

St. Stephen's College

Relationality, Reciprocity and the Nature of Self:
Encountering Expansive Connectedness in the Natural World

by

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Abstract

By moving within a dialectical framework of relationality and personal knowing, this exploration seeks deeper understandings of the meanings and connections of *home*, the natural world, and the expansiveness and relatedness of self. Viewing the self as a context of relational movements, rather than solely as a static and individuated entity, the balanced and dialectical quality of nature is explored as a viewpoint through which the self may accrue depth and dynamic. From this basis I explore the relationship between themes of belonging and autonomy within home, in Nature and the world, viewing these in relation to narrowed and sequestered experiences of a self related to substance use and addictions. My role as a therapist and participatory observer among the young men of Shunda Creek, a 90-day mindfulness-oriented wilderness addictions program in the Canadian Rockies, offers a wealth of rich and dynamic descriptions, generating important dialectic resonance with my own knowings and discoveries. The heuristic approach and participatory stance that I employ in this study is complimented by these experiences as well as selected material of data collected within this program.

Key Words: Nature therapy, eco-therapy, relationality, self,
home, dialectical, addictions, embodiment,
Indigenous, land-based healing

I dedicate this discourse to the spaces between beings

that connect us like strings...

In particular I honour the ties between myself and my partner, Nikayla,

who has journeyed through this project with me,

and my ties to the *Mohkinstsis* valleys,

through which I am continually nourished.

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Introduction

The natural world resonates deeply within the makeup of the human race. Just as a pebble generates so many ripples across a lake's smooth surface, there are many layers to this resonance, and its meanings both shape and sustain the self-in-relation. In all this diversity, particularity, and nuance, the human relationship to its global habitat is as immutable as it is problematic in our contemporary world. An ever-growing consciousness of how global, industrial, commercial modes of human living impact the natural world unearths the reality of a sobering and tragic disconnect with the environment that has hosted—and yet still hosts, our emergence as a species. As outwardly, so also within; while our relational crisis with the other-than-human world becomes clearer, the very idea of its otherness may obscure the way it reflects the very relationship we have towards ourselves, and the vital question of what it is to be human. Nature moves within countless natural processes that sustain life within our own bodies; an unmistakable wilderness churns with our drives, desires and appetites, even as widespread struggles with excess and addiction reflect this broken relationship; the human spirit thirsts for untouched tranquility, for freedom and for a soul connection with the great wide beyond. At bottom, the “great outdoors” is knit through the very fabric of humanity, and this also is a troubled relationship.

Conversely, human civilisation pulls incessantly towards greater control, quantification, and predictability which in the end favours all that which submits readily to analysis, dissection, enclosure. In contrast to the boundless and balanced interconnectedness of the natural world, the human world—particularly the modern world in its interests to control, proliferates closed systems, borders, and distinctions. The

self that takes form within such enclosed systems is imprinted with atomising and dualistic patterns of reason, posing a predicament noted by many voices that have taken up the subject of modernity's impacts (e.g. Gottschalk, 2001; Robertson, 2011; Taylor, 1991; Cross, Bacon & Morris, 2000). The prolific and ubiquitous value of individualism in the west for instance, "flattens and narrows our lives, [making] them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (Taylor, 1991, p. 4). In turn, Psychology by and large considers its subject to be the individual, honing in on "intrapsychic dimensions" (Clinebell, 1996), over against the broader relations in which it is held (e.g. social and environmental). Furthermore, dualisms between mind and matter (Clinebell, 1996), human and natural worlds (Russell, 2012), inherently over-identify with 'mind' and 'human', contributing to a broader, more insidious dualism between self and other. All this to the neglect of natural affinities and the relations between these that hold differences in balance with one another. Liberal movements and the critique of hegemonic frameworks of the modern identity deconstruct class, race, gender, and more (Gergen 1985, 1991, Hall 1996, Gottschalk, 2001)—yet here also an unintended and implicit upshot is the erosion of the "horizons of meaning" (Taylor, 1991) that framed our relational existence, such that the *individual* is all that is left to construct an identity around. So much spiritual understanding of ourselves relies on these very horizons.

Another layer of complexity that enshrouds many of those seeking help through psychotherapy is the experiences of trauma they have survived, which "shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others" (Herman, 2015, p. 51; see also van der Kolk, 2014). Comorbidities of addictive substance use and PTSD

are well documented (Roberts, Roberts, Jones, & Bisson, 2015) and conflates with the impact of internalising social stigmas related to mental disorder and addictions (Louma et al., 2007; Yang et al. 2014; Hansen, Bourgois & Drucker, 2014). Addictions emerge under the weight of many conscious and unconscious, intergenerational, historical and experiential factors which by appearance gather under one small roof. A great many influences converge within the atomized and isolated notion of the individual; in spite of these *many*, the burden of change in our Western context comes to rest upon a singular, solitary, and isolated subject.

In light of the prevailing independence and individuality of the modern self, the significance of *relationship* within the therapeutic setting comes to the fore as “the main curative component” (Lambert & Barley, 2001, p. 357; Norcross, 2010). Self-in-relation, then, is of critical importance to the integration and wholeness that many therapies pursue. In this context, Adventure Therapy seeks to open the therapeutic environment to broader experiential and relational exposures that engage the healing person in interactive experiences with others in a natural context (Gass, Gillis, & Russell, 2012). The open systems of the natural world thus provide an ample and diverse setting in which the horizons of the truncated self may expand *in-relation-to*.

In the scriptures of Christian tradition, this sense of inclusion and relatedness is tantamount to an encounter with the divine which takes place, according to Brueggeman, ... through the praxis of a faith that refuses to separate thought from action, body from spirit, or earth from heaven... It is exactly that dualism that so pervades modern thought against which the [bible] bears such powerful witness. (Brueggeman, 2020).

In this way human spiritual nature may pull and enliven us toward expansive, transcendent and relational realms of being (Sheldrake, 2014; Pargament, 2011; Friedman, 2018; Worthington & Sandage, 2016); widening a consciousness that may at once perceive the self as a *part of something greater*, and at the same moment this *something greater* as a part of the self. In place of dualism, a dialectic movement may transpire within this widening of consciousness. Where the openness of the natural ecological world makes contact with the possibility of expansive and relational movements of the self, here lies the home and wilder-space in which this study takes root.

Chapter 1: Research Approach, Sources and Procedure

Research Question

Through the lens of relationality, we explore here how adventure and connection within nature impact a felt sense of openness, responsiveness and flow within the healing person's self-world understanding. Within the dialectic of home and away, belonging and freedom, *a part of* and *apart from*, inclusion and differentiation, we explore the tension between these polarities as an energised space of richness and fecundity in which the relational faculty of experiencing the other in self, and the self in the other may be realised. In the stuckness that characterises so much of human difficulty—particularly addictions, the movement that takes place between polarities and within a relationship of differences highlights the stirring, activating, flowing and reciprocal quality of relationality that is often neglected. Seasons and cycles are nature's expression of the space between polarities, and this movement indicates a relationality that generates movement; and one which is deeply embedded within our very nature.

A Relational-Heuristic Approach

In kind, the arrangement of this project prioritises the points of contact, overlap and confluence produced in a weaving structural layout emphasising relationality between the discourses and sources. As such, instead of laying out my literature review and sources in independent sections and then drawing them together in the end, I have chosen to braid and overlay them within chapters entitled with themes that the central question has drawn out. The themes themselves move in a progression, and in turn oscillate between a dialectic of belonging and agency, home and away, being within nature and nature within.

I want to align the *how* of this project with the *what*, and in these central motifs of nature and relationship, to move within a methodology congruent to these. My choice of methodology came after several revisions, and progressively became more aligned with the deep personal motivation to speak from my own particulars, through the relations I am composed of, and with a humility that does not overextend its significance. To this end the model of heuristic inquiry approaches knowledge in a very personal way, fostering a rigorous process of exploration through natural movements and instincts of self in relation to the central question (Hiles, 2001; Moustakas, 1990). Against the backdrop of the individualising Western milieu, a vital balance for this usage of self is the acknowledgement that Shawn Wilson (2008), echoing Stan Wilson (2001), makes in understanding the self-as-relationship; that “we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of” (Wilson, 2008, p. 80). Importantly, in the Indigenous worldview that Wilson speaks from, this *self-as-relationship* extends beyond the Western interpersonal sense of *self-in-relation* (e.g. Surrey, 1985), to encompass a vital relationship with the land, and “all living things” (Wilson, 2001). a paradigm that bears strong resonance with the relational currents of this undertaking. In my own experiences around Indigenous ceremonies the phrase “all my relations” represents this sense of relatedness that I have with all the beings that sustain balance for the world I inhabit—these words honour all beings with which I am connected, and bear out a sense of reciprocal accountability. Respectfully, I acknowledge the depth that such Indigenous values hold in me, as well as the extent that my understanding and application of the heuristic methodology follows its influence.

Thus working within (or at least *towards*) a relational identity, the heuristic approach (Moustakas, 1990; Hiles, 2001) guides my process through the stages of *initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication* and *creative synthesis*. My *initial engagement* has uncovered a question with deep personal meaning, interest and passion, which has lingered and emerged at various points of my personal experiences and academic career, awaiting a deeper and more disciplined exploration; stepping back, it is possible, and perhaps more accurate, to say that the question of self and nature-connection emerged *through* me and my life story in the indelible gravity that the natural world exerts on my experience. For me this phase also included a journey of revisions—both fraught with discouragement and alighted with inspiration and natural movement, through which I landed in the heuristic approach as the methodology to work within.

Next, the *immersion* stage in which the question is “lived in waking, sleeping and even dreaming states,” requiring “alertness, concentration and self-searching” (Hiles, 2001, p. 4), became very real for me, and included much reflection on the period of live-in participatory engagement I had with the clients of Shunda Creek. Further, my own habitual practices of riverside meditation and reflection that I have been intentionally cultivating throughout this process bear a significant yet gentle wisdom, eliciting my own history of experiences and upbringing within the natural realm; finally, immersion also extends through the day-to-day in breakings of awareness of myself-in-relation, the natural world, and the movements of recovery, growth and flourishing I bear witness to in my ongoing practicum in counselling therapy.

The *incubation* stage relaxes into the subject matter, allowing more subtle qualities to emerge from a soft gaze removed of intense, goal-oriented focus. My own recreational engagements with the natural world have guided me gently in this manner, along with the spaces of *gentle trying* that emerged in my practicum counselling experiences. Incubation has a stepping back quality, which I sense can take place on micro and macro levels in my research, and may at times parallel the motivational ebbs and flows I have experienced within the project. Here at times it is as if the subject chases me down, ambushing me with insight when I am going about, what appears to me as *some other thing*. Refractions and echoes of a client's story or some comment they had made in passing, that has been bouncing unconsciously through my thoughts on a drive home may, for instance, suddenly and without warning coalesce around a central theme I am working through.

In a sense, the widely impacting realities imposed by a global pandemic elicited many and varied forms of incubation in the process of this writing. In the midst of an ever-changing world in the grip of COVID-19 the shared experience of being “stuck” at home became an incubation unto itself. Rolling with these was—and still is, a very challenging and stretching experience; in this context, somewhere from the unconscious realm, there emerged an extended treatment of home that was unintended at the outset. The significance of home came to the fore, even as being holed up at home pushed me, and many others, outward into local nature-scapes, perhaps implicitly extending the significance of home to include these natural spaces. In the same moment, the pandemic fell during my practicum at Shunda Creek, and as the human world came to a screeching

halt, it became apparent that this wider home remained quite unconcerned and unchanged in its ancient course of natural patterns and seasons.

Illumination, then, emerges from this cultivated space in the way of such naturally occurring break-throughs, awakenings and new awarenesses. Through an openness to tacit knowing, instinct and intuition, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge sublimates into a new discovery, and new understandings emerge from older knowings. The stage of *explication*, then, examines, organises and depicts the content of what has been awakened, drawing out its core themes. Next, the stage of *creative synthesis*, with a thorough grasp of the subject matter, carefully and reflectively pulls together all the components and core themes that have emerged. Finally, the question of *validation* recursively hones the cohesive meaning of the project: “Does the synthesis present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?” (Hiles, 2001, p. 5). This returns repetitively to the question of whether the discourse embraces all necessary and sufficient meanings of the subject matter. The committed and consistent interactions of reading and reflection on this work offered by my supervisor, Madeline Rugh, bolsters this validation process within an interactive dialectic. I am deeply grateful for her significant and thoughtful contributions.

In this heuristic approach, Hiles (2001) notes the significance of mindfulness and self-awareness through the process, and how close it stands in process and intention to Bentz & Shapiro’s *mindful inquiry* (1998). In this, my awareness of internal states, emotions, sensations, moods, dreams, and motivations are held within an important practice of internal reflection, which is reflected in multiple levels of the process, from writing, to nature-based meditations, reflections and conversations. My own practice of

mindful meditation, which has become an intermittent morning practice for me, nurtures the awareness of mind, heart and body, as well as the sense of self from which I am moving and interpreting.

Sources

This exploration takes root in three distinct sources: 1) the journaling and experiences of my participatory observation with the young men enrolled in the Shunda Creek program in the six months of my role as live-in student counsellor there, along with additional experiences as a student of psychotherapy; 2) the data of the adventure therapy experiencing scale (ATES; Russell & Gillis 2017), collected from participants of Shunda Creek between April 2018 and April 2020, overlapping with my own time there; and 3) my own direct relationship with the natural world, held within memories, practices, and meanings that have long preceded this study. In the course of this work these have taken on a more intentional quality, which includes several expressive pieces of art and poetry that have emerged organically throughout the process, some of which are included and discussed here.

The method of *heuristic comparison* laid out by David Hiles (2001) details a seven-step process for inhabiting the different “texts” (sources) and drawing them into connection with one another. This includes: choosing the texts pertinent to the research question (as above); engaging phenomenologically with them and exploring similarities and differences, as well as the demands they place on the researcher; times of discernment and exploring, beyond the superficial, which involves following “leads” to materials outside what has been chosen, yet always returning to the central question; gathering and sifting through materials, allowing themes, meanings and insights to

emerge; reflecting on inter-relations of the sources, cycling through the above steps numerous times to develop a range of insights; synthesising the inquiry using self-validation. These stages reflect and interweave with the six phases of *heuristic inquiry* described above as well.

Underpinnings: A Dialectical Epistemology

As I begin to explore in this way I am struck by the sense that “what we know”, in spite of how readily it appears as self-evident and distinct, is in truth greatly shrouded in mystery and obscurity. Our “knowing” can be seen in terms of 1) what can be articulated and expressed, and thus held distinctly and firmly within the realm of meaning and interpretation; 2) that which, often owing to a particular quality of its subtlety and minutia, vastness and expansiveness, or necessity and closeness, is subsumed within our experience and therefore utterly diffuse and ineffable—defying all explication; and 3) what, through care, deepened consciousness and sustained attention can be drawn up into the glimmering light of awareness and distinguished from the amalgam of reality as sacred parts of a numinous whole. Relating to something, both outside and within the self, critically involves this latter sense of knowing, and in this a balance may be cultivated between differentiating its otherness, recognising its distinctive qualities, and then making connection with the alterity of its way of being. Furthermore, the quality of intellectual knowledge is often proven in this first knowing, while the emotional and embodied layers of our experience fall between the second and third sense of knowing.

Rather than beginning from firmly established truths and constructs—proceeding from what we know we know (objectively), and building off this secure and certain foundation, our approach here creates space for meaning and form to emerge from the

great unknown through the natural particulars of my experiences within the overlapping fields of addictions, healing and connection with the natural realm. Connection and responsiveness are central to the process; moving and sensing alongside, among and within, rather than perceiving from a dispassionate, and elevated distance. Mahoney and Marquis (2002) highlight the emergent, tacit and constructive nature of knowing, and this subtle attention to the lens which *construes* the world aligns this project with a constructivist paradigm. Further, the significance of “social-symbolic processes” which denote the person as existing “in a web of relationships” (Mahoney & Marquis, 2002, p. 800) resonates with our touchstone of relationality.

While constructivism provides an important epistemic frame for this project, this does not preclude our interacting—and *relating* with more objective and definitive viewpoints, as some of the sources and references will show. The priority of our relational stance means maintaining an open regard for all the ways that knowing can emerge and be held. Duran expresses this notion as *hybrid epistemologies* (2006), particularly relating to his perspective on parallels between Indigenous ways of knowing and Western ones, and our approach here bears resemblance to this. In acknowledging epistemic polarities (i.e. dialectical tensions, Mahoney & Marquis, 2002) we seek to move responsively between the rigidity of dominating constructs on the one hand, and individualistic reductions of relativity on the other. In this way, while one polarity may emphasize the difference and opposition from its counterpart, we view through a relational lens the way these so-called opposites are related and connected, striving to become conscious of the draw of polarisation in this very discourse. The goal is to *coarticulate*; working with non-exclusive and relationally constructed interpretations to

develop a bridge discourse that spans between polarities of thinking—perhaps even making use of the energy of its tension—to affirm the complex dynamic between reality and interpretation.

To this end, I observe in my own tone of writing an oscillation between analytic technical voice, and poetic, emotive voice. This project will strive to make intentional and conscious use of this peculiarity of my style, weaving between these tones to create another implicit layer of dialectical movement within the discourse. At the same point, both contrasting voices may easily fall prey to the veiling of my particulars, keeping my *self* at a safe and invulnerable distance. There is a therapy in the process of making myself known, and this method with which I've chosen to explore places important emphasis here. Tendencies to remain cerebral are woven together with the emotion of poetry; tendencies to remain abstract are held in balance by the particulars of narrative accounts and personal reflection. As I am coming to notice in this current process, writer's block seems to be a sense of stuckness in one polarity (or perhaps brain hemisphere) of thinking, and practicing this dialectical *movement* between opposite poles within my writing cultivates a kind of *flow* within the process itself. This flow is an ecological principle which channels through the length of this work, and I understand this movement and experience to be an outcome of harmonious balance and equilibrium.

Even as constructivism offers an important lens to us, it is critical that we stand back from this viewpoint, to observe and evaluate the lens itself—becoming self-aware, as it were, of aspects of our position, so we may navigate in a manner consistent to our purpose. As Gottschalk (2001) delineates, post-structuralism destabilises knowledge systems that construe the universe as certain, universal, knowable, and finally

known—which are in this way is implicitly hegemonic. In its distilled form, the deconstructionist impulse would contest “the existence of any independent reality beyond the stories we tell, or at least ones we can get at in any meaningful sense” (Spears, 1995, p. 5). It strives to dismantle the way truth claims assert power within a discourse by severing the ties connecting “what we know” to *any* intelligible world beyond. Of course, more moderate arguments contend that if reality is constructed, it does not necessarily follow that reality is only constructed and that there is nothing beyond the construct.

Wilson points out that in both critical theory and constructivism, the goal is not the knowledge in itself, but the change that this knowledge is able to bring about (2008), for the status quo is maintained through what is “known”. There is certainly much that needs to change in the human relations with our natural world—new ways of seeing, thinking, valuing and knowing that yield new ways of being, building and becoming. Joseph Campbell has said, “If you want to change the world, you have to change the metaphor” (n.d.), and as we shift our metaphor from solid and unyielding building blocks of knowledge (noun/object), to a flowing, relational interaction and encounter of knowing (verb/movement), what first appeared as object, may become subject, eliciting a dignity and respect that honour at once the diversity and unity of things, reflecting both the self in other and the otherness within (Ricoeur, 1994).

Such modes of knowing offer more fluid and relational possibilities, and yet, Gottschalk observes that “while post-structuralism has deconstructed Man, it has not decentered the human” (2001, p. 10). This is evident in the emphasis on recognising and dismantling constructs, over against the external world they represent. In brief, to speak relationally and ecologically means giving proper place to the *other*-than-human, which

must admit of a realm that exists beyond human interpretation and construct (Gottschalk, 2001); The important truth that we emerged from nature means that the point of contact and connection with this realm remains within us, yet its construed *otherness* consists in the distance that a massive history of civilisation has imposed between ourselves and our participation in nature. This otherness is critical to hold in view, as to do otherwise would mean reducing it to the limitations of my human knowing—holding a view of it through my own limited lens, rather than holding it in its own rite. To view nature on its own terms means decentring the dominance of human story, as well as noticing our inescapable—and blessed, participation in this vast interconnected realm. Acknowledging this participation David Abrams (2012) importantly shifts the language from “other-than-human”, to “more-than-human”, recognising our vital inclusion within this realm.

The natural world lives through a humble instinct—an inalienable presence unto itself, so cleanly embodied. Vestiges of this instinct yet remain within our nervous systems, and our spirits; yet channelling through the murky and mysterious worlds of our dreams, and erupting in the untamable exuberance of our young. These points of connection mean that while the natural world is rightly *other*-than-human, it may also be a realm in which we participate without conscious awareness—a greater world of which we are unknowingly, yet inextricably a part; a *more-than-human* world (Abram, 2012). The significance of phenomenological experience, instinct, intuition and tacit understandings—as an heuristic approach entails, are thus emphasised as sources of knowing that have never lost their connection to the natural order; this realm in which we were originally held—and are yet still held, however unaware.

In addition, relationality proposes that the otherness of nature need not impede on connection—in fact, the very meaning of relation assumes an outside *other* as the subject of connection. It bears the capacity to preserve difference while yet acknowledging interdependence. Whereas human dialectics so easily divide across dualities (e.g. conservative-liberal, individualist-collectivist, modern-postmodern, mind-matter, human-environment), in the natural world polarities exist, but their difference elicits a vital movement and flow that both sustains and generates life (night-day, male-female, winter-summer, earth-sky). Here a relational lens may be rightly called an ecological lens, capable of holding the contrast together within a holistic dynamic, ever opening and widening to view the whole sum of parts.

From this lens we can see the way postpositivism strives at a unified conception of reality, while constructivism highlights the particularity and diversity of differing reality-constructs; the former often braces protectively against a relativism that threatens chaos and disorder, while the latter strives for liberation from constraining and flattening paradigms. In the first concern, relativity erodes responsibility and thereby degrades morality—yet relationality acknowledges the embeddedness of a person’s life within the particularities of a relational network, evoking an accountability and responsiveness born of attachment and love. To the second concern, the notion of “objective truth,” which contends to describe reality *as it truly is*, can be implicated in hegemonic cultures that operate to control, commodify and assimilate individual expressions—yet relationality preserves the uniqueness of each person within a relational field that is responsive, respecting and appreciative; recognising that diversity contributes to a stronger and more

robust collective whole. Together these polarities hold an entire picture, and one which may be held by the wideness of a dialectic, relational lens.

Participants and Particulars

This study explores the significance of nature affinity in construing and reflexively understanding the self. An important aspect of this exploration takes place within the adventure therapy (AT) of Shunda Creek program. This residential wilderness-based program serves addiction recovery in young adult men (ages 18 to 24) for a 90-day duration (Russell, Gillis, & Hayes, 2020). Treatment, both in camp and on trail, is overseen by clinicians and facilitated by experienced support staff, with an approach that strives to be responsive and empowering to the client. Shunda employs an integration of experiential and mindfulness-based approaches with a strong emphasis on group engagement, intention setting, and a progressive journey of treatment marked by initiation rites into next stages of treatment. Extended wilderness trips, both solo and in groups, are integral components of treatment, framed by preparation and intention setting in advance, and reflection and processing upon return, harvesting and integrating the experiences of this adventure.

The adventure therapy (AT) that informs much of the Shunda Creek program is a nature-based therapeutic model using nature experiences as a key factor of holistic healing (Gass, Gillis, & Russell, 2012). Its roots trace back to the mid 20th century (Rutko & Gillespie, 2013), and goes by different names such as wilderness therapy (Russell, 2001) and outdoor behavioural healthcare (Roberts, Stroud, Hoag, & Massey, 2017; Reese et al 2018), and within the past decade has enjoyed a considerably expanding base of literature in the field. AT's emphasis on "a prescriptive use of

adventure experiences” (Gass, Gillis, & Russell, 2012, p. 1), has typically trended toward themes of action, intention and choice, and some have suggested that the nature-based element of AT remains under-recognised (Beringer & Martin, 2003; Nicholls & Gray 2007; Norton & Peyton, 2017; Reese, 2018; Rutko & Gillespie, 2013); yet more recently the impact of mindfulness practices in AT have become a subject of exploration (Norton & Peyton, 2017; Russell, Gillis & Heppner, 2016). Significantly, a recent meta-analysis (Schutte, & Malouff, 2018) finds a significant relationship between mindfulness and connectedness to nature, though no studies from AT were represented. In light of the emphasis AT places on an active engagement within and upon the natural world, an important shift in our focus here brings Nature to the fore, viewing it as home, with the meaningful sense of connection and relationality that such an appraisal may evoke.

At Shunda several instruments routinely chart the progress and experiences of its clients. More than providing information for program improvement, the measures facilitate the therapeutic benefit of routine outcome monitoring (ROM; Russell & Gillis, 2017; Boswell, Kraus, Miller, & Lambert, 2015), in which the results and progress of outcome measures are reviewed and discussed with clients by a clinician. The adventure therapy experiencing scale (ATES) is administered by a therapist at two week intervals alongside an outcome measure of psycho-social stress (the OQ 45.2). The ATES measures the self-perceived impact of AT experiences for clients, and features *nature* as one factor, alongside *reflection*, *challenge* and *inter/intrapersonal* factors. To understand the impact and effect of mindfulness experiences on the clients, the FFMQ is completed at the beginning and end of their stay—this scale measures mindfulness across five

facets: observing, describing (internal states), acting with awareness, non-judging and nonreactivity, contributing to the client's understanding and engagement of mindfulness.

The adventure therapy experiencing scale (ATES) has undergone several iterations, and in its current form emerged with four factors across 21 items (using confirmatory factor analysis, Russel & Gillis, 2017): reflection, challenge, group adventure, and nature. In terms of reliability, ATES showed a high internal consistency for the total scale (.92) and for each of the four factors, with α coefficients ranging from .68 to .92. The data given in the ATES has both quantitative and qualitative aspects, and while our approach does not entail a formal analysis of this quantitative data, it is important to acknowledge its quantitative framing. Further, our qualitative approach does not bar us from interacting with this “closed” data, as part of our integrative approach. The qualitative exploration that elaborates the felt connection of self with nature, and the ways this impacts an openness of self in relationship to the world, then extend through this data of the ATES, into the sources of my more immediate interactions within the Shunda program, and my own relations with the natural world as well.

My live-in work within this community as a practicum therapist engenders the values of participatory observation in this study. Participatory research engenders a bottom-up approach, in which priorities are defined by the participant and their perspectives are taken into consideration throughout key points in the process (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). The dispersion of power implicit to this stance is well-suited to the culture of Shunda Creek, which strives to find a good balance in the power dynamic between staff and clients through principles from *the right use of power* (Barstow, 2008). Principles of participatory research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), as well as the listening

guide method (Gilligan, 2015), are attentive to the challenges of marginalised, so-called “at-risk” populations (also “at-promise”, cf. Berberian & Davis, 2020), including clients struggling with substance use disorder (SUD). Participatory values bear common strains with the motif of relationality, particularly regarding relational accountability, as Shawn Wilson observes in charting out an Indigenous research paradigm (2008).

My participation in the community of Shunda has consisted in my living at the camp 3 days every week throughout the research, during which I joined in most group programmed activities, including AA meetings, out-trip intention setting, community meetings, mealtimes, rites of passage (passage fires), and other aspects of community life. I have kept a journal to document interactions, perspectives and experiences that took place in this time, particularly relating to natural interactions, ensuring the anonymity of others involved. In particular I use this writing as a kind of self-observation, to reflect on my place in the community, my own sense of self in nature, and to check myself for bias and an appropriate sense of distance, as an important aspect of my participatory role (Crossman, 2020). To this end I have also reviewed my entries at the end of these periods, and included additional reflections on key aspects of my overall experience.

Ethical Considerations

A key consideration for this research is how it impacts others who are involved. Working from a posture of relationality means that accountability is the beating heart of this project, and this extends foremost to the at-risk (and “at-promise”) population of SUD recovering participants that I engage with. For many of these young men their time at Shunda represents an essential lifeline, even as stories of past clients who have

succumbed to the high-risk lifestyle of relapse weighs heavily on the staff team that I worked alongside. My participation within the program was held with this sobering awareness.

From a broader view, such accountability means joining the culture at Shunda in its own right with a responsive and listening stance; this kind of positive, supportive culture between the young men represents one of the most impacting aspects of their treatment. As a participant observer in this community, it was essential to conduct myself in ways that affirmed this positive environment, and proceed with sensitivity as though entering a different culture. My research interests could not be allowed to interfere with the structure, movements and ethos of the program. For instance, in spite of my passion for the subject matter, it was important for me to restrain this as a topic of conversation with clients in favour of their own perspectives and intentions in treatment, with the same being true on group culture and program levels. Because of my involvement in the community, the research is informed by participatory research values, however, as I did not directly involve clients from the program in the design and implementation of the research, the research lacks this important participatory quality. Consistent with participatory concerns, the interests of gathering credible observations meant needing to remain “somewhat detached” (Crossman, 2020). Having consistent supervision through my clinical supervisor was an important safeguard to these ends, and on many occasions this relationship helped garner the reflexive self-awareness that was critical in maintaining this ethical space.

My role in the program as a practicum therapist, removed me from concerns of maintaining program structures and routines, and thus helped mitigate the biases and

conflicts related to power struggles. I was able to participate in trail outings, group sessions and one-on-one counselling sessions with the guys (mostly in natural settings), as well as general community life, including dinner and dorm hangouts, without having to implement and facilitate too much structure of the program, which can lead to relational tension and power struggle. Furthermore, the CCPA code of ethics and standards of practice, as well as the supervisory relationship I have with the program's head clinician, guided my conduct as a clinician with clients, and framed my participatory engagement as researcher as well. Here it is also important to acknowledge how the added dynamic of my own research brought in this secondary role, one that could not be allowed to eclipse the primary role of providing therapeutic care. My journaling process as well as my supervision has helped maintain this priority. Beyond this, the CCPA code of ethics outlines important issues relating to conducting research in the field, which has been instructive to the process as well. Subject welfare (CCPA, 2013), for instance, outlines the way that researchers are responsible to protect the welfare of participants.

Another aspect of accountability pertains specifically to the data collection of the ATES. These data are collected by the program, and are anonymised for research purposes being subject to their own ethical protocols. The identities of all participants in this data are unknown to me, and remain so throughout the entire process. Further to this, all interactions with clients, and the experiences I have held in this program are recorded and presented in a way that protects the identities of the clients, and have been completed through the gathering of appropriate consent, in the way of signed documents. Finally, this project has also been reviewed by a research ethics board (REB), under the

guidelines of the tri council policy statement (TCPS). Beyond this as the heuristic approach concerns my own personal knowing, the data that is collected pertains to the impacts these clients made on me, and is thus not a direct study of the clients.

Finally, I also include other therapeutic encounters that I have participated in along the way, and from which I have learned, and gather some of these as interactions within the fictional character named “Tamara”. Any identifying information is excluded from these narratives.

Art-of-Fact

A process of interaction has been developing for me as I engage with the data of ATES through an heuristic approach. The significance of building a relationship with the comments of these young men stands front of mind as I have begun highlighting verbs in their comments, as well as small phrases that catch my eye. Using these to populate a bank of words and phrases, I read over my collection for a second time, reflecting on their meaning, feeling, and what it would be like to live through them. The next step sets out to arrange them in a flow of meaning that brings them into relation with one another and the stream of this project through my own felt encounter of them. In their new form, I add small and sparse inclusions of my own words, or my own rephrasing of the words of these men, which I format in italics. What emerges from this process is a poem that captures an interaction with the itemised data of ATES material with itself, through my own creative process, which I dub *art-of-fact*. This is a first expression—or perhaps, first order creative synthesis, of my immersion in the data, and may be explored recursively with other data sets and sources, and through different modes of expression (multi-modal expression). For instance, after reflecting on the poem, I may try to depict it with pencil

on paper, paint on canvas, arranging natural items, or exploring body postures, positions and movements that explore other layers of the phenomenological depth of this relational artifact. Each art-of-fact may be allowed to collect around its own theme, and will be used for later interpretation.

Iterations of this process include the method described by Carol Gilligan (2015) in listening for the *I*, and constructing poems out of I statements. This highlights personal statements and emphasises the voice of the participant. Another method I employ in tandem with this, is a focus on verbs and action words. Insofar as a verb entails action it implies a transition, a change and a movement, attending to the verbs that are given—often with an implied subject (e.g. “love the outdoors”) may signal movement, transition or transformation in the voice of the speaker, or at least depict their sense of relation to these states. Of course, the recursive use of these techniques means applying them in relation to the voices given through the ATES comments, as well as to words inscribed in my own journals, and even second level interpretations of the sources. While the poetic process here entails a movement away from the original voice of the client, by holding these in the context of our relationship, as well as the context of the program I am able to reflect on the experience while decentering my own interpretation and connecting my knowing in relation to their own.

Overall, the recursive style of this exploration parallels the nonlinear pattern of human growth, learning and development (Grimm, Ram & Hagamani, 2011), and thus takes on an iterative and overlapping technique resembling something of a braiding process. The three sources have been intentionally engaged in an alternating fashion throughout the gleaning and interpretive stage, rotating through the ATES, my personal

relationship and connection with Nature and my participatory experiences at Shunda.

This way immersion in each source can be followed by an incubation, and any synergies and relationships that emerge become part of the illumination.

At Home in Nature:

A relationship with nature has been an integral aspect of my upbringing, and its impact reverberates with ever increasing consciousness into my adult years as I grow in recognition of the deep and enduring place it occupies in my felt sense of well-being and resilience. Retracing the timeline of my life in terms of this relationship uncovers the profound significance that the natural world holds within my very sense of self.

River Relations

My youngest years were saturated with countless hours of outdoor play upon the grassy fields, knotted brush and high-canopied poplars of the small riverside acreage I grew up on. A veritable menagerie of 'domesticated' creatures became unlikely playmates, from llamas, cows, and horses, to chicken, geese, guinea fowl, and peacocks. These near daily encounters were punctuated with mystical visitations of wilder personalities that wandered the natural corridor of provisions carved out by the winding river: deer, owl, coyote, and even the odd bear, moose and eagle. The expansive valley draw hosted a luscious array of willow, poplar, spruce, wildrose, wildgrasses and more; and tending it all, the constant yet ever-changing flow of the river waters—lifesblood to this numinous collective. In all, this manifold other-than-human world was a vibrant and dynamic companion and confidant, teacher and parent to my childhood years.

City of Lights and Sound

It was only when my college years pulled me away from all these relations that I began to realise what they truly meant to me. Living in the city, hemmed in to its manufactured landscapes and its incessant hum of light and sound ever grasping at my unconscious attentions, there grew a slow build of subtle yet thoroughgoing discontent, that I struggled to articulate. I scarcely realised that each time in visiting my parents the inevitable pull of being alone beside the water's edge was invariably satisfied as well. My awareness of the attachment to this land grew painfully undeniable when my parents sold the property to the government as a part of the provincial highway expansion plans. The pain of seeing my childhood environment reduced to a featureless highway platform disturbed me greatly, yet still I had not fully apprehended the meaning of this grief. There was something in the contrast between all the slow time this land had patiently and generously gifted my upbringing, and the motorised speed and disregard for which it was now laid asunder.

Land-based Healing

Voice began to emerge for this grief—proceeding from the deep connections that underlay it, as I began participating in Indigenous ceremonies, such as talking and healing circles, pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, tea ceremonies, big smokes and others. I learned so much from *Nehiyaw* (Cree) Elder, Patrick Daigneault, and the community that gathers at his weekly sweat lodges about how “all my relations,” natural law, and the medicine wheel are enacted and brought to life in ceremony within the frame of “land-based healing”; I am also in deep gratitude for the teachings and spiritual knowings of Piegan Blackfoot Elder, Grant Little Moustache, with the deep respect he holds for life

and the spiritual world, and the way it holds us in connection and balance with Creator's world. Reciprocity, respect for living beings large and small, and even for non-living beings—acknowledging the spirit in all the world. All this uncovers in me the spiritual and relational quality of my affinity to the natural world, offering language to express and cherish these beautiful connections. Raven, grizzly, elk, and nuthatch; willow, spruce, sage and buffalo bean—these natural personalities become much more than mere items and objects alongside my path. Rather, as I begin to see—and feel, the whole world as populated with beings, persons and personalities of far greater diversity and intelligence than I had first imagined, and as I acknowledge them in their nature, they become companions, fellow beings, guides, and teachers, holding forms of ancient wisdom that by and large allude my own kinship network. Theirs is an authentic and interconnected intelligence, equally intertwined with an internal sensation and instinct, as with the external networks of ecological relations they inhabit. Theirs is a dispersed understanding, untouched by the trappings of hegemony and power that so easily entangle our human knowings. Every being acts and interacts from within the particulars of its own existence, none seeking the final, definitive word.

From an Indigenous lens, all these acts, movements and expressions are interdependent, and as I begin to include myself in this view, I begin to see the way my own human actions, choices, and movements in this world deeply impact other beings; this evokes a sense of relational accountability as I come to understand myself as equal to all other beings— not more important. The Western discourse of human dominion over the land and animals, and the hierarchy that this establishes, thus begins to erode into a dynamic of lesser power and control, and greater connection and belonging.

Concurrently my graduate studies in Psychotherapy and Spirituality call for in depth reflection and exploration of my own sense of self both through research assignments and personal therapy. This *self*, which at first appeared singular and distinct, begins to appear differently as my awareness gradually deepens and expands; the ways I understand myself grow more nuanced, manifold, and more related. The interconnectedness of the natural world on one level becomes a reflection of my growing internal awareness of the many facets of my self; and on another characterises the ways this self responds, reciprocates, connects, identifies—in a word, *relates*—with the external world. For instance, I begin to recognise a part of myself that holds up high expectations and ideals, creating internal pressure to be and act in a certain way. Rather than being solely identified with this “idealist”, as I sometimes call him, I am learning to hold this in relation with qualities of generosity, compassion and gentleness. Here I begin to recognise his positive intention of helping me grow and flourish, but within the balance of a compassionate acceptance of my circumstance. The complexity and nuance of these interactions, many of which remain implicit and inarticulate, find connection and expression outside themselves in the ceaseless interactions of life within the wide natural world.

The deepest motivation of this research is in cultivating an integrated voice from within myself that extends in a way of speaking that honours the numinous relationality it is composed of. Success will be marked by a discourse that on one hand holds with integrity the particularities of the lifeline which I inhabit—thought, feeling, and history, and on the other gives rise, with humble and steady expression, to the profound relatedness of my existence in the unfathomable diversity of the world. Learning to speak

in this way is a deeply spiritual endeavour for me; recognising how the life I possess does not belong to me, but moves through me, even as it moved through my ancestry in an unbroken line from the beginning, this is core to the meaning of “spiritual” for me. Kahlil Gibran evokes this understanding,

“Your children are not your children.

They are sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself” (2012, p. 34)

Breath itself nods toward this way of being. I inhale, expanding with openness to the shared air that envelops me, integrating and holding with vital connectivity. I exhale, releasing my hold of what resides within me, giving back what was never mine to a world whose existence I share in, grounding myself in what remains. I move within and between the humble weight of necessity and the exuberance of wonder and delight; between earth and air I find my *self*.

Chapter 2: Home

“When all is said and done, we’re just walking each other home”

— Ram Dass

First World: A Poem

By David Reize

Now I lay me

Upon the Mother's gentle textures

Turned from green to yellow

By days of shorter light and longer slanting rays

This yellow grass beneath me

Made gold in the newness of radiant Sky

This joyful witness to the gradual emergence of Day

Abounding with delight

The mother's wild and all-consuming silence

Erodes at the complexity of my higher mind

Dissolves the cares of an overextended ego

giving birth to my awareness anew

amidst the simple and rugged orders of a natural world

This primal and preeminent unity.

Lying ever beneath and ever beyond

the human world -

built upon worlds,
 built upon worlds

But this first world

 simply is.

Remembered in the instinct of flesh

Sparked in the intuition of our first unattended thoughts

This world

 Whose beauty is manifold simplicity,

 Whose truth is intricate and bare,

 Whose existence is rooted and

 self-assured

Who is only ever

no more than

itself unto itself: being unto being.

No Place Like Home

 “Nature is not a place to visit. It is home”

 —G. Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*

As we enter this discussion of home I invite you, the reader, to take your shoes off, and imagine setting your feet down on a carpet of lush, soft moss. Perhaps you can imagine a gentle flutter in the air, accompanied by the bright and delicate welcome of chirping sparrows not far away. Find a comfortable position for your body and take a few

deep breaths and allow your gaze to orient you within this moment. Notice any settling that might take place in your nervous system; perhaps you can find a home within this moment. Perhaps a home may be offered within the conversation that is about to transpire between the following thoughts, narratives and experiences I've strung together in this section. I hope that you can even begin to move about within these themes and ideas, perhaps branching off with some of your own. Please make yourself at home.

Welcome to this chapter.

We begin here, with home, just as a tree begins embedded in the earth; *grounded* in place; secure and stable within a soil that will support its development. We are creatures of the earth and sky, of root and wing, and we begin now, as we began at the very first: rooted and embedded, enclosed within a warm safety; supported and assured. As perhaps you have already begun to experience, home is a powerful and ubiquitous aspect of our nature. It fosters a settling of the mind, heart and nervous system. A felt sense of ease supports the whole being. These senses of familiarity, safety and comfort that home engenders transcend the human experience, being widely found within the more-than-human world. The digging, rooting, weaving, piling, and constructing instincts of living creatures show the vital significance in life's often painstaking tendency to take root and embed within its environment.

Spaces turn into places, environments into habitats, and locations into homes as they are marked by the distinct and particular scent of their inhabitants. The place of home is marked by the nature and character of the creature that builds it; imprinted by the modes through which they relate to their ecological world for surviving and thriving. Home is not only a provision of sheltering from elements and enemies, but is an

underlying felt sense of familiarity, safety and comfort. Besides housing stores of sustenance, a home shares space with family and intimate relations, and even neighbours and non-threatening others, as the muskrat is known to do in sharing the warmth of its burrow with shrews, voles and rice rats, particularly in the cold winter months (Kiviat, 1978). In a very real way home is the soil for the intimate relationships that make up the self; it is a context secure and stable, and in the same moment stirring a gentle convection within these relations to support the vital movements of life. The self is composed of home relationships, for better or worse—in security and safety, and in chaos and unsafety, and the movements and exchanges that take place within them have both a formative and self-sustaining significance.

This is a deep and fundamental characteristic of living creatures on this planet—this shared trait of taking root within place. Creatures of air, land and sea, we are all *homing beings*; And fundamentally the place in which we home—this ground of our being, is our planet. It can be said that the vast array of diversity that is *homed* within this world has been given birth to and parented by the totality of conditions of this planet—by this planet's nature, by its personality, by all its relations interacting and relating with one another in a diverse and grand ecology. This dynamic, balanced, all-encompassing personality of care and provision many call *mother earth*. The significance of this parental relationship may be at risk of being obscured in our moment of history by a confusion of the scientific tongue, a pursuit of stark causation, and a reduction of the agency and personality of the world to mere cause and effect; in a word, the exorcism of spirit from the cosmos, leaves nothing but hollow, empty matter to our minds. What is left for us if we have lost our sense of home within this world? And yet even for the

supremely cultivated pinnacle of scientific Western minds, a common experience for astronauts, projected into space and seeing our planet from outside itself is a deeply personal and emotional connection (Yaden et. al, 2016). This overwhelming sense of “identification with humankind and the planet as a whole” is a common experience for astronauts, described as the “overview effect” (2016, p. 1).

At the outset of this discussion we must acknowledge a complexity in speaking of home. While there is a sense that each one of us has had a home, and with it the some sense of attachment, familiarity, “normal”, and relative comfort—for without these essential supports in our development none of us would be here; yet no home is ideal, and none’s development has been perfectly supported. For many who have had to forge for themselves a semblance of protection and warmth within cold and even hostile environments, this word may mean very little, or even something negative. In particular the relationships implied by home, where they have been neglectful or harmful, can carry many painful and threatening associations. The same is true of the natural world, particularly as it is enshrouded by the apprehensions of a culture that is increasingly disconnected from it. The voice with which we speak of home, then must be born on aspirational rather than descriptive tones.

As we explore the nature of home, and a home in nature, the interweaving of the contrasting themes of belonging and autonomy, receptivity and action, trauma and healing, fear and love provide a dynamic of depth, texture and complexity. Fear, friendship, freedom and flow are important themes within the overlapping and oscillating movements of this discourse. Here we hope to enact these strong motifs in the ways we may observe in nature, finding a balance of opposites, rather than being a contradiction;

in this way when one polarity belongs to the other, the energy between them becomes actualised in a healing, growing, transcending movement we may want to call “flow”. We are borrowing the sense of synchronicity described by *flow state* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), but with an emphasis on the relationality as the essential condition. Home, as it is made up of relationships, offers to be a constant and caring host to the nuance and complexity of this natural dialectic of relationality.

Familiar Places

Home renders the important difference—both in quality and feel—between a sense of *space* and a sense of *place*; it is a difference that has been taken up in sociology (c.f. Urry, 2004; Thrift, 2003), geography and anthropology (cf. Lawrence & Low, 1990; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Haenn, and Wilk 2016), as well as in the field of psychology (cf. Fullilove, 1996; Hopkins & Dixon, 2006) with particular gravity in ecopsychology (cf. Scannell & Gifford, 2010, Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). While exploring this distinction in depth exceeds the purview of this study, the difference of “space” and “place” embedded in language represents an important feature of our nature to construct *places* of attachment, connection, familiarity and enclosure, as well as to orient and relate to *spaces* beyond, in an openness to novelty, adventure, opportunity and exposure. This dialectical positioning of place and space is important to our discussion, and parallels the interplay between home and away, belonging and autonomy, “connection and adventure” (as our research question frames it) and love and freedom. This dialectical lens is not meant to draw up exclusive categories, but to elicit the relationship of difference, and to move with—and be moved by the energy that is created by this polarity. Thus, while

home bears an important sense of place, as we shall discover, it also encloses possibilities of vastness and underlies possibilities of freedom that we may want to call “space”.

The idea of “finding my *place* in this world” carries a sense of belonging, reciprocity and responsibility that sews a “me” into a “we”, weaving through the greater fabrics of society and the natural world. Recalling my own experiences as a young adult, this question never seemed far from my mind, and I felt myself perpetually in search of a “real” adult to make place for me; to validate my belonging there, recognising the good in me. In mid-adulthood, I am by no means beyond these concerns, but to encounter young men struggling with addictions for whom this question is carried with such a sense of survival, brings back for me the gravity of place in the question of “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?” As I reflect, the significance of being an older man holding space for the stories and experiences of these young men is difficult to grapple with, and while trying, I’m certain I failed to pay its proper due. Yet when I have taken these young men outdoors, and facilitated—or merely held witness to, some experience of calm connection with a bubbling stream or a mountain vista, it becomes real and apparent that their questions of self are being held in some way by a far older, elemental witness.

The significance of this witnessing presence should not be understated, and Martin Buber evokes its generative effects on the self: “The inmost growth of the self does not take place, as people like to suppose today, through our relationship to ourselves, but through being made present by the other and knowing that we are made present by him” (Buber, 1988, p. 61). In some rare moments, I stand in as such an *other*, and yet it is the low-level frequency and immersive qualities of the natural realm that bear out this influence in subtle and thorough-going ways. These young men shared many

experiences of “being made present” by nature, and “knowing that we are made present by” the grand nurturance of this original holding environment. The gentle intimacy of this recognition is profound. This realm is both truly other, and encompassingly supportive.

The transformation of *space* into *place* takes place through familiarity—the fostering of family ties. Pathways are both created and found through an exploration that sprawls across the terrain like vascular systems, connecting source to cache, opportunity to security. Repeated usage packs the soil and foliage underfoot, clearing away bush and branch, making routes of travel that are shared by many; and for each creature that passes through, the familiarity of *this* place hinges on one crucial relation: the route home. Here we may notice how the imperial slogan “All roads lead to Rome” appropriates the inalienable felt-sense for each being that “all roads lead to *home*”. Animal trails nearing dens and burrows in wild spaces take on the same concentrated convergence as country roads joining into highways and freeways as they near a city. This central, orienting, north-star quality of home echoes in the significance that Mircea Eliade ascribes to the *axis mundi*: “Every Microcosm, every inhabited region, has a Centre; that is to say, a place that is sacred above all.” (Eliade, 1991, p. 39).

If you have ever had the experience of landing in a foreign country, awash with the difference of smells, sights, terrain, climate and culture, and at last find the room in which you may lay down the burdens of your personal effects, shutting yourself inside that enclosed place, turning in the blinds, turning off the lights and cocooning within the blankets, you know the sense of relief in establishing a provisional home, a felt sense of safety, even in a far away place. This enclosure becomes the epicentre of all further explorations and journeys outward, and the mind innately keeps track of the way back to

this place of security and rest. Likewise, my room at Shunda held a palpable boundary between the common space of the dorm and the enclosed private place of my quarters. On certain levels I related to the way some clients would hibernate whole mornings, and even days away in the safe, secure enclosure of their room, compounded by difficulty of substance withdrawal or relational conflict. This retreat into safe, enclosed place parallels the way substances may provide an enclosure within the subjective realm, cocooning within altered states of consciousness. Escapes of this kind may have an adaptive value in view of a flood of overwhelming pressure, pain and difficulty, while patterns of return to such places where ‘everything is okay,’ even if only through artifice, entails a common resemblance of the addictive impulse. For many in addictions, the using becomes a make-shift home in a cold, foreign and threatening space.

Home is instinctually central to every creature that possesses it. In heart, mind and action, this rootedness in place signifies a veritable centre of gravity. Being emplaced within home, the self rests at ease, natural and authentic. To say “this is my home” bears out the intimacy of the words *my* and *home*, and unearths the way that *who I am* takes place in relation to *this* particular place. It is a place of belonging—but is it that I belong in this place, or that this place belongs to me? This paradox evokes a reciprocity of connection that teases out some vital movement between the states being held, supported, nurtured, and the acts of holding, ordering, possessing. Day and night, summer and winter, north and south, male and female: the natural world hosts a plethora of polarities whose opposite qualities and opposing positions, when captured in still-frame overlook the power of their relatedness; But when perceived in live motion, the exchange of energy that transpires in the relation of their differences proves to be the very dynamic of flow

that generates and sustains life. So it is with this active-receptive sense of owning home and belonging to it.

Hearth and Home: A Place of Order and Attachment

Entering into this dynamic, we may notice how the place of home holds the self in its need for stability, security, and safety. Such familiarity encompasses a family of vital and intimate relations that call the self into being, and in turn reflect it back to the self, in effect making it real. As we shall explore, this is particularly salient to young development, and echoes into maturity as it leaves important imprints on the internal realm, impacting a person's felt sense of security and agency in the world at large. In reverse, a home may also reflect the internal realm of the ones living there: bleak and bare, chaotic and cluttered, warm and personal, organised and controlled. Jung also explores this connection between self and home in his own self-reflective work (Jung, 1995), imagining the building of self as a gradual construction of a mansion, adding room by room. In this parallel, the maintenance and upkeep of a home takes on the significance of self-care, as the recursive dynamic translates the care of one's home into a caring nurturing environment of the self—engendering the energised relationship between active and receptive polarities.

One recent client—we will call Tamara, described her most recent recovery from addictions as beginning with a letter from her landlord that indicated an upcoming walkthrough. Imagining someone else walking through her house sparked for Tamara a realisation that she lived in a house that felt like a dump—a house, but not a home. This realisation worked its way out in a deep cleaning process that lasted days, and in the end she marvelled at the way her now clean and orderly home changed the way her family

moved and interacted with one another, making things feel more light, personable and cheery. Tamara's house had reflected a sense of how she felt inside, reckoning with the aftermath of childhood abuse, neglect and the complex trauma of a prolonged abusive relationship in adulthood, it felt like a dumping ground for someone else's trash. A thick layer of numbing mechanisms and escape strategies had proven adaptive in her short-term survival, but in the long run laid waste to her internal sense of safety and order. Top among these strategies was Tamara's relationship to alcohol. Tamara's recovery and healing is an ongoing work for her, but this way in which her sense of self is held and nurtured within her home environment was an important insight, and thinking of herself as a kind of home has become an important metaphor for our work together.

From here she and I begin to notice how rigidly enclosed we are in this therapy room—boxed in on all sides. As we work with what is present to us and what we have around us, this very room becomes a metaphor of our therapeutic milieu. In this parallel of self and home we become aware of how “a conventional house [or therapy room] and a rigidly static concept of self [may be] mutually supporting” (Cooper, 1974 p.144), and the implications flow in both directions: of self and self-made environments. In other moments we allow our imaginations to carry us out into the open air, where everything is touching everything else—everything is connected. Thinking in this way means that Tamara's healing does not only draw on what is enclosed within the tightly sealed box of the self, but in connection with “all my relations”, drawing upon a plethora of supporting and reciprocal relationships—an open system. At another moment, in the fostering of thick, deep silence, she feels the presence of grandmothers and grandfathers with us in the room, blessing and supporting her healing.

As Tamara discovered, feeling this active sense of agency over the home that surrounded her entailed a vital empowerment. This quality of home as a place where some control may be exerted and a connection with one's own power may be felt is particularly significant to those who have been subjected to disempowerment in their upbringing and life experiences, whether through childhood neglect, through emotional, physical or sexual abuse, or witnessing any of these within the childhood home. For many these experiences have been echoing and compounding through generations as the effects of unresolved trauma resonate through time. In particular, Asiniwachi Nehiyaw educator Suzanne Methot paints an evocative and clear depiction of how this tragic legacy is passed through Indigenous peoples still reckoning with the historical traumas of more than two centuries of genocidal and actively discriminatory policy in the Canadian context and beyond (Methot, 2019). Ongoing colonial violence and oppression endures today in systems and structures that continue to control the lives of Indigenous peoples, such as child welfare, health system, justice systems. Many enrolled in the addictions program at Shunda come with past stories of trauma, neglect and abuse, some spoken—many unspoken, and perhaps even ineffable.

Actively organising a central space of safety and provision is an ubiquitous act across the living world. The instinct to arrange and order a controlled environment facilitates an involved and conversational dance between the living being and its habitat, as life colludes with its conditions in drawing up boundaries of warmth, shielding, defensibility, concealment, storage and more. What is created within this bounded space is a place of control that suits the immediate biological needs of the creature which endwells it. Each house is crafted through interacting with the textures, pliability, warmth

capacity, durability—in a word personalities, of its neighbouring relations (foliage, terrain, sheddings of other creatures etc.). Thus the creature takes an active role in its surrounding relationships to foster one vital element of home: optimal resting conditions—a signature unique to each species. In a word: abundance.

At Shunda, on one of my first days I was escorted by an exuberant young man, also at the beginning of his time at Shunda, to a rough hewn cave that previous clients had dug into the ground and reinforced with mostly natural materials from the surrounding forest. The boyhood glee this young man exhibited as he showed me the “secret spot in the woods” which I was to tell no one about, elicited something of its significance for him as a refuge and place of succour away from it all. Reading this sense of escape and reclusion in the context of a program aimed at fostering the changes of sober living, it is easy to imagine the sense of safety and acceptance associated with this “fort in the woods”. This home away from it all is subtly encompassed by an entire ecology of beings that are just being themselves. Perhaps in these spaces their recovery might proceed in a manner consistent with Lao Tzu’s observations of this patient realm: “Nature does not hurry, and yet everything is accomplished” (n.d.).

One’s home is one’s castle. This adage evokes a kingdom of personal influence and authenticity for the one living there. The colour of the walls, its adornment with particular photos and art, the arrangement and style of its decor and furniture, the organisation of belongings—all these provide the one belonging to this place a sense of agency and control. In the first place the symbols, meanings and memories of home arrange a temple of remembering—a collection of strong ties, enduring connections, and sacred feelings for *re-collection* of the self; through time these constitute a magnetic arc

around which the relationships, events and perceptions of personal history coalesce into the central narrative of the self: a seminal storyline bearing up the identity in a changing world. Here we inhabit language from the polarity of agency and control—over against its counterpart of belonging and connection, and I am contending that there is a vital sense of empowerment and influence held in one’s home relations; yet, as we submit even this essential sense of agency to the framework of relationality, we are not left with a storyline of “I”, but of “We”, and in this field of awareness self-hood empowerment and authenticity takes on a far richer and deeper quality than the narrow constructs of the self imbued with colonial and hegemonic values.

Thus, more fundamentally, this *re-membering* operates within the field of relationships; being with someone in their home is an intimate act, for being at ease in the presence of another means abiding with them. In this abiding the *re-cognition* of my being within the mind and heart of another becomes an essential witnessing that calls forth and sustains my self; *re-unions* generate this gravity on a collective level, with feasts, games and the telling and retelling of stories that interweave personhoods into a vibrant relational fabric. Egoic reflections and supports of this kind are vitally important for our younger selves—even the ones that yet reside within, and at bottom the shared nature of this place of home highlights the significance of the self as a relational construct, even as it supports our sense of agency.

In its optimum form, the home environment itself reflects back the purpose, action, movement, interactivity and creativity of its inhabitants—these effects of the self become external signs that the self carries a weight in the world, takes up space, possesses gravity—in a word: *matters*. Place is habituated by motion and intention. As

Levine develops, *poiesis* refers to a basic human capacity to influence and shape our environments (2011). It entails an ability to respond within the world, to imprint upon it, and in “building its world, the human shapes its environment, [which in turn] shapes itself” (Levine, 2011, pp. 23-24). This recursive dynamic is a relational movement which also takes place between the self and the natural world. Berger (2017) suggests that the act of building a home in nature, with natural materials, whether symbolic or actual, fosters a sense of safety, belonging and connection within nature, holding strong therapeutic value. This place of arrangement and orderedness positions the self as actively *possessing* the home; and yet as the dynamic plays out, the inverse is also true, and the self receives a sense of belonging to another, i.e. *belongs to* home.

Living in disconnection and dis-location from the land, whether by political removal, as for so many Indigenous peoples around the globe (e.g. townships in Africa, reservations in North America), or by urbanisation—an outcome of the dominant values of control, efficiency, and convenience—which encloses the experiences of the majority living in the so-called “developed” world, lend to anemic bonds of connection and belonging to this land that nevertheless continues to support and sustain our living.

Warm Walls

“I desire the impossible: to go back into my mother’s womb—to float there in that small limitless universe among the stars, with no beginning, no end... waiting for the new world to begin... constantly reborn”

—Prince Oleg;

Vikings

As it holds and supports life, growth and developments, home is a womb, a place of embeddedness; the self is a part of this place, belonging both in it and to it. There is something both primordial and spiritual here: A sense of oneness and potential; innocence and wholeness. It is like an infant who continues to experience herself as a part of her mother, not recognising the difference. As a boy sitting in my favourite spot beside the river, I could become embedded between that radiant warmth of a summer's day and the cool comfort of waters flowing beside me, carefree and at ease—feeling myself a part of this harmonious place. This sense of home is a warmth, a comfort, an attachment. It is a secure base that meets me at the place of my development, responsive to my cues of need, conspiring with the life within me and around me, striving to be and to become.

The spiritual imagination of returning to that original home is invoked in the waters of baptism—a practice that long predates its adoption by Jesus and John the baptist. Just as passing through the waters of the Red Sea became the birthing moment for the nation of Israel, the waters of baptism resonate with the imagery of renewal, regeneration and new identity as if returning to the womb and being born once more. Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 elicits the wonder and confusion of this spiritual notion, a birth in the spirit and an ensuing belonging to this deeper, spiritual existence. Jesus picks up this description at the moment of birth, but the implied notion of being spiritually wombed remains unspoken.

God's spirit hovering over the primordial waters in Genesis 1 underlies the significance of both Jesus' baptism and Moses' exodus. Often overlooked in this original creation story is the depth and fecundity of the darkness. Deep thoroughgoing dark. Preminent conditions of generativity, and regeneration. This lightless world of deep

waters is the womb of the cosmos. For many first peoples of North America, this womb is within Mother earth herself; the sweat lodge is an ubiquitous ceremony reenacting this holding environment as an experiential place of renewal, healing, and importantly, a sense of communion with “all my relations”, both human and beyond-human. Embedded in that dark womb of mother earth, sensing in my flesh this warm, all-encompassing immersion in watery darkness, my primordial relationship with both this body and the natural world emerge with undeniable clarity: I am made up of Nature; I am both in possession of and belonging to this natural existence. This place of healing and regeneration is an original home of my development, and goes back to the very beginning. However one may conceive of the emergence of the human species, its original embeddedness within the natural realm cannot be avoided. Our physiologies are interwoven with the qualities of this original home, and its dynamic movements and cycles are imprinted deep within.

In this light, the well-documented therapeutic value of being in nature comes as no surprise, particularly when held against the backdrop of knowledge held in Indigenous oral traditions. Many studies have focused specifically on the beneficial effects of nature engagement and connectedness, including increases in positive affect, cognitive functioning and clarity (Kamitsis & Francis, 2013; Schutte & Malouff, 2018, Frantz, et al., 2005; Barton, J., Bragg et al., 2016; Howell et al., 2011), its qualities as a therapeutic factor are less explored. In light of the strong Western emphasis on cerebral qualities, and the prevailing notion that it is our minds and our inventions that separate us from Nature, the sense we hold, and experience of ourselves is fragmented and imbalanced. The natural world returns us to our senses, to our bodies, and here we may recover the aspect

of ourselves that has never perceived itself as separate and aloof, and through this humble flesh be returned to unified existence.

Chapter 3: Body as Home

These Original Homes

It is possible that the trajectory of Western thinking, imbued and saturated as it has been with themes of light (e.g. Judeo-Christian light imagery, Enlightenment), and the corresponding faculty of vision—the most far-reaching and distanced of our human senses, has enculturated a value of seeing and thinking from a distance, with a sense of control and agency that comes from this same position. Darkness, on the other hand, primes the attention to closer sensations: smelling, feeling, tasting and hearing—emblems of our nature as material beings. Embodiment within a physical home of skin, muscle, bone, marrow, nerves, vessels—this delicate inter-weaving of hidden systems—sustains the whole being in tireless, innate and selfless acts, while beneath them all, the heart keeps steady time in a rhythm of coursing sustenance.

As fundamental as the body is, returning to this original home may be uncomfortable to our modern sensibilities. The language commonly used in mindfulness, grounding and embodiment exercises of “dropping back into the body” implies a default mode of being away, or outside the body. Whereas becoming mindful and aware of the body is an essential reconnection with the nature of our embodiment, common sensibilities resist dropping back into that supra-sophistication that masticates, sweats, digests, pulses, defecates and flatulates—performing all manner of tomfoolery that the modern human would best pretend did not take place. In parallel to Hannah Ardent’s chilling observation (1958) in the dawning moments of the space age, that the modern man anticipates with great relief the advent an escape “from the imprisonment of this earth” (1958, p. 1) an escape from this corporeal encasement has been imagined in the

popular narratives of the Six Million Dollar Man (1973-1978), the Matrix (1999, 2003), Altered Carbon (2018, 2020) and more. These curated experiences reflect a largely unconscious disconnect between mind and body on a collective level, and we further flesh out the significance of these narratives on our relational selves in a later chapter.

Further bearing this out Ardent writes,

For some time now, a great many scientific endeavors have been directed toward making life also “artificial,” toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature. It is the same desire to escape from imprisonment to the earth that is manifest in the attempt to create life in the test tube, in the desire [...] to produce superior human beings and to alter their size, shape and function. (Ardent, 1958)

Time Outside Our Bodies

The global pandemic caused by COVID-19 (current to the writing of this paper) drastically exacerbates a phenomenon and ailment of modern human living that has only been growing: screen-time; the time we spend within a screen is time we spend outside our bodies.

As we humans are spending more and more time entranced by our artifacts, caught up in the dazzle of the digital screen, it enables us not to notice—not to feel what’s really going on in the body’s world... *which is really the earth* [emphasis added]. (Nafshy, 2019)

On the other hand, the self gratification that fuels the systems of consumerism that dominate the Western predicament engenders a posture of self-gratifying love towards our own bodies, to the neglect of more caring and nurturing positions. Amidst the roaring

engines of sensationalism and promises of satisfaction that drive contemporary, we come to mine our bodies for pleasure, to landscape and terraform for satisfaction, and to clearcut for ease and comfort, all the while, like with our planet, returning very little in the way of reciprocal care, “killing” the very pain signaling that something might be amiss. We disconnect from the nature of our bodies in the same way we disconnect from the nature of our world. But here, in this embodiment, there remains an instinct, a movement of natural intelligence, encoded in the movements and interactions of each system, ever-growing towards the light, ever-knowing how to heal, wise to all the hidden ways of becoming whole. What the modern mind at best tends to view as a platform for pleasure, comfort and gratification, and at worst as a prison or torture chamber, is in truth our original home, connected inextricably to our original womb, our mother—this earth, yet teeming with abundance, upholding our belonging, sustenance and healing potential.

The Meeting Place of Sensation

Sensations of the body are conducted through the nervous system to the brain, to be held in its awareness. Framed in this way it may appear to us that the mind possesses these sensations—both in seeking them out with the branches of its nerves, and in consolidating, processing and interpreting them through the operations of the brain. As John Locke democratically asserted, the extent of ownership is established by the mixing of one's labour with the outcome in question, and from this view it is easy to see sensations as belonging to the individual that perceives them. David Abram, on the other hand, notices how sensation is a site of meeting between the awareness and the external world (2012). This phenomenological perspective means that sensation, rather than being an experience possessed and owned by a distinctly demarcated self, marks a relationship

with that entity that brushes on the skin, vibrates into the ears, wisps into the nostrils, coats the tongue or meets the eyes. This viewpoint loosens the definitive boundaries between perceiver and perceived, between self and other, reinvigorating the mystery of what *takes place in me* when I perceive, as Merleau-Ponty sought to expound. Such perception importantly shifts the emphasis: “I abandon myself to [what is perceived], I plunge into this mystery, and it ‘thinks itself in me’” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 228). Our perceptions thus become interactions with and within a world that is constantly alive, and brought to life within us. Returning to Locke, even as our sensations mix labour to apprehend sensation, the world is incessantly extending efforts to be sensed in colour, scent, texture, tone—all manner of personality and expression, and this mysterious and numinous encounter takes place in the convergence of active and receptive faculties.

As the site of all perceptions, the body is a playground of relationality, with each sensation marking a relation between self and other. The significance of this within therapy has become quite evident to me, particularly when working with those whose internal experiences of emotion and turmoil quickly overwhelm and threaten their system. For many this is where substance use intervenes, altering the mind-body-heart connections such that thoughts and feelings no longer pose such a perceived threat. One outcome of such escapes, as a client so palpably noticed, is a complete numbing of feelings, and an important part of our work became recovering and processing all the feelings buried under years of this numbing. Drawing the attention to the meeting place of external sensation, both sharpens the awareness and, importantly, *grounds* it. The notion of “grounding” awareness draws attention to the way the stability of the earth beneath us—this vast, diverse network of endless movement and delicate balance,

provides a home for awareness within the senses. The connection between the body and the earth runs deep: our bodies are a part of the natural realm. In this light may be that “grounding” and “centring” are something of the same thing, as perhaps the centre of our truest nature resides in the earth beneath us. In grounding, awareness takes ease in a sense that the world homes within me, and I in the world. At Shunda, the effect of such homing was never more clear and distinct than in stepping outdoors, into the vast sensory banquet that always greeted us.

Attention is a meeting between the reception of stimulus (a relationship in itself) that takes place in sensation, and the active movement of awareness to meet and commune with it. The mind interprets this meeting as a contact with the source of this stimulus, and a jump is quickly made that perceives an immediate contact. It is a feature of the mind to imagine its awareness as reality, to inhabit this reality, and to neglect the implications of our limited scope of our awareness. The illusion is necessary, for without it the mind would have no focal point, no intentionality; yet without the practice of honing awareness, as Dan Siegel—taking up the thread of many Eastern practices and philosophies (e.g. Hinduism/Buddhism), puts forward (2020), without becoming aware of its directionality and its quality, one begins to conflate their own perceived reality with *reality* proper, and the vital dexterity and plasticity of the mind is put at risk. Opening a window on the tunneling capacity of the mind gains critical importance for the awareness that is enmired in the aftermath of trauma, instability and unsupported development.

Returning to Ourselves through Our Senses

One Spring morning I met a friend at the river pathway down the street from our home. We proceeded down increasingly obscure trails, periodically glancing at Joey, his

dog, dart from bush to tree to shoreline. We wove our way through the unkempt wilder-space tucked in behind the trainbridge, bordered on one side by the beaver-inhabited inlet and on the other by the mainstream of the river, as the immutable drama of Alberta springtime unfolded all around us in full symphony. Our conversations fell frequently into natural silence at the exuberance of life that filled all the air around us. We soon found ourselves—or perhaps only beginning to find ourselves—sitting on a soft green patch at the edge of the shoreline, lulled once again into a silent, now meditative disposition before the smooth, placid flow of the Bow River (Mohkinstsis). Joey, by contrast, continued to dash, roam and splash in the waters before us, vying adamantly for our attention with propositions of play laid at our feet in the form of driftwood sticks. As my consciousness moved through this unfolding experience, I began to recognize the way this manifold tableau vivant depicted aspects of my internal reality: My thoughts and passions dashing back and forth, grabbing for the focus of my awareness, while beneath lies the slower, steady flow of passing emotions. (Personal journal entry, 2021)

Merely being in nature in itself does not guarantee that a holistic healing contact is made. Just as a temple houses the divine, a home must be prepared for this joining with nature. The emphasis at Shunda on mindfulness practices stages just such a home within consciousness for synergetic meetings between the senses, the awareness and the natural world. This coming alive to sensation in the natural world is at once a returning of the self to its bodily experience, and a returning to the world of its original emergence. Here I am struck by the perennial quality of this word *return*: re-turn. A sense of cycle, season and movement is implied that reverberates with the dialectic energies between home and

away. The spiritual and redemptive power of this word emerges from the compassionate work of Father Gregory Boyle with LA “homeboys” in *returning one to themselves* (2010).

When our prodigal minds emerge from the stupor (defined as “numbness, insensibility”) of over-stimulation and abstraction, we may return once again to ourselves, and begin to feel our nature once again, and in this resides a great depth of hope, for what we can feel, we may begin to heal. This truth resonates through personal, social, societal and ecological levels of our existence. Being aware and responsive to our body’s world is a reconnection to the land that hold ethical and spiritual significance, as Methot writes,

The constant interaction with the land by knowing it with all five senses guides individuals and provides what is needed to live in harmony with the environment with each other and with oneself. The reciprocal and dialogic relationship with nature provides not only the material needs, but also the ethical moral and spiritual underpinnings of living an ethical life (Methot, 2019, p. 93).

Though our minds may not perceive it, there is an underlying oneness that unifies ourselves with creation. This unity is still present within our unconscious, and supports the constitution of the self with invisible strings. Harold Searles writes:

It seems to me that, in our culture, a conscious ignoring of the psychological importance of the non-human exists simultaneously with a (largely unconscious) over-dependence upon that environment ... The actual importance of that environment to the individual is so great that he dares not recognize it. Unconsciously it is felt, I believe, to be not only an intensely important conglomeration of things outside the self, but *also a large and integral part of the*

self [emphasis added]... The concreteness of the child's thinking suggests for him, as for the members of the so-called primitive culture and for the schizophrenic adult, the wealth of non-human [beings] about him are constituents of his psychological being in a more intimate sense than they are for the adult in our culture, the adult whose ego is ... clearly differentiated from the surrounding world, and whose development of the capacity for abstract thinking helps free him ... from his original oneness with the non-human world. (Searles, 1960. P. 395)

At Shunda, sometimes the ministry of the land was implicit, and without a word about our surroundings, without any outward acknowledgement I could observe a settling effect wash over the conflicted, anxious, preoccupied individual. On one occasion, a young man began our walk deeply entrenched in self-punishing, self-destructive thought patterns which spouted liberally in frustrated and angry tones. Feet moving in an unconscious bilateral stimulation, breeze gently flowing across the face, with vast, rugged forest backdropping our movements, a distant hawk cry—I'm certain he hadn't taken more than 400 steps before his tone began to soften, and his words began to carry themes of sadness and grief. By the time we reached the slow-moving, clearwater stream (about a kilometer's walk) and sat for a few minutes on the low bridge, the pliability and reflective calm of the waters became a visual reflection of his internal emotional state. All this without a word of direction from me. Not so much as a "notice your breath" or a "give yourself a moment..." The day itself, in all its natural splendour had settled, soothed and consoled the raging shadows of this suffering soul.

At other moments, particularly on days that were friendly and congenial, I found my invitations to pause, notice, savour and enjoy the moment rarely (at least more rarely)

met with the pull of resistance. Drawing a focussed attention to the senses is not nearly so difficult when the encounter is subtle, gentle, and kind; After all, the moment was both soothing and naturally enjoyable. This natural settling and grounding of awareness and its nervous system is supportive of movement, healing and growth. Of course, misalignment was not uncommon. Either the day was too dreary, harsh or cold, or the consciousness was, and awareness was unable to emerge from the enclosed cocoon of its own mood; “This vexed being in whose flesh we’re entangled” (Abram 2010, p. 2). An ecology of factors condition the healing potential of this moment in nature, and all are mediated through the lens of awareness. If sensation is a garden, awareness is the gardener, synchronising the meeting place of root with soil, water and sky.

Many of the comments collected from Shunda participants consciously reflect this return to an embodied home, and a return to peace, calm and safety from which new possibilities may emerge. For example, several participants reflect the “sense of peace being in the wilderness”. The descent from cranial “abstract thinking” into an “original [sensual] oneness with the non-human” (Searle, 1960) is evident in the comment: “being in nature I don't allow the little things [to] get to me thinking[, it] is a lot more natural”. Embodied experiences between the nature of the body and the nature of this place offers “feelings, smells, sights, sensations [and opportunities to] be grateful... Got to observe a lot of things I would have missed if I rushed through everything”. We note here how sensation, gratefulness and observation converge with a sense of expansive time. Another participant reflects “I was very curious of my breathing, speed and my surroundings and feelings, Observant of how others were doing through the hike”. This spaciousness, and engagement of sensation platforms an observation, and perhaps curiosity of others, an

activation of relationality that spills over into the social realm. Conversely, for many this calm connection with nature also made it okay to be alone: "the backyard and solo were calming and I enjoyed the reflection;" "It's ok to be alone once in a while".

In dialectical relationship, awareness bears out this capacity of receiving our experience, while as Levine (1997), van der Kolk (2015) and others observe, particularly in trauma work, the active faculty of completing the movement that one was unable to make at the moment(s) of injury and trauma is crucial to the healing of trauma entangled in the nervous system. Both receptivity and action, listening and speaking generate a dynamic of healing.

Outward sensation, thus cultivated by awareness, opens way for a faculty of which the human creature is capable of particular depth: connection, attachment and love. Self-conscious of the care it receives from this generous and abundant mother, the body may become a platform of intimate reciprocal connection with the world: from taking to partaking; from consuming to communing; finding that beneath our endless longing is a reality of *belonging* to the natural world. Through these relations of our senses we become aware of ourselves as a part of the world and belonging to the world, even as the world is a part of ourselves, belonging to us, in a word: home. The sensations of the body received into the mind through awareness, and held within the meaning of connection overcome the assumptions of separateness and individuality that truncate the possibilities of the self. Of particular relevance to Adventure Therapy contexts, such as Shunda, is the finding that "positive effects of exposure to nature are partially mediated by increases in connectedness to nature" (Mayer et al., 2009, p. 607). This suggests that exposure to

nature, complimented by mindfulness may require a sense of meaning in which connectedness is realised and made explicit to the awareness.

Cultivating awareness and care for our bodies, this corporeal landscape of relationship becomes the home in which our very relationality is realised. Rediscovering Charles Darwin (1872), Bessell van der Kolk (2015) drives home how emotions play out in the theatre of the body (not the mind); This idea, while under-recognised, is not new, as William James also observed (1890) how emotion is first of all a physiological state, and only secondarily perceived and interpreted in the brain. Of course, the close association between sensations and *feelings* is embedded in the very word. From this bodily platform emotions bear out the important function of causing creatures to move in relation to one another: anger says “back off”, joy invites closer contact, depression and sadness cry “care for me”. The body that innately feels and senses every relation to itself also bears out a relational movement—an *e-motion*, fleshing out a social interactivity that Darwin noted throughout the animal kingdom (1872); and for mammals this interactivity is knitted deeply into our nervous systems.

Given this relationship taking place between the body and the natural world through sensation, and in view of the embodied quality of emotions, findings that nature exposure and connection help to facilitate affect regulation are by no means surprising (Richardson, 2019). More than sharpening awareness, the support of nature-contact for balancing emotional experiences is under-explored, and yet remains a key aspect of the way nature connectedness facilitates psychological well-being and resilience.

Self-regulation is a balancing act between parasympathetic and sympathetic systems

within the nervous system (Richardson, 2019), and within this balance a critical feature of relationality itself resides.

What Darwin called the “pneumogastric nerve”—now commonly known as the *vagus* nerve, is described by some as the “soul nerve” (Menakem, 2017) because of its role of governing the nervous system between states of ease, calm, and connection when at peace, and the critical survival states of fight, flight, freeze, fawn when in threat. It thus mediates the possibility of connection and love itself. When the latter pathway is activated through sympathetic response, relationality goes off line in favour of short-wired physiological preparedness for the immediate avoidance or resistance to perceived threat. Through the soul nerve, there also operates a specialised system unique to mammals called the ventral vagal nervous complex, through which social affiliative behaviours and perceptions influence the nervous system’s calm and arousal responses (Porges, 2011). Of profound significance is the way this complex is knit into the nervous system through perceptual pathways that precede, and therefore underlie conscious cognition. Subtle cues of sensation impact our bodies on preconscious levels, mediating the difference between fear-based and calm dispositions.

This fine-tuned instrument of our bodies, as it abides within discrete, overstated and fabricated sensory environments, becomes blunted and obtuse—alienated from its relational capacity. To this end Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) associate one of the greatest obstacles to our bio-social-psychological development as humans with the high ambient stimulation prevalent in our constructed environments. For one struggling with addiction, pining for that next high is a most pertinent—and tragic example of this. Alternatively, the sensitization and grounding of the body that takes place in the natural

world, in all its manifold nuance, may bear much in the way of priming our sense of connectedness, even among humans. An evidence of this which I often marvel at is the contrast between how humans pass one another by on the street in downtown without even looking up, while on a wilderness path, smiles and friendly greetings are the norm.

To consider the embodied way in which animals communicate, through many nuances of posture, positioning and movements (to name only a few), and at once notice we ourselves as the animals we are, is it any wonder that human interactions can be so fraught with anxiety and tension—a condition frequently plied with social lubricant (alcohol). As our nervous systems seek out nuanced and subtle communications of safety with one another, it may be that our sensory awareness, conditioned by habitual overstimulation, fails to receive and transmit these vital signs of relationality, while our minds endeavour to proceed in spite of these anxious bodies. In contrast, one might imagine how Indigenous stewards of this land, set in close and sacred contact with the natural realm, may attune by an acuity of sensation to the subtle and nuanced languages of their *relations*, “hearing” them speak, recording the blessings of their songs, and aligning to the embodied wisdom of these different creatures. Animism does not appear so implausible when viewed in this light. These possibilities follow from the assertion that experiencing the manifold and subtle world of sensation with and within nature primes our bodies to feel at home within relational connections, both human and otherwise.

A chance encounter during the writing of this section provides compelling evidence of this natural platform of relational safety.

Coming up from the river after a quiet and pleasant sensory banquet on its shoreside—a custom that becomes even more firmly established in the writing of this project, I am met by a woman and her dog with a kinked ear. Returning the dog's exuberant greetings, a casual conversation with the woman ensues. She comments that this dog is a rescue from a local reserve. Having been mistreated, he recently cost her \$1200 on vet bills from an injury he had inflicted on another dog. My response of how traumatised beings can be so misunderstood seems to evoke something in her, and she begins relating some very personal and traumatic aspects of her own history, and I meet these with care and empathy. At several points she relates her current surprise at how easily she feels she can communicate these things to me, admitting her difficulty in feeling safe enough to open up about her experiences—even in therapy. I asked her what being in nature is like for her—noting our present natural surroundings, and she says it is pure healing for her; holding her in calm and safety. Her stories carry a tragic tone of resignation, and yet this very event of her speaking them seems to enliven a sense of possibility. Nearing the end of our conversation, a drastic shift takes place when I introduce myself. She returns the introduction, and then hastily concludes our conversation, literally running away from our shared encounter. Up until that moment, I encountered her as nature does—nameless and thereby without judgement or association. But in the moment of naming, perhaps all the associations of being known, judged and held within all the unsafety of human recognition, triggers a sense of exposure, vulnerability and panic.

The young men at Shunda have depended on a disconnect of sensitisation through substance that bears dire consequences for the most basic platform of relationship: the body, and its nervous system. The social isolation that their addictions so often engender likely conflate in many cases with having learned the unsafety of others, both signaling a difficulty syncing with other nervous systems, and with finding a safety from which ingrained social capacities can achieve the connections they are wired for. Notwithstanding the immediate effects of substances like alcohol to act as a social lubricant, blunting the sharp edges of anxiety, and loosening the mind, body and tongue, a state of numbness does not discriminate between the threatening overwhelm and the feelings and sensations that underlie our affiliative nature.

This numbness as it translates to the emotional field bears the quality of indifference so eloquently conveyed by Elie Wiesel:

The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference (2016, p. 143).

Whereas *e-motion* generates movement and interaction—whether towards or away in accordance with its own internal sensibilities, indifference is a vacant expression on an empty canvas, evoking nothing, moving no-one—deathly still and lifelessly silent. There is no dialectic: no pull away, no draw towards; no movement, and no possibility of finding balance. In this very word we can detect a deathly stagnance. *In-difference*, like the word in-dependent, negates its root, nullifying the dynamic of difference and its polarities and movements of attraction and repulsion; it is dispassionate, perhaps even calculating and exacting; maintaining a rigid, cold and unfeeling status quo, yet where

there is no difference, there is no movement, no stir, no convection, no wind—no signs of life.

Being at home in the living sensations of the body prefigures the relational language of emotion, and recursively, it is safe and supporting relationships of home that underlie the vital awareness and recognition of the same:

Affects are initially experienced simply as bodily sensations. In order for such sensory feelings to develop into emotions, the child must learn to articulate symbolically the direct bodily feeling. It appears that children cannot do this on their own. They need their caregivers to help them identify and then label their feelings. In the absence of this facilitating intersubjective context, several different derailments of optimal affect integration can occur. If children do not receive assistance in the domain of symbolic articulation/verbalization, they will continue to experience affects primarily as bodily sensations, with the mind/body split thus being perpetuated and even intensified. In these instances, people are prone to develop alexithymia, a condition in which a person is unable to interpret or even recognize the physiological sensations accompanied by emotion.

(Mahoney, 2001)

Chapter 4: Places of Development

Home, as a substrate of relationship, serves the profound function of supporting the growth and development of vulnerable young. In its ideal state of safety, stability and warmth it meets the developing fledgling at the level of its need; it is a mother's womb extended into the outer world. Personhood emerges from this very soil, as an embeddedness in this place of home constitutes the very first relationships that make up who I am. In this way I am made up of home, and when one day I leave, do I ever actually leave, or merely carry this internalised home within me wherever I go?

The “Deficient Animal”

The significance of home as an extrauterine womb is particularly accurate when considering the prolonged vulnerability of human infants. The remarkable fact that from birth it would require twelve months more gestation to put human infants at the same developmental maturity as other newborn primates (Van Camp, 2015) bears deep implications for the peculiar vulnerability of the human being. In a way this vulnerability renders the human a *deficient animal* (Gehl, 1988) and the need for a protective social environment proves both necessary and seminal, as seventy seven percent of the infant's brain develops post-utero within this safety and supporting home (Van Camp, 2015). Here we gain a glimpse of how deeply our relational wiring truly runs. Within the ‘deficiency’ of this vulnerability “the social group assumes the task of an “external uterus” (Van Camp, 2015), meaning that more than it taking a proverbial village to raise a child, it effectively takes a village to *bear* a child to full term. And the natural world factors importantly into this village.

Much emphasis has been placed on the development of language, culture, thought and innovation that follows from the core need of society for survival, yet this profound vulnerability also gives rise to another peculiar quality which may underlie them all: a unique adaptability and versatility in relation to diverse natural environments; Wulf (2013), with Gehlen (1988) describes this as an “openness to the world”. Consistent to a discipline whose *anthro*-pocentric underpinnings are contained in its root word, the longstanding anthropological project of establishing the causes of human exceptionalism lead Gehlen and Wulf to construe this openness as merit to human culture, society and technology as hinge-points of human survival and ascendancy. Whereas, a view of this openness through the lens of relationality bears out the significance that all the multifaceted characteristics of the environment itself hold as vital and immersive personalities in this village of development. Considering the more-than-human world as a crucial part of this extrauterine home bears far more explanatory power for understanding why *anthropos* has been capable of moving and adapting so readily to the vast diversity of the *ecosphere*. An aspect of this awareness may be surfacing for Wulf as he considers that “when human actions lead to the destruction of nature, this openness towards the world is turned on its head” (2013, p. 51).

Thus reckoning *ecos* as part of the developmental home of *anthros* on the one hand allows for an acknowledgement of how relationality emerges from the nature of our bodies, so deeply activated in an immersive relationship to the wider natural realm. In my own memory, I cherish those first moments of bringing my hours-old daughter out from the enclosed space of our house and into the open air, under an infinite blue sky. I will

never forget how wide and calm her gaze became, as if in recognition of an old, old friend.

Affect and Emotions: An Embodied Language of the Relational

Emotions, as we have explored, are fundamentally relational impulses whose very recognition depend upon the affirming role of caregivers, with particular gravity in young extrauterine life. All emotions begin with sensation, and as Sylvan Tomkins delineates, they move from affect to feeling to emotion, with its final expression, in both positive and negative forms, as the vital movement that completes the emotive process, bearing vital significance to the intra- and inter-relational life of the emotions. According to Tomkins, emotions are the outcome of a sensory-heuristic process that begins with basic physiological sensation. In its first emergence, *affect* is a set of biological responses, "hard-wired, preprogrammed, genetically transmitted mechanisms" (Nathanson, 1994, p. 58), responding to both internal and external stimuli; its corresponding system of affect-regulation "controls our heart rate, muscles, and the way our brain functions in order to achieve the balance required for well-being" (Richardson, 2019; Kappas, 2011). This model is particularly salient to young development, and the substructure of sensation is not so prominently at play for adults, for whom emotions emerge from a more complex ideo-affective matrix (Nathanson, 1997). This fact emerges from a Western system of knowing—a lens directed at Western humanity, connoting a sense that adults are more entangled in the thinking world, and perhaps more alienated from the body's world. Following this line, one might expect to find a significant struggle in Western society both in comprehending emotion, and in creating and balancing healthy, reciprocal relationships.

The origins of emotion—this raw language of relationality, in the affective capacities of the body's world entails a closeness to the ecological realm of nature, whose relationality is unimpeded. The parallel innocence of children and nature connotes a purity of experience from which guileless expressions emerge naturally. Children elicit unbroken lines between experience and expression, moving in the world as embodied creatures. The notion of learning from our children, and in a sense revering and honouring them has been a beautiful piece of learning for me within an Indigenous ceremonial community, while in a society running on commercial-industrial values, childhood can quickly become regarded as an impediment to the productivity and efficiency that is assumed to be the telos of human existence. In this unbroken intimacy of embodiment, children are close to their own nature, a quality that is both retained and activated within the synergy of natural settings. How critical the growing concern that child development should take place outside of this abundant setting. To this end, Macfarlane and Morris devote a captivating collection of expressive incantations (poems) and illustrations to the reclamation of *the lost words* of nature from childrens' vocabulary (Macfarlane et al, 2018). And here, “at the very moment that the bond is breaking between the young and the natural world a growing body of research links our mental, physical and spiritual health to our association with nature” (Louv, 2008, p. 3).

Original Holding Environment

Key recognition of the vital place of attachment in young development has been well-established in psychological fields, to the extent that the term “developmental trauma” holds inextricable links to the attachment roles of caregivers, with safety and connection being nearly synonymous at this young age (van der Kolk, 2005). With

admirable intent, considerable effort has been directed toward linking this vital quality of attachment with connectedness with nature, and the potential of predicting environmental behaviour (Capaldi, 2020), turning up no clear and consistent evidence of the relationship. While such findings would have been exciting, the project itself provides an example of an underlying problem of orientation that yet prevails within much ecological literature: the problem may be the starting point. Western thinking assumes the human—the individual, is the origin of causation, and thus also the starting point of inquiry, and yet the need for a different kind of thinking can be seen in the isolation and disconnection of the contemporary predicament. Humanity first emerged from the ecological realm—our origins are deeply embedded in this Earth; Whatever attachment and security we hold in one another, and the impacts this bears on development, cannot be viewed from outside this original *holding environment*.

With this starting point, the Earth itself is the home of our homes—it is the body's body; and there is no surprise in the finding that positive affect correlates with greater exposure (Mayer et al., 2009) and connection (Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Tam, 2013) with nature, confirming this essential intimacy. Furthermore, in children connectedness with nature is found to be positively related to perceptual sensitivity (Bakir-Demir et al., 2019), signaling a deepening connection and recognition of the body's world, from which the relational language of affect first emerges. Thus if we begin with a relationship to the natural world, we may find it a complement to the mechanisms of the body—to which the young are not yet so alienated, sharpening the senses and the attention, mediating the relational language of *affect* as an essential foundation for attachment. From this *eco-centric* direction, explorations may emerge regarding the impacts of positive nature

exposure on family attachment relationships and patterns, mediated by both stress reduction, and potentially heightened affect acuity; or whether a sense of nature connectedness may ameliorate the impacts of neglectful and inconsistent care-giving in the home environment.

Feeling at home in our bodies is both a relational outcome, as well as the soil from which relationship emerges. Being in a state of safety and ease are necessary conditions of creativity, connectivity and the capacity to love through all levels of human development. To the point of our core motif, relationship is a necessary condition for basic feelings of safety, particularly at younger ages; and while the sensations of the body are the primary medium through which relationality takes place, the natural world is the original milieu in which our faculties of sensory perception emerged in the first place. In felt safety, much of which transpires on a preconscious level, mediated through the nervous system, the prefrontal cortex of the brain comes on line, and with it the operations of reasoning, personality and language. The ability to respond and interact *naturally* with one another and with our world thus hinges on a naturalisation of the senses, and to extend the suggestion that natural spaces offer conditions that intrinsically foster relational openness is not a difficult stretch.

Finally, the embodiment of affect in children is also rendered in Bruce Perry's (2008) research-based approach of supporting children with the sensory-motor activity appropriate to the age of developmental trauma or neglect to aid in rebuilding their regulating capacities (e.g. sucking, rocking, tactile objects, etc.). Here again the word "sensory-motor" denotes the dialectal theme of active-receptive, and for children it is unavoidable that embodied engagement in the natural world should entail the instinctual

allure of muddy puddles, low-branching trees and fuzzy dandelions; Perhaps inseparable from of the affective benefits of attention and regulation for children is their active engagement of the outdoor places as immutable playgrounds. The way a child is drawn into free and creative play, entailing all manner of sensory experiences, blurs the separation between person and habitat; the harmony signals a sense of closeness to the natural world, as if they themselves were not yet differentiated from the nature with-in and with-out.

For many adults being outdoors reawakens some very young impulses to play, get messy and engage in their surroundings. Beautiful tones of resuscitated exuberance can be felt in the voices of Shunda clients: “It was an absolutely amazing time. 10/10. I particularly love nature;” “It was so much fun! and also [a] huge learning experience while on the solo! I thank all staff for making my passage experience amazing & possible;” “I enjoyed myself so much. There were moments where I was much more genuinely joyful than I have been in years.”

Complimenting these sentiments are my own memories with these young men down at a swimming hole under the bridge, witnessing this reactivation of childhood play and excitement. These “lost boys” were rediscovering themselves once again in the canon balls, mud slinging, hollering and overall reckless abandon with which they immersed themselves in this environment. It seemed to me that this watery environment welcomed their return.

“Let yourself be drawn by the stronger pull of that which you truly love.” (Rumi, 2002)

Continuing with Tomkins' (1962) formulation, *feelings* are where these biological events of affects are met with awareness. As we have uncovered, the attention-restoring quality of green spaces and nature-immersion (Kaplan, 2001) heightens the awareness of *affects* that arise within the body. Inattention to the body's world means missing important affective messages that arise from the basic instinctual embodiment of experience, yet in this mindfulness and grounding practices provide a widening of the bridge that returns the mind to its home in the body. Finally, *emotions* are recognised through interpretations of this awareness through the frameworks of memory, associations and meaning. A crucial balance between positive and negative emotions requires expression of both, and in this, emotion flourishes within the dynamic between a reception of affective bodily states, and an active and outward expression of its energy. If positive and negative emotions remain chronically unexpressed, thus relegated from the relational field, whether from being in survival mode, under another's control, or sensing these to be unacceptable to the care-giver—the child remains unaware of their feelings and unable to form memories that help them understand or categorise their emotions (Methot, 2019). Accordingly, being able to express emotion within an accepting, validation and supportive environment—a *home*, is a developmental necessity.

Emotions link to the mind's realm of memory and meaning, and in this it is clear that whatever natural affinity is born between children and nature, it is also cultivated through exposure to positive experiences. The risk of rearing children within indoor environments, inundated with digital media carries the grave developmental warnings that Bronfenbrenner associates with environments of "high-ambient stimulation"

(Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000), with untold consequences for their budding relationships with their own bodies, emotions and extending relational fields.

Of course, just being in nature does not entail feeling at home there, just as a house does not necessarily entail a home. Nature can feel threatening and foreign to predominantly indoor creatures. Connection with nature bears an important emotional quality, like a bond, that can grow through positive experiences and associations. In her book *Children's Environmental Identity Development*, Green (2018) uses the term “natural world socialization” in describing this process, and interestingly interposes attachment language in understanding how a child can feel at home and secure within the natural world. She argues feeling safe in nature is foundational for children in developing a positive sense of identity in connection with nature. In this security, children may confidently venture out and explore natural areas, alone and with others, building a sense of environmental competence. Here, the attachment notion of *secure base* is distributed within an environment that may be understood by the child as caring and nurturing.

In the home of my upbringing it was the secret riverside places that held such important solace for me, in particular when working through the throws of strong emotions and difficulty. Feeling natural and at ease among the willows and waters made this a place where I felt I was both wildly free and at the same time understood and cared for. At times I felt only these places could understand me. The make-shift nests, hollows and hideouts, both found and created became secret worlds, enclosed and yet expansive. As a parent, I now watch my daughter as she ceaselessly attempts to communicate with the animals and is swept into altered time in the backyard tree branches, and I sense the same important work at play within her.

The active-receptive nature of this ecological bond is highlighted by Chawla (2007) who argues that a positive relationship with nature forms when children are able to develop environmental competence and knowledge through free movement and creative agency in nature, with support from friends, family and other mentors. That both human and more than human homes of development should synergistically compliment the needs of a budding youth renders development an ecological system, and in this we may surmise that diversity within this system would contribute to its robust stability. Thus we may consider how it takes an ecology (human and more than human) to raise a child.

Bruce Perry notices the deficit in modern thinking, particularly as it relates to mental health with children:

For years mental health professionals taught people that they could be psychologically healthy without social support, that “unless you love yourself, no one else will love you.... The truth is, you cannot love yourself unless you have been loved and are loved. The capacity to love cannot be built in isolation. (2008, p. 234)

Extending this notion into the natural environment, a child’s sense of love and connection in the greater world is a bond that offers a deep and rich sense of home, one which the child may carry with them long into adult life, finding a reflection of home in all the natural beings that yet grace our beautiful planet. To consider in this light the significance of Winnicott’s term “holding environment,” (American Psychological Association, n.d.) which describes the way a mother or care-giver is sensed by the child as they are calmed, secure, at rest—at home in their mothers arms, and how readily it is adopted into

describing a therapeutic relationship, it is a wonder that its most obvious application has not been explored. The natural realm as a *holding environment* for development is incontestable in our history as species (excepting perhaps the past 200-300 years), and the intricate interplay between body, emotion, and the very capacity for relationality, as we have explored, is fostered most elementally within this body's world, the earth. Further, it is this environment that so compliments the active-receptive nature of development, in a dialectical movement that is ubiquitous in nature, and parallels other important developmental concepts, such as Piaget's developmental dialectic of accommodation-assimilation (Smith et al., 2003), and Wilber's transcend-include (Combs, 2013).

Supported Youth

As human development progresses it builds from utter embodiment, into affect, feeling, emotion and finally into thought and cognition. Before moving into the significant ways in which a home in nature is influenced and furnished by the meanings of the mind, we return to the notion of the place of home and the implications of safety and supported development that this provides, and from there importantly explore the contrasting outcomes of unsupported development. Of course, the latter offers views into many untold histories of those struggling with addictions, and so the cold, lonely significance of being *unhomed* holds important aspects for our portrait.

Particularly in the young years of life, the significance of safe places, secure and consoling relationships and caretakers carries such immense gravitas for a child, and rightly so, for as we have seen it is such places that indelibly imprint upon the very development of the child. Wild places offer beautiful nooks and shelters for forts and

hideouts, and children are so quickly drawn to these, imagining themselves an animal, hidden away in secrecy and safety. Something takes place in a safe and providing homespace for the child that abides there, supported and cared for. The child comes in touch with their own agency—their own sense of power. For children this is exuded through creative play and an innate way of seeing themselves a part of the habitat, shaping and navigating it with a certain tactile intelligence. The abundance of this at-homeness is described in *the Poetics of Space* where Gaston Bachelard considers the paradoxical way a child may see vastness in the miniature, exhibiting how the grandeur of vastness is “most active in the realm of intimate space” (1994, p. 192).

A portrait of Home would be lacking an essential quality without the warm colours and shades of intimacy. Intimacy evokes a crucial sense of laying down defenses in the presence of another, and the qualities of ease and safety that condition this possibility are unmistakable. Weingarten discusses the significance of intimacy in terms of “relational patterns that lead to the mutual sharing or co-creation of meaning” (1991, p. 47); The outcome is a sense of knowing and being known by the other, and here we notice that intimacy is characterised by the ecological principle of reciprocity. The vital significance of intimacy for a developing self is emphasised in Buber’s understanding of the self being called into being by another, and in the way the internal growth of self takes place “through being made present by the other and knowing that we are made present by him” (1988, p. 61).

Abiding safety is not only realised by the absence of threat, but the presence of love. This is why the proper development and honing of sensation, affect and feeling are so crucial for the sense of home upon which development depends. Recognising love is

developed in intimate relational settings that attune to one another on embodied (nervous system), emotional and intelligible levels. The safety of being attuned to, and held within a caring relationship is vital to development, and as we have noted can take place within a caregiver relationship as well as a distributed felt sense of being loved by a natural world that so envelops the senses.

Home is just such a place of intimacy and support, translating so naturally into their dialectical counterparts: freedom and openness. Sensing oneself safe and nurtured, a place may begin to burst forth with abundance and feel spacious and alive. The vast openness of the grand world loses its terror and becomes in itself an opportunity for spreading one's wings, for testing the speed of one's feet or the volume of one's lungs. Of course each such movement is a relational negotiation with one's surroundings, and "freedom" thus conceived is not a mere lack of constraints or some full-scale affirmation of autonomy and independence, but rather resides in the ability to speak the language of one's environment. Freedom lives within responsiveness. The unfettered play of a raven among gale-force winds takes place in a sharp attunement between sensory and motor functioning, in one instance sensing a shift in the wind's force and direction, and in the next responding with such exactitude as to meet wind with wing in seamless harmony. The prowess of this display does not belong to the raven alone, but in all these shared intimacies between itself and the tempest.

It is the same with any confidence that transpires within the supported individual. It is not from sheer will, nor raw bravado, but from an implicit recognition of responsiveness made up of two dialectical parts, perception and response, taking place continually between the self and its manifold context. In the abundance of home, within

the interactive languages that have been carefully honed in its community of relations, a generosity of openness to the signals of the world meets with an entrusting confidence in the integrity of each personality to emerge as *flow*. The word “flow” denotes movement, but this is not always explicit. In a state of stasis, a flow may be subtly maintained in an equilibrium that is held between the self and other, like a meditation in a natural environment, or the subtle bend of a tree in the movements of the wind. Whatever its expression, flow is a continual fluid exchange of energy in both directions that embodies the sum balance of its context. In this way it engenders the important relational virtue of reciprocity.

Unhomed Development

Paul Wachtel writes,

Our present stress on growth and productivity is intimately related to the decline in rootedness. Faced with the loneliness and vulnerability that come with deprivation of a securely encompassing community, we have sought to quell the vulnerability through our possessions. (Wachtel, 1989, p. 65)

By contrast, where a developing child is not supported by the *home-effect* of its caregivers and surrounding environment, the outcomes bear impacts that are detrimental and challenging both in present and later life. Without being supported within a home of relationships to speak and understand the language of these connections, the child remains out of step with their world, their community, their close relations and themselves. Rather than living within a felt sense of abundance, prefacing the movements of giving and openness that characterise relationality, the individual learns to survive within a cold realm of scarcity, accompanied by a prevailing awareness of the need for

self-preservation. The attitude may become one of acting upon the world, rather than moving with and within it, or of reclusion and withdrawal, convinced of their own inefficacy. In place of the dispositions of responsiveness and reciprocity, competition and manipulation become survival tools. All this constellates around the basic existential feature of unsupported development: fear.

Chapter 5: Fear, Scarcity and Vulnerability

Art-of-Fact 1: FEAR

Don't trust people

aren't allowed to...

[Call it] OtherAnxiety

communication *is* icy

[like] closed spaces and

freezing cold nights under the tarp

I have conflict with [the other]

They negatively affect my mood

the entire time

[They always] blame others

out of spite

[I] wanted to prove to him

[he has] more arrogance problems than me

[Always] complaining—

“a long hard hike”

self doubt

a lot of negative self talk

social anxiety

makes me a little anxious/paranoid

had urges

what to do and how to do...

hard to change my lens of thinking

[A mind like] closed spaces

Don't trust people.

Senses of Scarcity

When a child's cries are not responded to, the discomfort and pain for which they cry begin to seem as though they may last forever; the chill of fear becomes palpable and threatening. Where their call is met with silence or silencing, the child begins to understand a terrifying thing: that the world is a fearful place. Just as a holding environment would have supported the child's needs and development, standing in as a microcosm of the whole world, the same projection takes place for the unsupported young, and the understanding, written into mind heart and body, becomes that the world is a dark, cold and unaccommodating place. Through an Eriksonian lens, the first stage leaves them in *mistrust*. A world that cannot be trusted to meet a child in their need for comfort, soothing, or even the provision for basic needs is an unsafe place, and a realm of scarcity.

The term developmental *trauma* is not synonymous with unsupported development, but is an outcome of this. Trauma in general, as Hübl explains, does not denote an objective external event, but rather an internal process of apprehending and carrying this event (2020); as such the event that lands as trauma for one individual may not be the same for the next. Further, particularly in young development a trauma may result not only from the presence of injury or threat, such as an abuse to the child or the vicarious abuse of their caregiver, but also in the absence of soothing nurturance and care (2020). In all its forms, trauma represents an overwhelm to the system, as a threat of annihilation, or being left alone crying in a seeming-never-to-end terror of dark shadows in the corner of a nighttime room. The system's intelligent response to this overwhelm is a numbing and disconnect from the source of threat, and memories of these experiences, while stored away in the body, are often avoided, or dissociated in the mind (Herman, 1995). An outcome of this can be the unhomeing of the mind from its body, and where this disconnect occurs, the impacts are felt relationally, intra-personally and interpersonally.

Voicelessness and Shame

When a child's cries remain consistently unanswered, a child may learn that their voice is ineffectual, and eventually stop crying. The power of their own voice has proven empty, and their own agency hollow, and these effects may echo through their development. For Erikson, the basic power implied in the second stage of *autonomy* is rendered ineffectual resulting in internalised *shame*. Echoing through the stages, this scarcity of support translates to guilt, inferiority, confusion, isolation, stagnation and despair. Notwithstanding the lens of Western, masculine values through which Erikson's theory was formulated, the notion that unsupported needs in young life do not merely

disappear with childhood, is significant and its implications echo through the stages of life development. The impacts of shame in particular are not left in childhood, although many of its later iterations find keen disguises. As shame emerges from this young sense of powerlessness in the world it becomes an internalisation of scarcity.

The threat of exposure that stabs through feelings of shame is carried on the instinctual assumption that being known in weakness and vulnerability equates to harm, punishment or rejection. Nowhere is hinted the possibility of being accepted, loved and forgiven, for the world is an exacting, punishing and unforgiving realm of scarcity. In such a world the instinct to hide, conceal and withdraw, or else to externalise, defend and attack, is indeed adaptive for survival. Owing to the peculiar vulnerability of the human species, as we have touched on above, exclusion from the community in times past would have meant certain death, and the wiring that remains within our natures yet evaluates this threat accordingly. For this reason both shame and attachment injuries are felt deeply, often triggering survival responses. Yet on a longer frame it becomes apparent that the mechanisms of bare survival are not fitted to flourishing and thriving, but only to the immediate avoidance of threat, or escape of annihilation.

At the same point, a constant gnawing, and perhaps partly unconscious, awareness of one's own inadequacies, vulnerabilities and powerlessness within what is conceived as an environment of scarcity may trigger this survival stance in even the most innocuous of situations.

While supported emotional development empowers an ability to know one's own feelings and to transition “out of intense emotions, and be responsible for the process, [which paves way for a crucial ability] to communicate their feelings and

needs to others, when an individual does not have this internal boundary as a result of experiencing trauma in childhood, they tend to blame others for the way that they feel and take no responsibility for transitioning out of intense emotions (Methot, 2019, p. 68).

In this way a deficit of empowerment in the unsupported child leads them to feel themselves as the effect of the forces around themselves, disconnected from their own sense of agency and efficacy, and the profound awareness of disempowerment is felt on a relational level.

Deficiency Cognition

When young men come into the Shunda Creek program, they are well aware of their ailment. The intake process is extensive, and elicits a firm sense of the first step of AA: “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol [substances]—that our lives had become unmanageable.” (A.A., 2009). With this explicit recognition it is hoped that the individuals entering the program are at the decision-making, and action stages of change (McConaughy, Prochaska & Velicer, 1983), and insofar as they have made significant steps to enter the program, this is on some level the case. Coming to terms with where one is at in life is surely important, and yet on the other hand, the risk of perceiving the self through the lens of deficit bears with it trappings of shame and guilt, and that natural withdrawal inwards often takes place as a result. To view the self as the fundamental material needing change implies a felt sense of rejection, and on some level entails the layers of resistance, and maintenance of the symptoms that rear up for even for the most “ready” of Shunda clientele. Some of what takes place in the engagement of nature and the empowering adventures outwards is that these young men find within themselves the

very energy and tenacity that generates change in the first place. This energy and tenacity exists in themselves only insofar as they begin to uncover their essential relationality—and perhaps even unity—to the world in which they sense themselves to belong.

Supported development, by Maslow's rendering appears as a pyramid of met needs, and at its apex stands *self actualisation*. By contrast “when an individual's needs are not met they exist within the selfish and competitive space defined by deficiency cognition: Trying to get their needs met and hostile to the needs of others” (Methot, 2019, p. 96). It is significant to highlight that thus seeing the world through a lens of scarcity, or through *deficiency cognition*, is not the conscious choice of an individual, but a developmental outcome of their unsupported upbringing. Instead of the solid base of foundation construed in a pyramid, the world feels shaky, uncertain and scarce. Even when there is abundance and stability, the perception of scarcity remains, and the individual's behaviours react accordingly. A lack of internal stability becomes attracted to the appearance of stability and support outside the self (Heylighen, 1992), often clinging to the shallow “certainties” of consumer and dominant culture. As Searles writes, “The greatest danger lies in the fact that the world is in such a state as to evoke our very earliest anxieties and at the same time to offer the delusional ‘promise’, the actually deadly promise, of assuaging these anxieties, effacing them, by fully externalizing and reifying our most primitive conflicts that produce those anxieties” (1979, p. 242).

Being thus conditioned by a deficiency of care and support, the focus in later life centres around deficiency reduction, underwritten by an unending fear of scarcity, and leads to hollow, empty, often parochial goals which yield listlessness, boredom and

meaninglessness, in absence of higher order need for self actualisation (Heylighen, 1992). Supported development, on the other hand emerges into the abundance, engagement and purpose of being part of the wider world, and in this self-actualisation embodies an openness to experience, a transcendence of dualities, and overcoming deficiency motivated behaviour (Heylighen, 1992). The qualities of belonging, interconnection and home within these descriptions need no further elaboration.

Scarcity and Relationality

The implications of scarcity perception on relational postures are dire and profound. The above art-of-fact, composed mainly of the words of Shunda clients conveys this sense of relational difficulty, and struggles with entering this tenuous relational field. Suspicion, aggression, competitiveness, jealousy, manipulation assume a sense that there is not enough in this dog-eat-dog world. Whether not enough money or power, love or recognition, food or enjoyment, alcohol or drugs, the need for more, and the insatiability of appetite is based on a fear which for many began in young life. The associated impulse to get more for me, or to keep what's mine, or to get what is owed, may find its reflection in unforgiving stances of holding to my right and never forgetting what's been done to me, and getting my revenge. As Worthington and Sandage contend in *Forgiveness and spirituality in psychotherapy: a relational approach* (2016), unforgiveness can be well understood as a stress reaction, while forgiveness, which can be mediated through the embodied, developmental, hermeneutical (interpretive) and cultural facets of a *relational spirituality*, is a coping response.

Relationships that emerge from this world of scarcity are subject to the motifs of "loving how you make me feel," a dependence on the other for a lack of internal stability,

a perpetual pull into power struggles and conflict, and even equitable but vacant quid pro quo agreements; But all these are underwritten by a sense of self-preservation and a difficulty in holding and even perceiving and understanding the needs of the other. Empathy, the very lifeblood of relationship, lends all its energies to self pity and the constant gnawing sense of being a victim. Fear of scarcity ever tips the scales of balance, sapping away at the possibilities for generosity, forbearance and reciprocity that constitute the groundwork for relationality. The significance of relational ability in substance use, observes Gabor Maté, is that “people who have difficulty forming intimate relationships are at risk for addiction” (2008, p.191).

In concert with this ubiquitous sense of scarcity is a difficulty in navigating the relational dialectic of communication and connection which stems on a basic level from the body’s world. As we have explored the ability to be at ease with others is mediated through the nervous system of the body on preconscious levels such that the impacts of abandonment, neglect and abuse in early life show up in often inarticulate experiences of feeling on edge around others and unsafe in relationships, while at the same time sensing the gravity and significance of connection. Furthermore, caregivers help a child understand the sensations of their bodies, and aid constructing a language of emotions through which these may one day become interpreted, and without this vital mirroring and responsiveness the child grows disconnected from their body, and incapable of parsing out their own emotional experience.

The Vulnerability of Impoverished Sensation

Asynchrony between the awareness and sensation characterises *alexithymia*, where one is unable to discern and comprehend what is going on in their own body (van

der Kolk, 2015). As the body is the ground of sensation, affect, feeling, and emotion, this disconnect amounts to an obstruction in the understanding of their own emotional field, which, as we have seen, is the very language of relationality. Along with struggles in taking proper care of themselves, an alexithymic's ability to establish and maintain intimate emotional connection is severely hindered, for on some level they "have learned to shut down their once overwhelming emotions, and not to feel" (van der Kolk, 2015, p. 248). Where one is unable to even feel themselves, the possibility of feeling for or with others outside themselves is also lost, and pathways of empathy blocked. Losing connection with emotion, this vital language of relationships, and the self-understanding on which it is carried, alexithymics show a marked difficulty in developing and maintaining relationships (Hessa & Floyd, 2011). In absence of these basic tools of relationship it is no wonder that social anxiety, social rejection and isolation often result, or that substances might be used to compensate for lacking confidence, or to help numb and disconnect from the perceived threat of these encounters.

In the work of Giannini (1995) alexithymia is shown to be significantly higher among those using substances than others, and further studies exploring the overlap of using alcohol (de Timary et al., 2008) and other psychoactive substances (Pinard et al., 1996) with alexithymia indicate a stability in alexithymia through both use and withdrawal. Here we gain a sense that many of the struggles of alexithymia are not caused by substance use, but rather may underlie a disordered relationship to substances. Disconnection from the world of the body, and its emotion is a problem that runs deep, in some cases finding correlation with deficient care and support in childhood, of not being held, mirrored and corregulated during the early stages of development when the child's

crucial relationship to their bodies and its affects were taking root. Relational outcomes are parallel for alexithymia as for substance use, with social withdrawal and isolation as a key feature in the positive feedback pattern.

For my client Tamara, the journey of recovery and healing meant learning to feel again, outside the numbing effect of alcohol. Near the beginning deep wells of sadness and grief would take hold, and on one occasion she wept deeply for more than 15 minutes in our session. Tamara notices herself returning to the sensations of her body, often painfully, and on one occasion while heading to an AA meeting something felt wrong about it, and instead embarked on an impromptu day-long adventure deep into the mountains. On this gradual sojourn she felt deeply cared for and consoled by a sense of connectedness to her surroundings, even sensing the presence of a deceased loved one in the way the clouds clung to the top of the mountains. Describing the feelings of life she had experienced on this journey, Tamara spontaneously expressed an interest in caring for her body through eating healthier and going on walks, and further related a deep desire to share some of these places and their meanings with her loved ones. The gradual rebuilding of intimacy and connection, with herself, her loved ones and the natural world that Tamara is experiencing in her recovery and healing journey appears not so much an outcome of the hard work of trying, so much as a natural emergence of safety, connectedness and openness that has been taking place, largely in spite of the pressures of her efforts.

What is striking in the ATES comments from Shunda is the way that enjoyment and recognition of nature are expressed in spite of social difficulties and challenges. For instance, one client's "feeling of division/immaturity in community/unreasonable

expectations of others” was still associated with a 10/10 total score for Nature. For another client the comment “social anxiety, anxiety/self doubt in teaching opportunities” related to a 9/10 total score for Nature. Here again, where the pain, disappointment, shame and turmoil of interhuman relations often culminates in internal chaos, nature may bear none of these associations, while ceaselessly offering a plethora of low-level relational invitations to the senses. Feeling understood, recognised and validated on this most basic level of relationality has a way of returning a person to the home of their own body, and here the elemental languages of the senses may be recovered.

The seminal study on later life impacts of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including emotional neglect, emotional abuse, physical neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, (Dube et al., 2002) set out to understand the links between ACEs and substance use and addictions in later life. The study found that with each adverse childhood experience (ACE) the likelihood of having early experiences of substance abuse increased two to fourfold. For those with five or more ACEs there showed a seven to ten times greater risk for substance abuse than those who reported none (Dube et al., 2002). Since this original study much subsequent research has shown the profound effects of ACEs on a plethora of adult vulnerabilities, and not surprisingly, alexithymia and its associated challenges with emotional regulation, mood and intimate relationships show strong correlations with adverse experiences in childhood as well (Honkalampi et al., 2020; Powers et al., 2015; Patwardhan et al., 2019).

Experiences of trauma and neglect in childhood are clear examples of unsupported development and a deficiency in being adequately homed. Their true prevalence remains ever understated as the childhood ability to communicate, along with

the power to be heard remain lesser; this is compounded by the shame, pain and confusion surrounding these experiences, often sending the injured, weak and confused child into an exile of shame and repression that lasts into adulthood. We have traced clean lines of connection between such detrimental experiences of unsupported development, through its effects of disconnect on the bodily awareness of sensation, with its implications this bears for emotion recognition and competence, into the realm of relationality, which depends so much on feeling oneself as the platform for feeling and understanding the other. *Home*, as we have explored, is the very substrate of relationship, and so diminished relationality impacts one's ability to find home, create home, and the possibility of one day becoming home for another. What such unsupported development feels like dispersed across one's lens of the world is that there is never enough; no-one's ever got their back; the ground is ever shaky; the ice is ever thin; and so the shadows of scarcity are ominous and threatening.

Threats of Grief and Loss

Consider the sense of scarcity felt when a loved one passes away. For example, the prospect of losing one's parents may, for many, evoke this sense of earth-shaken frailty. Supported development means living in the world within the deeply held awareness that your primary relations keep you grounded and secure, and for many who have been brought up and cared for by their parents, the sense of losing them may feel like they become utterly alone and adrift. On one occasion in the time of this writing, I went in to tuck our 8 year-old daughter to sleep, and finding her crying, I inquired about her tears. Between sobs, she spilt out her fears of mom and me dying one day, and her being all alone in the world with no-one to take care of her. In moments like these I

become palpably aware of how I carry the world of my young children within my own tenderness, care and provision. My heart breaks to witness her felt sense of vulnerability and fear, and I reassure her in the warmth of my arms.

During this same period, I fell into reflection on what it would be like to lose my own parents, as I attended a funeral with friends of ours who lost their mother to a long, drawn out battle with cancer. The sense of losing a mother struck an existential chord with an experience I had in the same week. I am with my own mother, and a simple moment of noticing a cluster of thin, aging hair around her ear, and gently tucking it back into place. The warm embrace that followed struck me with some overwhelming sense of sadness, and a feeling of frailty that stays with me. With all this swimming somewhere in the deeper waters of my being, my sleep the next night bore dreams of an obligation to some kind of self-sacrificial ritual. The specific events of the dream are lost on me, but I recall the existential struggle of letting go of my mortality, letting go of attachments, while having piece by piece of my body sliced out from within me.

How can I interpret this dream, except to think that somehow in the abundance I have experienced in my life, it is my sacred duty to give back, piece by piece, the very life that has been entrusted me. Having been so adequately home, I offer myself as home for another. Through the lens of my children, I hold this sense in a beautiful poem by Donald Hall (2015), *My son, my executioner*:

My son, my executioner,
I take you in my arms,
Quiet and small and just astir
And whom my body warms.

Sweet death, small son, our instrument

Of immortality,

Your cries and hunger document

Our bodily decay.

We twenty-five and twenty-two

Who seemed to live forever

Observe enduring life in you

And start to die together.

What a grace it would be to come to the end of my years, and with that final breath have surrendered with gratitude every ounce of love within my being into that part of my Self that remains after I die. And yet, I myself live as though grasping at straws and vapours. What is this scarcity that clings to my bones like some piercing chill that refuses to warm? Vestiges of my own unsupported development, to be sure. And in some ways it is my mind also that will not let me rest, strung up as it is into a web of cultural narratives and values shaped by what Willie James Jennings (2011) designates the “colonial wound” that prescribe my worth with words like “possessions and mastery and control”, asserting the supremacy of a one-way accumulation of wealth and stability. The heart beat of this consumer culture thumps out, with the urgency of its every contraction a need for more. It is in this subtle shift of language, *need*, that entitlements take root, and

so it is that the insatiable fires of gluttony, greed and lust may at bottom be fueled by a perceived sense of scarcity, and fears of *not enough*.

The true toll of this perceived *need* for more is a profound loss of freedom, for “need” entails a “must,” and a compulsion to be satisfied. In the homelessness of scarcity thinking, I find myself possessed by my possessions and captivated within the urgency of rat races and crab buckets. How telling it is that Jesus’ teachings about worry invoke the abundance of the natural world: consider the sparrow, the raven, the lily: see how God provides for them though they neither sow nor reap, toil nor spin (Luke 12:6-7, 22-31). Echoing this deep primordial wisdom, Lao Tzu notices how “nature never hurries and yet everything is accomplished” (n.d.). It is not for lack of anything that we worry so, nor is such anxiety a new invention.

The true need is not gaining the whole world, but in retaining the soul (Mark 8:36); and the soul is felt within the resonance of the whole world. Perhaps soul may be understood as this inalienable “muchness” that derives from its essential interconnectedness with all the world. It is, perhaps, this essential aspect of ourselves—the soul—that forever fails to comprehend the language separation and distinction, and eternally abides within an unbroken unity with all things; its felt abundance continuous with the inexhaustible universe from which it is derived. Self-actualisation, the highest order need of Maslow’s hierarchy, writ in the language of such a soul might be construed as an unbridled engagement in the world, finding one’s truest self at “the place where your deepest joy and the world’s deepest hunger meet” (Buechner, 1993, p. 6). It is a need to view and to feel oneself as part of a greater experience, a greater world. Thus, for the one who has truly felt the abundance of home,

abiding in an unmuted sense of belonging to the world, it is most natural to extend this belonging in making a home for others.

Rush or Flow: Time as Second or Season

One final feature of unsupported development which is perhaps most ubiquitous in our Western way of being, follows from the collapse of time that takes place in the urgency of perceived scarcity. “Need” implies “now,” and for caregivers who bear this sense of need, children and their *truer* needs can feel like an obstacle or an impediment. As a parent of young children I often reflect on how challenging and frustrating it can be to take care of my children when I have other objectives on the go. This project itself, particularly within the novel realities of a global pandemic meant many overlaps with my now stay-at-home-all-the-time children, and all their legitimate needs and negotiations for my attention, and a process of focus and creativity that even in ideal conditions could feel like herding cats. A perceived scarcity of time before its due-date, and attempts at juggling the balance of family life, practicum and school courses in the mix of it all, often left me in a state of near (or even complete) overwhelm. Here my children’s needs and wants—not the least of which is just a papa to “watch me do this,” or “play with me,” these needs, in all their legitimacy and significance to young development, could feel threatening and overwhelming. At my best I was at times able to completely resign my expectations and intentions to these little gems of life and growth entrusted to me, entering into their flow of play, exuberance and wonder. At other times their needs were met with impatience and a sense of rigidity, sometimes with frustrated outbursts, and often leading to an emphasis of their autonomy: “you can do it yourself—give it a try”. Oftentimes they could, but in this growing awareness I am beginning to see that my

children asking for help with things they are already capable of doing tends to be more about feeling cared for, than the inherent difficulty of the task they are facing.

Here it must be acknowledged that the best windows of balance were held under the wide open sky of our backyard, or better still, riverside, where sunshine, flowing air and the sounds of the birds coalesced with a free play that seemed to carry itself, and time opening up just enough to eke out a paragraph or two. All told, I notice a profound reciprocity in meeting my children at the level of their development and at the season of their development, with the time and patience this calls for.

The Greek language construes time in three forms, *aion*, *chronos*, and *kairos*. *Aion*, from which “eon” derives, is time from an eternal standpoint—forever time. If we consider the soul in the way it has been laid out above, as remaining undifferentiated from the whole of existence, then perhaps *aion* is the time in which it exists, within the eternal realm of ontological unity. *Chronos* is sequential, observable time; measured and external, and thus quantitative and commodifiable; it is from this word that the words “chronology” and “chronic” derive. *Kairos*, by contrast, may be understood as relative time, taken in reference to the proper fruition and need of a subjective being in. This word construes the seasons, and entails the Hebrew wisdom tradition’s notion that there is a time for everything under the sun (Eccles. 3:1-8). Whereas *chronos* frames the relations of the public spheres of the marketplace, *kairos* attends to the intimate needs of the private life—of *home*, in its care and nurturance. In this way, *kairos* evokes a sense of developmental time that parallels natural time; that the needs of a child are not pinned to their chronological age, but to their relative development and growth, just as a flower opens in its own *kairos*. There is a spaciousness in this sense of time, and yet to consider

our contemporary world, driven by its marketplace and governed by each passing second of a measured and exacting *chronos*, the rush of our mental environment becomes clear. The intention here is not to wage a polemic against *chronos* in favour of *kairos*, for surely between the two there lies an important dialectical balance. The purpose is to notice how chronic time exerts hegemonic influence over our sense of reality insofar as it becomes positioned as “true” time.

Thomas Hübl notices the sense of rush, and scarcity of time is a feature of trauma response (2020), for such urgency is enlisted as an adaptive mechanism for avoiding or resisting impending threat or doom. The need-it-now culture of consumerism, read in this light may be considered an enculturation of a trauma response, and the economy depends on fears of missing out on the latest, newest, shiniest of products and services. Deadlines, time limits and due dates are the language of schools and workplaces alike, and as this perceived scarcity of time trickles down into the holding environments of our young, so many are pressured to “grow up,” and “act your age.” In this deficit of time, children thus emerge into adulthood with what psychodynamics could call an unsupported ego, and, insofar as *chronos* has imposed so many “should’s” an over extended super ego. To pause, for a moment, and recognise the chilling association of the word *chronos* with the god *Cronus*, who ate his own children for fear of their ascendancy, bears out a compelling parallel with impacts that the ascendancy of measured time in our contemporary world may be having on the development of our young.

Figure 1: *Brickwork Youth*



Capturing this moment of demolition in downtown Calgary gripped me as a dramatic portrayal of the inability of a “brickwork” society to support the developmental needs of our youth. To me it evokes a sense of Cronus parenting.

Yet without some facet of supported development no organism could have survived; thus a sense of the supportive nurturance and safety of home is universal to the human—and more-than human experience. Connecting this sense to the assertion of Swartz in internal family systems theory that “everyone has at their core a Self that contains many valuable leadership qualities like perspective, confidence, compassion and acceptance” (Swartz, 2015, p. 265), we see commonalities in the characteristic of the Self

and the conditions of home. That Swartz's Self emerges from conditions of home, and the support, safety and abundance of this place bears out in his fuller descriptions of the Self:

The incessant nasty chatter inside our heads ceases, [and] we have a sense of calm spaciousness, as if our minds and hearts and souls had expanded and brightened. Sometimes, these evanescent experiences come in a bright glow of peaceful certainty that everything in the universe is truly okay, and that includes us – you and me individually – in all our poor, struggling, imperfect humanity. At other times, we may experience a wave of joyful connection with others that washes away irritation, distrust, and boredom. We feel that, for once, we truly are ourselves, our real selves, free of the inner cacophony that usually assaults us. (Swartz, 2004, p. 36)

Home and Self both keep their own tempo, some moments long, others blazingly brief. The supports of home provide for development at its own level of need and pace. For children this is a constantly moving mark—and nonlinear at that, and so attunement is critical. The intimacy of home entails relationships that co-create worlds of wonder, connection and adventure, entering into the possibilities of the child's experience, and sharing a kairos that unfolds with unhurried assurance. Child development and healing both require the nurturance of home kairos. The kairos of natural holding environments, even as its seasons may be more or less hospitable, nevertheless bears an unconditional acceptance of the present moment, of the being that abides within it. The more-than-human environment holds time as an open concept, and doles it out with generosity. One young man at Shunda comments, "It was really helpful to be in the bush, gave me time to really think on things and look at them differently".

An allure of substance use is in its counterfeiting of this *kairos* of intimate emplacement—of the time dimensions of home, altering experiences of time as the interface upon which one relates to themselves, others and the world. The felt quality this evokes is “of complete participation with the world” (Duran, 2006, p. 76), and these are the moments that, for the addicted person, may justify the high cost of this relationship.

According to Lewis, most people who struggle with addictions eventually get through them, regardless of the substance, and whether in treatment, program support or otherwise (2015). Natural movements of healing and recovery can and do take place within the system marred by trauma, grief, interpersonal conflict and addictions, and each of these may have a natural lifecycle for an individual. The shame that often surrounds an addiction, as well as internal and external pressures to change and be different, can be strong aspects of what hold the cycle of addiction frozen in stasis. Within the context of grief counselling, a colleague recently bemoaned the societal pressures to “get over it” within a certain time (*chronos*), and return to the industrious and productive norm of our culture; whereas grief bears its own schedule and calendar (*kairos*), and the burden of feeling “there must be something wrong with me for still feeling this way after so much time has past” only exacerbates the weight of difficulty.

Perhaps the same is true of addictions if we understand them to be, as Lewis argues (2015), behavioural symptoms of deeper internal causes that lie beneath the surface of appearance—like childhood trauma, unsupported development, grief, overpressured expectations, uninhabitable relationships, work stressors, etc. At bottom, healing observes its own *kairos* time. The complex interplay and seasons of these unseen wounds should be respected as truer determinants of the prognosis and course of

substance use. Seen in this way, substances are often a self-administered medicine for the overwhelm of struggle, suffering, grief, numbness, meaninglessness and stuckness, and the nuance in aligning with and validating the addicted person, and even the intelligence and adaptiveness of their medicating behaviour becomes critical to the traction of recovery. In this vein, Coherence Therapy (Ecker, et al., 2012) stresses the importance of validating the prosymptom position (PSP). Of course the impacts of substance use often bear alarming and deleterious effects on the individual.

A soul-in-movement that I am working with who is now six months sober is actively involved in AA. As she speaks about her own experiences, she notices how much pressure there is to work through the steps and get them right, and do this well once and for all. It is as if her recovery is governed by a commodified chronos time, in which she feels the ever-present guilt, shame and pressure of having exchanged many years of her life to alcohol; now feeling the weight of this impossible task of earning it back. She still speaks highly of AA, recounting its importance in her recovery journey, but also wishes she could take the program on her own terms, noticing how much internalised pressure she feels, and at some threshold she just “shuts down”. Under the pressures of a rushed sense of time, her development, healing and recovery struggle to find traction, and rather than being supported in feelings of abundance that draw a person outward, to be part of the world beyond, a sense of scarcity and separation precipitate a withdrawal inwards.

Chapter 6: Into the Wide Wild World

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts

of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion

—Thoreau, *Walden*

Beyond Home

Embarking as we have into this question of nature connection, healing, and relationality, we are taken into the great, wide expanse of wilderness. For if there is one quality that nature exhibits, clashing so painfully with our constructed realms, it is that nature is not designed for us. Our relationship to nature may not be construed this direction. Rather, to speak of our intrinsic connection with nature, it is more accurate to say that we have been designed by nature, reared by her, and knit together as part of her abundant and seamless interplay of habitats and inhabitants. And so away we step from comforts of an endless city buzz, away from the convenience of ready-consumable foods, sugars, starches and fats—these morsels of biological abundance, which to bygone

stretches of famine and starvation would have signalled the very hope of survival, but now bring a mere comfort, quite detached from this archaic concern; Away from the sounds of music, curated television narratives, news anchors and podcasts; Away from the drones of dishwashers, dryers, circular saws and reversing delivery trucks; Away from high-resolution pixels and the explosive array of better-than-life graphics and surround sound; Away from the warm, familiar pillow that cradles the dreaming mind. We move away from human artifacts that cater to human interests—Away from all the *fixes*, for whatever it was that broke in the first place...

Going out into the cold is an endeavour supported by the warmth within. And we are all, at some point, called out beyond the threshold of comfort and safety, into the terrible night. One day or another we all must leave home. Just as on that very first day when each one emerged from the supreme warmth and safety of that original home, into a cold space, exposed and gasping at this new substance—so vacuous and thin—this air. From a floating, weightless space to heaving against the matter of our own gravity. Out there lies a new thing... something quite different from the limitless abundance of the womb. It is the stab of cold; the threat of injury; the chilling terror of doom. Yet for all its shadow and terror, there is something in our nature that draws, pulls or pushes us outward, beyond the familiarity and safety of what we have been before. To the extent that a home-fire burns warm within our breast, fear may be rendered into the thrill of adventure and quest; as the chill of scarcity looms in the shadows of our inarticulate past, fear grows into terror and threat. Any crossing of the threshold of home into the great wide wild entails a negotiation of these voices, and much hangs in the balance.

In all the moments and patterns in which our development and flourishing stand unsupported and exposed, we eventually discover surrogate homes of comfort, support, and empowerment, embedding ourselves within these pockets of safety like a womb. This return to enclosed space often turns out to be a constriction that withdraws from the cold, threatening exposures of openness, recluding into the solace of isolation. Only such a return, like that of nostalgia, is not an actual return to the true reality of nurturance that the womb once provided, but is suspended by artifice and appearance. Addiction is just such a hollow home for many, and the notion of leaving it can be a terrifying proposal. On the other hand, there is some—albeit incomplete, intelligence at work in the invention of this hollow surrogate, and addiction represents a survival response, engulfed in scarcity, fear, and the immutable urgency that characterise these experiences. To consider the nuances of addiction may view it as an adaptive way of providing a womb for oneself, in which the threatening, cold, untrustworthy world can be held at bay. Cocooning in this “small, limitless universe,” the dialectic provisions of home are met on a surface level: belonging and safety are felt as the consciousness swirls and enshrouds closely around the self, while agency and empowerment over this newly sequestered universe can be exerted.

An addiction can be viewed as a protective enshrouding within a surrogate home. Substances close off the self to experiences of pain, fear and a world full of scarcity, simulating an artificial abundance that recentres the self within the felt safety of a smaller universe. The enclosing of the self within its own isolated experiences exacts a toll on the relationships of which the self is truly composed, and bereft of its relationality, the self becomes static, rigid and brittle in its isolation. It would be a mistake to

understand this as all taking place within the operant functions of a prefrontal mind, for as we have seen experiences of threat and pain cause the consciousness to recede back into its more basic and immediate survival responses, effectively taking the creative, problem-solving and choosing brain “offline”. This is why moral arguments often backfire, only increasing the burden of addiction with feelings of guilt and shame, precipitating a withdrawal back into the addiction.

If the self may be viewed not so much as a static, solid and definitive entity, as a context within which all its relations move and interact, then its healing depends on a restoration of its relationality and connection. While balanced relationships are characterised by a flow of dialectical movement and reciprocal exchange, the stuckness of addiction is unmoving and stagnant. The constriction of self preservation narrows the self and its relational movements as the perceived scarcity of the world mirrors that same feeling within; the situation is compounded within a Western context in which the independence and isolation of our living and thinking erode at collective ground of our relational nature; shortly we turn to consider the ways in which the self is held within its world of constructed meaning. Stepping out into a world of relations often appears as a zero-sum game: a sense of abundance within evokes the excitement and joy of openness to new connections and relations; the world tends to respond positively to such an energy, reinforcing the possibility for this one to find, or create home out there as well. By contrast, feeling scarcity within oneself and being pushed out beyond the walls of comfort and safety, the world is often met with the rigid unnatural movements of anxiety, suspicion and distrust, and in turn reflects these back, further confirming this felt sense of themselves and the world. As we have learned, the bulk of these responses, along with

their implicit exchanges of communication, take place on the preconscious plane of the nervous system, only later to emerge through the meaning of interpretation and thought. In some facets of the natural world, there may be more room for error, with many of the elements and beings of this realm responding consistently regardless of fear and anxiety response; yet many of its more sentient beings are acutely tuned in to this basic plane of communication and respond similarly.

Leaving to Shunda: An Anecdote

My thirteen-week sojourn at Shunda means a five am departure into a dark and formless world. Peeling away from a blissful enfoldment within warm pillows and cozy blankets, I am born into the crisp nighttime air, with sluggish, nebulous thoughts conducting clumsy movements. Beneath this haze lies a subtle admixture of excitement and angst, like waking for one of those obscenely early international connector flights—the thrill of new horizons and an apprehension of leaving the safety of home; But my awareness may be too dull to fully grasp the full sense of it all just now, and the feelings will resurface again and again in varying degrees of clarity and intensity throughout the morning’s journey. From the embedded enclosure of dreamworlds into the exposure and mystery of darkness, I am dislodged.

The route I follow trails gradually away from the big city towards the Rocky Mountains on an unhurried angle that nearly parallels the great spine of its faultline. Unlike HWY 1, which charges aggressively toward and through this mountainous collective, the “cowboy trail”, as it is called, carves generally north, with a casual encroachment westward, as if sneaking up on these great stoney beings. Leaving the city, a short cut I have found winds past an arrangement of massive, illustrious “Bears paw”

estates, a name appropriated from the Stoney Nakoda Nation, now “reserved” in conditions far different on lands not far west of here. I notice my jaw retract with a mixed sense of injustice, bafflement, disgust and undertones of envy. At times I avert my eyes to more comforting views of pastureland and cattle to my right, seeking something more modest and sincere to hold my gaze. Every so often I am taken off guard by a dull pang of nostalgic yearning for the countryside home of my upbringing, but this is often swallowed as quickly as it emerges back into the early-morning grey of my awareness. I sometimes notice the small herds of oil derricks in this area and my thoughts channel toward the industry and “progress” of this land—reason for the affluence of some of its human occupants, and a disparity that lurks beneath the surface. And sometimes, when I’m most keenly mindful, I notice myself among them.

This three-hour road leads through several small towns, past farmers fields and ranchlands, in a thin, straight ribbon laid across these expressive foothills. At the interval of each new town the pastures, ranches and croplands yield more and more to the rugged concealment of thick coniferous forests. And then the historic town of Rocky Mountain House—the last, biggest outpost of human civilization, marking a distinct gateway into undomesticated lands of raw wilderness. Thick forests of spruce, pine and some tamarack and a great many bushes host untold communities of grouse, hawk, raven, coyote, fox, moose, elk and deer, and more. On occasion I even see wild horses, these majestic creatures who have returned to their ancestry of undomesticated freedom from so long ago.

During this stretch of my journey the remoteness of this landscape begins making itself most keenly felt. Beyond leaving my home, in all its comfort and familiarity, the

feeling of departing the human world became tangible to my awareness, at times like a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, and at others like an expansion of self-conscious fortitude of being alone in a vast, inhospitable place. The thoughts that accompany these feelings shift also, between imagining the length of response time to a horrible accident that might befall me (usually vehicular), to envisioning the complete solitude of surviving alone somewhere removed from this thin ribbon of asphalt that is so anomalous to this rugged setting. Other shards of thought and feeling that penetrate and quickly dissolve during this stretch of mental terrain seems to sneak up and pounce with sudden admiration, awe and beauty; here at an eagle spotted soaring overhead, there at a vibrant ray of slanting sunlight cutting through the thick forest to my left with surprising brilliance.

My conscious mind at times attempts to proliferate this sense of the beauty of my surroundings by noticing and thinking about it, but by and large these intentions remain suspended above the experiential world of feeling and sensation, and my awareness of this elicits its own mixed sense of longing and frustration. I suspect that I try too hard, and my intentions get ensnared by the synthetic and artificial quality of goal-oriented thinking. My mentor's words return to me: "relax into what precedes intention, expectation and the self" (M. Scott-Alexander, personal communication, November 12, 2019). Here and there my breathing becomes a gracious companion to the imperfect process of becoming present to my surroundings; and perhaps even sensing myself a part of them.

As I reflect on these early contacts of my journeying into the natural realm I notice the way they oscillate between three very familiar features of my awareness:

apprehension, prowess and appreciation. My research uncovers a parallel in Richardson's "three-circle model of affect regulation" (2019, p. 124), taking place on the dialectic plane of sympathetic-parasympathetic response. *Threat* enlists the sympathetic response, eliciting a state of arousal characterised by anxiety and avoidance; *Drive* is also an activating response, but one related to joy and pursuing; while *contentment* is a deactivation entailing experiences of calm and connection. The dialectic of home which we have been developing here evokes the agency and empowerment of *drive* in balance with its counterpart of *contentment*, where attachment, connection and beauty reside. *Threat*, as we have explored rushes to enlist short-termed reactions, and the longer one lives in this state the more pervasive and enduring a sense of scarcity and isolation results.

Distinctions such as these help in describing and understanding emotional landscapes, but they are by no means exhaustive, nor mutually exclusive. For instance it proves important to our discussion of addiction that drive and contentment can be underwritten by the fear of threat. Drive can clearly be employed for the sake of avoiding painful and threatening memories and emotions, and plays a significant role in the pursuit of satisfying the addiction employed toward these ends. Similarly, the constrictive reactions of closing off the self, conditioned by a felt sense of unsafety and exposure, leads to cloistering within the comfortable and familiar, bearing a semblance of contentment. Fear and avoidance of leaving the contentment of home—whether surrogate or organic, may signal imbalance in the dialectic of belonging and opportunities for agency and empowerment, in favour of the former. Such an imbalance may underlie the "failure to launch," and extended adolescence that have been widely emerging in the past

decades, corresponding with deficits in relationality and maintaining meaningful connection (Stetka, 2017; Twenge & Park 2019).

It is often the case that lying implicit within the meanings and interpretations that overlay our experience of the world is an unconscious emotional appraisal. The metaphor of an iceberg is often employed to illustrate dynamics like these, yet when it is considered from the viewpoint of conscious and rational awareness, the image of a ship and its rudder bear a stronger portrayal. Imagining a royal European Galleon, its sturdy masts, billowing sails, pompous colours and forthright hull commanding a robust, decorous and invulnerable appearance, our rational thinking, and the narratives and interpretations it garners, may appear so prominent and significant to awareness. Yet under the surface, opposite to the ship's proud bow and foremost figurehead, operates a small part which bears tremendous effect on the purpose and function of the entire vessel. This rudder, while appearing so small, and for the most part so relegated from awareness, in truth is instrumental in guiding the direction and movement of the whole. So it may be with our emotions, often appearing so small and inconsequential to an awareness caught up in its intellectual properties, but in truth these guide our narratives and appraisals of the world in very significant ways.

Extending this further, the movements of this grand vessel upon the surface of the deep are far more determined by the currents, tides and waves of these vast waters, and by the gusts, gales and squalls of the atmosphere above—far more than even a humble rudder can admit to. By parallel, our ways of being, moving and thinking in the world are conditioned by our habitats in many ways we are at best peripherally aware. The significance of whether we move out into the world with a felt sense of abundance or

scarcity, or whether the world we move out into is primarily natural or manmade, holds strong influence over the narratives and dispositions we inhabit, and the potential for relationality that these exhibit. We turn now to consider these features of our intersubjective landscapes which we at once hold and are held within. As we have at length explored the realities of *place*, primarily through the familiarity, embeddedness and implicit relationality of the body and emotion, finding home in the wide expanses of *space* entails an heuristic of the self in the world that is not, as constructivists may be prone to imagine, merely relegated to the realm of the mind. Rather it is inextricably linked with the emotion and sensations of the body as well. Possibilities of relationality in the spaciousness of the cosmos rely on cultivating and integrating an awareness of the sensing, emoting, meaning-making self within the unity and diversity of all its relations.

At Home in Space

In spite of the unprecedented abundance of human life in the developed world, we still act and relate as though there is not enough. Somehow, for all our prosperity, there remains a collective scarcity from which we feel the need to secure ourselves and our resources away by lock and key, wall and weapon. What does this say about how we feel ourselves within the world; and what meanings might we anticipate emerging from this felt sense? It may be that in spite of our mansions, condos and bungalows, there remains a pervasive sense of homelessness that underlies these “needs” to secure and accumulate; even as this gap between the reality of abundance and the perception of scarcity is glossed by a lens of meaning held in the desperate clutches of this feeling. And so it may be that the world we unconsciously expect to find is the world we inadvertently create.

For human creatures, shared narratives account for who we are, why we are here, where we have come from and how we have come to be; like a topographical map, these stories draw lines of relation between the points of meaning and significance that orient our narrative awareness, and with it our sense of self within the world, depicting the contours and features of the world we inhabit, situating the self within. These cosmologies furnish a home—shared by a wide collective, for consciousness (*kairos*) within the grand, limitless landscape of time and space (*aion*), imbuing the living-world with values, purpose and identity.

Sharon Blackie, speaking from the interface of psychology, mythology and ecology argues that seeing the world through the lens of *enchantment*

“has nothing to do with fantasy, or escapism, or magical thinking: it is founded on a vivid sense of belongingness to a rich and many-layered world; a profound and whole-hearted participation in the adventure of life. The enchanted life ... is intuitive, embraces wonder and fully engages the creative imagination – but it is also deeply embodied, ecological, grounded in place and community. It flourishes on work that has heart and meaning; it respects the instinctive knowledge and playfulness of children. It understands the myths we live by; thrives on poetry, song and dance. It loves the folkloric, the handcrafted, the practice of traditional skills. It respects wild things, recognises the wisdom of the crow, seeks out the medicine of plants. It rummages and roots on the wild edges, but comes home to an enchanted home and garden. It is engaged with the small, the local, the ethical; enchanted living is slow living (2018, p. 12).

In my life and spiritual journey I have been deeply moved by *Niitsitapi* (“Blackfoot”) and *Nehiyawak* (“Cree”) creation stories that have been shared with me in ceremony. I particularly honour and acknowledge Piegan Blackfoot Elder Grant Little Moustache and *Nehiyawak* Elder Patrick Daigneault in the teaching and stories they have passed on to me. The way these stories and their associated practices hold intimate connection with *this land* and the beings that belong to it, facilitating an enduring and deep-running relationships with the land from time immemorial, is based not only in knowledge, but in ways of knowing that uphold ways of being, and ways of acting and relating, which at bottom are grounded upon “natural law”. Natural characters feature prominently in these stories, and the relationships between the human people and these other peoples of this land are significant and held in high regard. In effect the underlying recognition of “all my relations” places the human people as one nation among all the other nations of peoples—the *buffalo people*, the *bear people*, the *eagle people*, the *prairie chicken people*, the *standing ones*, the small *crawling ones* and the *great stoney ones*, to name a few, creating an important balance between all the peoples who belong to this land. The subjective and intersubjective qualities of these stories mean that their truth is proven not in their factuality but in their outcome: in how they help facilitate proper, balanced, reciprocal interaction within these relationships.

In this light, our modern scientific cosmologies begin to appear anemic. Objective knowings and ways of knowing that make an object of—“objectify,” the surroundings we inhabit, underlie industrial and consumer rationalities that consume and lay waste to our shared home. McGrath (2002) notices the disenchantment of the cosmos, the removal of its personhood, wonderment and spirit need not be so fundamental to the scientific view

as they have become. Consequences of this way of viewing, of knowing, of interacting with the world are becoming undeniably evident, and unconscionably dire. In *The Homeless Mind: Modernisation and Consciousness*, Berger, Berger & Kellner (1974) describe the transience of modern technological existence and the way it undermines belonging and grows a sense of isolation. An upshot of this is a proliferation of anonymous space. For the modern individual, the “experience of society and of self has been what might be called a metaphysical loss of ‘home’” (1974, p. 82). This profound sense of detachment, reverberating to the depth of belief and spiritual understanding, is something we may view as resisting the natural law of connection, relationship and reciprocity that underlies our interconnected nature. In the words of David Orr : “compulsive consumption, perhaps a form of grieving or perhaps evidence of mere boredom, is a response to the fact that we find ourselves exiles and strangers in a diminished world that we once called home” (2002, p. 175) This detachment bears the resemblance of a trauma response that has become enculturated and encoded within collective ways of being, as we shall soon explore further.

Big bang, evolution and string theories are modern cosmologies of the Western mind whose sense of scientific objectivity, transposed into the vernacular of dominant culture, create ultimate “theories of everything,” which manifest an abstract, non-specific, and theoretical viewing of the cosmos. They are cold, abstract and impersonal, featuring no characters, just matter, principles of physics and life (in abstract), causation and vacuous space. The intention here is not to discredit or deny these theories, nor any modern mythologies with which they have been overlaid, but to notice two features about them: 1) how they purport to speak dispassionately of a mind-independent reality, and the

implications this may have on the role that cosmology and narrative play in making sense of the self in the world; and 2) the way they supplant and undermine the inhabitable narratives that came before. It is a peculiar feature of the Western way of knowing that it contends to be *the* truth, to an exclusion of all other ways of knowing, and the truths these produce. In Western culture, the loss of inhabitable and relatable accounts of where, why and how the beings of this Earth came to be marks an amnesia of crucial relational memory, an erosion of the subjective attachments through which *place*—and emplacement, take on the cherished significance of home. The ascendance of modern scientific narratives in the contemporary West may speak less to their ability to hold and make sense of the human predicament, and more to their hegemonic wielding which threatens to pummel their “irrational” pre-modern counterparts into obscurity.

The plausibility of a pure, shining reason that could transcend all else as the hope of the cosmos emerged in the Enlightenment era. Bright futures lay ahead, carried on the wings of rationalism, while the prevailing attitude towards the past can be heard in the descriptor of the times that lay before: “the Dark Ages.” On one hand, a thriving optimism conveyed futures of endless possibility, and by and large our society yet abides in this sense of enamourment. Our reading on this side of history, however, takes for granted the implicit polemic that was being waged with these words upon preceding traditional sensibilities, for history (and its philosophy) is remembered through the writings of its victors.

In one movement, the doctrine of discovery supplanted both the ancestral stories, of a land-based culture and society of Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, forcibly displaced African people from their land and cultural ways of knowing through

the Transatlantic Slave Trade, replacing them with supposedly *enlightened* European Christians and enlightened European Christian stories and ways of knowing (Charles & Rah, 2019). The residential schools of Canada, mandated and funded by the Government of Canada and run by various Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, United church and Presbyterian orders, forcibly and violently removed an estimated 150,000 Indigenous children from their families and homes, many of whom were neglected, malnourished, severely abused, tortured and even perished (Methot, 2019), all within the explicit intent of “getting rid of the Indian problem” and “killing the Indian in the child.” These phrases are commonly attributed to Indian Act Superintendent, Duncan Campbell Scott (Eshet, 2015). This is only one aspect of what may be considered a genocide on this land, and with the last residential school in Canada closing as late as 1996, the historical and intergenerational legacy of this oppressive institution continues to deeply impact the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples today. Combined with other dimensions of the Indian Act, which banned Indigenous peoples from speaking their own language and practicing their ceremonies, moving them off their ancestral lands onto reserves with Treaties that were never respected by the Canadian government, the damages inflicted on the Indigenous peoples of this land are deep and enduring.

In the next movement, the church and religion, these grand archaic establishments of the past are themselves undermined, attacked and deconstructed, rendered irrational and unscientific at best, and at worst a superstitious opiate by the dawning age of secularism (Taylor, 2009). In these ways the Enlightenment of Europe proclaimed itself the supreme language of the cosmos.

By contrast, many Indigenous creation narratives speak of the origins of “the people,” by which is meant their own people, and feature the beings with which they have a special relationship. Creation occurs within the orders and natural laws laid out in the authentic movements of nature and is seen as ongoing, and one which we creatures are perpetually related to (Kidwell, Noley & Tinker, 2002). In all this, the world, in the vastness of its *aionic* time and space, becomes comprehensible, habitable and thus relatable to the human mind, body and spirit. Sherri Mitchell Weh'na Ha'mu Kwasset, from the standpoint of her Penawahpskek Indigenous worldview, notices the way "our songs, stories, and mythologies all speak of our interrelatedness. From birth, we are taught to be aware of the expanded kinship networks that surround us, which include other human beings along with the beings of the land, water, and air, and the plants, trees, and all remaining unseen beings that exist within our universe" (2018, p. 9)

Whereas so much of modern cosmology emphasises separateness, distinction, and individuality, the truth that we are composed of the same materials of our ecological world is writ both in science and mythology. For instance, the microbiome of the gut (both human and animal) bears significant resemblance to that found in the very soils of the earth (Blum et al., 2019), even as impacts of urbanised living sap at its diversity in humans, and industrialised farming threatens its diversity in the soil (2019). The deleterious impacts of our lifestyles of separation from the biodiversity of the living world bear plausible correlations to health issues, including those related to auto-immune, allergies, and even colon cancer, and other digestive tract complications (Bolourian & Mojtahedi, 2018; Blum et al., 2019). Beyond this,

gut bacteria also produce hundreds of neurochemicals that the brain uses to regulate basic physiological processes as well as mental processes such as learning, memory and mood. For example, gut bacteria manufacture about 95 percent of the body's supply of serotonin, which influences both mood and GI activity” (Carpenter, 2012, par. 9).

The resemblance between the *human* and the *humus* proves not an idle matter.

These associations are clear within the biblical cosmology of the second account of creation (Genesis 2). Here God molds the first human, *Adam*, out of the *adama* (the earth). As God fills this earthen form with *ruach*, meaning breath, wind or spirit, the human becomes composed of the soil and sky. In the progression of the creation narrative in the first account in Genesis 1, each day God invites new aspects of the world to emerge: on the first, God calls forth light and darkness, day and night, morning and evening; on the second, the expanse of the sky; on the third, God invites the earth to separate from the water, creating land and sea. God then calls on the land itself to put forth vegetation and plant life; on the fourth day, God evokes lights and luminaries of the sky, calling forth the sun, moon and stars, gifting them with rhythms that signal the passage of time through seasons, days and years; on the fifth day God invites the waters to bring forth the creatures of the sea and the sky; and on the sixth day God calls on the land to beget cattle, creeping things and animals of the wild, and then with a pause, God sets out to create a being in God’s own image, vesting this creature with a special responsibility to care for, cultivate and curate the order God called forth in creation.

It is commonly understood that the creation narrative ends here, with this special creation and ordination of the human, however it is clear that the seventh day portrays the

fulfillment of all that God has called forth. Many scholars take this rest, and its special blessing of the sabbath, as the final creative act in implementing relational harmony among all God had created, and thus the seventh day, within the balance of all the relations of creation, represents the true completion of creation. At this point in the text there lies a beautiful little sentence that offers a lens through which to understand what has just transpired: “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created” (NRSV, 2007, Genesis 2:4). The world, thus begotten of seven generations, is understood to be thoroughly related, and humanity, rather than being set apart from, and above the rest of the created world, is emplaced within this grand cosmos as a part of the whole harmony.

Seeing things in this way, through a lens of kinship and relationality, the entire Cosmos may become home as it houses all our relations. There is nothing we are not related to, and even the scientific tongue employs this language of relationships (e.g. the relationship between cause and effect, correlations etc.). Yet as I sit in the therapy room in which I attempt to facilitate contact with this soul-in-movement, and their own “home-fires” of development, growth and healing, I can’t help but think that a kind of “indoor thinking” may be part of the ailment here, colluding with the characteristics of trauma, and inhibiting an imagination of true horizons of the related self. How easily this cubic space—walled in on six sides with such geometric precision, may become a metaphor of the self; and how impossible to change a thing that is so entirely enclosed, related to nothing but itself. Western psychology has long imagined the psyche in this way. But to crack open a window of the soul, and to feel that cool current of air brush across the skin, as it brushed that pine across the way, and that fuzzy little squirrel

skittering through its branches, perhaps the open-system of relations can infiltrate the dark stagnant air of our isolation.

To speak for a moment of the therapeutic cosmologies at play in this helping profession, it is commonly acknowledged (how commonly practiced remains at question) that modalities and theories must submit to the particularity and complexity of the soul-in-movement. In many ways, these models offer cosmologies of the self, accounting for the what's, why's, how's and of the difficulty and the resources of the self that can be brought to bear. A model can provide a home of familiarity for the counsellor, and like an axis mundi, orient them within the complex, often pain-filled, often disorienting world of the soul-in-movement. In my beginner's experience, disorientation is thematic and common, and familiarising myself to these generalised understandings of diagnoses, theoretical approaches and treatment modalities, helps orient me with the expertise of others in this field, and provides a sense of familiarity and expectation for what may be encountered. I am encouraged to become *at home* within a theoretical orientation, and read evidence supporting the effectiveness of this lens. I sense the importance of becoming fluent with these knowings, of working with and through them as tools for orienting myself within the wild and ever-shifting terrain of the therapeutic encounter.

Yet it is in the phenomenological depth and subtlety that each soul-in-movement holds regarding their own experience that traction takes place; I am at best aware of the importance of this largely invisible-to-me ecology of relationships in which they are held, and from which their very selfhood derives. At the same point I am painfully aware (sometimes) of a drive in myself to be justified and correct, of wanting to be the active, heroic agent of recovery and healing in the lives of others; Here in particular belie the

dangers of dogmatic thinking, and here it becomes most critical to attune to the natural processes of healing that each client, within their peculiar ecology, possesses often without knowing. At bottom, my own certainty, clarity and comfort in theory and modality must bow to the deeper necessity that the soul-in-movement feel at home within the therapeutic relationship, feeling safe and at ease with this shared holding of their experiences. It is foremost in this sense of ease that dis-ease is alleviated, and in safety that a natural healing process is actualised, on both intra- and inter-relational levels.

The critical task is to step into the cosmological arc of this soul-in-movement, entering into their own narrative of how they came to be, their understanding of themselves in the world and the relations from which they have emerged. For many, a lack of meaning and belonging underlies the difficulties they are experiencing, and the gravity of these questions may lend weight and significance to their sense of self within the grander story of the world. Our place in this grand world and its vast narrative may be small, but it is no less significant; in these very questions of our relatedness and connection to the cosmos, we may come to find that we are of the same substance, and part of the same beautiful story.

Disembodied Narratives

“Stories bypass the shredding effects of over-analysis and conscious reasoning.

Stories are inherently hypnotic in that they fixate attention and appeal to the imagination” (Tyrell, 2013, par. 4).

The power of narrative to captivate the attention, spark the imagination and stir the emotions proves both the ease with which we find ourselves within their meaning, as well as our innate capacity to discover the significance of our own experience within the

experiences of others. Even as a story draws unifying threads between moments and events in time, it fundamentally operates within our ability to identify with and inhabit the lifeworld of its characters. The most powerful stories are ones that resonate with our own felt-experience, channel prevailing, often unspoken themes of our culture, and evoke more timeless and profound aspects of the human predicament. In this way narratives can portray strong themes that may be widely felt, but not yet articulated, and the true genius of a brilliant storyteller, thinker or even philosopher may lie not in their ability to invent novel and original themes, but in their ability to sense and give voice to what hangs ineffably in the air of the collective experience.

For an idea, story or cosmology to be influential, it must be plausible to its hearers, conforming to their sense of how the world is, how it came to be, and how its characters move and relate within it. In so far as they are plausible, aligning with the collective felt-experience of the world, these meanings take on influence, and through this influence they in turn shape the plausibility of collective consciousness. To consider the Western narrative in this view means that the sense of scarcity that we have observed to be at the root of so many of its ways of being, knowing and acting is both held within this narrative, and legitimated (made plausible) by some preceding experience. Scarcity is a fear-based appraisal, and as we have explored it is a feature of unsupported development, neglect and trauma; and so the homelessness of the Western experience resonates within the intergenerational wounds of a particularly violent European history, replete with famine, plagues, feudal battling, nation-state wars, revolutions and violent, public forms of torture and mutilation. Resmaa Menakem (2017) points to this through the lens of intergenerational trauma, noting how so many of the architects of white

supremacy in America bear their own unresolved wounds from generations past, from across the Atlantic.

Considering the way trauma can induce a “Survival Mode” which may be passed down by epigenetic code through several generations, it is significant to note that this transmission includes “risky health behaviors, anxiety and shame, food hoarding, overeating, authoritarian parenting styles, high emotional neediness on the part of parents and low community trust and cohesiveness” (DeAngelis, 2019, Feb., par. 3). The prevalence of these challenges in North American society bespeak the extent of this legacy, and as this heritage of trauma is woven into the narrative cloth of our cultural expectancies and narratives, it is taken for granted as a part of the very plausibility that underlies the possible. The “cold hard truths” of this “dog-eat-dog world” are saturated in the scarcity thinking of collective trauma (Hübl, 2020) that preclude relational dispositions like forgiveness, generosity and openness, and many other associations to the abundance of home, and it is most clear that the descriptor *low community trust and cohesiveness* is a ubiquitous norm of our Western milieu. As Freidman notices, “Modern man, in contrast, is homeless both in the universe and in the community” (2003), as the depth of our mistrust of one another is writ large, across the very face of the cosmos.

As we have seen, one of the main impacts of trauma is a disconnect from the body, its sensation, affect, and emotion, with profound effects on the relational field. Whereas our basic feelings of safety emerge from this field, feeling disconnected and unsupported in our relationships maintains a sense of scarcity, becoming written into our narratives and the ways we understand ourselves in the world. The natural realm is the body’s world, and the movement of Western civilisation inward, towards the comforts

and material abundance of cities, and away from the natural spaces and habitats which homed their emergence as a species, is matched by an inward movement into introspection and identification with the activities of the mind, and away from the body, in all its relational intelligence.

In parallel to what we have already explored, the great Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant recognises that “all our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds then to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason”, (1998, p. 52). It is this final clause that accumulated so much weight in the Western story, to the exclusion of what the former may have implied towards the significance of our bodily nature, even in spite of its categorical significance. This emphasis here made on the senses summarises the central thesis of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998), taking place within the Western philosophical discourse to which he was contributing, particularly between the stark rationalism of Descartes and its antithesis in the extreme empiricism developed by Hume. Kant’s concern is thus in mediating the rift between empiricism and rationalism, a union that would bear strong influence in the development of scientific epistemology (Mac Intyre, 1966), and not in affirming the significance of embodiment, muchless the realm of emotion and the relationality that this entails. The meanings of “relationship” and “senses” are overshadowed by the significance they bear in a Western discourse of scientific empiricism. The lack of plausibility for speaking of sensation, affect, emotion and relationship through a more embodied and inter-relational lens may well be understood through the lens of the traumas of European history, and their intergenerational accumulation, and the alexithymic disconnect of the body, and its emotions is thus enculturated and subsumed within the Western Narrative at large.

Feeling is a basic precursor to *healing*. Beyond the ways that feeling and sensation tell us that we are wounded, and inform the care and nurturance we can provide for our own wounds, as we have seen, the embodied basis of emotion means that feelings mediate our relational movements as well. Where basic feelings of safety and security are met within the relational spaces of home, it is in the ease of this experience of support, comfort and relational safety that the healing of dis-ease comes about. A disembodied narrative is thus a relationally vacant construct, and unsupported in this vital substructure we would anticipate the narrative to be characterised by a sense of scarcity and fear.

In particular, as domesticated landscapes and mass urbanisation began to characterise the Western experience, an alienation from its original home in nature became palpable in the fearful and antagonistic themes that began to frame much of their relationship to this realm. John Vaillant highlights some key examples of this in his book *The Golden Spruce*:

in 1651, the Pilgrim William Bradford described the low forests of Cape Cod as a ‘hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men.’ He was not alone; for many of the early settlers, clearing the land was not just a necessity, it was a sacrament—an act of holy alchemy in which the dark, evil, and worthless was transformed into something light, virtuous, and fruitful. Profitable, too (Vaillant, 2015, p. 102).

In many cases fear veils itself in strength, and from here we gain a vantage of how the understanding of Genesis 1:26; 28 came to conflate the mandate to “have dominion over” (NRSV, 1989) creation with “dominating” and exploiting it; as Davis writes, this text has been “invoked [since the renaissance] in the West to support the

project of ‘conquering,’ ‘commanding,’ or ‘enslaving’ nature through scientific and technological means” (n.d., par. 2). More accurately, the word “over” is better translated as “among,” or “with respect to,” which, according to Davis, amounts to the translation, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness, *so they may exercise skilled mastery among* [or, *with respect to*] the fish of the sea and *among* the birds of the air” (n.d., par. 2). This narrative of *dominance over*, is exactly what characterises the anthropocene—the era of human dominance over the globe, which “began with widespread colonialism and slavery. It is a story about how people treat the environment, and how people treat each other” (Lewis & Maslan, 2018, p. 11).

Within narratives of dominance—these clever disguises for an underlying sense of fear and scarcity, it is easy to see how our very nature has become construed through a lens of competition, which, in turn, is imputed to Nature itself. The Darwinian adage, “survival of the fittest” is rooted in domination and competition, and finds these to be the very organising principle of life itself. For all Darwin’s contributions to the science of biology, some of which is cited above adding to our current discourse, the prevailing narrative that views Nature, and by extension, ourselves through a lens of competition, purports to describe the central meaning and significance of the relatedness of life itself. This narrative curtails the significance of mutuality and reciprocity, that we have found to be so central in the warmth and abundance of home, and sets the stage for profoundly problematic projects such as eugenics and white supremacy.

Where the narrative construes Nature in this light, it becomes dark and fearful—a terrible contrast to the kindness and love we had hoped to find in the world; as Lord Tennyson’s famous stanza evokes:

Who trusted God was love indeed

And love Creation's final law

Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw

With ravine, shriek'd against his creed (Tennyson, 2007, p. 79).

The natural world is a fearful and terrifying place—*red in tooth and claw*, and one to be avoided, or else subjugated, dominated, and domesticated until it complies with the needs of my own fearful existence. So we stay indoors, in town, online, in reach, under coverage; forgetting the very world from whence we emerged in the first place.

Where we see ourselves in the light of this dominant nature, we ourselves become a terrible beast to be feared, like Nietzsche's "beast of prey; the magnificent blonde brute, avidly rampant for spoil and victory" (2003, p. 22), exploiting the world and each other out of unconscious fear. We become perpetrators of the anthropocene, taking all that is in our power to own, consuming all that we may, with wanton disregard for the plight of the dispossessed. Here it is we ourselves who become *red in tooth and claw* as Dawkins elaborates in *The Selfish Gene* (2017), summarizing human behaviour—among the nature of all living things, as arising out of the 'survival of the fittest' doctrine.

In this light, our own "animal nature," comes to be viewed as the satisfaction of our most base desires, conflated with an unimpeded selfishness. Viewing ourselves in this way—perceiving ourselves through an intellectual principle, and not through the honesty of our embodied existence, leads to an isolated imprisonment within desire itself; the self becomes synonymous with appetite. Addiction abides within this disembodied fiction of this cerebral narrative. In truth, to observe the natural world in its own rite, and not solely construed through our projections, we see how living creatures ceaselessly communicate

both in subtle nuance and in expressive display. Here again Darwin's observations of affect in the natural world, as noted above, are crucial qualities of the seamless, interconnected dance of natural beings in their existence of thorough-going relationality.

As a young man steps out into nature, there are schemas implicitly at work negotiating his sense of self within his environment. Narratives of "man versus wild," facing this cold terrifying place—the need to prevail, to overcome all odds and obstacles, to conquer this adversarial and inhospitable landscape; these are in part held within a narrative of competition and domination, underwritten by a collective fear and apprehension of non-human spaces. We fear what we do not understand, and we do not understand what we have all but lost contact to. It appears plausible to us that an environment that is not designed around the human experience is inherently threatening and chaotic, and bravado and grit are required for survival here. The narrative of adventure, here becomes steeped in a separateness, and an othering of the natural wilderness, and for the young men at Shunda, it appeared common, particularly in the beginning of their experiences there, to speak about their adventuring as one taking place *over*, and *against* these wild spaces, rather than *within* and *among* them.

Jack London captures something essential of this narrative of separateness in his account of a dog's return to his animal nature in *Call of the Wild*,

The blood-longing became stronger than ever before. He was a killer, a thing that preyed, living on the things that lived, unaided, alone, by virtue of his own strength and prowess, surviving triumphantly in a hostile environment where only the strong survived (2009, p. 77).

Beyond this portrayal of the fierce and unforgiving bloodlust of Nature, the narrative bears out the necessity of a stark and rugged sense of individualism; it is *me against the world*—and *only the strong survive*. In a sense, Jack London is construing this “real” instinct, very much partisan to the doctrine of *survival of the fittest*, as a quality of true living, from which the domesticated human realm has become alienated. In the background of this construal lies a sense of the collective mistrust of community and cosmos that defy vulnerability, intimacy and connection, these basic features of our relational existence.

There is also something of Thoreau’s getting “all the marrow out of life” here, as later London writes,

There is an ecstasy that marks the summit of life... and such is the paradox of living, this ecstasy comes when one is most alive, and it comes as a complete forgetfulness that one is alive. This ecstasy, this forgetfulness of living, comes to the artist, caught up and out of himself in a sheet of flame; it comes to the soldier, war-mad in a stricken field and refusing quarter; and it came to Buck, leading the pack, sounding the old wolf-cry, straining after the food that was alive and that fled swiftly before him through the moonlight. (2009, p. 91)

Viewing this text, and with its aspects of the Western narrative, through a dialectical lens means that our discourse here may descend into the complexity that lies beyond either-or thinking. Such black-and-white thinking itself marks a feature of enculturated trauma response as, when in a state of survival, appraisals of the world are reduced to the dualism of threat or safety. Dialectic movements between differentiation and connection are of vital significance to relational systems (Worthington & Sandage,

2016; Friedman, 2011), even as motifs of freedom and belonging, autonomy and affiliation, independence and love are so ubiquitous to the human experience. I am suggesting here that the imbalanced significance placed on independence, autonomy and freedom within the Western explanation of human existence—and writ large into the cosmos itself, is a quality of the accumulation and codification of unhealed intergenerational collective trauma, and the norm of homeless, unsupported development that emerges as a result.

London's ecstasy of being swept up into a complete participation of living is not an idle matter for a young man struggling through his addictions, and the unseen wounds that lie beneath; Nor is the sense of empowerment and efficacy that comes with being self-conscious of his own prowess and ability—being “possessed of a great pride in himself, which communicated itself like a contagion to his physical being. It advertised itself in all his movements, was apparent in the play of every muscle, spoke plainly as speech in the way he carried himself” (2009, p. 77). For instance, a Shunda comment reads, “I really noticed a strong sense of accomplishment after all the hard work to reach the summit.” Again, it is not that this narrative is wrong or intrinsically evil, but that it asserts itself as the sole truth of the universe, outside of its balancing counterpart of connection, belonging and love. Home and relationality offer both space and emplacement, exposure and enclosure, distinction and inclusion, freedom and love, and both healing and growth take place within this balanced movement.

This dialectic can be felt the contrasting tones with which Johann Gottfried von Herder and Lao Tzu describe Nature, that on one hand, “nothing in Nature stands still; everything strives and moves forward” (von Herder, n.d.) and in the same moment that

“Nature does not hurry, and yet everything is accomplished” (Lao Tzu, 1996). At Shunda, the narratives and experiences of separation of so many of these young men, entangled also by the strings and cords of addiction, were in some moments suspended, and in others completely dissolved, through an immersion in the natural world. Much of this, as we have suggested, owes to the prevalence of implicit invitations back into the corporeal realm of the sensuous. Abiding in these homes of our bodies offers the kairos and connection that underlie basic feelings of safety within its fundamentally relational nature. So many comments from Shunda evoke this sense of connection: “I love Nature;” “I particularly love nature;” “fun, [I had a] sense of peace being in the wilderness.” How this connection emerges from the senses is also evident for some: “Feelings, smells, sights, sensations and to be grateful. [I] got to observe a lot of things I would have missed if I rushed through everything;” and “I was very curious of my breathing, speed and my surroundings and feelings; Observant of how others were doing through the hike.” In these comments we hear how an activation of bodily sensation opens a relationality towards others as well.

Wolsko & Lindberg (2013) highlight the significance of appreciative outdoor activities for a sense of connectedness to Nature, and show its influence on positive well-being. This importance of noticing beauty, sensing and articulating enjoyment, and even care-taking for vulnerable beings in nature is deeply significant to how we understand ourselves within this environment. I am reminded of a young man from Shunda, who suffered with rather complex mental health issues, and often held a particularly negative view of others in the program. On one occasion, while hiking, he found an injured dragonfly struggling in a puddle, and in spite of his initial impulse to

destroy it, he followed a staff's suggestion and he cared for it. For the rest of the hike this little being recovered within the shelter of his hands, and at some point had regained enough strength to fly away.

That summer was bad for mosquitoes, and this young man was particularly irritated by them, to the point of avoiding the outdoors. One evening, when he was particularly struggling with the social environment of the program I suggested we eat outside, and though he was hesitant because of the bugs, he agreed. As we ate we began to notice a lack of mosquitoes in the air around us, and at some point he happened to look above us. We were both baffled by an immense number of dragonflies whizzing through the air above our heads. I had never seen so many. Without my prompting, he related that he was being cared for by the dragonflies just as he had cared for the little one he'd rescued days before. His implicit experience of reciprocity within a caring-cared for relationship was deeply moving and meaningful to him.

This vital balance between our active and receptive natures, written into the very sensory-motor functions of our nervous system itself, may emerge within meanings with which we view ourselves within the wider world. While our legacy of trauma may throw off the balance within the Western narrative in favour of independence, individualism and dominance, the meanings of connection beauty and love both preface and emerge from healing encounters in Nature. Insofar as we feel ourselves a part of Nature, there is an underlying activation of our spiritual nature as well. Spirituality is understood within ecopsychology as taking place within a sensed relationship to nature that include both sensation and meaning, and in this Kamitsis and Francis found spirituality to play a mediating role between nature exposure, nature connectedness and positive wellbeing

(2013). There is something of our spiritual nature that longs to weave together the separate parts of our nature as a whole cloth. Experiences within nature can become deeply spiritual, for the natural world has never perceived itself as separate.

The way we have conceived of ourselves in Western cosmologies and narratives has emphasised rationality, independence and individualism, to the exclusion of their more relational counterparts, with each of these represents a schema of separation. Rationality stands high and lofty above the rest of our experience, governing all else from its cold and distant throne; Independence stresses intrinsic strength and invulnerability, maintaining a rigid and stubborn distance from the help and contribution others; Individualism places the distinction and authenticity of a unique selfhood as its defining essence, disregarding its relational make-up. But it is balance that the rhythms and oscillations of life take place; and it is in the movements of reciprocal relationship that healing can come about. Our staunch intellectualism bleeds to be integrated with our emotional and embodied experience; our independence longs for inclusion within the reciprocal care and nurturance of the world; our individualism yearns for deeper roots that anchor it within the storied relations of its ancestry. But for fear we remain isolated within our abbreviated selves. Wounds of the past, many passed on to us without context, are implicitly woven into the stories we employ to understand ourselves, and our norm becomes a resistance and avoidance of the very thing that could heal us, and the very thing with which the natural world is utterly replete: relationality.

There is a safety that is felt when the meanings of our existence within the cosmos become big enough and at the same time small enough: Big enough never to disclude the vast world relations of which we are composed; and small enough to enclose the

integrated whole of our being. The stories we hold, we are in turn held by, and if they are to sustain an integrated existence, they must satisfy all the layers of who and what we are. A purely rational account will not suffice; nor will a personal narrative of isolated meanings and interpretations. Our truth must be textured and pliable—a product of weave-work, not solely the brick-work of certitude; it must bear holes and gaps for airflow and spiritual imagination. We must hold and be held by a bigger story—a horizon, which begins beneath our very feet. In this we may one day emerge into the spiritual recognition that all our portraits may in truth compose one grand piece, full of light, shadow, texture and colour—we may transcend beyond a lofty, disembodied narrative back into the meanings of an embedded heartbeat that resounds with the textures, vibrance and rhythms of the living world.

Beaver's Blessing: A Conclusion

The beaver has been an important companion with me through the process of developing this work, and helps me now in collecting together the threads of this exploration and meditation on the *nature* of home, relationality and dialectical (natural) movement within the lived challenge of addictions and its underlying wounds and isolation. The realm of the beaver became most real to me near the beginning of the writing of this project, when I stood in as a ceremony helper for Blackfoot Elder Grant Little Moustache in the early thaw of spring. At the outset of this account I must acknowledge my place as an observer-helper-participant, and honour the deep wisdom and knowledge of this ceremonial rite within the unbroken ancestral knowings of the Blackfoot people; the truth of this ceremony runs far deeper and more intricately than I could comprehend in these experiences, let alone in its intentionally limited articulation here. As a settler, my writing here acknowledges the fraught history of colonial occupation in this land, a story in which both my ancestors and my current predicament yet hold place. The gift of this experience remains with me as a part of my story, interweaving here with this original people's beautiful lineage of unbroken connection to the natural world.

The ceremony I participated in was a beaver sweat lodge, held by Piegan Blackfoot Elder Grant Little Moustache who had received all its rites, songs and protocols in the proper way. As Grant tells me, the spirits of many different natural relations are held together in a good way in this bundle, as the ceremony calls for help from the Great Spirit, in the presence and connections of all these relations. After collecting the willows, we set out to find a very specific wetland grass that would be laid

beneath us in this vital springtime ceremony. Ceremonial time proceeded in its own way, and I am soon immersed in the wet, warm darkness of the lodge—built of willows, carpeted in grass. These ancient songs call on Great Spirit—Creator, and invoke the unique blessings of this beaver ceremony and spirit and strength of the beaver for healing and help. I notice the moisture becomes thick and heavy around me and, to my surprise, begins rising from beneath me as well. The ground itself is thawing and giving up its waters and I am immersed in an indelible encounter with Beaver. My mind wanders into images of Beaver’s lodge, seeing brother beaver in his comfortable haunch, nibbling away at the inner layer of a twig of deciduous bark, while sister beaver nestles around their young kits, touching up on the beaver-grass nest that she has carefully built around them. What marks my memory most is a quality of utter alterity; it is as uncomfortable as it is profound in its otherness, signifying some foreign wisdom and resilience, facilitating some primordial connection with a pitchblack watery environment.

Beavers are at once formidable home-makers and world-builders. Although widely culled by humans because of the way their dams flood lands that are otherwise “usable” to the anthropocene of commercial interests, the flood creates vital wetland habitats in which entire ecosystems can flourish. This long standing human conflict with such a formidable creator of natural worlds and ecosystems signals a disconnect between the modalities and rationalities of human worlds, and the natural diversity and balance of the original world; as the conflicts plays out, it trends in favour of static, inflexible topographies that cater to the purposes of only one creature. Grant teaches me that the human peoples are meant to be caretakers of all those animals and to ensure that they have a *home*, even as old Indigenous ways paid much attention to this important balance.

The beaver has visited me in several other significant encounters through the course of this project. Routinely I return to that long, lazy shoreline on the Bow river's edge. I reconnect with the slowed breathing and gradual melting of tension that takes place within me as I am met by the innumerable, often subtle diversity of sensations hosted here. On one such occasion I came upon an extensive collection of "beaver blessed" twigs and sticks—what last evening I imagine had been a veritable feast of carefully peeled off outer and inner bark for this industrious creature. In a sense, my own work here has reassembled this careful peeling back of layers, to the nourishment of the heart, mind and spirit. Teeth sinking through the protective outer layers, finding the juice and softness of its hidden surfaces, puckering at the feel of tannins, exploring by texture and feel... eyes are of little help—guided instead by the pull of thirst and an honest hunger, that yearns for the rich, life-sustaining nutrients and sustenance—something of real substance.

These pencil straight, bare and nimble little willow fingers were left all piled up in one spot, not fifteen yards from the beaver home I walk past every time—a lodge whose gradual construction began sometime near the beginning of this project. Something about this pile felt as though it was being offered as a gift, and I laid down tobacco in thankful return to this kindness and guidance offered me by the beaver. Once at home, the offering quickly came together in a union which felt as though the piece was creating itself through me. Rough yarn made of the wool shorn from llamas that shared my childhood home by the river, and shards of reflective mirror became part of this balancing system which now hangs above the entryway, greeting all who enter our home.

Figure 2: Art-of-Fact 2*Beaver's Blessing*

“Beaver’s Blessing” is composed of beaver-stripped willow twigs and sticks, a spool of llama’s wool, mirror shards, Beaver grass, and mud and root fibres from a beaver pond.

This piece is called “Beaver’s Blessing.” It is a suspension of these twigs and sticks that yet bear the textures of the beaver’s teeth, delicately balanced with shards of reflective mirror and a nested feature of beaver grass. An interweaving of its parts creates sections of enclosure and open space, interacting with mirror pieces and yarn. This interweaving bespeaks an intimacy or interpenetration, wherein the being and position of one intersects with that of the other, generating a relational space by this interaction.

Reflective Shards

At the outset “Beaver’s Blessing” asks something very challenging of its viewer. The careful eye glimpses an image of self in the reflective shards of mirror suspended in the balance. To see oneself in the shards, among their sharp imperfect edges resembles a painful honesty and humility that precede the processes of healing. At the same point these parts do not become unbroken, just as the event of wounding is never undone; the process of healing wounds leaves scars, and scars—if given proper voice, speak of resilience and survival. Accepting the realities (but not conditions) of woundedness is an important condition of recovery, healing and renewal. It is not that healing makes me whole by unbreaking my brokenness; rather I am being made whole again in the ways my brokenness is woven back into relation with a greater fabric. Judith Herman speaks of this as a prime axis of trauma healing:

“Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation. In renewed connections with other people, the survivor recreates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy. Just as these capabilities are originally

formed, they must be re-formed in relationships with other people” (1998, Par. 1). Herman does not include the natural world here, yet it is easy to see how broadening the sphere of relationships to this wider world adds much to the healing milieu. In particular, triggering associations are likely few within natural environments, and the sensory banquet provided by this world of relationships bears great potential of drawing the healing soul back into its own body, returning it to the original platform of experience.

Numbness and disconnect from the body, along with the relational world this body opens access to, is an outcome of the shattering experiences in life. A paragon of this in my clinical experience was a young man whose numbness, boredom and addiction drew from a particularly tumultuous and chaotic past. In our early sessions together he would drop many hints about violent experiences in his life, some inflicted on him, and many he had perpetrated; it became clear to me that he had been much wounded in all this, and yet at the same time his preoccupation was on the things he had done—likely a carry over from the survival tactic of talking a big game—though for the most part he chose to spare me the more indictable particulars. It would suffice for him to say that he had hurt many people, and that he rarely slept, but when he did it was with his “piece” under the pillow, fearing reprisal at any moment. His presence and demeanour, to my memory, were marked by a peculiar mix of magnetic charm, with deep, albeit understated loyalty towards his fellow bunkmates, with those flat, deadpan eyes and that wry, chafing laughter. There was a numbness about him, resonant with “boredom”—a word which echoed rather ubiquitously through the halls of Shunda Creek. Boredom is described in AA and other addictions literature as a hallmark companion of addiction. Yet the unspoken and largely unconscious truth of it is that it is not the world that is boring, but

that these young men had adaptively protected and walled off their openness to it, severing the connections and possibilities of joy, exuberance and passion that come with participating reciprocally in a greater realm.

As we have explored, the traumas, wounds and unsupported vulnerabilities of youth—both experienced and inherited, become the lens through which we view and understand ourselves in the world, even to the level of inculturated overarching narratives of isolation and independence. In these shards, perhaps we may see ourselves in its impacts that “shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others” (Herman, 2015, p. 51). At the same point, the reflective quality of the mirror parallels that beautiful way that waters interact with light, alluding to possibilities of a reflective awareness of ourselves and a restoration of fluidity and flow. In the redemption of our relatedness, signalled by a return to our embodied nature, these shards may be healed in all the ways they are received back into an interwoven community of meaning and experience.

As *Asiniwachi Nehiyaw* writer Suzanne Methot beautifully express, within an emphasis on participating in the community of Nature,

Being connected to community is about being related to and a part of something.

This relatedness creates the experience of belonging, belonging leads to a sense of ownership, ownership translates into a feeling of responsibility, and responsibility creates reciprocity, which creates safety (Methot, 2019, p. 99).

The safety and ease that underlie our healing capacities are sewn into the very fabric of being aware of ourselves as part of a greater whole.

Balance and Strings

The reality of our connectedness and relationality mean that the system of which we are a part bears a crucial equilibrium between its polarities and extremes. Between one side and the other there exists a centre in which balance resides. Dualities and exclusion are features of a protective trauma narrative that construes the world as black or white: safe or threatening. Abiding in so narrow a narrative skews our relation to our world, perpetuating the imbalances of an abundant world construed through lenses of scarcity. Our own experiences become cast in this light, and what feels overwhelming and threatening—these shards of our broken histories, are adaptively excluded and avoided in the short-term. Balance begins to restore as these exiled parts of ourselves are invited back into the whole, and are held with love and acceptance within this home. This acceptance itself takes place in a balance, between our active and receptive facilities. Healing requires that we act and move as well as perceive and reflect. The balance of this dynamic in itself is a fundamental quality of the natural world itself, and one which our participation in this realm invites us into.

Beaver's Blessing, between the rigidity of its twigs and sticks and the pliant quality of its string, holds together with both structure and flex. Its cohesiveness and balance are brought about through the natural law of gravity itself. Any movement and change on one side of the piece entails a movement and change on the other as well, and only in a careful accommodation of this dynamic is the balance of the whole realised.

Heart and Earth

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin”

—William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*

These two words hold all the same letters, and the progressive creation of this piece it first became apparent that the composition required a heart, and later that this heart should be permeable and yet enclosed by earth. The heart came about in connection with a felt need to incorporate an element of “beaver grass,” as we had used in the Sweat Lodge, and which I passed every day on my walk by the river. Considering how the beaver uses this broad-leafed marsh inhabitant, collecting it in the fall and carpeting and nesting the interior of its home, I felt a sense of warmth and provision in it, and came to connect this as heart-material, as it relates warmth, care and love in the home. We have seen that warm, loving and supporting relationships are not a luxury of our nature, but a necessity; extending this sense of care and nurturance to the view of the self in the natural world evokes the very real sense in which we are ever held and supported by this, our original mother. In the ways that home entails a dialectic of love and freedom, inclusion and differentiation, belonging and adventure, the heart of this piece, strewn through with threads of red and blue, both imitates cardio anatomy, and signifies the contrasting elements of water and fire. In water there is a softness, a coolness, a reflection and an immersive inclusion, and in fire there is a burning heat, an action, a movement and a need for appropriate distance.

Another feature of this piece that characterises this entire project is that while ostensibly the heart is situated on the right side of its rib cage, the act of entering into it, and viewing through it, would imply a direct transposition (and not reflection) onto the self, which would put the heart on the left. This entire discourse has not been a face-to-face analysis of Nature, addictions and home, but insofar as we have journeyed together through its oscillations and contours, we face the same way and share an

encounter. The outcome here is not to offer a comprehensive understanding, but to portray a narrative and experiential tableau, one which, importantly, only becomes a *tableau vivant* as it is lived through—taken out into a wide, wild world of first hand experiences of home. Practicing therapy with and within Nature must begin with our own encounters of this abundance holding environment.

The final element to be included, then, was earth, and in light of this entire process it felt natural to somehow frame the heart with this element, particularly as we recognise Earth as home. As we have discussed, our experiences of home are both emplaced within the clay forms of these bodies, and located by the particular place we occupy on this earth. Yet while this enclosed sense of place is needed for our development, healing and flourishing, the permeability of this enclosure is equally vital, and so the earthen feature wraps around the frame, denoting essential gaps in which our sense of place and the sense of ourselves in space can be recognised. When first applying this layer of mud and fibrous root material, which I collected from the pond of the beaver's lodge that I often visited, it appeared dark and distinct, as it does in the photo included above. But as it set, it became more subtle and understated as it yielded to a humble gray tone. Something in this lays the course for our healing as humans. Moving from our overstated constructed environments, into the subtle and unassuming communications of Nature means decentering our experience, and finding myself as part of something greater. Such a movement from hubris to humus, reconnects our human nature into the seamless relationality of the Nature of which we are composed.

Permeability, Reciprocity and Flow: Languages of the Natural Realm

Admit something:

Everyone you see, you say to them, “Love me.”

Of course you do not do this out loud, otherwise

Someone would call the cops.

Still, though, think about this, this great pull in us to connect.

Why not become the one who lives with a

Full moon in each eye that is always saying,

With that sweet moon language, what every other eye in this world is dying to hear?

—Hafiz, *Love Poems from God*

In view of how addictions “walls off,” “holes up” and constricts the self into smaller and narrower experiences, the negative space in this art piece bears a significant theme of permeability, and openness, taking place within frames of enclosure. Our experiences, histories and enculturated narratives of trauma and unsupported growth leave us feeling exposed and unsafe in the world, leading us to contrive for ourselves surrogate homes of shelter and escape. The construction of these homes, under the short-sighted influence of threat-avoidance and scarcity thinking, overemphasises the need for solid, protective and impermeable walls, the inadvertent outcomes of isolation and brittle rigidity. The “Brickwork” quality of the Western paradigm bears an important parallel here, and yet the impulse to diametrically resist and oppose both these forms is

in itself construed through a dualist lens. Rigidity and certitude are not softened through opposition, but through inclusion and care.

Channeling the flow of the river, beavers painstakingly construct dams that curb its course, allowing it to run deeper and slower, generating a homespace for themselves, but in so doing also building the entire world of pondlife that emerges in this enclosed domain. Importantly, this water is not stagnant, but filtered slowly through the permeability of the woven construction of its dam.

On a molecular level, while a cell wall is needed to contain and define the cell, the need to exchange with its environment is vital to its survival. This barrier importantly distinguishes the cell from its environment, without it life would have no form. Yet without the doorways that maintain its unity with the surrounding environment its form would shrivel and die. Important boundaries elicit internal and external environments, the self and other; and yet the very definition of the self is maintained in that crucial exchange of substance, energy and meaning that takes place across a semipermeable membrane. The notion of the self which we have been developing here is thoroughly related, even composed of the relationships it is a part of. While boundary and barrier importantly distinguish the self as *apart from*, the relationships that the self is *a part of* not only maintain basic and immediate need, but also the need for a horizon and a world *with* which to become self-actualised. Insofar as we are a part of the world, we are a part of an abundance, and from this abundance generosity just means that the world is giving back to itself through me. The reciprocity of having a “full moon in each eye” and speaking with that “sweet moon language” evokes this generous space of being a part of the abundant love of the natural world. The body speaks this language with its every

breath; in the way that it hosts a greater number of other organisms than the cells it is composed of. As we begin to recognise the abundance of the world we exist within, we become aware of the reality that we are inextricably a part of this world, and of the home that has always been there. In this home of intimacy and balance abide the very movements of reciprocal love and care—in a word, flow, in which healing, development and flourishing are realised.

Future Directions

This discourse and its research have been rooted in the relationality of the self, and as we have seen, the underpinnings of this relationality are nurtured and supported in the soils of embodiment, sensual awareness, emotion, and interpreted and recognised in the cosmologies and narratives that furnish our self-understandings. Reciprocal and balanced relation to the natural world fundamentally supports our relational being on each of these levels. The outcome of supported development is a sense of abundance in relation to the world, making the world a home of reciprocal caring and connected relationships. As home is felt, the meanings of being a part of these greater relations evoke an expansive sense of self which can navigate the world and its challenges with the courage, relatedness and resilience that comes from a dynamic reciprocal.

Directions of future research which stem from this project include dialectical (reciprocal) models for understanding human-ecological relationships; whereas current research tends to be polarised into human-ecological care and human benefit from ecological engagement. For instance, a cohort of attention restoration studies have provided substantial evidence of the positive impacts of Nature on cognitive attentional capacities (e.g. Ohly et al., 2016), yet offer little in the way of human reciprocal care of

the environment. Nature connectedness studies (e.g. Mayer & Franz 2004), on the other hand, aim their research at the overlap of Nature affinity and environmental care, while the possibilities of Nature's reciprocal impact on mental health is left unexplored. Other studies, such as the inquiry of Howell et al. (2013) into the way a meaningful relationship with nature mediates happiness, and the study of Park et al. (2010) on forest bathing (*shinrin yoku*) in Japan and China, which includes a recognition and awareness of self within the nature-scape, provide beautiful examples of more holistic and integrative research directions.

Further, as it has been suggested above, understanding Nature as a holding environment within which attachment and support are experienced, must be approached through a recognition both its embodied preeminence (relating first to the body, then emotion then mind/meaning), and its dispersed influence. Nature as home means that it is the substrate and context of relationality, and bears supportive influence by bringing one to their senses, and helping activating the embodied pathway of affect-feeling-emotion which supports our relational movements. Nature's impact on the nervous system is also of great importance to this understanding, and at bottom, the heuristic influence of viewing Nature engagement as a reciprocal encounter, and seeing oneself as a part of this grander web of meaning and relationship should be considered as an important conditioning factor.

In closing, I want to put forward the words of our Shunda exemplars, whose courage in finding themselves in the natural world in large part inspired this discourse. First, I offer an unabridged and unedited quote that is saturated with the sense of reciprocity, embodiment and relationality we have been exploring:

[I] felt new feelings letting others take the lead and being able to lay back and enjoy not being in control... yet slightly challenging because I am used to being in control but I loved having things not [be] about me—[it gave] me space and time to reflect on my intentions [and] thoughts. Feelings, smells, sights, sensations and to be grateful. [I] got to observe a lot of things I would have missed if I rushed through everything.

Finally, I close with an Art-of-Fact, composed of the words of Shunda participants' comments pulled together within my heuristic process as a poem. This poem reflects the abundance of home as a relational movement taking place in the playground of nature, in the energised space between belonging and adventure.

Art-of-Fact 3:

Abundance

Open and Love,

Ohhh to love

Was love — *loving*

Loving nature.

Loving to try,

to reach,

to observe,

Loving to enjoy — *to find joy,*

take joy,

To be... joy. (sigh)

To do sober...

to be grateful

To be Alone

...solo

...in nature

To find it's ok to be alone

once in a while

To be

Breathing

Learning

Making

- Decision making - making process -

-- As if I was connected --

Wished for more — wished I had more — *wished I was more*

Personally not like to be ... *me*

Immaturity.

Unreasonable.

Communication is icy.

Being in control.

Expectations...

Rushed through everything... through *every* thing

Failed. (*sigh*)

... feelings *feeeeeling*

Observe

sights

smells

Patterns

behaviours

emotions

Failed to see...

But now I see

myself

my Self

sense of peace *just* being in the wilderness...

connected.

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