

Novels as a medium of contemporary discourse with ourselves:
An exploration of Benjamin's Storyteller
and
Bachelard's 'poetic reverie'

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ABSTRACT

Novels as a Contemporary Discourse with Ourselves: An Exploration of Benjamin's *The Storyteller*, and Bachelard's 'poetic reverie'

Monique Martel

This is a personal exploration into the landscape of the imagination, a landscape where memory, perception and the imagination exchange functions. It is a place where life becomes death, where death comes to life, where a suitcase becomes a lifetime, where a fountain mirrors the transience of human life. It is a place where everything that I have ever lived for evaporates into the air, into the sea, into the flame of the fire that burns before me. It is a place that leaves one with no theoretical place to stand. Here, I am on my own.

In this landscape of the ephemeral, subjectivity rules. There is no objectivity. Exploring this land will not be a way to produce irrefutable truth. Nor will it be a place from which to define a specific paradigm. But, the landscape of the imagination is a place from which a different perspective can be obtained on diverse concepts and disciplines, a place where the forced inversion of real and unreal forces one to examine who and what one is, and what one believes in. Like a virtual immersion in which one creates what one wishes to be, it is a place where being is not being, and not being is the reaching of the essence.

If there is any acknowledgement that I must make, it is to Professor Hal Thwaites. He has been a tremendous mentor, a true friend, and the most amazing configuration of inspirational brilliance. Above all, he has been supportive. He has trusted and believed in me, and in my abilities to create academically.

Thank you Hal.

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PRE I: Envisioning the Landscape of Dreams

This is one, of only a few recollections of my childhood, one which has remained solidly entrenched in my memory despite the passing years. It is Christmas Eve, and my parents have woken me so that I can attend Midnight Mass. I remember the bitter cold as we leave the house, the way it freezes my nose, even before we get into the warm car. Sitting on my mother's knee, looking out through the windshield of the car, I distinctly remember the immensity of the sky that faces me, the astonishing luminosity of the stars that marks its profound darkness.

It is then that I place that first moment of fascination with the universe, a fascination that later narrows itself to the vastness of the prairie fields of Alberta, later expands to the mountains that cover British Columbia, to the many lakes that nourish the crevasses between them, to the ocean that saddles its coast. Now, deprived of my beloved mountains, of that brilliant dark sky and those luminous stars, I have turned to passages in books to be reunited with their greatness.

An avid reader since childhood, I often chose to read rather than play with friends. But, it was not until my entrance into this Master's program, until I wrote that first novel, that I began to realize that writing and reading were much more than plots and characters, much more than an accumulated knowledge of

syntax and semantics, much more than complexity and profound thought, even more than is present in subtexts. I knew that there was much more, but I could not define what it was that they was more of.

Other things happened around this time, the sequence of which is now a mass of confusion in my mind. All of these events occurred over a period of a year or more. Their degree of importance is now impossible to separate in the final outcome.

- 1) I helped to amass data on a virtual project with Professor Hal Thwaites, a project that used Bachelard's work on the imagination as a orientation.
- 2) I wrote my first novel.
- 3) I read Heidegger.
- 4) I took a course on Freud.
- 5) I began a directed study with Professor Van Wyck, who gave me Benjamin's work as part of the course study: specifically, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," which contained the angel image that I remembered from a Political Science course years before.

The realization that there was an etymological connection between all of these did not seem immediately obvious, but I realized that there was a commonality of emotions, which I felt during times of specific writing, and times of specific reading. But, specific to what?

For over a year I struggled with some concrete direction, trying to find

what specifically, in the readings and the writing, was making me feel that certain way. I began asking other students, and the people who surrounded me, whether they had felt what I was describing. I found that it was difficult to explain to them exactly how I felt. First of all, I do not think that I really knew how I felt, outside of a general sort of orientation. That detailed knowledge only became clearer to me during the actual exploration. Secondly, I seemed to be lacking an adequate vocabulary for the task. The result was a lot of conversations trying to concretely explain an abstract notion, for which I had no language.

I did learn from this inquisitive process, however, that metaphors are valuable tools of communication. They can be the organization of thoughts, of ideas, a direction to follow, a similar path for two people to discuss a concretization or an abstraction. Like quantifying, a metaphor allows the communication, the sharing of concepts and ideas that would otherwise be very difficult to transmit.¹ In the end, I am not sure whether the conversations clarified any of the issues for me, or confused them, but I persevered.

At some point in time, the exploration developed a more narrow focus, and finally, with the direction of my advisor, began to gain some acceptable borders. By the fall, I was a hero on a legitimate quest. But, the direction was still not that solidified. Was I aiming for the actual North Pole, that small stick

sticking out of the ground? Or, was I just heading for the polar ice cap that spans miles and miles of frozen barrenness, and roaming large white bears? I was not sure, but I knew that wherever the journey lead me, it would likely prove to be as interesting as the intended destination.

I prepared for the leaving, at the beginning of January, overwrought with ambiguous feelings. How was I going to create an academic work from the feelings that I was experiencing? Would I be able to finish before the end of April? Could I write? Would I be able to? How was I going to write something in a format that would not only convey, but extend what I was writing about, and still be acceptable academically? How was I going to connect Bachelard and Benjamin? What if I could not connect them, what would happen then? Could I accept failure?

All the while I was thrilled with the prospect of such an exploration and could not wait to begin. It seemed that I had been preparing myself my whole life for this one quest. That it would result in a Master's Degree, if successful, seemed to be a minimal part of the motivation. It was a challenge, an unbelievable journey, that I had been lucky enough to envision, and could now experience in full.

I had prepared adequately, had read hundreds of books, and I wanted the exploration to be a true exploration, not some duplicate of previously written

work. I had Bachelard as my trusted map, but his map did not contain any geographical gradations present on the surface, and my destinations were not marked, only his markings were present. How could I reach Toronto, if I the only thing I knew about it was that it was to the West of where I presently was?

The beginning was fraught with insecurities, and the inability to write down anything decent, even anything at all. I resorted to playing spider solitaire for 8 hours one day, because I refused to get up from the computer in case something important came to mind, and I did not have anything to write it down on. Nothing did of course, and by the end of January, I knew that my exploration was in danger of collapsing. My mind/brain seemed to be in a certain state of mutiny.

Finally, I woke up early, one fine morning, the formulation of an idea in my head. What if I were to write in the format of a story and reverie? What better way to present such an exploration than in the format that is being examined? What if I were to write it as if the reader were inside my head, as if my writing was a virtual camera? Would this work? Could I create such a format? Was I able to write like this?

The idea seemed logical. What better way to explain a cake to an audience that does not understand the cake that I have in mind, than to present a plain white cake and to use it to describe the changes that would be made to it, in

order to create the cake that I am speaking about? Written down, the prospect sounds slightly confusing, but it was quite clear to me at the time, or as clear anything was. The whole thing would depend on my ability to create this format. I called my advisor and asked for his opinion. He agreed, and I began.

The whole exploration surged forward smoothly after that. It developed a momentum of its own that consumed me in its abundance at times, and dropped me off the edge of a precipice with its despair at other times. It seemed that the emotions that I was feeling were always extreme: elated to be alive and brilliantly inspired, or over my head in water and moments away from losing every thing that I had tried so hard to define and achieve. It was as if I was continually on the emotional Montezuma's Revenge roller coaster and could not get off, even when I desperately wanted to.

The extent of emotions throughout the process was truly brutal. Never have I felt such a continued rush of intensity of emotions, nor such a variety of extreme emotion. I found myself much more emotional with others around me as well: devastatingly hurt from an inconsiderate neighbour, tremendously insulted from a close relative, even slighted from looks from strangers at times, and definitely more in tune with the people around me, and the extent of their feelings.

There were a few glitches in the exploration, like a sentimental printer that

refused to work when I most need it, an increasing work load, too many late nights writing and too little sleep, a brain/mind that would at times refuse to cooperate at all. But, the most difficult was to constantly contain the analytical part of my brain, and to allow the creative part, the imagining part, to get the upper hand on a more consistent basis. I had dreamed before this exploration, but never to the level that was needed for this.

It would be equivalent to swimming 20 laps a day in a pool for 5 years, then one day deciding that the St-Lawrence was a worthy adversary. Maybe not absolutely equivalent, but certainly along the same general direction. This constant state of creativity or dreaming, is likely what created the intensity of emotions - the emotional roller coaster. But, I am not sure, since I have felt an intensity of emotion before while writing extensive pieces. The interesting part of this will be what I will experience when writing and reading other literature, after this stage of the exploration is over.

Interestingly, even though I have felt much more intensely inside, I think that I have managed to maintain those emotions to a level that is still socially acceptable. I am not sure whether that means that the imagining capacity is socially contained, or whether the conscious part of my brain knows when it can show what it wants when it wants. But, I do know that society does not allow an intensity of emotions to be portrayed or felt on a constant basis, not to imagine

someone who is a constant dreamer. What do we do with these people who show an intensity of emotion, those who cannot contain themselves all the time? We segregate them into nice little padded rooms, clothe them in lovely white jackets if it becomes necessary.

It is not acceptable to be emotionally distraught, even when we would seemingly have a right to be: the end of a relationship, the death of a loved one, a really bad day at work, an amazing gift, a kiss from someone that you cherish. We may be allowed to mourn for a short period of time, or to be elated momentarily, but the sympathy quickly turns into apathy from those around us. There is so much to do! Get on with it! There are many fish in the sea! Someone always seems ready to spout some proverbial gibberish at the emotional offender.

But, when I read a book, I am allowed to lose myself in it, without being reprimanded by those who surround me. I am allowed to cry, to dream, to love, to release pent up emotions in the form of catharsis, in the same way that I am allowed to cry every time that I see a sad movie. It would not be so acceptable for me to cry at the supper table without a plausible explanation. In this way, poetic reverie is feasible and it is accessible: format wise and socially.

Poetic reverie also turns a public space into a private space, and like the child's Teddy Bear, it provides for me, a space that is safe, with moments of

experience that have been prepared for someone else. I can enjoy these, effortlessly, allow myself to be surrounded by emotions, to be embodied by them. In this space I can choose what is real and what is not real, what I wish to experience and what I wish to escape. The immersive experience only demands that I surround myself with what is not real, and distance myself with what is real, with what surrounds me. It demands a certain reversal of the roles that rule the logical, linear, and rational side of society.² This is what was so difficult for me to maintain.

What follows is a representation of my journey through this landscape of the imagination: the difficulties that it engendered, the joys that it produced, the amazing poetic orientations that I experienced. Neither the exploration nor the writing makes any claims to truth, as both are a totally subjective rendition of a very amazing journey. I hope that a few readers will find it to be a stepping stone with their own research, a way of thinking of their own orientation differently.

I. Exploring the Landscape of Dreams

Sitting here, the silence around me heavy, the darkened surroundings disquieting, it is as if a void has opened up and swallowed me. I have been staring into the near darkness, for minutes or maybe hours, or maybe only seconds. I am no longer sure. I assume that time is flowing, but I have nothing concrete to assure me of this fact. There is no clock in the room, I am not wearing a watch, and there are no sounds from passing cars outside.

A single candle, on the table in front of me, minimally dissipates this darkness, deepens the absence of sound that surrounds me. The wax is dripping onto the saucer that holds it, every sliding down causing a momentary brightness that seems to follow the reverberation of the drop onto the saucer, a noise amplified by the deafening silence. The accumulation of wax, as insignificant as it may be, is the only thing that reassures me, that time and the universe, have not forsaken me.

There is a slight movement to my left, near the bottom of the bookcase. It is impossible to see if something has actually moved, or if I have simply imagined it. The movement was miniscule, or was it? My cat is in the bedroom with the door closed, and all the windows and doors are shut. But these facts do not reassure me. My vision, incapacitated by the darkness, increases my vulnerability. A shudder ripples through my body.

I really am not comfortable with this darkness tonight. It is oppressive, changes the familiar surroundings of my loft. The comforting aura is replaced by shadows that add a threatening atmosphere to everything I can see. The large corner cupboard hoards nightmares instead of books, the plants are like creatures with long stringy fingers exploring the darkness. Even the bulk of the sofa is threatening.

A large black spider crawls around my sock and continues towards the kitchen. I shudder again. The darkness is like a thick blanket around my body, like a concrete substance waiting for me to soak into it. I pick up my book, try to read a few sentences, but my mind refuses to read the words in front of me. It leaps to what happened yesterday at the supermarket, when that lady's shopping cart hit me solidly from behind. The pain in my ankle deepens the memory. I rub it to erase both.

A memory of this afternoon's encounter with the dog fills my head, my body tensing in response. I had been walking home and turned the last street corner when a man walking a large dog walked into me. The dog, taking the incident as an attack upon the owner, leaped at me. The owner failed to restrain it before I caught a frightening view of very large teeth, a drooling mouth, the bottomless oesophagus connected to it.

Bachelard states that solitude is the space in which "passions simmer and

resimmer” and that in this space, those who are passionate will plan their next moves and find answers to struggles.¹ I take a deep breath, close my eyes, recreate that feeling of being on top of the Andes. Sitting on top of Macchu Picchu, the breeze at my back, watching the people below walking around the ruins. But, the image dissipates into the darkness, must be coaxed back, only to slip away again just as quickly.

I take another direction. I keep my eyes closed, force myself to go back to that morning, waking up to Benjamin’s book, his thoughts still ruminating noisily in my head, try to remember how this whole research into the exploration of the landscape of dreams began; try to remember the intensity and accompanying feelings. My observations are in my notebook on the table in front of me. I pick it up, reread a few paragraphs of what I’d written back then, when the passion for understanding this phenomena became a focused orientation.

I wake to Benjamin this morning. It is not the first time that his words have remained with me while I sleep, and not the first time that his depth of thought has accompanied the emerging light from the distant horizon. I know that what I feel, when reading Benjamin and certain other books, goes beyond the words that are used, beyond the academic knowledge which deciphers the difficult theory, beyond any special syntax, plot, or character found in some novels;

beyond any cultural or political assimilation of knowledge that Foucault might consider archaeological.

Part of this special feeling for Benjamin is due to the way the book looks and feels: the dark red linen cover, its pages yellowed by time, its corners lovingly worn; like an old building, a monument to its surroundings, the book reeks of history: of the passing of universal time, of the events that have occurred within its folds, of the many hands that have held it. It is not the first time that the books themselves, the tactile feel of them, has put me in a state of reverie, has allowed me to lose myself in something much larger than the physical that lies in my hands. I have, on more than one occasion, decided on a book because of the way it felt, or because of its particularly musty scent of old.

Were I to reconstruct the history of Benjamin's book and find that its red linen cover has never been lovingly held, and that its words have remained unread, that its wornness is simply due to being thrown around over the years: an unused, discarded piece of useless print, valuable only to me; the image would be destroyed and my imagined scenarios, my reverie, would be destroyed by it. But, the imagination is a powerful force. Despite my reveries being reputed by such a harsh reality, I would dream, imagine again, at a later time. The same book, or another book, another phrase, a particular smell, would send me into a reverie, into a place that is far from the one which I inhabit.²

Could my seeking to explore the landscape of the imagination, seeking to explore the resiliency and flexibility of the imagination within that landscape, be reduced

to an exploration of the concretization of the imagination?

But what is concretization but a configuration of elements: water, gravel, sand, and cement into a more durable substance? Is this what an exploration of the concretization of the imagination would amount to? Would it simply be a reconfiguration of: memories, elements, environment, stimulus (or lack of them), recombined into a fleeting glimpse by the mind, of a world that is not in the immediate environment? Is the answer that simple?

When I became passionate about understanding this fleeting imagination, I began to think about what else had previously brought this feeling to me. An old image, Benjamin's Angel of History, immediately came to mind. Read long ago, the image still has the capacity to draw me into its depth. It is reproduced in part below:

a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.³

Even after years of absence from my life, this image puzzles me, draws me in so profoundly that I sometimes find myself in a state of melancholy after thinking about it. Why is this particular image capable of creating such immensity, such intensity, such a deep sense of daydreaming, when other images leave me so cold?

There is also a difference between my remembering the events that happened yesterday and this afternoon, and the feelings that Benjamin's image lead me to. Both can be labelled daydreaming, dreaming, or reverie by some, but both are not equally interesting to me. It is the depth of feeling, the leaping of the imagination from one image to the other, that brings me to this search, not my mind's wanderings over past trials and tribulations.

I had difficulty separating these two types of feelings until I began to more fully understand Bachelard's work on the imagination. There are two kinds of imagination. The first is a formal imagination, the second is a material imagination.⁴ The first may be likened to facts, the latter to values. The facts add up to acquired learning, observation, and a conscious thought process. It is the world of the rational and the linear.

In this rational world of thought and perception, ideas and concepts, the building blocks of reality conceive, construct, separate and decipher: conceptualize truth, determine what is true and real. But in the world of art, there is a different measure. If I were to examine a painter's version of a tree, and find that the tree reached high into the grey clouds and contained twisted versions of leaves adorning it, the painting would not be viewed as a true representation of reality. The tree could however, be considered an artistic representation of the tree - a product of the imagination: a mixture of real and

unreal.⁵

Creating images that allow the imagination to soar is a work of art. To relate what we feel, what we imagine, and to present it in a form that will create poetic reverie is not simple. Each word, used as a brick, creates something that is analogous to a brick house, which can be elaborate and architecturally pleasing, or a picture of functional efficiency. Both create a home, as words used in the proper order create a sentence, but the difference is not only artistic rendering. Formal imagination would be functional: kitchen here, bedroom there; material imagination creates a throne and surrounding kingdom from the living room chair; climbs to a castle in the clouds and lives as a princess with the stairs leading to the attic.

Material imagination understands matter and form,⁶ will centre itself around a value in an image, and take on a greater value when dreaming begins.⁷ In the same way that this candle, in front of me, is the centre of my solitude,⁸ so dreaming around a value (or form) is an act of the imagination upon space, time, that value, and a particular substance: water, fire, earth and space.⁹

In a true poetic image, the elements given are reconstructed,¹⁰ and the reader/writer devotes its being to it, and allows it to bestow being upon him/her.¹¹ But the dream is a becoming, images become what they are not: intricate versions woven from raw material.¹² And being, can only seek its own

dissimulation in an environment that is similar to itself.¹³ Forms - limited by formal imagination, reach their completion. Substances, or matter, never reach a completion. They are the outline of limitless dreams,¹⁴ the reconstruction of inner life,¹⁵ the soaring into an infinite space.¹⁶

This process of reconstruction is common to writer and reader alike. As a completely subjective rendition, it is never possible to be completely objective about this,¹⁷ nor is it possible to be absolute. A dream is a force that is inherent in everyone,¹⁸ and it is not something that is necessarily planned or brilliantly executed. Like a road leading to suburbia, the orientation of onerism, to dreaming, can lead to a multitude of places: an unlimited number of diverging paths, with an unpredictable variety of experiences. In essence, the semantics of the words are highly limited, only the orientation can be provided by the writer.

It is this orientation, this poetic image provided by the writer, that allows the reader to dream his/her own dreams.¹⁹ If someone else read the same passages that I have provided, he/she might get some of the same feelings, or he/she might find that inspiration is completely lacking. All that I can communicate is an orientation towards what I feel, an orientation towards oneiric possibilities, an orientation that gathers a full universe in a simple object.²⁰

I know from my own work as a writer, that I can find myself so

completely in reverie while writing, that time and space are completely obliterated. It is as if I am exploring a space inside myself, an infinite space, intrinsically tied to the immensity of the physical environment in which I live. This reverie is not an "echo from the past,"²¹ nor is it a perfect reconstruction of some memory, or of a previously visited physical place. It may contain elements of it, both figuratively and literally, but the initial memories will become something else in the process of dreaming.

At the beginning of *Essence*, a novel which I've written, there is a passage about raindrops on the window pane:

Drops of rain land on the window pane, merge, become one in the clustering process. The cycle begins again, blurring the movement: the fall, the disappearance, the replacement by another drop, making it difficult to separate the present from the past.

Did the past even exist? And the future?

The future was a mystery a moment ago, is now the present, becomes the past, and is gone below my window sill.

Only the moment is temporarily describable.

The rest exists in the confines of my memory, is filled with my expectations of the future.²²

Even now, months after having finished it, I still find this passage extremely disturbing. It rips at the inside of my stomach, fills me with such an intense emptiness, a desperate sense of longing, that part of me desperately wants to cry out in pain. But, and there always seems to be a but when dealing with the imagination, there is such an intense feeling of peace at the end of the ripping out.

Writing this passage, which was originally almost a full page, took me a number of days, and quite a few editing sessions as well after (approximately 20 in all). The length of time to write this, may have been due to my inexperience as a writer, but the greater reason, I think, is that I kept getting lost in the aspects presented by this simple drama of raindrops turning into, further on in the chapter, a river of water rushing to meet the sea.

It is the raindrop that is the value around which the universe is gathered in this passage. In their realistic form, raindrops become beautifully patterned snowflakes, become skin bruising sleet, become treacherous ice, and they blend so well together. Who can pick out a particular drop from a glass of water? Who can tell where one drop came from when looking at the ocean? This value has mobility, versatility, and shape changing abilities, is perfect as a value for the imagination.

And, my particular imagination loves this value. It turns that raindrop into ephemeral existence, the dissolution of our individuality into such a large body of water in such a short time span. The past, present and future, are so blended together that their irrelevance seems irrefutable. If I think of time as important, it makes my life, my actions seem so miniscule, any intervention seem so momentary, that I feel I am wasting my time.

Then, the drop becomes our busy lives, just like those raindrops rushing

down the street, rushing to our deaths at break-neck speed. But, why are we in such a hurry if there is nothing at the end but dissolution? Not only time is irrelevant in this context, but so is individuality. Where does that put the choices that I take so much time in making, if I just end up in the ocean with every one else?

The ocean, water, as the substance in this passage, is perfect fodder for the material imagination. In its actual form, it is a powerful source. Everything that has a form gets reduced to minimal pieces by this element: mountain ranges, brick houses, wooden fences, rocks, trees, people.²³ The time between now and then is all that separates the birth and the dissolution. This is a cycle shared by everything on earth.

Water is also the ultimate binding substance: sculptures, cement, brick, all use its powerful capacities. It also feeds and harbours life. Have you ever seen a seed slowly crack its shell and a green sprout emerge, or seen an irrigated section of arid farmland amid heat scorched hills? Humidity also appeals to me.²⁴ It is as if my skin is capable of absorbing the moisture in huge amounts and saturate its form with it, just like the leaf of a plant.

Versatile water is also the ultimate in serenity. At times, it cradles us with its movements, gives us back a moment of womb like sleep²⁵ as we float on it. How many times have I driven to the edge of a lake and sat for hours watching

the slightest ripple upon its surface, or enjoyed solitary time on the edge of a river? How many times have I taken my sadness to the edge of the water and mirrored that flow with my own tears? Do tears ever need an explanation?²⁶

How many times have I thrown a coin in a fountain, and watched that flow of water, told it my darkest secrets, hopes and dreams? Does the fountain keep the secrets that I tell it when I throw my coin in? Or, did it already know them? Does it know the secrets of all humanity, since it contains its life and death in its grasp? Does every fountain contain the same secrets?²⁷

Water is a universal value. It is not particular about who it falls on,²⁸ or dissolves; it has no age, racial, or economic preferences, nor does it have a preference of form. It soothes my tired body, quenches my thirst, cleanses my soul with the rituals surrounding it, and it is a brutal killer.²⁹ Anyone who has been in a storm on an open sea, or large lake, can attest to its magnificent powers when unleashed, or experienced its anger during a flood.

Despite the facts surrounding water, it is my material imagination that knows that water is a matter that unites all individuals, all aspects of life within the confines of its existence.³⁰ My material imagination is the one who knows that water is the expression of my inner life, the expression of my existence on this earth, that water holds my destiny within its flow.³¹ But, just as moisture alone is incapable of forcing every seed to grow, or to grow in the exact same

way that the others do, so the dreamer of water dreams different dreams, with a difference in intensity, and with variable ambivalence.

There is ambivalence in my feelings about the raindrops: ripping out and then peace, as there is ambivalence within this darkness that surrounds me.

Darkness invades, penetrates the matter which it covers,³² and alters the shape of everything it touches. Darkness absorbs light, reduces it to its minimal form, but transforms it into a beacon of hope on a stormy night. Sound is also, alarmingly intensified during times of darkness.

Darkness has also been the space of ultimate inspiration for me. I have, for years, written my best work between 10 at night and 2 in the morning. My mind knows this to such a degree, that it has, occasionally, woken me at 1 in the morning with some brilliant (and not so brilliant) image, poetic configuration, or pieces of a plot. Most of my writing is also done with a dull lamp behind my shoulder, maintaining that darkness to feed the inspiration within. Whether seen in a fearful, or in a kind light, darkness can speak to those it touches, without saying a word.³³

I pick up Paul Auster's book from the table in front of me. It's pages are slightly worn, that second-hand look that most books get when they've been passed around, but it lacks the tactile charm of Benjamin's book. Are there images inside ready to feed my imagination? Is it simply the plot that has

brought me back to Auster's writing time and time again?

I open the book randomly, begin to read. The words shake as my body shudders from the cold that now seems to fill every corner of the room. Is the cold real, or is my mind assuming that with darkness, there is a drop in temperature?

An empty soda can went clattering down the street toward the river; bullets of rain pelted the sidewalk.

Auster writes in his *Book of Illusions*, on page 95. I close my eyes and allow my mind to simmer upon these words, repeat them over and over, try to see and feel more to them, but am unsuccessful. The image remains an image of the can, the river, heavy rain bouncing off the sidewalk. I try to push my imagination, but there is only a blank, an accompanying annoyance at the lack of success. My imagination is not interested in this configuration of words.

I read further. The candle flickers again, making it difficult to read. I pull my chair closer to the light, read it again.

[It] was still drizzling, and there were no lights on in the house...The sky was black. The ground was black. I groped my way to the house by memory and feel, but I couldn't see a thing.³⁴

The intensity of the feeling grows as I read it again and again. A deep fear spreads from the center of my abdomen as I close my eyes, an intense sense of dread chills my blood. The blackness consumes me. I feel the night seeping into my bones, the raindrops sliding down my arms, my face; my hands reaching

around me, try to find something that will set this darkness into relevance. My body evaporates into the nothingness,³⁵ as if it has never existed outside of it.

I lean back into my chair. Memories of another dark evening, cross-country skiing at Apex fill my mind. The crispness of the air fills my nose, my fingers tingle and I rub them, remembering how cold they had gotten as I had lain in the snow on the side of the trail, watching as the light breeze blew the branches around me, the shadows covering me momentarily, only to be replaced by moonlight in the next instance. The coyote's lonely call in the distance, the only noise to disturb the peace that had settled over the entire area.

I smile, remember the immense feeling of contentment, the connection to the elements that surrounded me, as if its history was my history, as if I completely belonged there. I remember having had this feeling before, but when? My mind weaves through the labyrinth of memories until it finds it. The top of Haleakela in Maui, that was it! No breeze, yet a deafening sound filled the rocky landscape, seemed to flow around the mountain top. The blue of the ocean, far below, framed the isolation and togetherness, as if it had glued the pieces together just for me.

I shake myself out of my dream, feel like a woman emerging from a coma - or at least what I think a woman emerging would feel like. I feel detached, like after a long meditation, but my heart is pumping madly from the excitement.

Could simple words be this powerful? How could those words from Auster have merged me with the night, and sent me back in time to that fateful evening of midnight skiing, and of being at the top of Haleakela? If I were to re-read the same image, would my mind follow the same path?

I try a few times, but am unsuccessful.

Undaunted by failure, I continue to read and happen upon a section that exactly explains how I felt in the darkness and Haleakela a few moments ago:

I felt as if my skin had become transparent. I wasn't occupying space anymore so much as melting into it. What was around me was also inside me, and I had to look into myself in order to see the world.³⁶

I pick up the pen and write a nice WOW! in the margin next to this image. That is exactly how I felt a few moments ago with the darkness, with Haleakala and with the memory of cross-country skiing. It was as if I was melting into them. They were me and I was them. Does that mean that the solitude, silence, darkness, and the words have become an internal dialogue in the form of an image, which I am having with myself about myself, but using the environment to discuss it? WOW! Again.

What would that mean exactly? Would that mean that these observations that I am relating are actually a discussion which I am having with myself? Do I dare use the word discourse? How can this be proven and rendered academically acceptable? These observations, these feelings, are products of my

imagination, and there is no concept that allows me to verify these reveries, no facts from which logic and reason can proceed. These reveries are floating around in my mind, and I am attempting to relate them in a language that is sometimes difficult to find. Is the reader understanding the words, the concepts, the way that I want them to be understood? Does it matter?

Part of the problem of exploring the imagination, is that more extensive knowledge is not a gateway to more imagining, and I realize that my careful analyses of tonight could be limiting my capacity to dream. Dreaming is an extension of something that presents itself, or that is presented, an increase in value of that particular object or image,³⁷ and Bachelard's "phenomenology of the image" specifies that the imagination is active before the thought process.³⁸ But really, I have put the thought process into effect before the dreaming began. I have staged a set and attempted to assemble imaginary conclusions.

Could it be any other way? Was I not staging a set when I sat at my computer to write, and rewrite, the passage on raindrops; or when I have sat down to read all those hundreds of books that have led me to this point tonight? If Bachelard is correct and dreaming is a more powerful faculty than that involved in the thought process,³⁹ then maybe the staging is irrelevant to the results. Even staged, they would still be valuable.

What is happening when I am staging, and when I write passages, such as

the one with raindrops? Do I become a painter in words,⁴⁰ a craftsman manipulating the inertia of etymology?⁴¹ And now that I have written this passage and others, explored their depths, felt their intensity, I can never go back to seeing or reading about a raindrop, a fountain, or any body of water without being affected by this. Once an image is loved, it changes the facts that surrounds it. In the landscape of the imagination: values alter facts and perceptions.⁴²

Imaginary notions should not be scoffed at. Freud created a myriad of imaginary divisions in the brain that many decades later are still being considered highly accurate by some psychoanalysts. None of these divisions were “visually viable objects,”⁴³ nor did they contain a biological basis, or any true scientific content, but were very high in the literary and imaginary department.⁴⁴ Of a high literary and imaginary quality, we could also add Marx and Einstein. Incredible imaginary notions, linguistically transformed into social and scientific realities.

What about colonialism? How imaginary were those lines drawn on hypothetical maps, turning virtual territory into political entities related to a ruling nation thousands of miles away; linguistic lines that made the neighbour across the river an enemy, and the exploitative power, thousands of miles away, a friend? The resulting nationalism can be viewed as a political nightmare, or as

a vehicle to advance democracy,⁴⁵ but the point is that all these things were imagined before they were put into thoughts and implemented.

At the basis of this communication of the imagination to others lies language. From the essence to the phenomena, from dreaming to the crossing over into thoughts, it remains the communicative link.⁴⁶ In everyday life, language serves the purpose of communication, and necessarily maintains a closed aspect in order to allow the facilitation of that communication. A table cannot mean a table to me and a horse to my neighbour. Sushi, apples, university degrees, schedules for the train, and Bud Light mean the same to everyone, though there is some allowance for variations in terms of size, shape and price.

To be a poet, to present a poetic diagram, means that what is portrayed must be more than just a collection of words, more than just an image. I dig through the books on my table to find good examples, finally find two:

After unpacking his various bags...Geoffrey went down the stairs of the guest house and wandered across the compound to the filthy old theatre that he adored.⁴⁷

This image leaves little to the imagination, and therefore, leaves me unaffected.

It is an image that is visually clear, too clear, creating a simplification that will

block the imagination of its power.⁴⁸ Nor does imagination and language

necessarily create an oneiric image. Here is another example from Rotenberg, as

he relates the words of a Shanghai woman learning English:

So I shitted up. Don't fuck on me.⁴⁹

This confusion of words is interesting, but lacks interest for the imagination. In these sentences the language remains closed.

It is in the imaginary realm, in the writing of poetry, that language acquires an openness.⁵⁰ It is then that it can breathe, expand, mutate. It is then that it can take the imagination to places it has never been. Auster's quote is a good example:

more light poured into the room: streams of red, liquefied sun, a tidal wave of luminosity.⁵¹

What an incredible way to portray sunlight entering a room. Instead of the sun's rays, the light entering the room becomes a moving, living stream of fire, lighting and burning everything in its path. With the words 'tidal wave', Auster creates a rolling to the movement of the stream that is pure inertia for the imagination, and an impressive opening of the words. By comparing light to fire and the fire to a tidal wave (water), he is also implicating a powerful ambivalence within the stream of light. What greater enemies in this world than fire and water? What greater powers?

When an image is fulfilling to the imagination, as the raindrop, the darkness and the stream of light was for me, the language gains a type of inertia.

It is the movement of words from the perception of the physical object, and its subsequent transformation into a soaring. The significance gives us the poetic diagram or image, but as we read it, dream it, it becomes our own image.⁵² The flow, the verse, carry the imagination with it, as if the imagination were its own fibre-optic nerve,⁵³ and inertia the transmitting device.

Poetry, as Bachelard uses it, and as I have chosen to use and explore it, is not consistent with the literary version of poetry, nor does it exclude it. It is not a specific form or style. It is a way for the writer to communicate “soul to soul” with the reader,⁵⁴ it is that capacity to convey the creation of a whole new world from the familiar.⁵⁵

Intrinsic within this communication is the ambivalent nature of the substances used, and the ambivalence of language itself. They function together in poetry, because poetry mirrors the reality of everyday life,⁵⁶ it mirrors the pain and pleasure of living, of being. It is the mirroring of our inner pain and joys, the mirroring of our measly and blissful existence. This is why reading poetry is a way to interact with who we are and what we are.

I continue reading. On page 121, a passage stops me. I read it again:

Other people carried their humanity inside them, but I wore mine on my face. That was the difference between me and everyone else. I wasn't allowed to hide who I was. Every time people looked at me, they were looking right into my soul.⁵⁷

I find this passage heart breaking. Can I explain it? No. I just know that it wrenches the heart out of my chest and reminds me of another quote from David Rottenberg's book. It is a few minutes before I find it in the pile of books.

And the faces - everywhere stories etched in human material.⁵⁸

Scars, smoking lines, heavy wrinkles, outdoor skin, pampered skin, facelifts, crooked noses, broad noses, high cheekbones, broad chins. The myriad of ways that all these people obtained these physical particularities sets my imagination to rambling. Only a poet could convey such feeling, such intensity, could lend life to a world of faces without bodies.

I pick up Auster's book again. I make notes as I read, but it is many pages before I find a more powerful image. I read it many times, savour the feelings that make their way through my body.

I fired all six bullets into the ground...It couldn't kill anymore, but that didn't mean it was any less potent, any less dangerous. It embodied the power of a thought, and every time I looked at it, I remembered how close that thought had come to destroying me.⁵⁹

The thought of guns is very frightening to me, and I find this passage especially disturbing. I have difficulty erasing from my mind the image of the gun containing its own power to kill me.

I put the book down and think about this frightening instrument for a few moments. The images vary, scenarios ranging from the gun miraculously rising from a cupboard and beating me over the head, to other images, the gun creating

huge holes in different parts of my body. Or, it sits on the table waiting - and the wait is worse because I don't know what to expect from it. Will I die by my own hand or someone else's? Will I lose half my face in a botched attempt, like the policeman I saw on Oprah a few months ago? Goosebumps erupt all over my body.

These images that come from this gun are not verifiable,⁶⁰ and I cannot rationally explain them. They are variable and ephemeral. But the fear I feel from them, the discomfort I feel from their near haunting capacity is very real: palpitations, shallow breathing, shudders, goosebumps, the tensing of muscles and mind, ready to defend themselves.

It is as if my whole world is condensed in that gun.⁶¹ As a sculpted piece of matter, a chunk of steel carved into an instrument of death, the gun becomes the sketch from which dreams can flow,⁶² the center around which the writer assembles the universe.⁶³ That gun is the source of the feelings that I am experiencing, the value around which the world is gathered in the dreaming process.

Every poetic reverie revolves around such a value, which can range from a lamp, a house, a nest, a shell, a nut, locks & keys, corners, a table, water, etc. Each of these contain their own imaginary capacity. Anything familiar that can be transformed or dreamt about, can be a 'living' value, one that is capable of

coming alive in the imagination.⁶⁴

The transformation of familiar objects to dreamed ones, supports the idea that values can alter facts, but this is not to say that these are completely separable. It is not possible to dream (poetically) of things that do not have some function of both real and unreal; of both facts and values.⁶⁵ Bachelard quotes from *Supervielle*:

A tall shuddering tree always moves the soul.⁶⁶

What better form, or value to use, to understand how these values can become something so much more than just factual, solidified objects from everyday life?

How many trees have been planted to commemorate events? How much reforestation now covers the globe? How many trees harbour privacy for young children? How many create shade, protect nests, provide food (i.e. the eucalyptus), hold soil in place, provide safety for animals? Without trees, the necessary conversion of CO₂ and oxygen would not exist. But these are facts. What do they become during the dreaming process?

In the passage below, the trees become the connecting vector between the infinite, and the finite, between the cycle of water from above and its inevitable return to the ground.

The clouds are low, almost completely obscure the tops of the large, leafless trees in the park, hiding their reach into infinity.

Under the trees, tall round lamps, illuminate the growing darkness; haloes glow off the puddles that grow larger, infringe upon the sidewalks, feed

into the water running down the sides of the road.
Water, rushing to meet the sea.⁶⁷

A tree is the creator of shadows, the designating barrier between concealed and approachable, bewildering and mystifying. A tree has so many branches, so many leaves, and even in its small form, it contains a nobility that is awe inspiring. It is a nobility that grows with age, as it becomes gnarled - much like human material - twisted by the force of the wind and precipitation, by the forces of nature. It becomes the epitome of struggle against the forces of life.

In my discomfort with the darkness, with my critical, analytical academic eye narrowly watching my mind's every movement, my mind and imagination has leapt around like a forest fire all evening, consumed thoughts and memories with equal hunger and speed, felt inspired one minute, intellectually destitute the next. But, in this enforced silence and solitude, in the absence of something, it has found the doorway to imagining.⁶⁸ It has found a solid path that it will continue to explore another day.

The candle goes out, leaves the words in front of me in darkness. How important is what I have imagined tonight? How relevant is it in terms of truthfulness and the portrayal of reality? Is what I have imagined as real as CNN news, or any number of academic writings? But, who is to decide if it is real or not?

There is no pretence to objectivity here. There is no objectivity in the observations that I have noted down, nor is there necessarily objectivity in the way that tonight is portrayed, nor in the material that is selected to be presented. There is only subjective meaning: an immersion into an infinite inner self, an intense adventure with an inertia of words, an exploration of myself and who I am, an exploration of the landscape of the imagination.

II. Dissecting the Landscape of Dreams

Hours of staring at the flashing cursor, dozens of Spider Solitaire losses, and the page in front of me remains a blank slate, a daunting stretch of landscape that surrounds me with its nothingness; like some fearsome desert, it fills me with fear, fills me with a parched and exhausted feeling. It is as if I am some wild and formidable explorer who has lost his/her courage at the most crucial of moments. I seem unable to conjure up enough creativity to cross it.¹

And my thoughts. Stale thoughts: insipid and trite.² They curdle in my mind like milk in the heat of that desert, food for a journey I no longer have the nerve to take. These thoughts have become inappropriate food, destroying the moment, like noisy nacho chips at the opera, or tuna sandwiches on a first date; they have become a hell of stale obstacles,³ indigestible, obstructing my way to the landscape of the imagination.

The click of heels echo down the hallway towards my door, enfold me as I stare at my computer in frustration and despair. Bouncing off the freshly waxed tiled floors, the reverberations stretch all the way to the end of the hallway, bounce back, create a strange high pitched double echo that impacts against my door.⁴ Like some peculiar, insulated burial chamber, the hallway gives rise to the noises, then buries them within its depth.

The heels are getting closer, occasionally pausing along the way. Is she looking for her keys? A whiff of perfume floats through the air. I take a deep breath, inhale the sweetness of it, breathe in again, try to consume it with my lungs. But, like a wild and delicate perfume, it can only be enjoyed in small, fleeting bursts. A deep sigh escapes me; a vision of a sunny meadow surrounded by high peaks, the smell of crisp mountain air, spreads through my brain as the elevator door opens. The noise disappears inside. I jump up, follow the smell to the door, open it, try to capture what is left of the fragrance. The elevator door closes as I open mine. She has taken the elusive scent with her.

I step outside my door, walk up and down the hallway, try to find some remaining morsel of scent, try to recapture the intense feeling in my body that released the sigh, produced the mountain meadow. A smell of toasted bread reaches my nose as I pass the doorway to the apartment 3 doors down. Toast at 11:30 at night? An intense contentment fills my body as I breathe the aroma in again. For as long as I can remember, every time that I feel really depressed, I eat toast. Every time I need emotional comfort I eat toast.

I know that the sense of contentment that I feel from eating toast is rooted in a childhood memory, but even if the actual memory, or the reasoning behind it, remains ungraspable, the smell and eating of toast sends calming sensations throughout my body. With the licking of each butter covered finger, my mind

falls inside a place where I feel connected with myself, at peace with myself, at peace with the world. I know that toast is capable of taking me to a place where I am no longer alone. The interesting thing about this, is that I am really not fond of bread.

Other smells have remained with me through the years. The smell of hospitals sends my imagination soaring to the times that I gave birth, reminds me of holding that brand new baby in my arms. In my imagination, the baby never cries. The smell of animal manure reminds me of the rivalries with the neighbouring children of my youth, the teasing on the bus, the smell that adhered to them and floated around them at church.

The memory of toast and perfume, as opposed to the memories of hospitals and childhood affinities and struggles, unravel very differently in my brain. The latter rely on actual events, as if they are the summing up of pieces of memories glued together. With the former, I seem to fall, or leap, into a place which cradles me, accepts me into its depth. Like swimming in dark, hazy water, my body and mind lose themselves in a sensation of acceptance, unconditionally. Is this the difference between material imagination and formal imagination?

A man from the apartment further on down the hall comes out of the garage door pushing a cart full of groceries, the wheels echoing a bizarre melody, a strange and eerie music grating to the ear.⁵ He looks at me strangely as I stare

back, standing in the hallway in my stocking feet. I nod my head to him in greeting and walk back to my door, closing it behind me. The eerie sounds from the cart's wheels course through my body as I lean on the door, as if I have been unpleasantly touched by a slithering amphibian. Is my body echoing my dislike for the man? Or, are my reactions solely related to the sounds?

Is it that the sense of smell, the sense of touch as in Benjamin's book, and some noises, are more powerful than the visual?⁶ Are formal and material imagination as separable as I have made them out to be? I know that just the thought of an outdoor toilet makes me cringe. But, am I reacting to the anticipated smell, a buried bad memory, or to those horrid stories that circulate? Do snakes, racoons, and large creeping bugs actually like these places, actually lick the salt from under the seat? Is it the thought of falling down the hole, or of being touched by one of those creepy things at such a vulnerable moment that is the worst?

What about those snakes coming out of toilets? I have never seen this phenomena, but I have read about it in the newspaper, and since I have a friend who lost her 6 foot boa in her house (absent for almost two years now), I don't know what to believe anymore. Is the boa roaming the plumbing of her house waiting to catch someone unaware? Or worse, is it roaming the neighbours' plumbing? She keeps assuring me that it is alive because they are incredibly

resilient creatures, but what is it eating, and where is it? Regardless of what is factual and what is not, the two things have the same reaction in my body: boos equal terror. Only my thought process keeps me from cringing every time I see plumbing.

Last summer, I visited the dungeons of Edinburgh, Scotland. Dreadful scenes had been set around the chosen equipment of terror for that period in time: equipment to crush skulls very slowly, stretching racks, and horrific other torture appliances which I have successfully forgotten. Each setting was carefully staged, with accompanying historical specifics: important people who had gone through this, the years that the instrument was used, approximately how many people had lived in the dungeons at a time, etc. Purposely crowded together, narrated to, and subjected to accompanying groans and howls of pain, the torturer (joyfully leering and always a he) and the tortured (agonized expressions and a he or a she), and the horrified visitors, were led through the cold, damp, darkened cellars, herded through like cattle being led to slaughter.

I sit down on the chair in front of my computer, reopen the document that has been replaced by the screen saver in my absence. Why would people spend days, months or even years perfecting techniques to create pain? Were these also imagined before they were implemented? Memories of it still sends shudders of repugnance shooting through my body, yet it is not in the least bit interesting to

my material imagination. The visual orientation is not orientating in the way that I am seeking.

The cursor stops its flashing as I begin to write on the blank page, my mind leaping then stopping - WHY? My fingers move on the three letters for a moment then return to my lap. Because a visual picture that is too clear, too well historicized, too logically and orderly presented, cannot be appropriate food for the imagination? I look at the picture on the CD case next to my computer: a rosy fog surrounding a canoe, two paddles resting on the side. Attached to the pier the boat remains an unmovable object, solidified in time and space. For the imagination, a phantom wearing chequered pants and a striped shirt becomes a joke, not a source of fear.⁷

Despite my ability to dream with smells, touch and noises, literature is the most powerful inspiration for the imagination for me. I love the fluidity of language, its flowing like water or the passing of the days, that allows it to create an inertia that is so pleasing to my imagination?⁸ Or, is it that language acts like an architectural structure: controlling and removing the chaos from the flow of energy, acting as a stabilizing and solidified form?⁹ What form? What space?

I had read, years ago, the story of a man who had killed his wife and buried her in the cellar. The news coverage had been minimal and the specifics almost non-existent. Yet, my imagination soared over this story. When, a few

years ago, I finally lived in a home that had a cellar, an enormous amount of courage was needed to open the small door, to walk down those rickety stairs.

Every step downwards brought me closer to her presence, always there, waiting for me. Her prostrate body, her imagined pain, undiminished by space or the passing of time: the large square hand encrusted, barely visible under the mounds that covered it, the twitching fingers, the fist closing, opening, the large slanted gashes covering her upper body, scattered dirt partially concealing the large purple bruises. Her eyes, a washed-out grey, would open as she sat up, and their depth, clouded with pain as she looked at me, would fill my soul with unspeakable horrors.

Every time I now read of a cellar, or think of one, these images float back to me. They vary slightly, but the physical reaction is usually the same: my chest tightens painfully, an audible gasp escapes my lips, I shudder; an intensity of feeling, a concentration of the psyche, a fusion of the real and the unreal overwhelm me: the smell and confined feel of the cellar, her beaten body, the look in her eyes.¹⁰ All become a synthesis of inescapable terror. My mind knows that she is not there, but my imagination does not believe it. And my body believes my imagination.

Why could my rational (i.e. factual) mind not explain to me, in very plain terms, that this woman did not exist in my cellar, and may never have actually

existed in any way, shape or form anywhere else either, and remove the intensity that I feel when I imagine her? Why is this imagined image so much powerful to me than that dungeon filled with obvious horrors? Why does one produce simple disgust, and the other body shaking terror?

The cellar, that subterranean vault, that storeroom that holds the living and the dead: the musty air of decomposing matter, the black stagnant water, the dirt walls and floors darkened by time, impregnated with it. A space where movement of the smallest creature, the slightest fall of a grain of dirt, is amplified in the deafness of its silence;¹¹ where darkness reigns, despite the position of the sun, despite the seasons that assault and bring life to the terrain above, despite the passing of time.

Such a complex place, such an ambivalent place, is a prolific value for dreaming, for the expansion of fears; is a space where both can flounder, both can roam without limits?¹² The cellar is a powerful value, but its strength is only understood through material imagination, through the language of a primitive reduction of elements. What is this primitive reduction, this poetic orientation capable of reaching what other images cannot? What does it access that remains closed within the closed confines of language itself?

It was Freud who first coined the word unconscious, and the notion that the Id was some frightening expanse of space filled with seething drives, and

unconquerable material. But, Freud's discovery simply reinforced what artists always knew. The unconscious has always loomed large in the world of art. The poet's debt to Freud, is that experiences in the unconscious can now be recorded in a manner that is more acceptable to the scientific and academic community, as well as to the world at large. It has also made acceptable the combination of both the conscious and the unconscious in the world of experience,¹³ and the legitimate connection of the formal and material imagination.

It seems logical that only a primitive place would understand a primitive reduction of language, and the unconscious is such a primitive space, an untameable, primitive frontier. It remembers the cellar as it used to be, a storage vault for the living and the dead, lit by candles and entombed in shadows.¹⁴ The unconscious does not understand this modernized version of a 'cellar', the cement floored, dry walled, wall to wall carpeting and electrically lighted space, that our civilized world accepts as standard. When the unconscious goes into the cellar, it still takes its candle.¹⁵

The unconscious is a deep, irrational space,¹⁶ and its memories are not like those of the conscious mind. What the unconscious remembers are not the logical or rational fears, not the fears that stem from past experiences, nor does it necessarily remember the fears that are a physiological response to any direct stimulus. It only remembers the fears that have remained unchanged despite our

civilized social surroundings.¹⁷

The unconscious is not hampered by scientific experiments, circumvented by rationality, logic and reason, nor does it care about the rise of technology.¹⁸ It has retained its knowledge directly connected to the original etymology of the word cellar,¹⁹ not because the unconscious is necessarily the source of this etymology, but because both the etymology and the unconscious are connected to a past that our civilized world is no longer directly in contact with.²⁰

Two people walk through the garage door, follow the hallway towards the elevator doors and my door, the loud closing of the door behind them a minimal background to the shrieking that accompanies their footsteps. Do the noises that echo in this modernized cellar outside my door, orient me towards the feelings that I experienced an hour ago? Is the terror I feel when thinking of a cellar, a 'primitive human feeling,'²¹ a connection to a primordial existence that lies deep within the confines of my unconscious?²² What would this primitivity contain?

The unconscious is the place where poetic reverie leads and develops, where the essence of humanity is maintained, where the cosmic symbols and feelings are maintained, where an ambivalence of feelings crash and collide, unite and separate. It is a place where melancholy, mania, and other imbalances of the mind reside and thrive.²³ It is the place where the darkest of pains is held,

the deepest of wounds hidden.²⁴ It is the place where love is remembered, idealized²⁵ consumed and kindled.²⁶

The window dressing outside my door can encompass a multitude of social, political, academic divisions: the environment, society, family, work, moneyed/or not, as it can be separated into specific physical or bodily needs: food, shelter, clothing. In a reduced form, or in the expanded version, the whole thing can become rather difficult to label and separate, and rather difficult to connect all the disparate pieces in order to achieve a relatively presentable picture. And, what about inner divisions of: mind/soul, conscious/unconscious, emotions: love/hate, rational/irrational, optical illusions/reality, etc.?

The discipline to which one adheres also narrows choices and possibilities, the perspective that the social group in which the individual belongs is also relevant. But, a passage I read in Foucault's *The Order of Things* always brings things in perspective for me. Speaking of a Chinese encyclopaedia he is reading, he explains the divisions:

Animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.²⁷

The classifications are priceless and so different from our own, they illuminate the divisions that we have created in the world that is considered real and

imagined, with the latter containing the less desired worth. We create the classifications not only from the language that we know, but also, from the socially/academically acceptable. If the words that we use to label, separate, denote and exclude, can be a shared space of communal memories,²⁸ is it not possible that the unconscious harbours a communal primitive memory of a primordial existence as well?

To speak of primitivity seems like a reversal, a harkening back to the early 20th century, and the anthropological armchair expeditions that separated the world map into the civilized and the primitive. But, Bachelard's primitive is not a social or political assessment of space. It is the finding of something within all humans that can surpass our humanly conceived divisions/revisions. As

Lustbader writes:

The great shrine bell...Like art, this symbol of his inner beliefs affected him far more deeply than did his dealings with humans, which ...were insignificant and ephemeral...only the cosmic symbols survived in the mind.²⁹

I think that I have felt this place of eternal wanderings at Haleakala and on that dark night of skiing at Apex, and I think that I have access to some of these symbols, and I think that I feel this "cosmic fear"³⁰ when I think of the woman in the cellar.

I do not think that my feelings for the woman in the cellar are acquired social feelings. It is not specifically, the physical violence which I am reliving in

this dream, it is the inescapable pain of life in her eyes, the inevitable physical struggle of every day living, of becoming elderly, and the eventual dissolution into dust. It is the sharing of the fears of living and dying - without the social/political/economic or racial coating. These, I think, are fears that connect us to those legends that radiate the living of primitive situations.³¹ These are fears, and joys that connect us to the elements. Despite our portrayed civility, they have remained within us.

My *Common Culture* book is behind the computer and I retrieve it, remembering an article by Stephen King about his huge success as a writer of horror stories, and his connecting this success to the needs of the primitive needs of the unconscious:

we're all mentally ill, those of us outside the asylums only hide it a little better - and maybe not that much better after all...morbidity unchained, our most base instincts let free, our nastiest fantasies realized...in the dark...the most aggressive of them...lifting a trap door in the civilized forebrain and throwing a basket of raw meat to the hungry alligators swimming around in that subterranean river beneath...all you need is love...as long as you keep the gators fed.³²

The subterranean river, the unconscious, teeming with hungry alligators needing the raw meat to keep things smooth in the daily sector. Is this truly why we crave morbid and horror filled movies, dungeons, and books? Is the unconscious so different from the cellar then? When I dream of the cellar, am I dreaming of my unconscious, exploring a part of myself, in a part that is myself, but the

universe, the elemental basic nature of all life?

I add two words to the page in front of me: WHY NOT? A downward descent has never been seen positively in many cultures, and is used in everyday sayings to denote a degree of moral, political or economical demeaning; representing this descent into the darkness and primitive. Does our society deal with this subterranean with sayings that characterize a fear that lies in that space of the irrational? Like a tabooed word, the unconscious is present in all of them, but remains unspoken: 'You are going down!' 'he/she is as low as they can go', 'to downgrade,' 'down in the mouth,' 'to be downtrodden,' 'a downer,' 'downfall,' 'to downsize'? What about that most frightful descent of all?

How many hundreds (or thousands) of years have Christians feared and done anything, to evade a descent into Hell? That lone concept has dominated the world, used to torture (The Inquisition), justified colonization by the need to save souls. As Kipling writes in *White Man's Burden*:

Take up the White Man's burdern -
 Send forth the best ye breed -
 Go bind your sons to exile
 To serve your captives' needs'
 To wait in heavy harness,
 On fluttered fold and wild -
 Your new-caught sullen peoples,
 Half-devil and half-child.³³

Could the removal of darkness and primitivity (does primitive equal young - as in child?) have been the basis for the 'saving of souls'? Could that have been a

running away from our own primitivity, an attempt to eliminate it from our proximity? Is civilization simply an attempt to run away from our most frightening morbid needs?

An exploration requires previous research, extensive note taking, an advance into the unknown, and an expectation of the unfamiliar. But, when did I begin to join such complex questions into the maze that is the imagination? At what point did a passage on raindrops or luminosity, become, the complex mixture of social and academic learning, combined with psychoanalysis, philosophy and horror movies?

I cannot say for sure. My memory is unreliable: short-term and long term. Even reviewing old notes, and rereading them all now, I could not be certain that what I was now reading was actually what I had written then. How often have I had to ask myself if what I remember of an event, or at a certain point in time is correct? I know that my sisters and I remember the events of our youth in very different ways. Are any of the facts that I, or they, remember, truly as I/they remember them?

Memory is not an act that is in any way wilful. It is something that happens regardless of whether or not we want it to. I have a dreadfully embarrassing memory from a few months ago, and I cannot seem to forget it, no matter how hard I try. Even for the things that I do want to remember, my

memory often falters. With so many things constantly changing, and with such an accumulation of varying memories, it seems impossible to remember everything over time, over space, and over the pain or joy with which they are accompanied.³⁴

Would I want my memories to be perfectly replicated? Would I want to remember everything that has happened to me since my childhood, and to remember it exactly as I experienced it at that moment in time?³⁵ Wouldn't that make reviving memories exceedingly painful? For example, wouldn't it be difficult to remember the home in which I grew up without remembering the pains of sibling rivalry, the losing of a favourite kitten to a coyote, the hardships that my parents endured?

Do I really want to relive the accident which I sustained to my back, when I was 12? Time has erased most of the pain, but not the moments of joy that accompanied the recovery. I prefer to be selective, and maybe I do not even choose to be. Maybe the decision is not a fully conscious one at all. Even academic material, for example, never seems to sit perfectly in a linear or rational path in my memory. After I read it, it suffers consistent modifications, and often gets regurgitated in a varied form, whether or not it has fused with the material that is already there.

A memory is like a delicious piece of cheesecake, I think. I can't conjure it

up again and re-eat it every time I think of it. That moment is gone forever, and even if I can eat another piece of cheesecake, that will not bring back the interactions, the particular taste of the wine or coffee that I had with it, the warmth/coolness of the day, the brightness/darkness that surrounded me.³⁶ Besides, that piece of cheesecake is so much better in my mind than it was in reality, of this I am sure. My memory has altered and amplified the satisfaction,³⁷ and created a complete halo of happiness around the event.³⁸

Only on the part of dreaming am I able to remember this luscious piece of cheesecake. Only with the combination of perception, memory and imagination am I able to recreate any part of the past which is now behind me.³⁹ Therefore, experiences that I have had, become the basis for my "imagined recollections,"⁴⁰ but they are not the whole of what is imagined. What I imagine is an exchange of functions between perception, memories and imagination. Without some combination of the real and unreal, there are no recollections, there is no dreaming.⁴¹

There is another side to this. Without the imagination, all my memories remain buried, useless pieces of a past, hidden in the shadows of immediacy.⁴² Without a purpose, without a reason for digging them up, these remains are lost forever as well, to me and to the world at large, regardless of their importance or lack of it.⁴³ Like some archaeological fortress lying under a tropical jungle, the

memories will not see daylight until the trees are cut down and the site is excavated. Is writing then, a way to extend extends memories infinitely?⁴⁴

To excavate, to soar, to escalate or descend, into the obscurity of etymology is the work of the poet. Only poets are allowed to rise too far into the sky and evoke the clouds, or descend too far into the earth and stir those darkened forces in our minds.⁴⁵ From a constructed world into an imagined one, it is the poet who is most adept at taking me.⁴⁶

When I read Auster, Rotenberg, Bachelard, Benjamin and others, I become the story's teller. The author is the storyteller, but the text becomes mine, I make it mine.⁴⁷ I struggle to illuminate the paths that the poet sets out for me. I reconstruct then deconstruct, make hints and shadows into ambivalence, live those connected experiences which my immediate environment cannot provide me. My life on earth is too limited to refuse the help that poets are offering me. How else am I to gain so much knowledge about my inner self and the environment that surrounds me, except to obtain the help of other dreamers?⁴⁸

A definite darkness surrounds me. I fight the urge to go upstairs and make a few pieces of toast. The darkness surrounding me is not an environmental one, as in lack of lights, but an internal darkness, a thick oozy darkness that seems to cloak my thoughts before I can express them. It is as if I am a prisoner of this ooze,⁴⁹ as if my creative blockage is my inability to escape

from it. Have I had this darkness for some time? I look at the total of 3 words that I have written on my page. I cannot remember.

I look at the clock. 2:35 am. I reach for my book by Kristeva, find a quote that I remember having read there:

I am alone, I am bereft, and the night falls upon me.⁵⁰

I do feel alone, but what is bereft? I open the dictionary to the appropriate page: deprived. But the deprivation is definitely not physical, maybe it is psychological? Have I lost something lately that would relate the difficulties that I am having in writing anything useful tonight? Is there something in my immediate past that could be making me ache this way? Or, is the inner darkness simply a reflection of the darkness of my surroundings?

Melancholy and night - moving darkness filled with shadows and memories. But, what kinds of memories inhabit this dark and lonely place, and what exactly am I bereft of? Melancholia is a feeling of loss, often of something that is unknown to the person feeling it. Also there are negative feelings towards one's self, often the reflection of a feeling for someone or something in the environment, and within those feelings of negativity, is the ambivalence of a love/hate relationship over the object. There is also the rejection of the outside world, the consistent sleeplessness, an intensity of feeling, and the neediness that feels like a wound that draws surrounding energy into it.⁵¹

Though I have severely reduced this view of melancholia there are a couple of things that I find interesting, a couple of parallels to my present and recent past, state of mind. The ambivalence, always present in the imaginary things that I have examined, is also present in melancholia, as is the rejection of the outside world. I am not qualified to enter deeply into the realm of Freudian psychoanalysis, so the exploration can only remain superficial. But, since it is an exploration, would the possible connections be helpful?

I push the enter button on my keyboard to remove the screensaver and push the appropriate keys to obtain the words: MELANCHOLIA - AMBIVALENCE? Ambivalence has been crucial throughout my exploration. It seems to permeate every statement I make, every connection I find: imagined, real, unreal, memory, perception, self, universe. It is like a conduit for the imagination, creating reaction and action, feeding, nurturing destroying the original, the unoriginal.

Ambivalence is also present in the writing that I am attempting to produce. Could this ambivalence also be part of the problems I am having verbally concretizing the ideas that float through my mind? Why would I put myself through all the negativity that goes through publishing anything academically? And, the prevailing negativity is not only a problem in academia, it exists with writing in general.

Why would any writer take the chance of getting destroyed by literary critics, or spend months or years writing something and then have the public reject him/her by not buying/liking the book? Every time I write a sentence, it is a portrayal of the world I believe in and create. The work that I do when I sit down to write, the life that I live, they are all present in what is written: those words are the sum of who I am, and the sum of how I portray the world around me. How can this personal work be judged by the outside, a world that knows or cares little about who or what I am?

Ambivalence continues in viewing writing as an illness, to actual physical neurological changes in the brain. Flaherty, a neurologist and the author of *The Midnight Disease*, says that writers are a 'bit ill,'⁵² herself included. She mentions a number of well known, and respected authors such as Flaubert in her analysis, deconstructing the level of disease that each author has/had. And, she does specifically specify that anyone who is really ill is not capable of writing, is incapable of creativity.⁵³ What astounding ambivalence this brings to the exploration. In order to write, I must be ill to some degree - as in melancholic - but not too ill or my creativity will be swallowed up by my illness.

I reach for her book, flip through and browse through the sections that I previously highlighted. On page 46, she states that writing is a sociably acceptable way of presenting the unacceptable drives that are present in the

depths of our unconscious.⁵⁴ That sounds good, but, a writer's social acceptability is quickly removed as she separates the most common of writers into prisoners, mental patients and normal people.⁵⁵ To which of the latter categories to I belong to? Am I a prisoner of this ooze that has settled over me?

Am I a prisoner of my own thoughts/imaginings when I reject the outside world in the setting of candle in a dark, isolated and noiseless room? Is this a mechanical setting of the stage for a melancholic discussion of itself and by itself? Is the fusion of perception, memories and imagination, only a representation of the melancholy and ambivalence that surrounds me? Have I stumbled upon something very important?

I dig through books again, read and reread parts of Kristeva's book. If melancholy means that the individual is in a type of exile, that the rejection of the outside world makes the individual a type of foreigner in his/her own land, in his/her own tongue, then how would metaphors, images and language maintain the meaning that they presently have?⁵⁶ But Bachelard's point is that language does not maintain its meaning, at least not its everyday meaning, but that it is "poetry inaugurating a form."⁵⁷ Would the connection of Flaherty, Kristeva and Bachelard mean that the soul is really the unconscious in some form? What exactly is a soul?

I understand what a soul commonly means - in terms of everyday

layman's language: something that lives on after our body dies, some spiritual entity that inhabits our body, qualities not necessarily displayed in a social setting, the animated part of a being (though immaterial and invisible). Have I forgotten anything? Oh yes, I have. The soul is an imaginary object, and a religious one, without whom religion itself, would become irrelevant. It is a profound part of our lives, but one we rarely ever discuss directly, much like the unconscious.

What about etymologically? The dictionary adds another interesting meaning to the ones that I have already mentioned: emotional or intellectual energy or intensity especially as revealed in a work of art.⁵⁸ Intensity can be the drawing together of a whole universe using a value, as in poetic reverie (Bachelard). What does the whole configuration lead me to then?

Melancholy is a product of the unconscious, with ambivalence as the law of this unconscious.⁵⁹ Writing is a possible symptom of melancholy and a socially acceptable presentation of the drives of the unconscious, which harbours melancholy. Poetic reverie leads to a fusion of the unconscious/conscious, as well as to a synthesis of perceptions, memories and imagining, and art (as poetic reverie) is the intensity of drawing energy together. Then, 'poetry inaugurating a soul' is the presentation of partially ill writers articulating drives that reject reality, but need its immediacy to discuss and understand the seething

subterranean material that is the product of their writing and 'soul to soul' communication to begin with?

I write one more word on my page: WHAT? I shut my computer off and go up the stairs to my kitchen and a few pieces of well earned toast. The exploration that I had envisioned as very simple, has become intensely complicated. Am I on a path of discovery, or a path of destruction? Is this truly connectable? I shut the light off on my way up the stairs, the darkness covering me, forcing me to feel my way up to the stairs. Am I lost, or should I sing Amazing Grace? I feel exhilarated and profoundly disturbed. Is ambivalence always part of the process of discovery? I decide to skip the toast and slide into bed, the dark ooze within, covering me again.

III. Death in the Landscape of Dreams

I wake to Benjamin's words in my head, to his separation of the novel and the storyteller. I remember his emphasis on death, on experience, on solitude, on time in the novel, but I fail to remember the specifics of each of these. And, what else does he speak of? There is something about the storyteller having the same relationship to his raw material as a craftsman,¹ but I am unable to pull anything else from the depths of my memory.

I sit up, my feet hit the cold cement floor before I am able to slip them into my down filled slippers. Is that not almost the same thing that Bachelard concentrates on in his analysis of the landscape of dreams, and of art and poetic reverie: including literature, pottery, painting and working with iron?² Are these not the exact things that have become the focus in this exploration?

Have I returned to my point of departure? Is this a circular exploration that after 2 years, leads me back to Benjamin's book in my hand? Benjamin's *The Storyteller* has long been a favourite of mine, but my academic focus has always concentrated on his separation of the ancient epic into the modern versions of storytelling and novels. Could it be that Benjamin and Bachelard have more in common than what I previously thought? Could it be that like Coelho's *The Alchemist*, the answer has been in the pile of material in front of me all this time, that like an old memory, the connection simply needs to be excavated?

I throw on some clothes and forget breakfast, run downstairs and pick up Benjamin's book. There is a sense of urgency seeping through my brain, as if I have missed something really important. Am I misunderstanding this urgency? Is it about the finishing of my exploration before next month? Or, is it that there is something extremely important to my exploration inside the covers of this red book? Does this discourse with ourselves, that seems likely with Bachelard's imagining, relate to the interactivity that Benjamin speaks of between the storyteller and the listener? Are Benjamin's storyteller and novel once again one, an epic of sorts, within the confines of Bachelard's dreaming? How is this possible?

I go through Benjamin's article and separate the elements of the novel and storyteller into two columns, take note of other specific things as I am reading. A quote on page 102 stops me dead:

A ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds is the image for a collective experience to which even the deepest shock of every individual experience, death, constitutes no impediment or barrier.³

Benjamin is speaking of the way in which storytellers move up and down their ladder of experience when telling a story. But, he is also saying that the image of that ladder going up into the sky, or down into the earth, is capable of overcoming any individual perspective, that the storyteller is able to reach

listeners with this image (or these images), regardless of their social/political or economic situation. Even death leaves it untouched. How powerful of an image is this. How powerful is this storyteller that even death is unable to kill him or her, or their story?

To Benjamin, this image of climbing and descending is rooted in the people, especially in the 'milieu' of the craftsmen. This is where the storyteller must take his/her source of material, in an expanded milieu: from the rural areas, from the urban areas and from the coastal areas (e.g. the traveling salesperson). This large resource area, and its inevitable mix, helps to incorporate a large amount of material from which stories may be conceived and presented. The result may be: religious, pedagogic, hermetic (as in Poe), or it may be expressed in terms of seamen and colonial soldiers.⁴ The stories related are a mixture derived from the 'artisan class,' most of which were 'traveling journeymen' before they decided to settle down.⁵ A sense of validity may be gained from these sources, despite there being no way to verify them.⁶

These stories, would therefore, always have a sense of worldliness about them. They would always contain material that has been heard or lived somewhere (or many places) far away, that is condensed into a regurgitation that would include the artisan shaping his/her material: the potter with clay, the sword master with his blades, the painter with her paint and brushes, which

would necessarily include the storyteller's life.⁷ A configuration, of memory, perception and imagining?

The storyteller is that person who is able to not only tell me a story, but able to take me with him/her on this journey. What good is a story that the reader/listener cannot live? If the teller/writer is unable to directly connect with the listener/reader, then, that story becomes fiction. I am a great lover of fiction, but I know the difference (though maybe not in terms of literary theory), between reading a whole novel that fails to make me dream, and one that takes me on such a diverse number of adventures, that, like Benjamin says, the endings are infinite and different, every time I pick up the material.

Even more important to my exploration than exactly what Benjamin is saying, is that the image that he presents, that of moving on the ladder up and down, even without explicit information, is incredibly effective. When I read this quote, I know what he means; that earthly limitations are not present in the tales told by the storyteller, maybe not even applicable to the storyteller him/herself. His capacities must be near to those of the hero that leaps tall buildings, that rides in on a white horse, that builds that castle in the clouds and lives in it. It must be true that he is able to do any of these, since his experience has been woven into the fabric of the material that is capable of these incredible feats, of these feats that have no earthy limits.

But wait! Am I mixing Bachelard and Benjamin into the same basket, and proving the work of one with the work of the other? Why am I doing this when I thought before today that they were so far apart: one the hater of novels, the other epitomizing the writing in them? I connected them earlier in general terms, but why am I connecting them so specifically now? I follow the ramblings that unroll in my mind. Like a transmission signal traveling through the haze of memories, I weave in and out, looking for something, for some signal, for why I have done this, unsure of exactly what I am looking for.

The answer comes with a profound release of breath. It is because Bachelard wrote something like this too. It concerned the going up and down. But where did I see it? I glance at the piles of notes on different size paper, the stacks of books and numerous notebooks, covering the table next to my computer. How can I possibly find it in this collection, this chaotic configuration that has led to the relatively ordered, but multiple sequences in my mind? Where, in the last two years, did I happen to see this?

I push the button on the Media Player of my computer. System of a Down blares out at me. The darkness within me coats me once again, smoothes the edge that I have been feeling, and at the same time intensifies it. "When angels deserve to die," the singer blares out at me. Why would angels deserve to die? How could the personification of goodness and love, at least in my Christian life,

ever have the need to die? I feel uncomfortable as this sentence anchors itself in my mind. Does this mean that even the very best of the best, holds corruption at its depth, at its core? Is this like Kristeva's *Black Sun*? Can the best always turn intensely ugly given the right context?

I reach for Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, wander through the pages. This is the first book of Bachelard's that I read, and despite having read it 4 times (and the French version once), a wonderful feeling spreads through my body as I pick it up. The book transmits, radiates, a warmth that should be illogical for an inanimate object. Only Foucault's *The Order of Things* comes close to this as a book for me.

With many of the sections highlighted, or marked with different kinds of pens, the book resembles a patchwork quilt, each group of patches showing the perspective from which I was approaching the book at that point in time. As if it is a representation of my last 2 years, a document to the extensive evolution in my focus during that length of time. In the end, the evolution is irrelevant as it is the incredible poetry and profound, thoughtful revelations, that remain important. I have to force myself to keep going and not lose myself in a paragraph, in a sentence, despite my familiarity with the material.

I find what I am looking for on page 147, at the end of a chapter labelled 'corners'. The chapter title is not capitalized, none of them are in the book. Its

French counterpart *La poetique de l'espace*, on the other hand, has the chapter titles all in capitals: LES COINS.

To go upstairs in the word house is to withdraw, step by step; while to go down to the cellar is to dream...To mount and descend in the words themselves - this is a poet's life. To mount too high or descend too low, is allowed in the case of poets, who bring earth and sky together.⁸

Bachelard is not using a ladder to go up to the sky and down to the center of the earth, but he is using steps, making the climb and descent more exaggerated, more pronounced. And he is using the analogy of a house.

Houses are important to Bachelard in terms of space, and his use of them helps to clarify some otherwise difficult concepts. The memory of the woman in the cellar overcomes me for a moment and I push it away. The cellar holds the worst of my fears, while the attic, is the one place where I can not only find solitude, but where my soul can reside without fear, without being disturbed by the problems, the obstacles, that I must fight against every day, that I must consistently overcome.⁹

This climbing has been epitomized in children's fairy tales. How many of the fairy tales that I read when I was young have this kind of climbing to a tower? The stairs carved out of the rocks that surround it, the circularity going up and up. I remember Beauty and the Beast, the cellar in which she is imprisoned, then, the final climb and battle between Gaston and the horrible

beast - and his becoming a prince, up there, at the top of the tower. Sleeping Beauty also falls into a sleep in the castle tower, where her prince finds her. What about Rapunzel? All that hair could not have crawled out of a cellar. Besides princesses do not live in cellars.

This tower, this attic, this space that stands high and alone, is certainly a building from the past, and it cannot exist without this past having existed. And now, with our civilized surroundings, it has disappeared from our immediate environment; its immensity and intimacy, its ambience can only be captured through books, or films, and the oneiric orientation within them.¹⁰ Our daydreams are in need of this climbing higher, of the dreams that are waiting for us there.¹¹

Benjamin says that fairy tales were the first teachers of humankind, and that its legacy can be found in the story. Fairy tales bring nature into the story, by representing it as a partnership with the individual. An individual only feels this type of partnership when he/she is happy. It is the children who first meet this complicity and it is what makes them happy in reading the fairy tales.¹² Has Bachelard's poetic reverie taken the place of this for adults of the 20th and 21st century?

Fairy tales are gone from my immediate environment, both physically and emotionally. And, our living environments have separated us from nature. The

sky-scrapers' reach is an exterior one, the imposition of elevators removing the heroism of climbing higher,¹³ removing that oneiric climbing of the steps to the attic that is conducive to dreaming. Therefore, these sky-scrapers fail to achieve cosmicity. The removal of natural surroundings creates an artificial relationship between the natural environment and that of the home.¹⁴

The oneiric house is a being whose essence is natural, bound to the rise of the land, subject to the devastation of eroding water, surrounded by immense plains or mountains, natural spaces, that allow our dreams boundless proportions.¹⁵ It is a living value, and in dynamic, cosmic, living poetry, a house must remain vulnerable. To lose this vulnerability, is to kill all those values that remain alive, oneiric and dynamic.¹⁶

When a reader 'reads a room', in a particular house, he/she leaves the actual space, leaves the actual description and begins to dream of one of his/her own. The description never needs to be very definite, since the value of this intimacy is so powerful that even minute details will achieve this.¹⁷ The pages of Auster's quotes, from that first night of exploration, are in front of me. I read through, looking for the one about the room, the one that had captured me at the time, but I had not really known what to do with it.

I find it on page 187. After quite minutely describing a room that leaves me untouched, Auster ends the description with:

It was a room full of nouns and unmovable objects, an enclave of thoughts.¹⁸

I sit and think about this for a moment. My imagination is not interested in the minute description, it is circling around something else - some room that would be full of nouns and unmovable objects - an enclave of thoughts. I remember a time of my youth when my sister used to play the piano. I would sit there, listen, encircled in a big armchair. I remember feeling like the notes floated around me, settled onto the furniture that surrounded me, each note representing something specific that was being said. But the notes were coded, an enclave themselves to the thoughts of someone else, and now becoming enclaves of my own thoughts.

A space that we love takes on particular characteristics at particular times, it does not remain forever enclosed. It shifts and changes like a virtual conception: across time, across space, across the terrestrial and celestial.¹⁹ Just like that living room in which she played. It was a space that I loved, that I still love, but when I dream of it is it always the same?

I am not sure, simply because the dreaming is so consuming that these questions only occur to me after the event, or before. During that time I am too occupied to notice these things. I know that I always see this room as oneirically small. I do not remember its actual size, nor do I remember the walls themselves, or what covered them. The imagining that comes to me never contains walls. It is as if the room had never contained them,²⁰ my dreams do not need them.

The inhabiting is not strictly limited to houses in Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. The intimacy that is found in corners, in cellars, attics and in spaces such as I created with my candle, can also be found in shells, in caves even in suitcases. These items hold a multitude of dreams because they are living values. How many things can be imagined in a suitcase? Makine helps to answer this question:

The number of suitcases the men were loading onto the boats astounded me. So somewhere there must exist a life, I said to myself, where all these things it was so difficult to transport were irreplaceable. I pictured this life, for which my own past had left me ill suited.²¹

We never find out what is in those suitcases in Makine's book, but I have to admit that I spent a fair amount of time, imagining about how a person could shove a whole life into a suitcase.

What would I take if this were me? Would I bring my pictures, my best books, my Greek vase, my expensive red boots? What items could possibly be the representation of the life that I lead? How would I go about putting the contents of my apartment into 2 suitcases and still feel whole? And how would I feel about myself when I got to where I was going and opened that suitcase - saw my life and choices, in the items that I had hoarded with me?

In that one suitcase, my whole life seems irrelevant, pointless in its material focus. How would those items be of any value to me if the context in

which I exist changed? And, that change in context is implicit in the word suitcase. It entails leaving the place in which I live at the moment. Every time I fill a suitcase, I am beginning anew. I am reconsidering everything that has become important to me until this moment in time. It is the sum of who I am, of those things that I cannot live without: the accumulation of my experience and knowledge.

That suitcase is the equivalent of the 'transcendental homelessness'²² that Benjamin associates to novels. A person with a suitcase has that suitcase as her immediate home, is that salesperson, with his/her home reduced to a few crucial items. It is what a traveling salesperson would take with him/her on her travels, and it would be what that person would bring to a place where he/she would have chosen to settle down in. The source of the material attributed to the craftsmen/salesmen who is a storyteller, then, is really the transcendental home which he attributes to the novel: experience and knowledge condensed in a few items.

Like that suitcase, a story is able to "concentrate its strength" and it is able to discharge its strength even after a long period of time.²³ Whether I travel for a week or a few years with my suitcase, my life is still condensed within it: literally and figuratively. What better way to gain this intensity capable of holding its power, than to minimize,²⁴ or what Benjamin calls "miniaturize,"²⁵ to concentrate

everything in one single item: the life of a storyteller in a story itself, the life of a person in a suitcase.

But, the intensity of this space, is a function of the intimacy that inhabits it. Valorized space, space that is concentrated in a value, gains an immensity that only intensity and intimacy can bring to it.²⁶ That value becomes the world, the world as that person knows it in terms of memories, perceptions and imagination. Like a Freudian melancholia, the value which represents my life, becomes the space in which I find myself while dreaming. It is in my head, and my dreams are in it.

I pick up Benjamin's book again, realize that I have gone too far, have missed something really important within these covers. I have become distracted with all the possibilities that the material engenders in me. I return to page 98. Something very interesting is happening within this chapter. Benjamin is writing about the novel, about its content being the melancholic depiction of memories that would have otherwise been lost. Worthless memories that would have deserved such a burial, and would have remained there, were it not for the melancholy of the writer himself.²⁷

The novel uses the "meaning of life" as the center around which it revolves. It is simply a past full of memories, blurted out by a confused and uncounselled writer, who in turn, fails to counsel others who read his/her work.

The novel, is therefore, the bewildered writing of the perplexity of life which he/she feels within, narrated with time as a major component of its existence. He states that the novel becomes a simple struggle against time itself, a struggle that is the representation of compressed, melancholic memories,²⁸ and one which derives its meaning from the word "finis."²⁹

And, while the storyteller takes his/her authority from the historical, from the natural death which is the background to his story (only the background since he/she weaves his/her own web around it), from the events which are now at an end, while the novel is only a single death, of a character who cannot possibly live longer than the age that he/she has during the time of the writing. A character who dies at the age of 40, cannot possibly appear anywhere else in the book, as a character who lives any longer than that.³⁰

But, if Benjamin will forgive me, his whole definition of the novel is partially a conundrum. If the novel gains its meaning of life through a melancholic (often necessary to produce a poetic passage) representation of the compression of perplex and uncounselled memories, that struggle against the ravages of time and find this meaning of life only in death. Then, I would tend to think that Bachelard's poetic passages would tend to unite the novel form, with Benjamin's storyteller's capacities.

I have not entered into literary analysis, nor in plot contemplation or its

validity within the confines of this exploration. I cannot evaluate, nor can I condemn or properly support, Benjamin's overall view of the novel. But, I can argue that Bachelard's poetic reverie, those passages within the novels that I have examined, do not take time as a constituent, nor do they center around the meaning of life, or the lack of it. My exploration views these passages as transcendent of time itself, as capable of eliminating the time that has passed since that communal sharing of primitivity, and to bring us back to it.

A passage from Makine's book is relevant here, as a description of the timelessness of the patterns that equate the poetic passages of which Bachelard speaks, and their anchoring within the confines of the natural elements:

the real torture was the sky, with the stars, slightly hazy from the heat, which beguiled the eye with the geometry of their constellations, learned at school and since then stubbornly unchanged. There was in their soft light a kind of mild deception, a promise eroded by millions and millions of prayers never granted. Even when he closed his eyes he did not escape their timeless pattern.³¹

This book has love and war, the inevitable connection to death, or its inevitability, woven through it. Makine connects death to everything that we endure every day. The death of a relationship, of a nation, of a colleague, the leaving of a beloved home, of a youth and a happiness that will never be possible again. Makine connects human pain, the pattern of human life, to the patterns of time itself, to the patterns of the universe.

Makine is the epitome of Benjamin's storyteller: the soldier/doctor, a man

who has traveled widely across the world. He is, in essence, the storyteller who has chosen to settle down and relate the stories of his travels, and the deaths that have marked it.³² Does this passage also not suggest the timeless capacity of stories to increase in intensity and maintain their strength despite the passage of time?³³ Could I not live anywhere on the planet, and be part of any social or political group, and still be able to share this moment with Makine under the stars? Could I read it in a hundred years and still be able to relate to the star filled sky?

Makine's pattern of death, is very much like the storyteller's: he has the experience: travel and at home, he is a craftsman with words, and he weaves a good story of national history with his own experiences blended in beautifully. The death that permeates Makine's book, is not a death akin to the death found in the bowels of Benjamin's novels, where the death not only encloses the novel in its grasp by writing 'finis', but the already deadness of the material of which the novel itself is spawned.³⁴

Is there a difference in the kinds of death that are possible? Nothing that lives can escape death.³⁵ This is an absolute truth, or is it? What is death exactly? Is death the only way that we can express ourselves, by leaving something special at the end of our lives, even if it is an artistic form of death?³⁶ Is it Benjamin's version of dead memories, or lightening the burden of a "shivering

life" that the reader of novels leads - a type of death feeding death?³⁷ Is death the journey, or is it the death itself?³⁸ Is death a hopeless ending of things that happen every day: relationships, career changes, the end of dreams?

Death is many things, but it is not separable from the issue of time. Time is entrenched in the elements that surround us, entrenched in the society in which we live (in terms of advanced civilization), in nations, in technology, in each and every one of our faces and families.³⁹ Have I not encountered death within every corner of this exploration? There is the death of my documented dreams, death of my writing of those few words on my computer yesterday, the death of every thought that runs through my mind, since the next time, those thoughts will be different in some way. There is also the death of each day, every day, and a renewal every dawn. My hopes and dreams would be seriously reduced, if I did not have a fresh start every morning.

Am I being foolish in using the word death, in the sense that death is simply the end of something? But is an end ever an end in itself, or of itself? A quote from Rotenberg pops into my brain. I search and finally find it:

He felt the lightness of death in his arms. Coals without heat. Noise which only love could resurrect as music.⁴⁰

If love can resurrect a death, even if the person only lives in the other's mind, how can anything dead ever be final? We do not consider an ideal or theory to

be expired when someone passes away. I am still quoting Freud, even if he is no longer of this world.

Another quote from Makine has remained solidly ingrained in my mind since my reading of his book. I have spent a lot of time thinking about this passage. It reminds me that I can make a difference. Makine has taught me a lot about death:

I saw myself as the last person who could speak about you, tell your real name, give you an existence among the living, if only through the ludicrous means of recollecting the past.⁴¹

Half my exploration has been recollections of the past 2 years. Every death is not resurrected in the same way, but death is never anything completely absolute. It is simply an ending, a time span placed around a specific set of occurrences. If my body dies next week, and even if I did not believe in a soul, the decomposition of my body would return to the earth and feed new life. And, I would live in people's memories, in this thesis, in the world from my actions, in my children: an oral and physical immortality.

Death, can transform anything and everything that it touches, it is a crucial part of our existence. To be open to an encounter with death means that we are willing to reassess all that is significant and most important within our lives.⁴² This resonates a quote that Bachelard has taken from Goethe: Die and become.⁴³ Becoming is what the values in poetic reverie do within the confines of

our imagination - with fusion of the memories, the perception of our eyes, and the refinement of our imagination. And, when I feel terror from a poetic passage, I too am becoming, the imagination itself is a becoming.⁴⁴

I pick up Benjamin's article, flip through it again, go back to the part about the novel. The reader of a novel, "swallows up the material as the fire devours logs in the fireplace."⁴⁵ Suspense within that novel is simply "the draft that stimulates the flame in the fireplace,"⁴⁶ the reader of a novel is an addict to this form of print (the middle class mostly), because it is the only way that any warmth can be brought to his/her own lives.

[By] virtue of the flame which consumes it yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate.⁴⁷

I have read this article at least 5 times. Why had I not noticed this before?

Benjamin has grounded his intellectual argument in the element of fire! What brilliant ambivalence Benjamin is invoking in his discussion of the novel. Is the ambivalence on purpose? Did he know that he was evoking such a controversial power when he did it? How could I have missed this association? How many other associations with the elements have I missed, within the academic writers which I have read?

Fire is an mystifying element. Understanding the association of fire with inner heat, for example, is scientifically impossible. This understanding comes

from the unscientific part of our mind: the primitive unconscious. This is true of other elements, but fire, is the most indestructible of intuitions, the ultimate intensity. Fire separates substances, changes their taste, that which it touches gains a stubborn colouring.⁴⁸

Fear of fire, is not a primitive fear, but a social fear, a learned fear. The reaction that makes the child pull back his/her hand from the stove element, from the logs in the fireplace, is the slap on the hand or the angry voice, that he/she has received previously for such an action. Fire does burn, but knives cut, needles cause bloody pinpoints, and cars kill more than any fire. The difference is that fire can hurt even if it is not touched. The scream and the slap achieve that.⁴⁹ But, we retain an unconscious admiration for fire, as it holds many primitive memories, many personal experiences that we share with those who were there.⁵⁰

Fire is the creator of the greatest of values since it is the creator of light.⁵¹ Has it not been used as such in architectural designs of Frank Lloyd Wright and other architects? Has its association not been consistently linked with that of the sun, the greatest giver of light that we have upon this planet?⁵² Light itself is the greatest of conquests, it is capable of giving life and value to things that looked insignificant in its absence.⁵³ How beautiful is a crystal vase in the darkness? Of what use is a beautiful poetic passage without light to illuminate its presence?

Fire also suggests the desire for change, it is the speeding up of time itself: a 100 year old log becomes ashes within a few hours. A robust home that would have lasted hundreds of years, is reduced to nothing, regardless of how long it took to build. Fire is the conclusion of life, and it is life itself.⁵⁴

Is Benjamin evoking some or all of these? Fire is swift in its many isolated shapes and forms, and it is powerful and continuous in a concentrated form.⁵⁵ Did Benjamin know that the consumption of one novel would have to be immediately replaced by another? Is his statement a reflection of his dismal view of capitalism and the middle class? Or, is his statement a connection to the elements because he is talking about the storyteller, and he is really relaying that storytelling has to be cast in 'natural history' - and that, that natural history is elemental?

Benjamin invokes air, space, the wind that supplies the draft for the fireplace next. The novel, a deadened log, is fed by the hot air that feeds the fire itself, increasing its intensity, its speed and its heat. So the suspense that fuels the knowledge is nothing without the deadened material that the fire is feeding upon, and the fire is nothing without either. But all this is momentary. Without fuel, the fire will lose its intensity, its heat, and its light.

And, it is the flame that warms the reader's life and gives him/her some heat from this momentary, intense fire. But, a flame is not a fire, it is altogether

different. A flame is all by itself, the epitome of solitude. Dreaming by its side, is to dream solitary dreams, to dream of things that must be listened to, to be understood. It is the slowing down of time, a vertical presence that lends itself to the vertical movement of the imagination, allows dreams to reach transcendence, an "ethereal non-existence."⁵⁶

With a flame, the dreamer returns to the past, returns to a world where he is no longer alone, where he is in the presence of the oldest of dreamer. He/she communicates with the dreamers of a thousand memories, the dreamers of a previous life, surrounded by a communal vault of primitive memories, of primordial engravings.⁵⁷

And when I write of a candle, I am attempting to speak the language of the soul, that language capable of reaching other souls who read about it. That candle flame is the essence of human dignity and strength, strong yet weak, small yet powerful, giving a favoured circle of light and surrounding the rest in shadows. I might fall asleep before a fire, but a candle, a flame is not conducive to this.⁵⁸

What the flame is, can be condensed in what Benjamin says about the novel: memories, solitude, slowing down of time (or a struggle against it?). Is Benjamin saying the exact same thing as Bachelard then, but using the material negatively against the novel, while Bachelard is using the material in a positive

way for poetic reverie? Is Benjamin's "transcendental homelessness,"⁵⁹ the same as Bachelard's "ethereal non-existence"?⁶⁰ Did Bachelard learn from Benjamin at some point in time? I dig through the endnotes in Bachelard's work. There is no reference to Benjamin that I can find.

But, there is ambivalence available within fire and the flame, room for this multiple use of the element. Fire destroys and purifies, as the survivors of the Black Plague knew when they burned the rats, then the diseased corpses. It can be confined within a fireplace, or on a candle, its power harnessed to give heat, to cook food.⁶¹ It is a saviour during the long winters of the north, both in terms of light and heat.

Unfortunately, to provide this service it must destroy what it consumes. To remain alive, fire must consume the tallow which surrounds it, the dung or wood used to fuel it, even if it is the human life that surrounds it. Did Benjamin know, then, that his academic words would be seconded by the elements he was invoking, that his poetic passages were capable of returning me to the primitive elements that surround me, that sustain me?⁶²

My stomach grumbles loudly. The clock says 3:08 pm. The sky is cloudy and small tufts of snow float towards the ground. Does poetic reverie draw its source from death, as Benjamin relates of his storyteller?⁶³ Benjamin joins two more things which I have failed to implant in my exploration: the lowest

element or mineral, is directly connected to the highest, the apex - that righteous man - who is able to reach down to the lowest: "the abyss" of the inanimate.⁶⁴

The conclusion seems to be the same as Bachelard, that matter, the elements, have the ability to unite everything in their totality, have the ability to find the image of both outer and inner life within their substance.⁶⁵

Benjamin contains a number of other elemental configurations within the pages of his article:

"swallows up the material as the fire devours logs in the fireplace"
 "the draft which stimulates the flame in the fireplace"
 "by virtue of the flame which consumes it"
 "human flame calmly burning, within as without"
 "earthily powerful, maternal male figures"
 "a stone...green as hope and only toward evening was it suffused with blood"⁶⁶

In the twenty-six pages of *The Storyteller*, he has at least thirteen images related to the elements, and I have my answer as to why I have been transfixed with Benjamin's work for so long. Not only is he intellectually brilliant, but he speaks Bachelard's language of the soul. His story is embedded inside a natural history not in terms of how Benjamin himself uses it,⁶⁷ but in terms of being embedded in an elemental one.

I feel a little dizzy at the finality of this exploration. Is the dizziness lack of food or mental devastation? I had not expected to completely join Bachelard and Benjamin. Nothing had prepared for this moment. I had originally intended to

connect the two as far as I could, when I had realized that there might be a correlation between the two. But, the “function of awakening,”⁶⁸ that I have experienced during this exploration has flattened me. When Anderson said that “nothing connects us with the dead more than language,”⁶⁹ maybe he too knew, that he was saying more than the linguistic connection to political affiliations and territorial divisions.

I feel empty, as if I have just reached the goal I have been aiming for, and found it to be sadly lacking. Although, I really should have known before this last moment. Even if my mental comment to myself this morning about returning to Benjamin’s book, to the place where it had all began, seemed quite strange, everywhere I went, everything I did, was circular. Am I disappointed in this apparent, proverbial meeting of the minds? I would have to say yes. In a way I really am. And in a way, I am not.

Part of me feels that a little bit of magic has occurred at my computer, in my mind, in the stacks of notes and books that are in front of me. Was my unconscious aware of what was happening? Was it gently leading me, waiting for me to take the leap and merge the two together? Or, is this how most large and tiny discoveries are made, whether they are personal or universal? Have I been naïve or blind until now? Have I had a closed perception to something that should have been so obvious?

The other part of me is really shocked. I had picked Benjamin because he hated novels and I did not agree with the negativity with which he portrayed them. I felt that his assessment was partly to do with his dislike of the middle class, about the capitalism that had given rise to this class, and not necessarily about the actual novel itself. I was looking for a political assessment to meet with the phenomenological, or to be offset by it in some way.

Not until the actual moment of connecting the two similar quotes from Benjamin and Bachelard, did I realize the likeness of their writing. I reread Benjamin's article again, find another quote which I find enlightening:

Time when the stones in the womb of the earth and the planets at celestial heights were still concerned with the fate of men, and not today when both in the heavens and beneath the earth everything has grown indifferent to the fates of the sons of men and no voice speaks to them from anywhere.⁷⁰

Is it possible that poetic reverie has become such a voice who speaks to humans who are now separated from the natural environment, as ants separated from their mountainous anthills? Is it possible that Benjamin was only trying to understand the changes that were occurring rather than to find them deplorable as I have interpreted him? Without getting caught in the whole entropic view of the changes since the time of Benjamin's writing, could it be that those changes can be viewed as positive changes to an art that would have otherwise been lost because of the changes to our view of time in the societies in which we live?

It is impossible to live in a world that does not change. And if that possibility did exist, who would want to? Who would want to be born in a canyon and know that the canyon will be his/her home after death, in the next life? Change is the only thing in life that is constant, the only thing that we can count on. Exploring its positive possibilities seems like a better option than deploring the alterations that it brings to our lives.

IV. Expanding the Landscape of Dreams

8 am. March 30th. Another nuit blanche, another night of staring at the ceiling, thinking about all the ideas that should have been explored in the process of writing, all the ideas that should be connected to the exploration. So many things have been excluded: the closer examination of the earth as an element in dreaming, digging deeper into the realm of space, an in depth exploration of Benjamin's texts. And, how does it all connect to living at the beginning of the 21st century?

The questions are endless, and the lack of sleep is fuelling the exhaustion that is settling into my body. Every part of me aches, and my eyes feel like sand has taken residence behind their lids. The stress from the writing, the exploration, consume me during the hours when work does not, the difficult moments starting to expand into the daytime, no longer contained within the hours of darkness, physically and emotionally.

How long can I keep up this relentless pace? How long before the dreaming becomes reality, and reality (e.g. working) becomes the time during which I somnambulate? How long before the immersion that solitude has brought, becomes the order of the day. Will I soon reach for poetic passages instead of salmon and salad? Will I refuse to answer the phone, turn away my friends, forget to go to work? Will I begin to live for dreaming, like some people

live to work? Will someone come up with a cure for it before I am lost forever in this obscure inertia of etymology?

I had a blank moment teaching yesterday. I could not explain what I wanted to explain, the words and the process necessary to say them, were gone. It was as if my mind had become a blank slate, a nuclear landscape incapable of supporting life. Does every exploration, whether physical, philosophical, or emotional, always create such havoc in its travelers? Have I become like Don Quixote, fighting every windmill as if it is a worthy adversary?¹

I close the door to my apartment, tuck the notebook under my arm, head in the general direction of the market, am immediately surrounded by the smell of baked bread from the bakery a few blocks away. Whiffs of exhaust from passing cars momentarily usurp it, before it is capable of surrounding me again. The Atwater Market. Such an amazing array of delicacies can only soothe the tautness of my nerves today.

I cross the street, run to evade being run over by a red car heading south. The air is still cool, the sun gloriously warm as it strikes my face. What of the hero in Benjamin's storyteller? Who is this hero that counsels those who listen? It is definitely not Cervantes' Don Quixote, the most uncounseled of individuals - the epitome of the confusion of the novel and its writer for Benjamin.² But how can this be true? How can such a quest be reduced to only confusion? And what

is confusion exactly?

A woman passes me on the sidewalk. I have to walk on the street to escape being tagged by the children that circle her like perpetual motion gadgets: with regular frequency and with increasing speed. The two youngest children are in a double stroller, one of which is crying at the top of his lungs, the other is sleeping through the commotion. The two older children (both under 6) are circling the stroller, tagging each other, yelling and screaming. She slaps the oldest on the behind as I turn back to watch them walk away. The poor woman looks completely exhausted, and the day is just beginning.

I turn back towards the Market, head towards the coffee shop on the street across from it. Is my problem with this traditional hero simply a rebellion against an art form I no longer see as plausible? Or is it that I see the hero him/herself as a myth in, and of, itself? This hero is someone's version of what a hero should look like, a time inspired version of the person that transcends life's difficulties and achieves what everyone can achieve. Or is this in fact the truth? Does that make everyone who does not embark on a quest less important, less heroic?

What kind of a hero is present in the first teller of stories, in fairy tales, if Benjamin is correct? Who was Snow White? Who saved her? Who was Sleeping Beauty, and who saved her? There are other fairy tale heroes like Hansel and

Gretel, and Little Red Riding Hood, all of whom escape from the usual constraints and defy the big bad Goliath. But, my problem is that I do not understand why we need to reach into such stories to find heroes. Was that woman that I passed with those four children not a hero? She is tremendously courageous, and must embrace this courage everyday, not just once or twice in her life on some specific quest.

What about that elderly man who always begs on the north side of St-Catherine between Peel and Stanley? Anyone who has walked that stretch has seen him. He is always there. Long white hair and beard, his feet grotesquely swollen, covered in layers of plastic bags in the winter. I am guessing that this is because his feet do not fit into anything else. In the summer, he manages to push them into large sandals, their scaly, swollen redness still visible through the open parts. I always try to look away from his feet, but they follow me for hours after - haunt me.

Storytelling may need a hero's quest, a hero's journey, but how is this ideal of a hero imagined? My father has always been a hero to me. I remember being enthralled by constant tales of his childhood, and the hardships that they had endured. Sometimes he would cry as he recounted them. His stories were about himself, but they were also about the building of the north of Quebec, their existence during the Depression of the 30's, his looking after his parents and 15

younger siblings. His stories contained defeats, joys, elations, and the eventual life and death: of siblings, of his own children, of those around him, and those that were so dear to him and have now passed away (he is 95).

I don't think that I could have ever survived the pains that he has, nor could I have survived the struggles of those who surrounded him. I do find his stories fascinating, and his successes inspiring. But, living in the 21st century, I am cauterized from this extensive emotion that he displays when he relates these stories. I flee it, as I see others fleeing it. I have my own vices while I see others burying themselves in drugs, alcohol, extreme spirituality, money, just so they either can feel extensively, or not feel at all.

Not only are we socially cauterized, but we go to a lot of extent to not have that cauterization flake off. We busy ourselves from morning till night. When one relationship ends we immediately begin another. Or, we simply do one night stands so that we can remain emotionally distant. We drive, an activity that insulates us from our surroundings, instead of walking, an activity that automatically brings us closer into the togetherness which we have the chance of living.

Is it so surprising then, that we would seek to enhance and experience the emotions that we choose on our time and in our own space? Is this such a peculiar idea? Not at all. I have enjoyed my father's stories, but I do not feel the

need, nor do I have the inclination, to listen to a storyteller and to take his/her story to heart to the point where I am modelling my behaviour upon their example. Certainly the feats that they have endured, as my father did, are awe inspiring to me, but I think it is different if the point of reference is someone that has already proven themselves to you in some way, and if you feel that they are reliable.

Storytelling was an art that relayed information that was never verified, material that listeners believed, and material that might today not sound very plausible.³ Maybe the advent of the Internet has played an important part towards the decline of this art form. I am sure that many storytellers were amazing, but how many were not, how many's material simply would not stand up to any type of scrutiny?

I cannot help but think of Benjamin's Theses on the Philosophy of History when I read Benjamin's The Storyteller. Does Benjamin not say that to quote from the annals of history is to not necessarily see history as it was, but instead, "to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger"?⁴ Maybe danger is happening to a form of communication, but to hark back to ancient times to prove its godliness seems to be a burial of the wonderful changes that are occurring and the possibilities occurring with them. It is difficult to not see this, at least partially, as a nostalgia for something past, as a maintenance of some

level and type of status quo:

I order a coffee and walk out to the terrace that overlooks the canal and the bike path. Something else is bothering me. Is this hero autonomous in his/her decision to become this hero, or is there some force outside of him/herself that would lead the individual become that hero? Do we truly choose all that we choose, or are there forces outside ourselves determining some, or all, of our directional choices?⁵

I was given, a few weeks ago, an article on the neurological search for 'free will'. As an issue that has been debated for thousands of years: from Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, to Saint Augustine to Democritus, to Foucault, it is crucial to any theoretical standpoint. Whether the question lies dormant or prominent in the paradigm, it is the center around which it must revolve. How to punish for sin if the forces are from outside? How to escape chaos if order is not imposed upon it through some form of barrier?⁶

According to this article by Benjamin Libet, free will may be a physiological impossibility. Research on human subjects shows that the intent to act occurs a full 4/5 of a second before the actual action does. Since it only takes 50 milliseconds for a command to the brain to be executed, this leaves a very long time that is completely unaccounted for.⁷

According to this neurologist Libet, even the most impulsive of actions

were present in the mind of the subjects before they knew that they wanted to be impulsive. It is as if the brain has a mind of its own, the neurons firing without the subject even knowing that he/she is getting ready to act.⁸ I open my notebook, find the quote that Libet has written from Democritus, the one that has been hounding me:

the interactions of invisible particles, akin to atoms and molecules, determined all activity on Earth, including the acts of man.⁹

The atoms that make up the elements that are surrounding me, on the canal: the water, the dirt, the grass, the trees, the air that I am breathing, would determine the actions that I take every day?¹⁰ Would this leave us with no choices at all? Is this a view of destiny as ultimate, inescapable?

Thankfully, there is more to Libet's article. Though the readiness to act comes before the thought to act, the individual still has 350 milliseconds to decide whether or not he/she wants to act. It is the conscious, then, that has the ultimate capacity to decide whether or not the action will take place. The unconscious merely keeps generating choices for the unconscious to decide on.¹¹

This is in perfect accord with Freud's belief that motivation is rooted in unconscious emotions. It would mean that human will would have its anchoring in a neurological process of which we are unaware, some course of action entrenched in the unconscious.¹² This lends credence to Stephen King's

relating the unconscious to a subterranean river populated with ravenous alligators - humans driven to action by the hunger of a dark depth.

Reduced, I could say that our brains are made of atoms that follow the same rules of the universe that planets do, the same rules that create and destroy all that surrounds us. How long it surrounds us, or does not, is irrelevant. If our brains are atoms and molecules the same way that our bodies are, and so is the rest of the universe, how is time relevant in this process unless specific time barriers are imposed upon an occurrence in order to explain or categorize it?

A lot of what we know seems to come to us genetically, but how it's organized or how it functions is still largely a mystery. We do know that when a child is born, the brain already contains some basic knowledge about seeing, feeling, and the structure of language. What began as a single is already embedded with a basic power of functioning beyond its physical capacity.¹³ Does this organ contain the workings of the universe within its mysteries.¹⁴

Am I talking about the mind? Or am I talking about the brain? Am I trying to map out a physical entity,¹⁵ the actual physical grey matter that is referred to as the brain?¹⁶ Or, am I reaching into something intangible, indecipherable to the naked eye, something closer to Freud's unconscious? Could I compare computers to the brain in order to better understand its intimate functions?

Using the computer as a metaphor for the brain is dangerous because a computer must be programmed with data before it is able to function, while the brain comes with its own wiring in that single cell. We do not have the technology to create a computer that would develop fully from a single computer chip,¹⁷ therefore cannot properly compare the two.

It is true that both the brain and the computer are capable of manipulating symbols and of producing some kind of behaviour from it,¹⁸ and that both can be mapped in terms of reaction process. And, both follow the rules of quantum physics.¹⁹ But, the brain is not so simple an organ, and comparing the brain to a machine can be very misleading. What is the idea of a machine that is being used to make the metaphor? Did it used to be a clock, a waterwheel and now has become the computer, because of the changes in technology?²⁰

We can map out this brain to some degree, but it is as if the blueprints themselves were missing for it, as if the structure of the plumbing, the electrical and the position of the heating ducts is still a mystery, a constant reminder of the limitedness of our knowledge structures. Only the actual walls and rooms are present in our knowledge of it. Even if we use the hardware/software comparison and equate it to the mind/body one, there is still something missing.²¹

The parallels of the workings of supercomputers and the brain, have been

examined, even to the workings of the unconscious activities related to the five senses, muscle control and instinct. But this scenario lacks the notion of consciousness. Consciousness is more than a program, and physicists are having little luck in understanding how this works. It is not something that can be simulated with a computer,²² and sticking an electrode in some area of the brain will not produce the answer.²³

It is a shortage of knowledge which hampers this understanding, a shortage of knowledge that extends to a section of quantum physics that has also evaded demystification. It is connected to a particular situation in which atoms react erratically, and that erratic behaviour has been parrelled to the way consciousness works in the brain. Scientists will need to come up with different ways to think about it if they are to understand it.²⁴

But, if this consciousness is not visual, it is observable. A conscious experience itself is the starting point and the ending point of what I know and understand, it is the totality of my experience. The experience that I have acquired over the time of my life is the basis of my knowing, just as this exploration started with my fascination with the elements around me, so that knowing can never be removed from what I think and do.²⁵

Consciousness is also something that happens in a physical organ, something that provides us with the ability to deal with abstract ideals, with an

imagination, and that gives us an inner voice, emotions and a sense of self. This occurs by some inexplicable quantum mechanical occurrence in the brain cells.²⁶ On a physical level, it seems that this would partially occur because of the “cellular scaffolding’s” ability to transmit signals of their own.²⁷ In other words, the cellular structure itself is capable of creating some of this imagination, inner voice, emotions, and sense of self.²⁸

To relate it to an architectural structure, I could say that a cathedral may be made of bricks, but studying the uniqueness of the bricks, would not lead to an understanding, at least not a complete understanding of the cathedralness of the structure.²⁹ It would also mean that the mortar holding the bricks had a life capacity of its own besides just holding up the structure. And, in the cathedral, lurking, are dark needy entities that remain hidden from passers-bys, but regulate who preaches from the pulpit, and who is admitted to its prestigious depth.

A woman walks by me with her Doberman. The dog sniffs at me on the way by, pulls at the end of the leash as she leads him away. Other stragglers are out this morning, but the place is relatively calm, and there is no one else on the terrace. It is peaceful looking out over the water, but the peacefulness that surrounds me, this solitude in a public place, is not always accessible to me. My coffee is cold. I take another sip and drop it into the garbage at the end of the

row of tables. I walk over to the canal and sit on one of the big rocks, the matter cold against my body.

Another article discusses the reflex of hand being removed from heat, stating that the eventual learning that means the removal before the touching of the hot pot, is significant because of the way that we can communicate this necessity to others around us. This communication he equates to consciousness, meaning "con-sciousness" or to know together. It is through this consciousness, that humans can develop a connection to each other, and to the surrounding universe.³⁰

How does this view of reflexes change the cause and effect if there is no cause, but there is an effect? Would this remove the cause and effect part of the action process of human beings? Would this also remove the goal in other given tasks, since moving towards a goal would be causal? Without causality, would time and space become free radicals untied to structured events, since there would be no events as I know them now? How would a concept of no beginning, no middle and no end affect my academic and scientific perspectives?³¹

If matter, including the psychological and neurological, interact on a quantum level, and something happens at this level that is not understood by scientists, an arbitrariness that is equivalent to a spiritual experience under the

microscope,³² is intuition, psychic powers, and even past lives measurable under the microscope as well? Will science have to redefine itself in order to maintain its status of legitimacy and its disciplinary division from religion? If this is changing, why is it changing?

This concept of sharing, of quantum levels, of the brain and spiritual experiences, is about the organization of order in a universe overflowing with incoming data.³³ Order, is not naturally present in the world that surrounds me, in the places that I explore, in the experiments that I engender. It is me that must restore it in some way, in the same way that I get to choose from the myriad of choices of action fed to me by my unconscious.

It is in the same way that the sounds of an unfamiliar language is just noise to me until I learn to recognize those specific sounds, and to place them in an organized order so that they have meaning. Only when they have become relevant to me do they stop being noise. And, when I speak a different language, I become a different person, as if that language amalgamates the culture into my body as I speak. All of this is a creation of a specific order, for a specific situation or need.

Creativity works the same way. If I look at something in front of my face, I can only see the defined, rigid form. But, if I allow chaos to rule how I look at it, then I am sometimes capable of escaping the space/time structure and

allowing a different focus or organization of the process to take place. Like all the pictures that I see in clouds if I look long enough, or like staring at an optical illusion, or making mountains out of molehills. This would relate to an implicate order and an explicate one. The only way to access creativity, would then be to reach into this explicate order. By the time the image is created in the mind/brain, then the order has been restored and the image is set in time and space.³⁴

This organization of chaos into order, would then mean that order depends on suppression, whether it is time, data, or anything else that is pertinent. There is the suppression time necessary to allow the decision or refusal to act after the neurons are firing.³⁵ There is the suppression of data that gives us the definition and understanding of the world around us: whether it is perceptually global, local, universal, racial, political, time/space confined, or implicitly in terms of the rules of quantum physics and mathematics.

There is the suppression of the unconscious by the conscious, that suppression of dangerous material that the conscious mind does not want leaked out into the world. There is a suppression when a memory is accessed, a suppression in the area where the memory is found and in the suppression of the material around it as I manoeuvre through the labyrinth of my brain/mind.³⁶ The memory, can be compared to a landscape of energy,³⁷ creating rolling hills that

suppress some images, and deepen others, the more painful or the more useful in the canyons of their depth.

These paths through the memory are called neural pathways,³⁸ and they explain a lot of things to me. It explains the difficulty of creating a new path through this landscape, and the extreme feelings of being lost that I experienced through some of this exploration. Now I understand why I had such difficulty turning off the analytical part of my brain and accessing the creative part. The paths of the analytical were deeper and much easier, while I had to climb very high to reach some of those creative peaks.

This suppression and rolling landscape is also relevant in terms of written texts. The writer's ability to create boundaries to what is presented is highly important, since any neural pathway that has been established in the mind of the reader must be very close for the reader to be able to understand it.³⁹ This could be compared to wanting to get to Toronto and having a limited number of ways to get there: including roads, trains, airplanes. If the writer wrote that the character jumped off the roof and flew to Toronto, the neural pathway would not be reached, the borders would not be adequate.

This creation of borders, this accessing of neural pathways is interesting, since it would mean that the "carrier" and the form in which it was presented would have to be close together in the book and close together in the reader's

mind as well.⁴⁰ This would mean that the difficulty in pushing past the linear expectations that are the norm, would not just be cultural, or academic, but biological as well. But, survivors of the 20th century brag quite openly about the limitless perspectives that are accepted and embraced, about the openness towards story lines, intersecting stories and variable mediums.⁴¹

Does this mean that people living now have a greater number of neural pathways than those who lived a hundred years ago? Or, does it mean that the borders between the neural valleys have become more flexible, more accessible to those who wish to experiment and explore? What does that mean in terms of understanding with different cultures? Are there a certain number of genetically handed down pathways that are related to creativity and Bachelard's poetic reverie is accessing those paths with poetic reverie? How would it be possible to know if this is truly universal and not just Western culture semantics?

I stand and walk towards home. The rock has failed to warm up and the sun, behind some dark clouds, has left me in the coldness of its shadow. The water is flowing slowly on the canal, passing under the bridge, limited by the cemented borders that have been imposed upon it, to contain the destructive potential. It too leads to the sea, like all water that flows, like all life that dies.

I kick a rock in the water and watch the circles that emanate from it. I am part, physically, socially and biologically of this landscape. My thoughts and

imaginings, everything that makes me feel special is really irrelevant. The only thing that makes me see myself leaning on this railing, is my limited perception of time and space, my determination to see myself as important in this landscape of atoms, molecules and consistent change.

It is not surprising that there has been a growth of multiform stories in the last 20 years,⁴² as religion, science and every other discipline around us imitates the expansion. My favourite, *The Matrix*, is very close to my heart. As a depiction of the erroneous perceptions that we console ourselves with everyday, it is unsurpassable. Many more films have followed in its wake, but few are so emotionally driven, few are so totally devastating to a limited view of reality.

Maybe the reason that these stories are flourishing is because they resonate changes as a whole: whether regional or global. As the questioning in physics and the unlikely ally of spirituality becomes more widespread, it is likely that many types of story forms will emerge, undermining the version of time and space that was important in the educational system of the 20th century .

Castanada's writings immediately comes to mind. How many alternate universes can there be if there is more than the one that we live in physically? How many dimensions can we access? If we are part of the environment, can those elements help us to expand our view of the universe, can it transform us, can it help us to live those other dimensions? If life is possible in more than one

dimension, how are the alternatives going to affect us? Can time be consistently 3 dimensional, or even 9 dimensional?⁴³ How many selves would I have in this scenario? Would it be 9 X 3 or would it be 81 X 9?

These different dimensions and visions of self, have been extensively played out with the immersive environments that have become an everyday occurrence. Whether it is the internet, an avant-garde film, an expensive version of virtual reality, or the virtual representation of a cultural heritage site, every artistic medium has its own possibility for desire, for expansion, for the creation of beauty, for the expression of what we feel to be real, to be true, in the life that surrounds us.⁴⁴ These means of communication reverberate with human potential.⁴⁵

That this organ formed of protein structures, of the same matter as rocks and stars, is capable of all these things, this is very difficult to understand for someone with such limited knowledge as myself. The world is full of ambiguities, full of incredible amounts of knowledge, and the brain must decipher the disorderly, imprecise, unpredictable data that is being fed into it, and my measly experience isn't enough to allow for the amount of learning or diversity in reactions that are taking place with the incoming data of this exploration.⁴⁶

Unable to differentiate between the nuances of scientific data that I have

examined in my exploration, I can only imply that the atoms and molecules, that are capable of erratic behaviour sufficient to create consciousness, could definitely be connected on another level than the physical, to something that is timeless. In one of the articles that I read, there was a connection of this mental phenomena of physical to abstract, to acting like an "emergent."⁴⁷ Is emerging the same as Bachelard's becoming? Is Bachelard's dreaming the concretization, or rather the ordered observation, of this mental phenomena of emerging?

I walk back towards home, the large brick building looming out of the trees in front of me. I may not be able to understand the living, the dead, the assorted configuration of atoms and molecules that this building harbours. But, I can grasp that this configuration of atoms, whether it is from a literary, scientific or spiritual perception, means that there is some powerful connection that exists within all of this, that this connection defies the current narrow perception of time and space, that it defies the narrowness that separates people into difference rather than similarities. If we are only atoms and molecules, does this affect the Darwinian version of evolution, of survival of the fittest?

V. Post exploration and Beyond

As I write this from the exile that I have constructed around myself during this exploration, from the solitude which I have cultivated, from the insularity which the topic originally brought with it, this poetic reverie as a discourse with myself seems impossible to refute. How can it be any other way? How can this type of poetry not be an intensity of emotions, an immensity of interaction with myself, within the confines of the elements of which I come from, live through, and go back to?

But, as sure as I am about the occurrence of this, the more the question begs to be expanded way beyond anything that I have already brought to it, to be extended past any borders that I can see as plausible. There is a centre to Bachelard's work that is a value, and to Benjamin's work which I have labelled as natural history. There is a concreteness to space which can be felt and lived but is not visual, there is the capacity for smells to create reverie, for the too clearly visual to dissipate it.

There is also the necessary solitude to reach the goal, the necessary suppression to the immediate environment and other memories, the neural pathways present, the elemental strength of fire, of water, of air. There is the exchanging of functions between the memory, perception and the imagination. There is the consistent ambivalence, the role of the unconscious and its

melancholic emergence, the continuous death of everything, the circularity to so many of these arguments, and the writing that is produced and reconstructed by the reader.

But, where does this lead? Is all this really there so that the mind/brain, which is simply a construction of atoms and molecules, can have an intimate discussion with itself? Is this place that I have reached through the dynamic poetry, a becoming just for me to reach that primitive place that still lies somewhere in a place that is not quantifiable but observable?

What if I were to remove the constraints of time and space from this whole configuration? What would I be left with: nice sentences, a map which give directions that I have already said will likely never be duplicated again, a pattern of elemental poetry, and a goal of reaching that primitive place which I have already envisioned? What if I were to remove the cause and effect as well?

The brain is a 3 pound organ of delicate tissue. This small lump of tissue, regulates my body, contains numerous memories, revels in thoughts and experiences from which learning is hopefully extracted.¹ And where is the mind in this particular organ? Is it truly the erratic actions of atoms and molecules producing chemical secretions that produce something akin to a spiritual experience? How is this different from finding spirituality through drugs? Could drugs be dispensed through drinking water to make people more

spiritual?

Is this brain, this organ, a tissue that acts independently, or is it part of a system of communication upon which the practise of acupuncture has been based for the last 4000 years in Chinese medicine?² Does the communication between the body and the liver, heart, spleen, lungs and kidneys mean that every emotion: love, hate, lust, joy, happiness, elation, that rips through our minds also rips through our entire system of organs? Would this mean that dynamic poetry could be very healthy, in the same way as meditation is?

Fear is a powerful emotion, and neurologists have used it to try to understand how the brain functions around it. They have discovered 2 paths for this fear. The first bypasses other circuits and allows action in 5 milliseconds, so that the body can protect itself if it needs to. This very quick pathway is found to solidify memories in the individual experiencing it. This would mean that if I were to be frightened or startled, while something is occurring, or while I am looking at a certain picture, the memory of this picture would be more solidly entrenched in my memory. This would also be the case if I was startled while remembering this particular picture. This path can occur without my awareness of its occurrence.³

The second path that fear can take, leads through the corridor of memories, of cognitive awareness, of responses that have been learned, and

allows knowledge to be part of the decisive action that is taken. This second path would tell me to leave the apartment if a fire alarm went off. It would send me off the path of a car after it honked at me, it would send me to the door buzzer after that horrible buzz startled me, as it still does after 4 years here.⁵ These different paths taken by fear, as the need arises, lends an interesting perspective to this whole exploration, if I add the notion of the map that I have laid out for the next explorer.

Is it language that is the first route to dealing with the environment?⁶ I would be massively interested in following this simple notion of what route does a human being take in dealing with the environment. Do I follow maps in terms of goals and getting to certain places by using signs on the road, an approximate time of arrival, the next gas station (verbal cues)? Or, do I follow indications outside the body when I go somewhere (physical cues)? Do I know that I walk 2 blocks to the market and how long it will take me to get there? Or, do I cross the street and know that the park must be on my left and the large brick building on my right?

This issue seems crucial to my exploration, since if I am using the first method, then I am basically using the issue of time and space, of cause and effect created by the reaching of an envisioned goal. But, if I am using the latter, then, what is really going on in this type of dreaming? Where is this dynamic poetry

leading me, while I am busy following the elemental indices where it is telling me to go? Have I only found a minute path leading somewhere, that my perception is not yet prepared to see? Is the dreaming leading to an elemental illusion which must be deciphered to be understood?

How many times have our knowledge structures changed? How have they been effected by the changing political tides? How have they ever been separate from it? How could my narrow envisioning of this concept truly be outside the proverbial box in which I was raised, in which I have existed since I was born? Is the dreaming that I have explored and experienced simply a means, a path, leading to something so much bigger than I can possibly imagine at this moment?

This primal space, reached by poetic reverie, is used for other purposes, such as the visualization for the healing of cancer in patients, and it works very much along the same lines. Candles are lit, the room darkened, words are played through some medium, words that sometimes sound like this:

Imagine an opening on top of your head. The light of stars, suns, galaxies, heavens, of love enters your body.⁶

Does this primal space also lead to some primal ability, or abilities, that human are born with but do not yet understand, in the same way that we are born with knowledge of language and other basics?⁷

The issues of self naturally question the issues of the universe. If my place is set: if my perspectives aligns itself with an accepted version of truth, life is simple, I can simply smile, follow and nod. But, if I attempt to think outside the proverbial box, where do I go, what do I follow, more importantly: WHO do I follow? Have I been searching for something that I will never find in this exploration? Like the voice in a radio⁸ with no listeners? Or, does the voice not even exist, and the radio is a product of atoms and molecules that I have strategically structured to resemble such an item? If I can make them resemble a radio through my constructions, which radio is real and which is not?

Throughout academic life, I have been taught to find references for the ideas that shape themselves in my mind. But, what if I have something really special, like the Velasquez painting at the beginning of Foucault's *The Order of Things*, what do I do with that? Do I log onto Google and go through 65,000 sites related to Foucault? I am exaggerating maybe, but only slightly. How do I find time to research and document what I feel and find myself reaching out to?

If the imagination and its incredible reserve of material is timeless and partially spaceless as well, my body, my mind/brain, my existence upon this rock, is not. I must deal with that time constraint, even as I try to escape it. It is the ultimate ambivalence. And, will I be able to write about the world when I am a grain of sand? Or, am I a grain of sand now and do not know it? From

outer space I would not even be large enough to look like a grain of sand.

Is this imposition of the human body/mind/soul upon the elements that surround it, simply an attempt to create importance and meaning where there is none? Would I have been better to have read Heidegger's Question Concerning Technology again instead of burying myself in abstract and complex notions of self (physically, mentally, spiritually)? If I had used Heidegger would I have followed a similar, or a dissimilar path?

I have seen enough 2-D pictures of brains, and have imagined enough about them, to create a certain sense of queasiness in my stomach. But still, I do not know what a brain truly looks like. I have evaded seeking out a real one, pickled in whatever it is they pickle them in, to preserve them. Is it alcohol, or formaldehyde? Just the thought of someone's life form being preserved in a jar is disturbing. And what about John Saul's book, where the owners of a private school for gifted children kill the smartest in order to take their brains to power a super-computer?

No matter how far away I get with abstract notions of self and universe, with poetically engendered elements, I seem to return to the brain, and I have not spent enough time on this remarkable organ and its numerous connections. Among these amazing connections is that some types of brain disorders (or orders), are related to genius status in politics, military type careers, to music,

literary, or performing arts brilliance.⁹

Some of the people who have had a disorder include William Blake (my favourite poet of all), Virginia Woolf, Robert Schumann, Winston Churchill.¹⁰ I am also reminded of a quoting of Rilke by Flaherty, a quote that relates the impossibility of seeing a psychotherapist for some of the problems that he (Rilke) has been having. Rilke is afraid that if he loses the demons that hound him daily, he would also lose the angels that allow him to write with such brilliance.¹¹

Could I have connected the issue of mind/brain to death in some way, if I had been more focused with the issue of time/space? Would all the rituals found in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* have been useful for this, or would I have had to completely eliminate time and space from the analysis in order to understand the issue of death. This fascinating subject alone could have been a thesis, and a comment by Bachelard, that water helps us to die more slowly and more completely than other elements, could have been part of the orientation of research.¹²

There is also Carlos Castaneda's work on death, the supernatural and the shamans of Latin America. As an anthropologist, Castaneda has done extensive work with alternate realities and the narrowness of Western perspectives upon this aspect. How would this view of alternate realities affect the view of poetic reverie? Would this mean that what I was dreaming was truly just as real as

what surrounds me, and that I could have entered into that realm in a more complete way? How would that completeness be engendered? Would this be a type of virtual reality?

And if I had done more work on the issue of death, would it have altered the way that I imagine the elements around me and how they are portrayed to me in my dreams? If I saw my death as the absolute end of me, could I carry on with my dreams of flowing water, that merging of individual drops into the conglomeration that is the sea? How would my seeing that drop as the beginning instead of the end change everything else in this exploration?

Even the properties of the elements may have shed some light upon the issue of death, or the lack of it. Water, for example, maintains its properties and identity no matter how it is divided. This is not the same for all objects, or elements. Fire is not always fire. Earth is not always earth, and space can be altered dramatically, even if it is just with the absence of light.¹³

I have also taken the medium for granted throughout the exploration, never questioning its importance or its orientation. Is the medium the message here, or has the message, instead, become solidly entrenched as an important characteristic of the medium? How could this be answered without the amalgamation of science and spirituality, within the confines of poetic reverie?¹⁴

If I understand this entrenching of the message into a characteristic of the

medium, this supports Bachelard's view of poetic reverie in a written form. How could I have explored this more fully and given a more appropriate assessment on it? Would this mean that Heidegger would have been useful here in terms of sorting out the parts and pieces, or would this better be left to the sciences?

Where does that leave *The Matrix* in terms of form and message? How does that shed light on the message that *The Matrix* is dissipating: that life is a perspective that can be harnessed politically, philosophically, and emotionally; that freedom can be just another word for constriction? Where does that place revolutionary technology into the amalgamation of daily life?

As *The Matrix*, and its faithful followers, expands views of life, science and spirituality are joining together to expand that view from their own perspective, to share knowledge and to learn together.¹⁵ Is this a version of progress, that disciplines can be merged and knowledge shared rather than hoarded and used for power? Or, is this some varied version of a different power emerging from the union of such unlikely associates?

With ethical questions dominating the globe, The Dalai Lama, open to a larger view of the world, has joined with research scientist to study the effects of meditation on the brain/mind. The joining of the two disciplines, is regarded as a seeking of principles that will use reasoning and compassion for the greater good.¹⁶ Is the silence in meditation an important way to develop certain changes

in the brain? Are they permanent changes or ephemeral? Are these changes healthy?¹⁷ By seeking to find what science can reveal about the mind, the Dalai Lama has overreached the comfort zone of traditional religious beliefs, has also allowed science to enter the depths of spirituality, allowed a harmony to develop between the two.¹⁸

So much more has been omitted from this exploration, directions which really need to be expanded further. What about the power of an orator? Like Jesse Jackson, how are words used to stir listeners to action?¹⁹ How did Hitler manage to create such a powerful party? Was it mostly from his oratory skills? Did he and Jesse Jackson, and other powerful orators use elemental metaphors in their speeches? Are elemental metaphors crucial to the skills of a talented orator?

And, has any of this imagining been in color? Do situations change where it is in color, then it is not? Patients who lose their ability to see color, cannot conjure it up in their memories after, while some people lose the ability to properly connect the color with the right word, but they are able to match up color chips to the right colored items: banana chip to a colored yellow chip of paint.²⁰ How would different brain injuries affect the ability to imagine, and how could this be researched without being invasive to those afflicted? Is it possible to study without causing undo harm?

How does the issue of gender fit into this exploration of imagining?

Different genders affect the performance on certain tasks: men do better on spatial ones (rotating objects, etc), and motor skills (intercepting), women do better on: identifying, greater verbal fluency, arithmetic calculations.²¹ But, are these a response to the learned necessary skills to survive in society, a response to designated social roles rather than genetically defined differences? Do men and women dream differently as well?

Would aging affect the behavior of dreaming, would age itself also be relevant?²² How would dreaming affect patients with different neuronal alterations? How could dreaming be used to reach patients who have difficulty articulating their needs or feelings? Could dreaming be a possible solution to communication with children with social behavioural problems, or with patients with Alzheimer's?

I am beginning another exploration now. Or, maybe it is simply a continuation of this exploration - a lifetime of exploration. Where will it lead? How will this exploration change my writing? Has it already changed it? How will it change my daily life? What specific research orientation will I follow from here? If I remove cause and effect, time and space from the questioning, nothing matters but this moment and what I am doing with it.

ENDNOTES

PRE I: ENVISIONING THE LANDSCAPE OF DREAMS

1. Jubak: 73 and Pribram: 4
2. Murray: 100

I: EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE OF DREAMS

1. Bachelard, 1994:9
2. Bachelard, 1994:184
3. Anderson, 162; Benjamin, 257,258
4. Bachelard, 1982: 1
5. Bachelard
6. Bachelard, 1982: 11
7. Bachelard, 1994: 152
8. Bachelard, 1994: 32
9. Bachelard, 1994: 112
10. Manguel
11. Bachelard, 1994: 75
12. Bachelard, 1982: 47
13. Bachelard, 1994: 132
14. Bachelard, 1982:113
15. Bachelard, 1982: 148
16. Bachelard, 2004: 90
17. Bachelard, 1994: 13
18. Bachelard, 1982: 134,145
19. Bachelard, 1988: 37
20. Bachelard, 1994: 184
21. Bachelard, 1982: xvi
22. Martel, 2003: 1
23. Bachelard, 1982:148
24. Bachelard, 1982: 101
25. Bachelard, 1982: 131
26. Bachelard, 1982: 91
27. Bachelard, 1982: 8
28. Auster, 1987: 28
29. Bachelard, 1982: 92,105
30. Bachelard, 1982: 2

31. Bachelard, 1982: 117
32. Bachelard, 1982: 101
33. Rotenberg, 2004: 43
34. Auster, 1987: 98
35. Bachelard, 1982: 104
36. Auster, 1987: 108
37. Bachelard, 1994: 152
38. Bachelard, 1994: xx
39. Bachelard, 1994: 16
40. Bachelard, 1988:55
41. Bachelard, 1982: 190
42. Bachelard, 1994: 100
43. Bloom: 120
44. Johnson: 5
45. Anderson
46. Bachelard, 1982: 3
47. Rotenberg, 1998: 49
48. Bachelard, 1994: 121
49. Rotenberg, 1998: 130
50. Bachelard, 1994: 143,144
51. Auster, 2002: 288
52. Bachelard, 1994: xxii
53. Bachelard, 1994: ssviii
54. Bachelard, 1994: 17
55. Bachelard, 1994: 134
56. Bachelard, 1982: 169
57. Auster, 1987: 121
58. Rotenberg, 2002: 172
59. Auster, 2002: 298,299
60. Bachelard, 1994: 86
61. Bachelard, 1994: 84
62. Bachelard, 1982: 113
63. Bachelard, 1994: 84
64. Bachelard, 1994: 10
65. Bachelard, 1994: xxxv
66. Bachelard, 1994: 201
67. Martel, 2003: 5
68. Bachelard, 1988: 77

II: DISSECTING THE LANDSCAPE OF DREAMS

1. Bachelard, 1988: 76
2. Auster, 1985: 139
3. Auster, 1985: 139
4. Rotenberg, 202: 191
5. Auster, 1987: 33
6. Bachelard, 1994: 174
7. Bachelard, 1982: 17
8. Bachelard, 1982: 188,80,187
9. Galiano: 87
10. Bachelard, 1994: 32
11. Bachelard, 1994: 19
12. Bachelard, 1994: 18
13. Wolfert: 13
14. Bachelard, 1994: 19
15. Bachelard, 1994: 19
16. Bachelard, 1994: 18
17. Bachelard, 1994: 19
18. Bachelard, 2004: 4
19. Bachelard, 1994: 25
20. Bachelard, 1988: 4
21. Bachelard, 1982: 4
22. Bachelard, 1988: 50
23. Freud. Notes from class.
24. Felman: 15
25. Bachelard, 2004:54
26. Bachelard, 2004: 106,39
27. Foucault, 1994: xv
28. Manguel: 35
29. Lustbader, 1990: 40
30. Bachelard, 1994: 23
31. Bachelard, 1994: 23
32. King: 498-500
33. Spielvogel: 501
34. Auster, 1987: 86
35. Bachelard, 1994: 61
36. Bachelard, 1994: 9
37. Auster, 1987: 18

38. Bachelard, 1994: 58
39. Bachelard, 1994: 16
40. Bachelard, 1994: 32
41. Bachelard, 1994: 59
42. Bachelard, 1994: 15
43. Benjamin: 257
44. Flaherty: 61
45. Bachelard, 1994: 147
46. Bachelard, 1994: 21
47. Manguel: 39
48. Manguel: 59
49. Flaherty: 36
50. Kristeva: 142
51. Freud: Mania and Melancholia
52. Flaherty: 37
53. Flaherty: 66
54. Flaherty: 46
55. Flaherty: 36
56. Kristeva: 53
57. Bachelard, 1994: xxii
58. Oxford Concise English Dictionary: 1328
59. Bachelard, 2004

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