are concerned with the totality rather than dissecting into parts, which tend to make one lose sight of the whole.

The Heuristic Process

Descriptions of the heuristic experience usually centre on self-knowledge that emerges through tacit dimensions often through moments of inspiration. Moustakas introduced heuristics to the field of psychology as a research method which considers the individual internal experience as a valid source of knowledge (Boomgarden & Netzer, 1998; Sela-Smith, 2002). He described the heuristic process as one that seeks to draw out “knowledge that is embedded and integrated within the self through understanding of the self in relation to and in context of the dynamic whole” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p.55). The objective is not to prove something but to discover the nature of a phenomenon and to explain it as it exists within human experience (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). What is required through this methodology is that this search be driven by passion as well as a disciplined commitment in living the question internally, wherever it may lead. Through her experience of the process, Sela-Smith adds that feelings provide an entry into heuristic inquiry. By remaining internally focused and allowing ourselves to enter our feelings, we may come to know, not through our reasoning function but through intuition. From these descriptions we might surmise that stillness is very much a part of the heuristic process.

Initially, it seemed to me that the heuristic line of inquiry as elaborated by Moustakas and Douglas (1985) described the creative process, and that by delineating a set of procedures one must follow, they might have been trying to legitimize the heuristic research as a valid scientific method. Yet paradoxically, Moustakas sells it as "the way not limited or confined by methodological structures" (paraphrased in Sela-Smith, 2002). Bloomgarden & Netzer's (1998) also draw the parallel with the creative thinking process as described by Wallas (1926) which they found to be reminiscent of Douglas & Moustakas's 3- and 6-phase models. If anything the proposed guidelines may act as sign posts by which one might assess one's progress, ensuring one's complete engagement from beginning to end.

According to Moustakas the heuristic research should evolve from the phase of "initial engagement" through "immersion", "incubation", "illumination", "explication", and the last phase of "creative synthesis" (Bloomgarden & Netzer, 1998; Sela-Smith, 2002). In the first phase of "initial engagement" the researcher who does not have a topic engages in self-dialogue to discover an area of intense interest, and makes the commitment to its study. The "immersion" phase begins once the research question has been formulated. The researcher comes to be on intimate terms with the question which is lived consciously or not, and has a power of attraction which tends to draw experiences which will seem to revolve around it. It requires that one surrenders control in order for the research to unfold. As a result, one may experience a great deal of synchronicity. During the third phase of "incubation", the researcher retreats from the intense focus on the question and "allows the inner tacit dimension to wrestle with the new input gained during immersion, reorganizing and re-forming wholes and clusters of wholes, creating

new meaning...” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p.67). Additional input ceases as living with the question thus far has provided all the needed information for this stage of unconscious processing. The fourth phase of “illumination” occurs when there is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of understanding of the phenomenon which can be clustered into themes. This ‘eureka’ experience may happen in a single moment or unfold in waves of awareness. In the fifth phase of “explication” the researcher examines the material generated with added scrutiny, continuing the kind of internal focusing characteristic of immersion. The researcher also needs to reflect critically on his/her own beliefs, feelings, perceptions, before understanding can possibly break through in conversation with others (Sela-Smith, 2002). The natural conclusion to the heuristic research is said to occur spontaneously to form a “creative synthesis” in the last phase. According to Moustakas, it emerges from the tacit or intuitive dimension through inspiration (Sela-Smith, 2002). It reveals a new whole that draws on the researcher’s creative expression and should resonate deeply with the observer.

My approach of the heuristic process

It has been my experience that if one engages in the true spirit of the heuristic method, the phases described should naturally emerge from this process. While I feel I did go through Moustakas’s phases, I did not experience the heuristic process as one which is quite as linear as described. In my experience, it was more of a circular or rather spiraling process as it kept building on itself (Figure 1). I was aware that the objective was not to isolate an absolute but to draw out all the elements

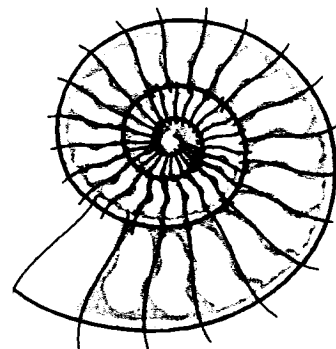


Figure 1

which would help me understand, elaborate and clarify the relationship between stillness and art making from my own experience. The components identified, continuously gained in clarity in relation to each other and as new elements emerged. These kept building on the initial shape, of which I had a strong feeling/intuition from the very beginning. I feel that the phases were not always so clear cut. Even as I was in the stage of “immersion”, I came by moments of sudden comprehension and inspiration which are perhaps characteristic of “illumination”. But perhaps this reflects a process of self-discovery that may have been at work before I made the conscious decision and commitment to engage in the heuristic process. For inspiration comes unannounced, and as Sela-Smith (2002) states, the phases occur in their own time, which required that I let go of expectations, trust the process, and just allow the research to unfold naturally.

I believe one should not set out to do heuristic research, but rather it begins with an internal need to know, a question or problem that calls out to the researcher and which should be driven by passion (Moustakas & Douglas, 1985; Sela-Smith, 2002). The concept of stillness was one which wasn't unknown to me when I set out to do research into this area. Even as a child, I had been introduced to Christian meditation by my mother and in time came to know more about other meditative practices. My self-search into this area is one that began perhaps out of necessity for I had a strong intuition that it was the path I needed to follow. I had identified the area of research and the essence of my question, before I even came to the heuristic method as a possible course of action. Not only did my “initial engagement” happen outside of my immediate awareness, but most if not all of my experiences seemed to connect with my research. When I made the

conscious decision and commitment to this heuristic research late in 2005, it felt as though I was already involved in the stage of “immersion”.

From the moment I understood where my process was taking me, it gave me the pretext that I needed to return to what I feel is my more authentic means of expression, art making. I also kept a journal, writing everything down no matter how remotely related it seemed with my question. Even a group therapy training in which I was involved at the time offered many opportunities for self-discovery and growth. I carried a small tape recorder with me on walks, not wanting to lose any possibly important or significant thought which might break through. This went on for some time until I seemed to have exhausted this stage. I remember feeling in the summer of 2006 that I had everything I needed to move on.

If I had to identify a period of “indwelling” in my research process, I would have to say it started that summer. While it was clear to me that all of the fragments and experiences I had accumulated thus far were connected to my question,

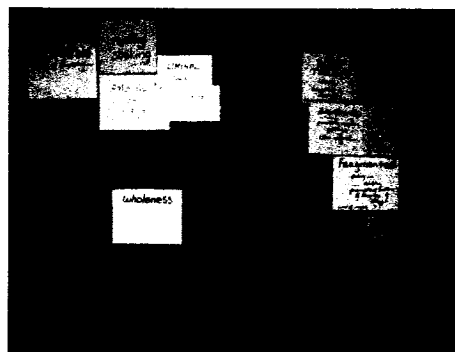


Figure 2

I was still unclear as to how they could be organized intelligibly. I started by drawing out words that summarized the various fragments and taping them on a large sheet of paper

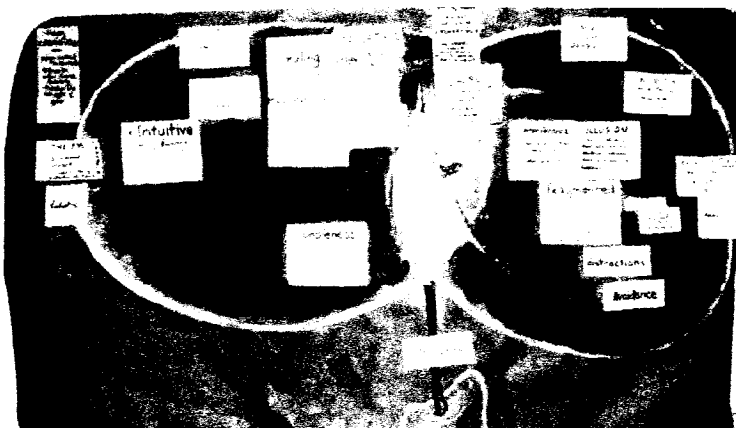


Figure 3

which to this day is still hanging on my wall (Figure 2). Groupings started to appear as it evolved almost as a diagram (Figure 3). I was noticing a directionality between these groupings as it became clearer that it seemed to be mapping out my journey into stillness.

I feel that I experienced moments of “illumination” almost at every stage of my research. But none stand out as much as in the late summer to early fall of 2006. During that time, a friend helped me get into contact with two experienced artists, whom she felt might help further inform my research. Both were seniors with a lifetime of experience as artists behind them. It gave me the opportunity to step outside my material, and consider someone else’s. All the elements had been there from my own experience, but from meeting these artists some elements took on more relief, gained in clarity, and helped to fill in some of the gaps.

In the fall of 2006, I felt that I needed to start writing in order for the whole to reveal itself. I tackled the material from within the context of the story of my experience. This is in my view when the stage of “explication” really began. I was also able to finally get in touch with a longtime friend and artist, who through our discussion provided her perspective on the optimal conditions for creativity, thus helping me further reconsider my own experience. Even at this stage, and perhaps in part because of the writing, I was coming by different levels of understanding. It is through the sustained effort of writing (although I must admit there were moments of great resistance in which I retreated from writing) that emerged a “creative synthesis” in the form of the story of my journey into stillness and through art making. The fragments of knowledge I accumulated were grouped into broader topics which I feel should help to clarify my

research question, while following a natural progression which is not exclusively chronological.

Co-participants

Within the heuristic process I understand the need to involve co-participants. There is a real danger that one can become so engrossed in one's own idea that it has the potential to become a convoluted, delusional or psychotic like process. I used my co-participants for reality checks, to bounce ideas around, as expert witnesses, as well as for their expertise or experience in the area under investigation. They include two friends, classmates, Sarah Brodie and Agathe Lesage, who were also my fellow supervisees under the guidance of our research advisor Suzanne Lister. With Sarah, Agathe and Suzanne, I engaged in informal generative discussion earlier in my research process (around the time of my "initial engagement").

Later on as I seemed to have exhausted the stage of "immersion" I was introduced to two artists, one is a Dominican nun living in a convent, and the other is a Dominican brother working in Japan doing missionary work through art making. Both are seniors with a life time of experience as artists, dedicated in sharing their gift which they practice full-time. For the purpose of this study I also interviewed my long time friend and artist, Lisa Puopolo. I have always considered her artwork as honest. In her own words she has expressed that she feels compelled to make art work, revealing her personal message which she feels she needs to communicate with others. From all three artists I wanted to learn more about their art making process, hoping perhaps to find out whether stillness had any part of it, and whether it offered a different perspective.

Since losing my parents and youngest sister in March 2005, my Aunt Elise has been a constant presence through our numerous phone calls. She has been a friend, a guide and teacher, who has helped me come to new understanding, contributing greatly to my self-search. Her area of expertise is as a trainer/mentor of reconnection healing. She also facilitates and teaches groups in the psychology of consciousness and personal growth and is experienced in the practice of stillness inducing methods (a search which spans thirty years). My aunt Mary Ann has also been a great inspiration in my life these past two years, reminding me to have faith, to trust. A spiritual woman of great wisdom, there is no doubt in my mind that she has also had an impact on this study.

These are the people I can identify, who as it would happen were already part of my life at the time or that I sought out as informants. I also acknowledge that there are many people who crossed my path and may have helped to spark ideas along the way, for which I am most grateful. This is the nature of such an important personal search, in that we are given what we need when it is needed (not always when we *want* it). Their contributions have allowed me to step back and reconsider the material from other perspectives and identify areas of resistance, which further fueled my ideas thus helping to generate new insights.

Reflexivity and Delimitations

While, as Hellowell (2006) advances, reflexivity should be an important part of any qualitative research, it is implicit to the heuristic process. Reflexivity is seen as “the conscious revelation of the role of the beliefs and values held by researchers ...” (Shacklock & Smyth paraphrased in Hellowell, 2006, p.483). In other terms, it is a deliberate self-scrutiny in relation to the research process, facilitated by the ability to

stand outside. I needed to reflect critically on my own perceptions of where I stand in relation to my informing experiences and topic. Oddly enough, this is where some confusion may slip in, for it is a process which is further facilitated (as it will become clearer further on) by the same phenomenon under investigation, stillness.

I was aware that as I was embarking on this project I was working from a number of assumptions which became the basis for some of my questions (as seen above) and needed to be further investigated. I also had preexisting biases which stem from previous experiences with Christian meditation. My own personal beliefs, or spiritual life, lead me to believe in the existence of God, whose presence I feel we encounter through the experience of stillness. In an effort to make this study more accessible to a broader audience, I have tried to explore the material that emerged from different perspectives without denying my more personal beliefs (for no matter how much I try, they will tend to colour my view).

While I know that the topic under investigation could have become quite expansive, I set out to limit my inquiry within the scope of my own experience for the purpose of this research. I have focused mainly on my experience through the art making process as well as through contemplation of art, my environment, meditation (sitting or walking – focusing on simply being in the moment, with or without the help of the use of a mantra or attention to breath), encounters with people and objects, and the dialogue I engaged in through journaling or through a portable tape recorder. Because I am the only participant, it is difficult to say how these experiences would translate with different populations; there are some for whom the capacity to experience stillness may be limited (i.e. individuals with severe pathologies). I can only speculate or form educated guesses

from other relevant research. However, it is not my aim to offer answers, but to open up a new area of investigation, to offer a different perspective. Limitations to research in this area also included limited literature specific to this topic as it relates to art therapy. But I think the greatest difficulty resides in trying to grasp a subject which eludes words. It is one that is best described through experience, through what it is not, and the effects that it produces or the difficulties that its absence engenders.

My journey of inquiry along the path which has led me to my research question is in my view a rich tapestry of experiences which have further informed my process, and which began long before I decided to research this topic. I will therefore occasionally refer to material which was produced previously and which has been properly recorded (i.e. summary of experience and journaling) in as far as it helps to contextualize or expand on images, insights, and indwellings...

THE JOURNEY

I soon realized that deciding to engage in the heuristic process was the easy part, but everything that followed was anything but easy for if I was to be honest in my approach I needed to dig deep or rather allow myself to let go. And yet this seemed to be the most obvious course of action as it came at a time of self revolution (great transformation when one cannot continue as before) as I was still grieving the loss of both my parents and youngest sister and going through some significant changes within myself. I had been shaken in my foundation and could no longer continue in my previous way of being. Paradoxically it also marked a home coming, back within myself, to reconnect with a more creative mode of being which would allow me to integrate all that

I was and am becoming. I think, more than anything else, I felt I needed to stop, to just allow myself to be, to feel, to be still...

Awakening

Stillness offers a way back from what David Bohm (1996) qualifies as the “self-sustaining confusion of the mind” which occurs when “the mind is trying to escape the awareness of conflict... in which one's deep intention is really to avoid perceiving the fact, rather than to sort it out and make it clear” (p.xviii). I think it is perhaps easier to let ourselves be driven by outside demands. It is then that amnesia sets in and that we forget who we truly are. How are we then to find our way back? There have been defining moments in my life, moments of awakening when I felt like I did not have a choice but to reconsider a way of being or position which no longer seemed to work for me (these times in which I grieve the loss of my parents and sister being one of those). I have come to realize that there are no “shoulds” and “musts” but in my own mind. It doesn't matter how much I plan, the unexpected and sometimes terrible can happen and for a time I may be destabilized trying to regain my footing. But I have found that these are the places that hold the greatest opportunity for transformation and from which one never really returns. It requires that I accept that life may not follow the course which I have planned or imagined for myself, that I stop engaging in control which only creates the illusion of holding (security). For in this space of unrest, one which is bound by time in which I am invaded by thoughts of the past and the future, I become caught in a cycle of doing rather than being.

Doing is a state I would characterize as one of agitation which does not necessarily lead anywhere; whereas, being is anchored in the present moment from which

emerges action with direction, a creative movement. I don't think it is necessary to be shaken by something difficult to force us to become aware of our state of dis-ease, although harder to ignore it does help. I believe that perhaps what is needed is the willingness to enter one's feelings without expectations and to be open to whatever is there if one is to become aware of the state of dissatisfaction which tends to dominate our minds when we are fragmented and driven. The noise or mental and emotional activity which goes on just below our awareness tends to drain much of our energy and are the roadblocks which must be surmounted to experience stillness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). It would seem then that this would be the first step towards experiencing stillness.

I am at a point in my life where I am ready to face my demons. Having three close members of my family so brutality taken away, I could not help but to look at how I was living my own life. What was clear was that there are many things I wanted to experience in life, but it seemed as though for the most part I could only envision these for the future. As I prepared their eulogies looking back on their lives (March 2005), in a moment of stillness of mind and fullness of heart I felt at peace and in an instant knew that I had been privileged to have been touched by their presence in my life and desired deeply to carry on the lessons of their lives. In that moment where I allowed myself to feel, I could see more clearly and realized that all this time I'd had the teachers I needed to help me get to where I wanted to go. To a certain extent, deep down, I had known for quite some time. But for a time after they were gone there was regret that I maybe had not been conscious enough to fully appreciate what I could have learned from them. However, I am often reminded that every day is fresh and holds the potential of new beginnings/possibilities. If I was going to live life to the fullest as my youngest sister did,

I needed to let go of what could have been and stop living in anticipation of what is coming. My deepest desire was to be able to fully appreciate the present moment and I felt and knew from within myself that the experience of stillness was the way.

Fear and Control

As I considered what it took to get to this point, I realized what had prevented me from getting here sooner. To a certain extent I think I experienced some fear in facing whatever lurked beneath the surface, fear of losing control. Given the overwhelming, draining and seemingly irrational nature of those emotions I have sometimes kept bottled inside, I have found it difficult to surrender control. As a child I was easily driven to tears and quickly learned that not only did it make people uncomfortable but it seemed that it was not considered an acceptable behavior. As a result I did not feel entitled to my feelings. However, I found another outlet for them through art making. I sometimes wonder how I would have gotten through the difficult period of adolescence if I had not been encouraged to make art. Within the space art making offered I did not feel the constraints of time or of any outside expectations (which can be a source of anxiety) and was free to simply be, face whatever was there without being submerged by it. There was a part of me that could sense what I was expressing through my art work, yet it remained ambiguous enough that I could handle it. It became something that I could explore and manipulate through symbolic imagery. The feelings contained within the image, no matter how difficult, could be a thing of beauty and through art, processed and transformed. I became a witness to myself. In time I learned to control my emotions, to keep them in check, a form of self-denial. As I became more skillful at putting myself out of phase (out of touch or disconnected), pushing any sign of conflict out of my

awareness, inspiration did not flow as easily. In fact as I look back and consider when I produced my most authentic and original artwork, it appears that they all occurred at moments of emotional upheaval in my life, when I could no longer keep it in.

Moving what is stuck

The first image I was inspired in the stage of immersion came to me fully formed in my mind's eye as I was walking (Figure 4).

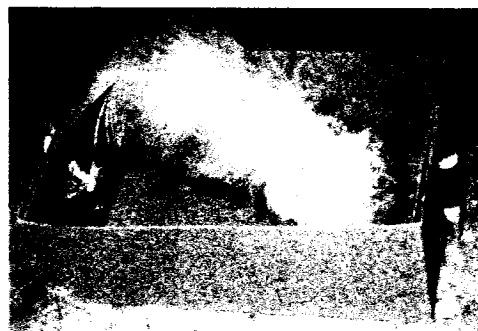
While I knew immediately that it was significant, it took some time before I related it to art work I had previously created. The seal had appeared in a few drawings produced in my late teens to early twenties, but more significantly was the main character of a myth I had chosen through which I was to experience



Figure 4

my creative process in a course given by Yehudit Silverman, an instructor in the Creative Arts Therapy program (in the summer of 2004). I had selected a version of the seal woman's story which connected with my personal experiences on so many levels. The seal, as I discovered through my exploration of this story and more recently found in native symbolism, represents a going back and forth in between two worlds. The

underwater or the unconscious and the surface or the conscious has often come to symbolize creativity (Andrews, 1993). The rock, which the seal circles, is very much reminiscent of a piece and poem



I had created in the same course (Figure 5).

Figure 5

*The floating rock rides the wave
 Beating against the shore
 It has weight but will not sink
 It hears but the echo of what lies beneath
 Tossed and turned it has been softened,
 Worked, smoothed until all sharp edges
 Have disappeared and it has come
 To rest heavily upon the ground
 Where it gathers the warm rays of the sun
 And burns the bottom of my feet.*

Suzanne Maxheleau, 2004

As my journaling from that time attests, I remember feeling as though I was caught in what had become a habitual mode of being, in the kind of movement which sedates. Furthermore, I also felt I had lost or suspended the fullness of my creative voice for so many years. As I poured over my journaling from that time I found another passage which seemed to expand along similar lines. It describes elements of an environment I created for my character, the seal woman, and how she moved when I embodied her within this space. It was comprised of several smooth rocks which I compared (through my journaling) to thoughts that keep my character captive as she smooths her hand over and over in that moment of stuckness. The smooth rocks are well invested forms, which perhaps did not sit well with me as I broke them (copies of smooth rocks made of clay) during a ritual performance which was the culmination of my process at the end of the course (to keep in mind as it will become clearer in relation to the next section). But I think that perhaps it only communicated my desire at the time, and now... well I might say that I am chipping away at them. Whether it was a question of timing or resources, I think that while a part of me knew what needed to happen I just didn't know how to go about it. Another passage, from my journaling of that summer of

2004, may however indicate that I did have an inkling as I also wrote about her %need to sink into the sea& - mine and the seal woman's.

On several occasions, at various times (regular intervals) in the initial stage of immersion, I found myself sitting in the same spot in an outdoor terrace behind the university which looks out onto an alley way. There I experienced an encounter of a different kind with ... a brick wall. Initially I contemplated its density; perhaps because in life there are illusory walls that I sometimes find myself facing, but mostly I played with the thought that if I could alter the frequency of my body I might become adept as a 'passe-murail' (a person who can walk through walls). I have on other occasions preferred to look at the intersection of paths in the alleyway leading towards other horizons, in a hurry to escape what I perceived as a heavy weight which holds me back and weighs me down in my body, mind, and spirit. However, it is the first image of passing through walls which is strongest and resurfaces more often, for as I have experienced it, and this will be made clearer further down, when the walls we encounter seem impermanent it becomes much easier to navigate the labyrinth of life.

What are these rocks or the walls which they build made of; what do they represent? I know that they only exist in my own mind. I have often wished it was as simple as just turning a switch and thinking positively, as it seemed my mother would often have me believe. But in these moments in which I was open and still enough to receive these images, I also felt that they were pointing to what was preventing me from entering yet deeper levels of stillness.

When beliefs immobilise

As I sat here trying to tackle my writing, a struggle which has been going on for some time now, I realised that I felt a connection with the image of the seal circling the rock, that I identified with it. Trusting this feeling but not fully making sense of it, I sought the assistance of one of my co-participants, my Aunt Elise, who acting as more than a sounding board helped me access that feeling. She did this by instructing me to become an observer rather than moving with the feeling of stuckness which wasn't leading me anywhere. She led me to identify the feeling and where I was experiencing it in my body. In doing this, I stepped outside rather than being the feeling, identifying with it. The next step was to recognise and affirm that "this is not me; I am not going to take it on; I am not going to become this feeling". When I was able to do this, I accessed the kind of objectivity and clarity that I have experienced in moments of stillness. What I took from my image was the understanding that although I was willing to look at my beliefs and obsessions (was previously engaged in a process of self-reflection in which I was becoming aware of my beliefs and obsessions, a few months before committing to this heuristic search), I was finding it very difficult to let go of these. They are the substance of my distractions and delusions, and are, like the rock, strong well invested forms, not so easy to part with. Even at this stage of "creative synthesis", I struggled with the destructive belief 'it is not good enough', which tends to interfere in most of my pursuits and projects and sometimes even prevents me from getting started. This is a big one, for it is the voice of judgement, one which is unkind and does not allow me to believe in my own abilities (such as writing). Therein lay problem as this stance is contrary to the attitude of openness, non-judging and acceptance which is required to

enter into stillness and access the fullness of my creative voice. From my experience with meditation, I knew of and used devices such as focussing my attention on my breathing or on a mantra (a word repeated and pronounced in equal syllables) as a way to circumvent these obstacles. But would I always require these devices to enter or experience stillness? This is very much part of the question I am exploring.

As I consider this further I am reminded of the Zen saying, "The joy of the raindrop is to enter the ocean" (MacInnes, 2001, p.67). How I wish I was that raindrop which sheds its boundary as it enters the ocean. But this freedom from what I have considered to be myself will only come when I can finally completely let go. It is a process to even get to that point. Elaine MacInnes (2001), a catholic nun and former musician who became the first Canadian-born *roshi* (Zen Master), relates her experience with the violin which she claims to have only truly mastered after 20 years of Zen meditation when, as her Zen master put it, she "finally got [herself] out of the way" (p.25). She describes this experience as one of great joy.

I think stillness is a process, and it is my hope that as I continue to cultivate its experience in my life that I may with time and practice become more aware of the roadblocks I put up for myself. As I start to deconstruct these I might even enter deeper levels of stillness and awareness...

Feelings - Obstacle or way in

Around the time I was embarking on my heuristic research, I was already involved in a group therapy training program. An important part of the training required our participation in a process group. My experience within this group became a valuable source of self-reflection and learning. For one hour every week we would come together

and interact as a group without bringing in any personal life material, the focus being on the here and now. It was at times uncomfortable, for it felt as though there was no direction, no content (like stillness in some ways). That left us dealing with silence often heavy in nature, talking about our feelings in the present moment or the avoidance of these, and at times we would 'play' by collectively creating a fantasy or metaphor through which the group's dynamics were expressed. It would often take me some time to process my experience within the group for emotions would often run high, but with time and greater understanding on how to handle my emotions it became considerably shorter. I came to know on a deeper level that no matter what my experience is when I interact with others, no one can make me feel anything. However, if something has been triggered in me by someone or something, this feeling offers an opening to get a hold of my obsessions and beliefs and if followed back to the beginning, the opportunity to gain some insight into how it originated. This only became possible when I stopped moving with my emotions or identifying with them, not allowing them to take over. For when I am overwhelmed, ruled by my emotions, I remain caught in old mindsets. And as I have been learning and practicing, if I can gain an objective stance on what it is I am feeling (as I have often been guided through by my aunt - as in previous section) I may catch myself in these beliefs and start chipping away at them.

I think how I feel has at times become part of the background noise in my spirit which does not give me rest when I don't take the time to fully accept, experience and investigate my emotions. This is a difficult thing to do because of the sometimes unpleasant nature of these feelings; in the moment I guess it is easier to rationalize them away or just ignore them. But I have found that when I do not deal with them they

always find a way back to the surface and furthermore tend to colour or distort my view of the world. If ignored or left unaddressed for too long, they have found other ways to call for my attention by lodging themselves in my body in the form of aches and pains or physical illness. However, even this presents an opportunity if we keep in mind that every physical body is a schoolroom and every disease a lesson. The challenge then has been to remind myself to breathe and pay attention to how I feel. It is as though I become an observer of my own inner landscape; trusting what I feel, I try to remain open to whatever thought or image that comes. I believe that as one further strives towards self-fulfillment, the ego helps transcend itself by drawing attention to those parts which need healing. Within the group I was most challenged by those who triggered the (greatest) most adverse reaction in me. These were painfully difficult moments as I reconnected with old feelings such as being on the outside looking in, as though I was not part of the group, one which I remember very clearly from my childhood. The question was whether I would rise to meet the challenge or remain in my patterns, defending them.

From this group experience I was inspired to an image which came in a moment of inspiration and that I continue to elaborate (Figure 6). A woman stands in the center of a group of seemingly menacing trees. Light is shining through and because of the darkness/shadows is made more visible and beautiful. The darkness here reveals the light. The trees also bear witness to one who used to fear to be seen, perhaps for fear of judgment. Given how unkind I can sometimes



Figure 6

be in my assessment of myself, it is not surprising then that I sometimes worried about other's perception of me. While facing my shadow (in Jungian terms) can be a difficult, even unpleasant experience, I have realized that avoidance is not the solution. What I am discovering from within the darkness is of far greater beauty than I could have ever imagined, but mostly there is greater peace in stillness.

Breathing

In this group, we had a group experience involving collaboration on a collective mural inspired another theme which deserves some attention. I was a participant in a group which for the most part did not have experience with art making. The activity was meant as an experiential demonstration which aimed to help extol the virtues of art making within the group process. It was met with some resistance as group members each stayed very much in their area with no interaction with other group members. Although I resisted, I had the strong desire to draw a wave like shape across the top of the image putting the whole piece under water. I had felt on some level that I needed to respect the present group dynamics and not stir the pot. However, I was frustrated because I had hoped that through this medium we would feel safe enough to play with it. To enter the water could have symbolized in Jungian terms (Shear, 1982) our willingness to encounter the depths of consciousness. But by imposing this gesture on the group, while it would have communicated my desire, I think it would have been too forceful. As the image stayed with me for some time it inspired a different meaning. On some level I already experienced the image as being underwater in that it felt as though for the most part we were holding our breath.

As I further pondered this idea I wondered how many of us journey through life 'holding our breath'. I became aware of my own breathing patterns and realized that they can be quite irregular and variable depending on my frame of mind. I considered these as I was engaged in art making, noticing that it was regular when I was relaxed and able to trust the process without questioning the outcome, to enjoy it. But when ever I would struggle with the image, trying to 'figure it out' (intellectualizing) instead of allowing myself to be guided by my feelings, my breathing would become quite irregular and at times it almost seemed as though I stopped breathing for a moment. I have also noticed the relationship with breathing during low intensity exercise which is more regular. Could it be that the repetitive, rhythmic nature of the activity helped to regulate my breathing and possibly other biological functions? What I do know is that physical activity helps me relax and clear my mind. I have often experienced a walk as meditation in movement, and come up with some of my more creative ideas at such times. Potting is another art process I have been involved in that I would qualify as meditative. The still hub of the wheel draws me into its center, and hypnotizes me. But here again there is the involvement of the whole body, and breathing is key if one is going to be successful at remaining centered. In fact, in Eastern practice the potter will meditate before throwing. I have experienced it as an activity which is stilling; it requires awareness in what I am doing without engaging my mind. Its effect is calming which is also reflected through my breathing and further resonates through my whole being.

From my experience with meditation, I know that attention to breathing is important towards stilling the mind. In the tradition of Christian meditation, to which I was first introduced by my mother and further explored with UNITAS - a Christian

meditation centre in Montreal, we use a mantra to prevent the mind from wandering, but there is significant attention given to breathing. I have also noticed (especially in the stage of immersion when I was particularly attentive to everything I was experiencing), when I have been taking walks and that my mind has been particularly agitated, that I have been able to calm myself and still my mind by taking deep slow breaths. This would seem to indicate a direct connection between body and mind. At a later stage of this research, I returned to review relevant literature which might help to clarify the relationship between emotions and physiological processes.

Apparently, many in Western societies are living in a chronic state of stress, not even realizing how stressed they are, and consequently live out their lives disconnected from themselves (Hannaford, 2005). It is now recognized that this state of being can lead to severe even life threatening illnesses (Hannaford; Prattis, date unknown). Giving attention to how I breathe has lead me to further consider the interconnectedness between the body, mind and spirit. I have found that these should not be considered separately. Even as I think back to the intense levels of stress I was trying to manage as a full time student and single mother in the program I am still currently involved in, I was at the time becoming increasingly aware of where it would lodge itself in my physical body. In the months that preceded the official beginning of this heuristic search and throughout the stage of “immersion”, I have been giving more attention to how I feel in my body. When I look at how I breathe, I feel that it gives me an indication of where I am emotionally and how it further impacts down the line. The conscious focus on breathing can facilitate stillness, while also helping me address what it is that I am feeling emotionally and physically, and integrate body, mind and soul.

Trusting

In the beginning, engaging in the experiential aspect through the “immersion” phase of my investigation came effortlessly. It seemed as though all of my experiences and encounters were feeding, revealing my search. But to some extent they had been for years before I identified stillness as a topic for research. It is almost as though I have been led to this point. This is the very nature of the heuristic line of inquiry and of stillness; I was learning to trust my feeling function again. As a result I experienced a great deal of synchronicity, greater awareness, perceiving connections throughout all my encounters. I did however have some setbacks at every stage of this research whenever I would allow doubt to enter my mind. This also became part of my process which I documented as I struggled with self-judgement fuelled and supported by rationalization. As I worried about the seemingly haphazard course I was taking several weeks into the “immersion” phase, I would once again engage in control, planning how to cultivate the optimal conditions for the experience of stillness, and as it relates to art making, to inform my process. This did not last, as, through the actual experience of stillness, during long walks that followed, I quickly realised that inspiration comes unannounced and not always at a time when I can sit with it. That is when I began carrying a tape recorder and a sketchbook at all times. The key was to set the stage or intention but without expectations. Realizing that I needed to let go, I was again reminded that “not-knowing is the highest wisdom” (MacInnes, 2001, p.22). Before thoughts and images can crystallize, I think one must be able to tolerate ‘not knowing’, to accept that no form

or thought is final and will almost inevitably be deconstructed to eventually be replaced by another higher or more suitable form. When I consider the biblical story of Adam and Eve, what comes to mind is that it was their desire to know rather than to trust which led them towards misery and unhappiness. But trust in what?

As I now consider this question, I think for many when one speaks of trust it needs to be directed towards something or someone without which trust is blind. But what I am referring to here speaks more of a stance of openness as opposed to only having faith in what our rational mind tells us which is an incomplete knowing. Going through my notes I unexpectedly came across a wonderful quote by St-John of the Cross, a medieval mystic, who expresses this beautifully when he writes:

*“...be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.”*
(cited in Dawson, 2003, p.37)

I realize that I am considering here what I view as possible in my experience. But as I stepped out of my own experience, I wondered whether there can be trust for those who fear, those who do not feel their environment is safe or supportive? Can there be stillness without trust?

Going through art work produced during this study, I came across a semi-abstract water colour which was part of a series and on which I wrote: “trust, accept the unknown though it may look like nothing”. For I have found that when I start questioning myself on what is there I usually short circuit the process that is revealing itself. If I consider my art making process, but also as a reflection of this larger heuristic process, I guess I am

learning to trust my intuition and honouring what I feel, rather than looking outside myself for answers. And should I make mistakes? Well, that is part of the learning process, and those mistakes have as much if not more to teach me than my successes.

Interconnectedness with all things

Learning to trust can become a lifetime pursuit which perhaps becomes easier to achieve when one can believe that there is nothing random about life, our existence or the universe. For quite some time now I have felt that life does not happen to us but that we draw certain things to ourselves and that even when bad things happen we can draw on our potential for alchemy and turn it into gold. While it is taking time for the rest of the scientific community to catch up, a shift in paradigm has occurred in certain circles, particularly in those dealing with quantum physics, which through their research on subatomic particles have come to discover what mystics from various traditions have known for thousands of years (Prattis, date unknown). They now understand that “the whole universe is ... engaged in endless motion and activity – in a rhythmic dance of creation and destruction...” (Capra cited in Prattis, p.3). I have felt as though this perpetual cycle of transformation by which a state of order deconstructed is replaced by another has been at work at different times in my life, particularly in those moments that have brought significant personal changes (as these past two years). As Bohm (1996) has otherwise suggested, in a sense entropy occurs when we halt or resist the natural cycle of transformation. When we live out our lives disconnected from ourselves and each other, what results will tend to be in a state of conflict, out of balance.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper (and for the moment, beyond my capacity) to explore the levels of correspondence between our perceptions and a

consciousness which includes ourselves, the planet and the universe and which tend to be kept separate in our minds, I would like to briefly look at this feeling that everything is connected. The interconnectedness which I am speaking of here go beyond the various levels of experience within our own persons, but extends further from the micro at the atomic and cellular level and all the way through as we enter a dance with each other our environment ... the universe. I know that I am deeply affected by my environment; I have often felt the rhythm of the city which I feel puts me in a state of hyper vigilance (stress). When I am in the city, I find I often need to make a more conscious effort to quiet or still my mind which tends to go in many directions. During the writing of this paper (at the beginning of this summer 2007), I had the opportunity to spend a week in the country side, on a waterfront. I brought a portable computer along, and found while I was there that it made for a very different quality of writing. Stillness was more easily accessible, as I felt the wind blowing through me, carried by the rhythm of the surf, my attention was held by the movement of nature and how it moved through me. There I connected with my material; I began to see the connections more clearly.

I have sometimes experienced this feeling when I engage in art making. In those instances I do not question what I am doing, totally absorbed by what I am doing it almost feel as though I am channelling something. The art which results from this kind of experience (as seen in Figure 7) is usually abstracted, which may further facilitate



Figure 7

this perception of interconnectedness as it suspends the constraints of personal, social and historical conditioning. For, as Bohm (1996) has pointed out, the creation of such work “requires an active process of distilling perception and experience to their essences allowing one to reconsider the nature of the perceptual experience” (p.xii).

Even throughout this heuristic search at every stage, I experienced such synchronicity that it felt as though the universe was conspiring to reveal to me that which I wished to discover. This is especially true at the stage of “immersion”; perhaps because I could appreciate the whole without yet trying to organise and communicate all the connections that were being revealed. As I review all the experiences I have had throughout this research, it is clear to me that this feeling is one I have only come by in moments of stillness whether through contemplation, art making... when I have been present within the moment.

Setting my intention

When I initially started on this quest, it was an emotional time for me as I was still grieving the loss of my parents and sister. From one day to the next I might be carried on a roller coaster of emotions, at times feeling powerless. On one particular day in the very begin of my “immersion” phase, I had been feeling as though my head was in a vice grip, being squeezed. As I was walking, I entered into an inner dialogue, looking at where it may be coming from, addressing what wasn’t working, dwelling very much in those heavy feelings, in the negative. Well, since it did not help me feel any better, I took deep breaths, letting go of a little bit more with each breath. Before I could go any further my mind wondered again, but this time to reflect on my experience of stillness through meditation and that feeling of *love* that envelopes me, helps me feel connected when I am

in that space. As I stopped dwelling on what wasn't working and turned my attention to what I wanted to experience, I noticed a switch in how I was feeling. It was one of peacefulness, connectedness, and warmth. From this point I understood the importance of not allowing myself to be guided by my emotions, but also that I can set my intention for what I wish to draw to myself.

I believe that life does not just happen to us, but that there is a greater plan and that we do decide what our part in it will be. I feel, as Prattis (date unknown), McTaggart (2007) and others have suggested, that we draw certain things to ourselves which is largely dependant on our mind set. While as previously mentioned it is widely recognised that the effect of thoughts and emotions on our body is quite real, what I would like to consider here extends beyond these effects. Mystics of all ages and now quantum physicists know our thoughts and their effects are real, that they have a frequency which has a power of attraction and which reverberates; if you think it, it will be so (McTaggart, 2007).

The problem is that I often lose myself in old mind sets. However, I am convinced that a part of myself remembers its original programming, knows what my healthy self requires and puts desires into my heart. It is in stillness that I can quiet potentially harmful thoughts, become aware of what it is that I need, and that I can access a more loving, kinder side of myself. Through art making, dreaming and contemplation (what draws my attention) the images show me what I need, when I am attentive to their call. Through meditation, I can alter my frequency which is said to persist for a while even after one stops meditating (Austin, 1998). If we consider that our brain registers our thoughts as reality (McTaggart, 2007), as it does other outside influences such as

television even though we know it is created (Hannaford, 1995), there should be no question as to the importance of maintaining a good mental hygiene. What is needed is the kind of awareness which is cultivated by being present to every moment.

It really is a question of what we do with what we get. Bringing about real changes in my life, I realised had to start with my own perceptions. So many times I have heard, or been told: “anything is possible if you put your mind to it”. By setting my intention it will have a power of attraction that will draw to it what is needed for its fulfillment, this heuristic process being a perfect example.

Natural unfolding – When boundaries have dissolved

For the most part, I gave myself the space to experience or be inspired with whatever came in the stage of “immersion”. However, I was aware on some level that I was invested in making the connection between art making and stillness. As I questioned a few artists on their own creative process, in some cases I initially felt some disappointment because it was not obvious to me at the time that what they were describing was related to my area of study. I had already started to tackle the stage of “explication”, when one such person, a friend and artist, related experiences regarding her own creative process which I now realise support my findings. Remembering a time when she was at her most creative she identified what she deems to be important contributing factors and which relate very closely to what has been discussed here so far. It happened within the year that followed the end of a long term relationship. I think it is safe to assume that this marked a time of self-revolution in her life. Images or titles would just come, triggered by an emotional experience with another person. The more

contact she had with people, the more chances there were that something would happen. She did not question what; whatever was there, was there. This required her to be open, which in her case (she could not stress this enough) involves other people. While she described her contact with others as emotionally stimulating, it was paradoxically a time of emotional freedom. She felt as though she was not 'bogged down', success or failure did not matter. She experienced the synchronicity in her life as 'magic', and her art from that period as 'the luckiest kind you can make'. It would usually emerge from what she calls a premonition of the image, a really strong feeling. However, if the image was not resolved she had to let it go for she ran the risk that it might get overly intellectualised, resulting in the feeling leaving her.

Similarly, what stayed with me from another interview (at the stage of “illumination”) with another prolific artist is the idea that one should not ask an image what it means. Although it may be appropriate to entertain a dialogue with the art work, it is by respecting its ambiguity that one enables creativity. He does not go back on a finished piece, but continues this dialogue through the act of creating as he mostly works in series. His works exist in themselves, separate from their maker, rising through his intuition allowing him to *see* the present. The viewer, which includes the artist, is transformed by the art in a constant dialogue, a perpetual cycle of transformation. What would be the use in elaborating a piece which is figured out in advance? It has been my experience that it usually halts or puts the brakes on the creative process and often produces work which is left lacking... The creative process facilitates that movement of giving shape to that which is felt, and perhaps escapes words or can only faithfully impress through the beauty it engenders.

I sat down one day early on in the stage of “immersion” with my water colours and some newsprint. It would seem that I did not trust myself enough or my own abilities to use better quality paper without a planned image, which I latter regretted. However, this gave me permission to just let-go of expectations and have fun with physical qualities of the medium itself, to draw out an image from the contact of the pigment with the water. On the edge of two of the three water colors (Figure 8, 9 &10) which I produced that day, I made notes: “when I start asking the image what it is before I am done I lose the flow of the movement”, and “trust, persevere, accept the unknown though it may look



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figures 10

like nothing”. They served as reminders, as I would catch my rational self getting in the way. This movement or flow as I have experienced here and on other occasions, is only made possible when I stay in the moment, in the feeling, and do not allow my mind to take over – when I am still.

Images that draw you in

When I initially considered the various ways in which I could encounter stillness through art, it occurred to me, as I recalled my own experience with the works of certain artists which captivated my attention and inspired, that these also have the power to draw

us into stillness as objects of contemplation. Within a therapy group which I co-led, I had observed the potential of contemplative practice as a patient, who was experiencing an acute bout of anxiety from accessing painful memories, got up walked around the room and stopped in front of a print which was hanging on the wall. As she later explained to us, she had managed to access a space where she could feel well within herself through gazing at the image. McNiff (2004) encourages the practice of what he refers to as 'aesthetic contemplation'. He describes the experience in terms of becoming present to the process of reflection rather than intellectualizing or thinking. It is my understanding that in order to do this one must be able to let go, be still.

As part of my process I also went looking for objects of contemplation at the Montreal Art Gallery. On those occasions, I did not find any works that spoke to me, perhaps because I was hoping or had expectations of what needed to happen. However at another time, as I was walking through Concordia University when the title of an undergraduate show at the Ellen and Leonard Gallery caught my attention. It read "The only way out is in", to which I would have added '...and the only way in is out', following some of my more recent musings. As I entered the gallery, the sound of what seemed to be a woman crying around the corner grabbed my attention. When I actually entered the space I realised that it was a larger than life video of a woman laughing uncontrollably. I wondered if the woman's seemingly manic laugh was perhaps a kind of diversion and that deep down she was crying. Our eyes, mind and what people try to convince us of (try to convince themselves) can sometimes deceive, which is why, as I was being reminded, it is important to also give attention to our feelings. As McNiff

(2004) would say: “losing the object of contemplation is a necessary step in regaining it” (p.58).

I have found that experiencing nature also has the potential to draw one into contemplation, into stillness. I had such a moment driving back from an inspiring meeting with an artist. This was early in the fall of 2006, during what I consider to be my phase of “illumination”. On this particular day as I was following the river, the light was glistening on the water in such a way that it seemed magical, it was calling out to me. I stopped twice taking time to sit with it, soak it all in. The second time, I was inspired to write a piece which sums up what I experienced in those moments.

*“...Puis la lumière pris tout la place
Et je m’avança sur les rochers
Voulant entrer dans le courant
Toucher à cette lumière
Mais elle est aussi en moi
Laisant aller le fil de ma pensée
Je m’abandonne au courant
Et me laisse imprégner du moment présent
Je sens pénétrer la joie
Qui s’étend comme la lumière sur les flots”*

Roughly translated the poem reads: “... and the light filled the entire space, and I moved forward on the rocks, wanting to enter into the current, to touch this light, but it is also within me; letting go the course of my thoughts, I give myself up to the current, and soak up the present moment; I feel the joy that penetrates, which spreads like the light

on the waves”. Upon my return, in an effort to further capture/record the moment, I elaborated a water colour from a small sketch (Figure 11). Such was the impact it had on



Figure 11

me; I did not want to forget that I could experience such joy in simply being in the moment. In a way, I feel it beautifully sums up my quest. To me it impresses that search, trying to grasp that experience of great beauty which seems to be just beyond my grasp. But it is there within me, if I can only just let-go, trust, and simply be in the moment. The feeling I experienced in that moment is one of complete freedom. I was open to the beauty I experienced on the outside, and as it expanded from within me. It was a feeling of happiness and love.

As I consider some of the clients I have had the privilege of assisting through art therapy, I do not think this kind of experience is given to everyone. A person, who has not had the opportunity through good enough parenting (or a substitution of it) to feel love from without and from within, and develop the ability to trust, may by all accounts find it difficult to enter into stillness. The difficulty does not reside in the experience of stillness itself but in the roadblocks or obstacles one must surmount to get there. Art may present a viable alternative for the visual language is one which is not mastered by many due to the ambiguity of symbols. There is a knowing without knowing (intuitive - I believe implies a certain measure of stillness) which is palpable within the liminal space of the image or art object, and which may emerge into full consciousness when one is ready to receive it.

Images that speak

The signs are within and around us; what we get has to do with how we receive them. I have found that what is required is to let go of what I thought I knew to be open to other possibilities, to be receptive and attentive.

Around the time I was trying to motivate myself to start writing, images here again were pointing the way. I have often found myself saying that I am allergic to words. Yet they have weight, give shape, organize the images and communicate my ideas to others. The difficulty I was meeting in initiating my writing was again driven by my beliefs and fears. Especially given the personal nature of the material, I wrestled with: 'is it enough' as I continued making art, avoiding the inevitable; 'is it good enough'; and a lack of faith in my capacity to write. It was during this period, after praying the night before that I would remember, I dreamt that I was trying to hold a miniature baby. Despite its small size, it was quite vigorous, wiggly, and threatening to escape at any moment. I remember being afraid I would drop it. I felt responsible for this precious being I was trying to control by holding it close to myself high above the ground, feeling quite inept. As I sat in a café the following day, quiet within myself and open onto my environment, my attention was drawn by the small baby at the next table with its parents. It was all I needed to remember the dream from the night before. In that moment where I could be still within myself, without even looking for it, I picked up on a cue from my environment that jogged my memory. As I was remembering and not asking of the dream what it meant, I knew almost instantly that it was about my struggle with my research project. While the baby was miniature in size, it was healthy, vigorous and fully formed. At this point I could hear my research advisor reminding us not to make our projects into something bigger than what it needed to be. The baby was ready, but I needed to get down on the ground and play with it instead of trying to control it. If I was to remain true to my process and topic, I needed to be open enough for it to show me the way every step of the way.

I have experienced this kind of synchronicity in life, when I have been open and attentive or still; it has felt as though God or others might say the universe conspires to show me what a wiser part of myself already knows but which needs to be brought into consciousness. One such experience, which was particularly touching and has stayed with me all these years, happened in my early twenties at another time of self-revolution. I was walking along a beach collecting shells, but these were fragments which resembled little their original form. In my mind they were like spiralling flowers akin to white lilies. It was so surprising for it seemed these shapes had invaded the beach and there was not much else to be found at that moment. This in itself was a great comfort, for they appeared at the right moment and spoke to me loud and clear, which I accepted as a symbolic sign. Around that time I wrestled with guilt, self-judgement, feelings of being impure and undeserving which to a certain extent undoubtedly stemmed from beliefs fuelled by my catholic upbringing. The white lily was significant because my mother had always told me that my name *Suzanne* signified 'pure as a lily'. I was filled with such joy as though something had washed over me as I was able to let go of those negative feelings which had poisoned my spirit.

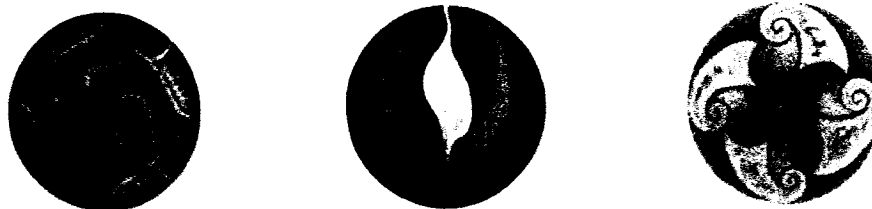
In both instances I did not come across these images, signs or experiences because I went looking for them, but rather they found or called out to me. Images seem to speak loudest, expressing or helping me truly understand what I would have not come to through reasoning. When I think of the dream, there is an experiencing through images which helps me accept and adopt what they reveal. I do not doubt these for they reflect a knowledge I can accept not only with my mind but my whole being; they resonate. Again, there is a state of being which was required of me in order to be receptive to these

images. Walking by myself along the beach without any preoccupations on my mind, and feeling the rhythm of the surf through my whole being, I enjoyed the kind of stillness I experience when I enter into communion with nature. In the café, I made a more conscious effort to just breathe and be in the moment, and then became more aware and in tune with the environment. When I enter a certain level of stillness, I become aware of the connections and begin to understand that when I am attentive the universe (God...) conspires to show me the way.

Truth in beauty, beauty in balance

I had the privilege to meet a Dominican Sister and artist who works in a studio within a convent. Sr Marie-Thérèse's experiences with art making were familiar to me. Like many artists she started as a child because she felt the need to create and it came naturally. When asked if there was ever a time in her life when she lacked inspiration, she recalled only one instance which she overcame by asking herself what would give her pleasure. Being drawn to sculpture and relief, she listened to her heart's desire. It would seem that she follows the path that offers no resistance, not one which is determined through her will (or any mental process) but instead she follows her heart or listens to her feelings. But what stood out for me from becoming acquainted with this artist, is something which I read in an interview she gave for an article in *Le Moutier*. In it she shares that her fascination for beauty in all its forms pushed her to create it. Through the creation of an art object there is a thirst to express a beauty which always wants more. This is, in her view, the essence of spiritual life.

When I consider the question of beauty, I still cannot help feeling that it is subjective: what is beautiful to one person may not be for another. However, thinking of art work I have produced, whether it was during the process of this heuristic research or from before, I know right away which ones are successful or fall short. Oddly enough, I have found that when I set an expectation, when I try to create a thing of beauty, it may have the merit of demonstrating great skill but often fails to inspire. But when it emerges through intuition or the tacit dimension without effort, when I do not try to control or allow judgement to impede the process, what results is a piece that reflect, communicates something of that beauty which is felt inside. The beauty I speak of here may have something of what Plato describes as “the Form of Absolute Beauty” which Shear (1982) compares to “unboundedness”. In Bohm’s (1996) view, we create “to find in the reality in which [we live] a certain oneness and totality, or wholeness, constituting a kind of harmony that is felt to be beautiful” (p.3), and which I feel is experienced in stillness. Poincare confirms this point when he spoke of the feeling of “beauty and elegance” that all true mathematicians know, which he qualified as an aesthetic feeling letting through those “...mathematical entities... whose elements are harmoniously disposed so that the mind without effort can embrace their totality while realizing their details...” (cited in Shear, p.165). Perhaps it is the feeling of a whole, something which is in balance, harmonious, an expression of personal maybe even universal truths we are meant to uncover and share with others. During a presentation, one of my informing artists, Br Gaston Petit shared his vision of beauty as something that rises from the depths of our being as it tends towards its full expression in the world.



CONCLUSION

Early this summer I was vacationing on a water front with a group of parents with whom I had been asked to lead in a ceramics workshop. As I was instructing the participants in the manipulation of clay, I also produced a piece. It turned out to be ...

well, I am not sure what it is (Figure 12). It is only later that I made the connection with the

smooth rocks from the beginning of this

heuristic process (Figure 4 & 5). But this one

seems alive, as though some kind of creature

is trying to break out. As I consider this image

I cannot help thinking that it reflects, in a way,

how far I have come along through this heuristic

journey of self-discovery. Although I wish I could, as in the ritualised performance

previously mentioned (p.30), simply break those rocks or dysfunctional beliefs, I now

realise that it is a process. I have not yet rid myself of old mind sets however, as I

become more aware through stillness of the boundaries that I created for myself, I can at

least begin to deconstruct these and create a new reality for myself. This is an important

process which cannot and should not be bypassed as there is a great deal that can be

learned through knowing oneself.



Figure 12

Stillness offers us a way back to explore our own creation and initiate a perpetual cycle of transformation. I have come to realise for myself that it is far more comforting to accept how little I know. And when I do touch something of the mystery of life, the experience is one of great joy and beauty which inspires me to create. In exploring the relationship of stillness to the art making or creative process I have found that when I can let go and allow myself to simply experience the present moment I create more honest works that express something of that beauty or truth which I feel is more accessible to others. Whether my experience of stillness is fleeting or more profound, I found that it is an important part of the creative process for it is through stillness that I can let go of what I think I know and perceive things anew. It is by cultivating awareness of what I feel at any moment that I will come to stillness more frequently and more deeply. By being attentive to how I move, breath, or feel, I may come to know and surmount the obstacles that my own mind creates. As a result I have found that in those moments that I enter into stillness I feel balanced and am more open onto others and the world.

I no longer consider stillness an option; it has become a necessity for it allows me to perceive more clearly, to remove my coloured glasses and see things as they may actually be. Furthermore, I have found that it is essential in accessing the fullness of my creative voice. Art making provides the means by which I can quiet my discursive mind, and experience stillness. The required stance is one of openness, non-judging, accepting whatever is there, holding only an intention without expectations and never asking an image what it means but instead just trusting and allowing the image a chance to impress. The key is to play with the process, letting go or forgetting for a while everything else. I have found that abstract art provides an easier access into this type of experience for it

call out to our tacit powers of perception, suspending our personal, historical and social identifications. The fluidity of paint, and the malleability of clay are more conducive toward this kind of exploration as the physical quality of these mediums lend itself well to transformations.

In the past I have had moments with clients who struggled with engaging in art making, not able at first to trust the process. Between their own expectations of the process and what art should be and those they may have believed I held for them, it may have been difficult in the beginning to trust, or let-go of everything else and just play. At the time, I would sometimes try to find devices to help them surmount these resistances, thus missing the opportunity to help them become aware of these as well as what they are made of. Usually they were themes or questions which engaged their mind. There is however, a quality about images that calls out to our intuition, and even in those instances where clients may have been given a direction, there is a point at which the image exists by itself and acts upon its maker. Perhaps what is needed is to further encourage this in the client through contemplation, asking them to not try to “figure out the image” but to simply allow it to impress upon them. In essence, this consists in guiding them to be still or open in the presence of the image. It is tempting for us as therapists and clients to dismiss what creates discomfort; but those are some of the places or feelings that offer the greatest potential for insight. One needs to be ready to accept whatever emerges. As for individuals that are more fragile, I would proceed with caution and only assist them to venture where I feel they are ready to go. Thus, as the therapist, I must also contain the space to make it safe for the client to explore their own stillness. As I mentioned earlier, this may not be available to all individuals but for those whose ego strength is secure,

providing the space to experience stillness can invite the client to go in deeper to their creative exploration.

Even as therapists, if we are to be at our best with our clients, not only can we come to be aware of our biases through self-knowledge facilitated by the experience of stillness, but we can also become more present and open to our clients through stillness. Freud put his finger on it when he described the nature of the process to a group of physician as one where the therapist “should maintain... calm, quiet attentiveness of evenly hovering attention” (cited in Austin, 1998, p.127), which is to say or could be taken as - we need to be still. I feel that in stillness, we become truly aware and experience every situation with our entire being. It opens us up not only to what is said but to that which is not visible or remains unspoken. In adopting this stance as therapists, we lend our intuition in the service of our client. It requires that one lets go of the desire to identify and really listen, open not only to what one hears but also to feelings and images that may emerge, or what is felt in the body. I have found, after sessions with certain clients, the need to produce an image. It has been for me a particularly useful way of letting go, thus preventing me from obsessing or carrying the person with me wherever I go, but it also helps me become more aware of what I may have been sensing during the session. Through art making I can let go of theories, of what I think I may know about the client and allow myself to trust my feelings, my intuition and be still.

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