

**The experience of artmaking:
body, self and word as ontological environment**

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ABSTRACT

The experience of artmaking: body, self and word as ontological environment.

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All of my senses are implicated in my art-making process. My paintings come from deep inside and materialise before me on the surface of a canvas as it develops. A dialogue on the creative process must be based on an art practice because art making represents thinking in the language of creation.

I am very close to a phenomenological consideration of temporality as I paint. Experience and time are visible in the brush marks of a painting. My creative process is phenomenological when I consider and associate the things that I perceive while focusing on my senses. I know that I can decide whether or not I am open to awareness of my organism and as I record my physical state, metaphors emerge in the form of mental images. Opening my perception to the world around me constructs my sense of self. Learning about the interrelationship between the outside world and my body allows me to understand my perception and how I change an internal idea into an image.

Language can bring implicit experience into the world but I cannot address someone on the outside in the same manner that I think when I am creating. For this reason I believe that there is an inner language that allows for the associations that become metaphors. When I am creating I have an awareness that cannot be translated into words or images. Inside my mind, images are fleeting and intertwined with emotions and my organism, but they can cross over to the outside directly through my relationship with a material to become a part of reality that can be rationally interpreted and transformed.

The bridge that I cross from inside to the outside when I make art is not the same as the bridge I cross when I speak and write. Paintings encompass all that is being considered by perception. Ontology is within an artwork which reflects life experience.

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To my husband Andres, words cannot express the profound sense of appreciation that I feel toward you (so many interesting moments). To my daughter Mikelle, thank you for understanding my love of art and to Isabelle and Anatole, art is worth pursuing in spite of the obstacles.

DEDICATION

To my parents

Mona Laumailier

and

Georges-Henri Millette

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1 Introduction



Fig. 1. Views from my studio window

In Chapter 1, I introduce the discussion that I elaborate in subsequent chapters. I begin with a thesis statement and the context of my research and follow with a general summary of my study.

Thesis statement

Attempting close proximity to the conscious self enables a process that is creative in nature. The human body resonates to the mind the merging flow of inner and outer perspectives. The blending of sense and self occurs within life experience, which can then be embodied through the production of artwork. As a phenomenon, this process can be carefully observed and noted and reinterpreted to provide insight into self-knowledge and the nature of understanding.

General purpose of research

In my experience, the idea of creativity is shrouded in mystery. Words like clever, inventive, interesting, original and eccentric are often used to describe the creative personality. I have often wondered whether my brain functions in the same way when I am painting as it does when I am solving a scientific problem. Is creativity self-knowledge? I like to

think that it is. The purpose of this thesis research is to look into the nature of the human faculty of creativity to better understand myself as an artist.

In post secondary studio curricula, the emphasis is on self-directed learning through practice (Mottram and Whale, 2001, Lavender, 2003). For many good reasons, including expressive and formal traditions in studio art teaching, the challenge of materials and practicality, teaching has been object oriented. As an artist, I learn things each time my ideas cross over into material reality through the making of an artwork. I believe that a rigorous consideration of an art practice can offer insight into ways that art students can learn about themselves as well as how thoughts are managed conceptually when thinking creatively.

This is a qualitative study that provides a detailed picture of the personal and academic influences that have contributed to my art making. The result is largely an exploration of how my recent paintings have developed from my consideration of phenomenology and hermeneutics. It is based, personally and ontologically, on my inquiry into my own artistic practice and knowing as I experience it in the studio.

An overview of my study

I began my research because I had questions about my creative process. I could not quite understand the emotional peaks and dips that occur while making art. I wanted to better understand them to remain productive because in creation there is always uncertainty and I needed to learn about it.

My experience with phenomenology and hermeneutics shifted my thinking away from art theory, learning and concerns about what other people were doing in their art. Through a phenomenological method I was able to turn my attention toward art making through a consideration of my physicality. The experience made me feel like I was touching and looking at art in the way I did before I received my training. My inquiry provided me the opportunity to orient myself toward an authentic art practice.

I started my inquiry with phenomenology because creation comes from within my organism. I wanted to find out more about the senses. Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty introduced the notion of “self” to Husserl’s phenomenology and made it work as a

means to understand consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's writings referred me to Heidegger and his notions of being and, through these ideas, I acquired a reflective understanding of perception.

In my explorations I wanted to know how the mind worked. I wanted to know about memory and how it functions. I wanted to know about dreams because of the way ideas come in metaphors. It made sense for me to look at things dealing with the conscious and sub-conscious mind as these notions were related to mental images that artists work with.



Fig. 2. Viscera, 2004, detail

I think with images but also in words and that took my research to language. I looked into language to see what place it occupies in experience and perception. How do we use words? Is language the same inside as outside? Why do ideas come so quickly? Why do I have lingering questions that are suddenly answered out of the blue? All kinds of mysterious things go on as I create. I wanted to understand how they related to the creative process. I now have a better idea of creative inklings, why I see the way I do and what emotions are and how they work within me. I did not wish to explain art. It remains mysterious and beautiful but I did come to a better understanding of the way the mind works creatively. I now know what the symbolism in the work that I was doing was about. My knowledge was already beginning to appear in my paintings as I was reading Merleau-Ponty. I literally cleared images from my mind without realising that I was doing it. I was burying language and figuration by covering things over. I was putting

things away — not in terms of meaning but what they looked like in convention and content. I wanted my new understanding to be in my work, and I found it in the studies I made of a piece of lace. From them I constructed paintings with lines that traced my experience and that released me from figuration, for a while at least (Fig. 2, 3, 7, 8).

In my studio, I have observed that the art object is the result of many environmental, cultural and perceptual influences. Observing and noting all aspects of the creative process reinforces my belief that culture is the natural outcome of sheer human existence. Contemporary art making, as much as it is linked to past artistic knowledge, is primarily focused on the present, and my experience involves this reality. I learn as I make art. With time, I have accumulated knowledge that continues to grow through my practice.

Art practice involves a great deal of subjective reasoning in the form of introspection. I sense that art stems from deep inside of me – memories – the way I feel when I look outside. It is the surface of the canvas as it develops. Visual representations and words cannot capture everything that I feel inside and some aspects will always remain unexpressed.

It is language through metaphor that bridges my inner and outer reality of experience. Focusing on my body's senses turns perception inwards. When I write about my physical state, metaphors and mental images emerge from rich unexplored venues. Words describe subjective experience; however, they are also objects of consideration with categories. A better understanding of phenomenology, hermeneutics and metaphor can provide a framework for the description through words of perception in the art-making process.

Once our basics of physical sustenance and security were established, the contemplation of the meaning of our own existence became possible. My senses allow me to perceive many phenomena within and outside my organism and my body exists in the present even though my mind knows the past and looks to the future. I might age, but my sense of self remains who I have always been. I define reality through my physicality, but my consciousness has its own system that I cannot always access. Turning my attention to my organism makes me the object of consideration. Consciousness of my physicality allows an understanding of reality through lived experience.

Neurologist Antonio Damasio (1999) notes that there has been an absence of the notion of “organism” in science. The human mind is linked to the brain but the brain has been considered as somewhat separate from the body, which has always been understood as a complex living thing (40). Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasises the importance of the body for perception. I have chosen to use the terms “body” and “organism” synonymously to express the idea of an integrated body and organism at work at art making.

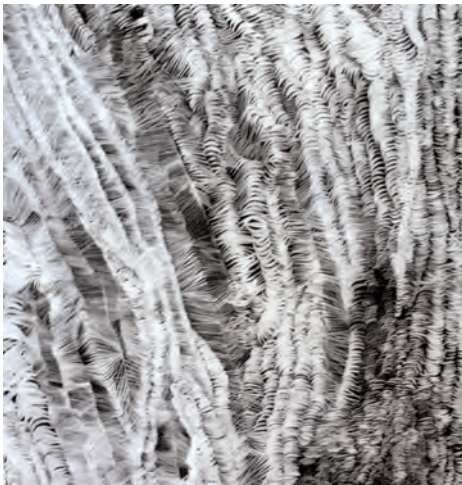


Fig. 3. Weaving Emotions, 2005, detail

Although my body is material, my mind understands it as an intelligible space. My entire experience is stored in neurological structures yet the world that I perceive outside of my organism cannot be understood as an extension of me. When I am making meaning through art, I get a sense of my physical reality. My hand at work exercises my will as I create. Phenomenology, which is cognitive and physical perception considering an object of thought, brings me into the moment of creation.

Although through language phenomenology allows an examination of the present, words themselves can distance me from reality. Words are tools for communication. New words are continually created to identify things which, without language, would simply not exist. Words combined into sentences enable me to state the most complicated of concepts. Words are anchored in cultural subjectivity but hermeneutics or the use and rereading of uncomplicated texts can reveal meaning. Art does not come from language

alone but through introspection. I can generate reflective texts that trace the path of my creative process from mental images to metaphors.

As I read old letters, postcards and my diaries I remember moments that resonate meaning that gains significance through the passage of time. Words cannot come from nothing and so they have to be related to other structures in the mind. People identify with and read each other's body expression while conversing because body language reveals an underlying emotional interaction (Damasio, 1999, 53). My artistic process opens me to understanding another's personal experience and meaning in creativity. When thinking, concepts precede words and an aesthetic object can allow for communication. Through my relationship with another, I can address both the interior and exterior self and emotional interaction becomes an outcome in itself.

It is important for me to know as an artist that I have an extended consciousness that I cannot normally access. I believe that latent memories motivate me to make art and that art making is about self-awareness. In my mind is created a nonverbal imaged consciousness of every occurrence outside my organism. Although mental images occur spontaneously, I can also consciously create them. As I paint, sensory motor systems and rationality work together to construct perception. Making a picture brings a conceptual metaphor into reality. Art allows for associations that can uncover deeper levels of meaning through the use of recurring symbols and fragments of memories. As I paint I am not entirely aware of the meaning within my marks but there are clues that reveal to me aspects of my self. The aesthetic object I make allows me to see myself from another perspective. My ontology is in the work of art and art making is tied to the present. The human element within the artwork is its "aura" (Benjamin, 1968).

Although it is thought that the creative process progresses through stages (Wallas, 1926) it is difficult for me to categorise the experience in discrete steps. Originality correlates with problem finding and discovery orientation, and original solutions come through the discovery of unexpected links between bits of information (Taylor, Getzels, 1975). Creative thinking is at the top of the hierarchy of problem solving. Creative ideas are intuitive and seem to come spontaneously (Beittel, 1972, 62). For these reasons an empirical inquiry into the creative process must look beyond interviews and external observations. An art practice can provide a qualitative foundation for dialogue on the creative process. It is instrumental research into creativity because it is the language of creation (Eisner, 1998; Hollm, 1989; Best, 2000; Regent, 2002; Sullivan, 2005).

Creativity began when humans could spontaneously shift between analytic and associative modes of thought, which allowed for multiple solutions to problems (Gabora, 2006). Because the exploration of novel ideas is shrouded in uncertainty, creators are disciplined. They also possess a naiveté that permits inductive access to knowledge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Creativity cannot be measured through testing. Tests only show that creative individuals are considerably dedicated in areas where quantitative tests cannot predict success (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, Whalen, 1993). They also have the ability to adjust to many disciplinary environments (Gabora, 2002), which tends to support the idea of creativity as an inherent human trait.

Every individual has access to latent memories acquired from evolution and through lived experience; however, due to the physical constraints of human physiology only a portion is available at any given instant (Damasio, 1999, 332). Because creativity comes from both a physical and logical mind, intuition is the product of cognitive mapping of primary metaphor with logical decisions (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Abstractions and concepts are the result of neurological structures and can be considered as synonymous. The social and cultural environment of any person will determine the kind of thoughts that will emerge from latent memories (Lakoff and Johnson).

Researchers have compared brain function with computers because computers were designed to mirror the nature of human language. In contemporary thought, memories can be understood as reconstructions rather than retrievals (Damasio, 221). This neural mechanism is useful in creativity. Biologist and cognitive scientist Liane Gabora (2002) has used the computational metaphor to describe how the creative process occurs in a state of defocused attention, heightened sensitivity and an awareness of stimuli perceived unconsciously. When deductive and rational approaches fail, new ideas come through a sort of conceptual meltdown.

Perception occurs in consciousness but empirically there are many levels of awareness. The idea of the subconscious comes from the duality of consciousness; one from the sense that I am awake and the other in the form of an autobiographical brain map that creates a sense of self. They both feel the same because there are no physical structures in the brain that separate them (Damasio, 1999, 300-302). The physiological pathways

used by the creative mind are considerably easier to describe than the creative process itself. Creativity is a part of conscious experience that cannot be readily explained because the human mind does not function as a machine (Chalmers, 1995).

Emotions are made manifest through body language. It is through the dynamics of an inner dialogue of the body that I have intimate thoughts about where I might fit in the outside world. These thoughts are at the core of my art-making process because I know that I can be opened or closed to awareness of my physical senses. Even though I might be deeply involved in thought, my body is still aware of my exterior reality. There are many levels of perception and some parts of me operate autonomously.

In my artwork, the moment is perceivable in the paint itself. My work is the path between what was inside of me and the exterior world, and the crossing over is mediated through language. Language is both a culturally determined form of communication and an internal cognitive and physiological component of the brain shaping the very perception of the space around us (Chomsky, 2005).

My sense of being-in-the-world precedes language. As I awake my autonomic system arouses my sense of awareness that defines consciousness. Language is a framework for dynamic thought. I need a conceptually amalgamated network for art making (Gabora, 1997, 9) because I must know what I perceive in its completeness before I can abstract it. The intrapsychic is my interiority and the relationship between its parts. In the intrapsychic and before the necessity to communicate, I possess an internal language that knows no boundaries. It is very different from the language that I use in the exterior world. My inner language shares the cognitive mechanisms of common language but also is the means by which I communicate between conceptual metaphors and emotions. Thoughts inside will be lost unless they are recorded through writing or speaking. However, the bridge I cross from inside to the outside when I paint is not the same as the bridge I cross when I speak and write. When I paint, I am silent.

I generally see myself as being somewhat rigorous for details and I tend to notice things unrelated to the main object of focus. When I was young, the term “sensitive” had a negative connotation for me, defined through bad feelings. The repression of sensitivity brings frustration and loneliness (Csikszentmihalyi, Larson, 1984) that affected my early experience with school. Only much later did I realise that if I had not been as sensitive as I am, I would not have become a painter.

The human organism cannot discriminate between emotions related to instinctive feelings (for survival) and those that appear in the body through blushing or tension (Damasio, 1994, 139). When art making, I deal with both instinctive and conscious thought. My moods fluctuate continuously as emotions link my mind and body into a seamless flow of experience. Perception is about how things came from the outside to the inside.

Damasio (1999) states that consciousness is the result of the interaction of internal physical and neurological events. The body can be described as a projection of an autobiographical image created by neural synapses, but we perceive a world constructed from my interaction with it (169). At birth, the sense of being-in-the-world emerges from a primary encounter with another. This experience creates a dynamic model for the inner self that is called an “object” in psychoanalysis. Introspection comes from a need to relate to the object. In art making, the object in mind takes the form of an inkling or potentiality. Introspection allows for the metamorphosis of the inner object into an exterior form. The “object” refers to my physical senses bringing in the world from the exterior. It describes me and gives rise to my self inside.

Throughout my life, I have watched my body change and I know that life is lived through the perspective of my physicality. I feel a need to paint because it reinforces my sense of presence. I cannot live in isolation, because I was born into society and I have been made in such a way that I have senses that allow me to communicate with others.

My creative process is phenomenological when I consider and associate things that I see. At a certain point, my inner dialogue and mental images enter reality through drawings. As I draw, I think of the way I feel about my subject and somehow those things are transformed into my work. I change the shape of a tree as I draw it and it acquires a unique meaning from my interpretation (Fig. 4).

I think that I have an inner language because I cannot address someone outside in the same manner that I talk inside my head. In my mind, I am in my own world. Not everything that I think about can or should cross over to the exterior world. I noticed that as I work I am always crossing over ideas from an internal intimate dialogue to an exterior social context. For example, when I look at roots on the ground, I imagine a whole system. What I am doing is considering perception within my mind to live an experience before I rationalise it into an aesthetic object or situation. My ideas come from associa-

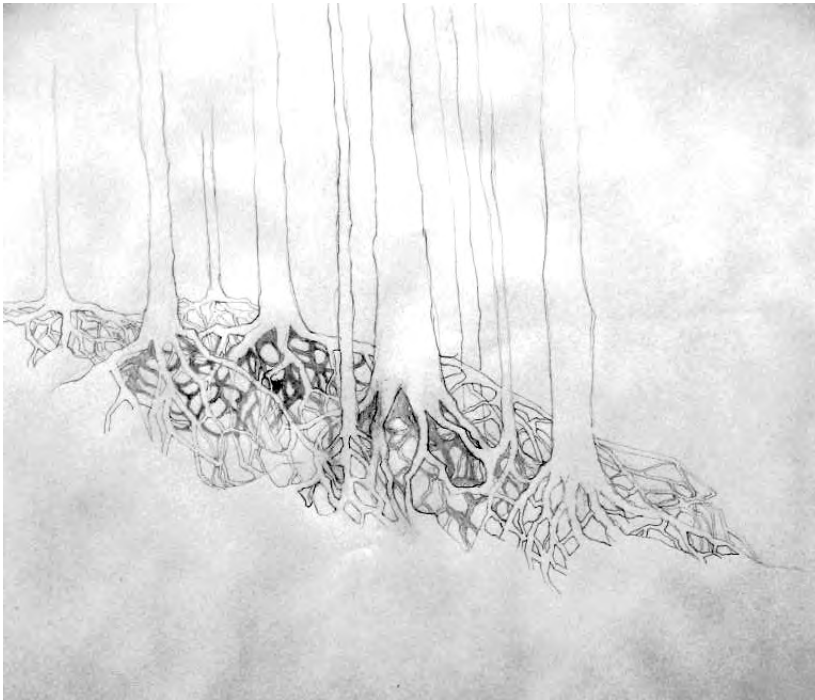


Fig. 4. untitled drawing, 2006

"I change the shape of a tree as I draw it and it acquires a unique meaning from my interpretation".

tions that I make inside from what I see from the outside. I have an awareness in my mind that cannot be translated into words and images. As I begin to bring inner thoughts into the world, the fundamental nature of inner language changes as I see ideas cross over into material reality. Bringing out notions from introspection cannot occur in existential isolation, because for ideas to make any sense, I must be a part of a world that includes others.

All that I need to know about ontology can be uncovered through my experience as an artist. I know that I am very close to a phenomenological perspective of temporality when I paint. A similar thing occurs in intense physical activity. As I run, I am aware because my organism becomes my object of consideration.

When I paint, I am in the temporal present. Feelings and memories go through a process of rationalisation through sketches and dialogue. I look for related ideas but I rarely know how they may appear in my finished work. At a certain point, my original inspiration seems irrelevant, perhaps because it was too closely related to a specific moment. I have been looking at the phenomena involved at this level of self-awareness. When I am

involved inside with creativity, there are things that I do not wish to share with the external world because they might seem incomplete or irregular and so the vocabulary of my conscious self communicating with my intimate self remains internal. I cannot share my inside language because as soon as I choose words to express it, everyone will assume that I am referring to the same thing that they understand to be in their mind (Wittgenstein, 1968, P.I. 293).

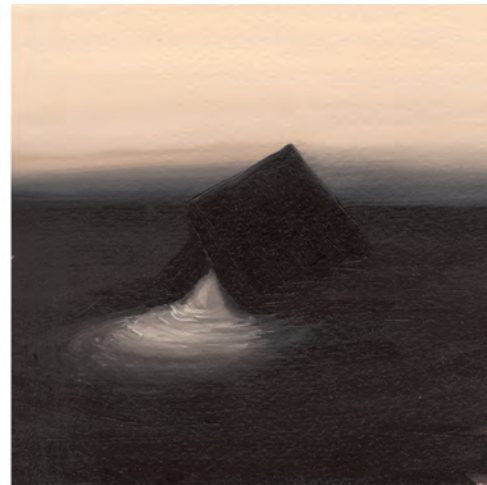


Fig. 5. Details of Sur naturel (On Nature), 1998
Oil on paper
11 x 11 cm

In the intermediate place between my imagination and rationality, creativity is close to my sense of self (Winnicott, 1971). My imagination is where I look for variety or distraction while my rational mind figures out things. The place inside is where I go for authenticity. It is where memories and emotions blend together in mental images that can be recorded. My imagination can push things to impossible extremes where the place inside allows freedom to think and create. The mind's eye is always creating mental images. Sometimes these thoughts are distracting and at other times they are helpful. The basic neural system that regulates emotions and body function is also implicated in conscious notions. When I am sensitive, it is a product of my physicality and not of my imagination (Damasio, 1994, xvii-xviii). Any idea or mental image is fleeting because it is connected to emotions and the organism but once it is brought into reality on paper or by some other means, it will not change until I choose to alter it in a technical manner.

I have noticed that my experience as an artist is not based on theory that has already been put forth by someone in an objective manner. If my work tends toward preconceived ideas, it inhibits my expression. Artistic rationality is linked to notions of art, criticism, history and philosophy. Authenticity is what truly comes from the self.

My studio is an environment conducive to creative thinking. I have worked in several studios and each environment has had a distinct influence on my work. When I worked at school as an undergraduate student, the social context of the studio was very different from the intimate environment that I had at home. My paintings at school were subject to exterior influences, where at home, I painted from my interior self. I know, however, that as a student I needed to be around other people who were also learning about making art.



Fig. 6. Detail of installation of The Ends of the Earth, 2003
Oil on panel
20 x 20 cm each

My second studio had more space but, with a full time job, I had to learn how to discipline myself as an artist. I found that I could think about art and sketch while I was at work and, at the same time, my day job created an appropriate distance between my artwork and preconceived notions of what I had imagined an artist to be. Many of the drawings that I did at work were relevant to my Master's thesis project, On Nature (1997) (Fig. 5).

Being an artist implies looking everywhere but it also means that I sometimes want to see things in particular ways. My project On Nature came from what I perceived in the interaction of human rationality within a natural environment. In the difference between

a park and a forest, I distinguished myself from nature. My second studio was where I went through the transformation from an art school graduate to an artist. Having a place where I could go and consider what I was perceiving, away from home and employment, allowed me to create the work that eventually became On Nature.

I am now in my third studio. When I walk to work, I go through a mental transition from domestic life to my artwork. When I arrive at the studio, I ignore what I call “ghosts”, or second thoughts about what I am doing. Once I begin a project, I stay as close as possible to my initial intentions or I would never complete a painting. The kind of thinking that I do at my studio is like brainstorming. I work out things and look for common denominators. I have noticed that when things do not immediately work out I tend to panic, and it is at this point that my knowledge of the creative process allows me to moderate these thoughts.



Fig. 7. Dream Interrupted, 2003, detail

Making a picture for me is finding out what the world is like at this moment through my own perception based on my entire life experience. As I am involved in the different stages of a process, a dialogue takes place within me about the issues that I am addressing and how they affect me inside and how I will put them across to the outside world. I wonder what shapes and materials I should use and ask myself whether it will be clear. There is no certainty; otherwise, it would not be art. The way I feel inside is what initially made me pick up a pencil and draw and I have to trust those feelings. All artists have

a different approach to the creative process. In my inquiry into creativity, I try to use words to describe what comes naturally to me from lived experience or embedded memories. It is my perception that leads me to art making.

My project The Ends of the Earth (2002-2004) (Fig. 6) is related to language. Interior Experience, on the other hand, is related to my physicality and my inner self.



Fig. 8. Process, 2004, detail

In everything that I have done I have expressed my interest in my relationship with the natural world and how my faculty of reasoning seems to be different from nature. The Ends of the Earth reflected something different from what I had initially planned. As my idea crossed over from the inside, outside, it brought out latent images that I was only aware of after they had been processed through my technical abilities. It seemed to me that the work developed its own direction from within and I did not have control over my creative process. But a painting does not paint itself and I am responsible for the outcome. Mental abstractions are difficult to grasp because they are either amorphous or illogical; however, I possess a rationality constructed from my learning that moderates things but may also stifle creativity.

Through making art I have learned that every painting is a stepping stone to the next one. The Ends of the Earth made me think about language and its categories. The written language is the foundation of discourse and our primary method of communication, yet artists also express meaning in a relevant manner.

A visual language has been identified in formalism and semiology but art is not language. Aesthetic representation refers to itself for meaning. Language acquires meaning through the conventionalisation of symbols and signs. Words can be used to describe what we see but a picture is an object of such perception.

The project Interior Experience made me wonder about how the creative process allows for conjecture. My subconscious mind makes connections of which I may not be aware that reveal empirical truths in a metaphor. Philosopher David Chalmers (1996) thinks that the inner sense of consciousness might be one of the fundamental properties on which empiricism is founded (216).

The difference between man and nature is made manifest through the shape of logic — the post and beam, systems of measure and the street grids that shape our cities. I look outside my body to examine an inside that I cannot see. I compare roots in the ground to my organism and I can imagine the earth and the soil as a system like mine. I choose things from my perception and render them singular and authentic.

When I create, I am in an area between my inner world and my outer world. I am closest to that place at the studio and when I feel the moment frozen in my body at work sustaining life.

My art is related to time, sensitivity and physicality. Phenomenological inquiry, hermeneutics, but most of all, body consciousness can be effective and meaningful in my understanding of the creative process of making art.

In this chapter, I will consider phenomenology, hermeneutics and metaphor in relationship to witnessed introspection.

2 Phenomenology, hermeneutics and metaphor



above left: Fig. 9. Studio notes

centre and right: Fig. 10. Details from The Ends of the Earth, 2003

Oil on panel

20 x 20 cm each

"I see the outside world in shapes and colours with objects near and far away and at the same time"

Ontology sets out to trace the phenomenon of human existence, a task which calls upon the imagination in quest of words to capture what fleeting picture comes to mind and define it. Art and language are sometimes stretched to encapsulate all of the complexities of an idea but this may result in expressing something other than what was intended. The meaning of experience is challenging to express and some aspects remain unsaid.

The definitions that we have of words differ slightly from one another. Our perception of the world and the way we interpret anything is based on our experience.

Phenomenology, hermeneutics and metaphor are the means through which I attempt to express my own perception in my art practice.

There are countless human faculties, interlaced and complex, that come into play when art making. Some aspects are naturally implicated in the process, while others are consciously chosen by the artist. I can decide whether or not I will focus on my environment. I can choose or not to interpret the writings from my art journals as a way to define my creative path. However, I cannot make art without metaphor. Much like monkeys swinging from vine, to branch, to bush, we live from metaphor to metaphor, joining words into meaning that will somewhat reflect the contents of our inner existence.

Perception through awareness of my own physicality describes to me the purest form of reality. Language in the form of learned groupings of concepts that encompass many domains has distorted my view of the world into a human construct (a system of beliefs such as a language that has been abstracted from others' experiences). A simple language with an unassuming vocabulary can be used to describe the physical manifestations of thought (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, vii-xi).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology has been discussed, defined and applied differently in several fields of interest since Edmund Husserl (1982, c.1913) introduced the term. As a method of inquiry, it is cognitive and physical perception put to the task of defining the object of consideration. The phenomenological approach is based on the lived experience rather than concept. It involves physical awareness, reflection and sensitivity.

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour.

In his poem, William Blake (1800) came to express the unity of existence through a carefully nurtured perceptual awareness. All life forms on earth interact with the environment and in turn, the environment defines their natural forms. The planetary surface I walk on is rich with remnants of creatures long-ago extinct and the poet's "world within a world" has long been confirmed. Now and then from among the great thinkers of the world, someone will turn our gaze ever so gently from art toward scientific conjecture. Intuition is born of sheer sensitivity. Blake simply sensed in all its complexity timely existence in the palm of his hand.

A part of me remains primal. There is a whole network of functions within me that make my heart beat, my eyelids blink and change the food I consume into energy without my awareness. This is the part of me that wants to live, eat, and sleep safely protected from the elements. Once the idea of survival, sustenance, safety and comfort is secured, I have the capacity to ponder my own existence and everything else that such an idea might entail. Everything that I consciously produce from these notions is human culture. Art constitutes culture. The different things that I make through art define my passing through time and experience.

When I think about my physical self, I realise that the human body is an extraordinary organism that can access a vast range of stimuli through the senses. I know that if I remain in a darkened room long enough for my eyes to adapt, the smallest discrete particles of matter, as few as five photons, become perceivable as sparks of light. In the winter, away from the city, I can look up to the sky and see constellations. The light that I perceive comes from stars, many of which have been extinct for hundreds of millions of years. These empirical truths fill my senses and my imagination. Is there such a thing as empty space? I know that there are waves that fill the entirety of the universe. Human understanding has allowed us to realise that the hissing sound on the telephone seconds after dialling a number is the noise of the birth of the universe. Fossils in the earth mirror the evolution of the planet (Gould, 1989), while coiled within my genetic material is the history of my species (Cann and Wilson, 1992). The knowledge of nature and the universe through all time is there for me to physically witness through phenomena, the aggregate of human faculties that are used to define what is being considered.

My body brings the present moment to me. I touch my face and there, on the tips of my fingers, is the outside surface of me. This place in which I live brings to my conscious mind the exterior through my senses. As I live my life and go about my days, my organism remains in the present. While many other thoughts come to mind, the present lingers, and my body persists in reality. My body ages as the past accumulates behind me but my self inside remains ageless.

My body is my presence in reality. Perception, language, creativity and sexuality stem from the exterior it creates. My consciousness with its own systems of rationality exists outside of the “organic symmetry” of nature. Husserl’s dialectic for a science of consciousness excluded the self in an attempt to access pure subjective perception. With

Phenomenology of Perception (1962, c.1945), Maurice Merleau-Ponty reintroduced the idea of self and experience to a doctrine that would have otherwise remained stagnant. The self is in a material body in a physical world but the projections from the mind are produced from energy consumed by the nervous system. The object of perception and the sense of me-in-the-world is a living connection identical with that existing between parts of my body within itself (237). The body, as a sensitive organism, is implicit perception. “In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in a world through our body” (239). Through knowing the organism and, with it, the world, I am reintroduced to myself, since perceiving makes the body a natural “I” and the subject of perception (239).

Damasio (1999) provides a scientific context for perception. Within the brain are areas that create an imaged, nonverbal consciousness of everything happening outside the body. If the body’s sensory processing system requires further information, the image becomes perceptually apparent (169). Pure perception, for example through the visual cortex, occurs only through a combination of sensory mechanisms and body adjustment signals (147). Past events and emotional experience are registered in the memory within interrelated separate systems. The brain generates an account of how the organism is processing an object, and enhances a stored mental image of the object before situating it in a spatial and temporal context (169). Damasio (1994) suspects that all activities within the human mind occur in images. These neural representations differ from what we consider to be pictures, in that they are “dispositional”, which he defines as abstract records of potentialities not directly accessible by the conscious mind.

Martin Heidegger (1977, c.1927), in Being and Time, described phenomenology as the point of departure for an analysis, access to the phenomenon and the passage through what is “buried over” [*verstellung*] (84). As the means to understanding perception, Merleau-Ponty (1999 c.1945) says that phenomenology can only be defined from within ourselves through a phenomenological method. All knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is experiential and from a subjective viewpoint. Merleau-Ponty’s approach consists of subjective description without explanations or analysis. He cautions against the use of generalising categories such as “living creature”, “man” or “consciousness”, all of which stem from the languages of zoology, social anatomy or inductive psychology. The “I” is the absolute source of knowledge without antecedents from the physical

and social environment. The “I” moves out towards the exterior and sustains it (Merleau-Ponty, vii-xi). It is only from this carefully constructed ontological space that phenomenology can proceed.

When I look around me, I see the outside world in shapes and colours with objects near and far away and at the same time, I have in mind thoughts and mental images (Fig. 9, 10). They may be related (or not) to what I am looking at on the outside; my inner and outer perceptions are both at work at the same time. I can be looking at a flower when the position I am standing in feels suddenly uncomfortable, and that changes the way I perceive the flower. The experience is not as meaningful — discomfort distracts my attention. Being conscious of these physical implications that come into my daily life opens my consciousness to my own physical reality and offers further understanding into the origin and nature of certain thoughts conducive to self-knowledge. If I perceive my physicality without a spiritual or transcendental objective (such as in meditation, which seeks to induce detachment from anxiety), it brings me closer to the reality of the material world, that is, my own body sensing everything it can. The simple act of looking out at the world around me as I sense my living organism takes me into a different way of experiencing reality.

When I rationalize my body’s spatial state, I try to develop some sense of it from my perception. I cannot find empty space within my organism. It is filled with fluids, blood, muscle and bones. All within that I am capable of understanding is intelligible space and if that comes from my mind then my mind is my body. It is my continual interacting with the world in its reality and that which is within my mind that gives my inner self its existence. However purely implicit in nature, my inner space is familiar with the oriented space on the exterior because it is the place from which I originated (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, 114-120).

I get a feeling of longing when I consider that all of my recollections are stored in detail somewhere in my mind. How I wish I could remember my own birth, coming home, meeting my brothers and sisters. I know that my body remembers when I was born, and when I was in my mother’s womb. As soon as I was developed enough, I was getting signals in my mind from my body. My earliest recognition of my surroundings was when we were still living in the house my grandfather built. It must have been early spring from the smell of thawing earth in warm sunshine that owned my senses. The

white clapboard was extremely bright to my eyes. Too bright, and that is all I can remember of that moment.

Damasio explains how the brain processes and stores neural images. He describes two areas, the image space and the dispositional space, neurological structures that hold the knowledge base and mechanisms of the images we see in our imagination and the ones of which we remain unconscious. All of life's moments from birth remain dormant until consciousness recalls them (Damasio, 332).

I walk on a busy street and all at once the environment enters my senses and I become part of the scenery, I am a participant in the action of walking along with others. I look at them and they at me and I wonder what each of them is thinking. They are as exclusive and authentic as I am. Levinas described the encounter with the Other as an alterity that cannot be understood as an extension of myself. Through this encounter, I realise that I am not alone and that the universe is not subordinate to my needs and desires (Davis, 2003).

You are the Other and I am me. I keep walking toward the metro station, occupying a space called my own within a crowd of people. Down the stairs we go, winter boots in brown slush, vicious wind blowing hair and scarves until the feeling of warm air draws us in from the cold. Like a river facing rocks, we divide into our separate ways. In the train, a whole new crowd awaits as I again claim that bit of space for myself. I look around and sense tension in the air — or is it me? Of course not! Most eyes are facing downward, either looking at others' shoes, reading a novel or browsing through the metro paper. Some individuals chat with acquaintances, while others listen to anonymous gossip. Cell phone users and music lovers are busy tending to their gadgets.

Eye contact! I was being observed, for how long I wonder? I have no idea. The observer is a stranger in the other car. The train stops and a number of people get off to join the passing flow of commuters going down staircases or hallways. The train is less crowded and so I sit facing a lady clutching her hat and gloves. Her boots have traces of yesterday's street salt. She is wearing a beige coat and a long scarf that matches the hat she holds. Every once in a while she looks at me. I wonder where she is going, if she is working or whether she might be retired and on her way to see a friend at the hospital. She looks kind.

Observing others works both ways. No less than a second goes by, when I am looking at someone, than that person feels my gaze and looks in my direction. For that mysterious reason, I cannot observe others that easily. I feel intrusive, and I am. I can look at crowds in passing, but I cannot observe people at will for any length of time without getting a questioning stare. We can permit ourselves to admire and study at need all the creatures on earth, but have a sensitivity to the other's gaze upon us. I feel as though I am invading someone's privacy when I look at a person. A sudden glance from him or her may catch me in this act of indiscretion. A person who suspects they are being stared at turns to check — a head movement catches the eye of the starrer, whose gaze confirms the feeling of being stared at. Behaviourists rationalise this as a self-fulfilling effect (Shermer, 2005). To what human faculty do I attribute this kind of awareness, this sensitivity to someone's gaze?

When that person on the metro caught me looking, a shock sensation ran through my body. It felt real, a kind of electric touch where both our perceptions met in mid-air and connected. I reacted as strongly as if the person had touched me. My gaze lunged quickly to the floor, denying everything. Both observer and the observed become involved in a peek-a-boo game.

When I look around, whatever scenery happens to be there takes me in and colours my disposition. Together with the other concerns that I might have, it seems as though everything I feel inside and outside becomes that moment. In one instant, my perception radiates the state that I find myself in, while my consciousness observes a level of complexity beyond my comprehension. Attempting such an understanding would require a separation of the many systems that constitute the kind of awareness that I so enjoy. I let my senses shape my days as my thoughts go on about life. Every once in a while, what I see, touch, smell or simply feel will lead my thoughts to another place. Memories may steal my attention and flash as a moment from another time within my mind's eye or, on another occasion, my senses will conjure a solution to a problem.

When I am in the park on the mountain, I am immersed within the seasonal cycles, an overarching reality that humbles my physical existence while indulging both my curiosity and senses entirely. The gradually ascending path that I follow as I walk broadens or narrows in the distance like the stripe that I would paint with a flat square brush. A ribbon-like shape twists and becomes as thin as the thinnest of lines and then untwists to

broaden again (Fig. 11). I see in my mind's eye my thumb and fingers turning that brush, pulling it gradually away from the canvas while the bristles still touch the surface. Then, ever so gently, I can see my fingers turning the flat square brush in the opposite direction, making the thin line wider still, just like a ribbon flowing through the air. My path is like a ribbon, my ribbon is a path.

The crossing over of path and ribbon, of line in paint on canvas, to me, is a reflection of what my senses have gathered from the conditions of reality outside my organism. This can be construed as the sum, I suppose, or the common denominator of the result of what my body and mind have gathered of what the outside is like for me. All of this is manifested within me prior to my own intellect having a chance to contribute through a conscious understanding of this metaphorical occurrence.



Fig. 11. *Dream Interrupted*, 2003, detail

"A ribbon-like shape twists and becomes as thin as the thinnest of lines and then untwists to broaden again."

When I am working with colour and I need to create pictorial tension or contrast, something other than my sense of vision is called upon in my construction of meaning. Of course, my aesthetic judgement is in the forefront of my thoughts, but as I step back and look at my work, a sense of gravity, equilibrium as well as awareness and knowledge of those physical realities become part of the decision-making process. Attempting to draw a symmetrical shape plays upon the senses in that peculiar way. When I try to draw a large circle in chalk on the board, as I am halfway through, and need to make the second half perfectly symmetrical to mirror the curve that I just completed, even my physical

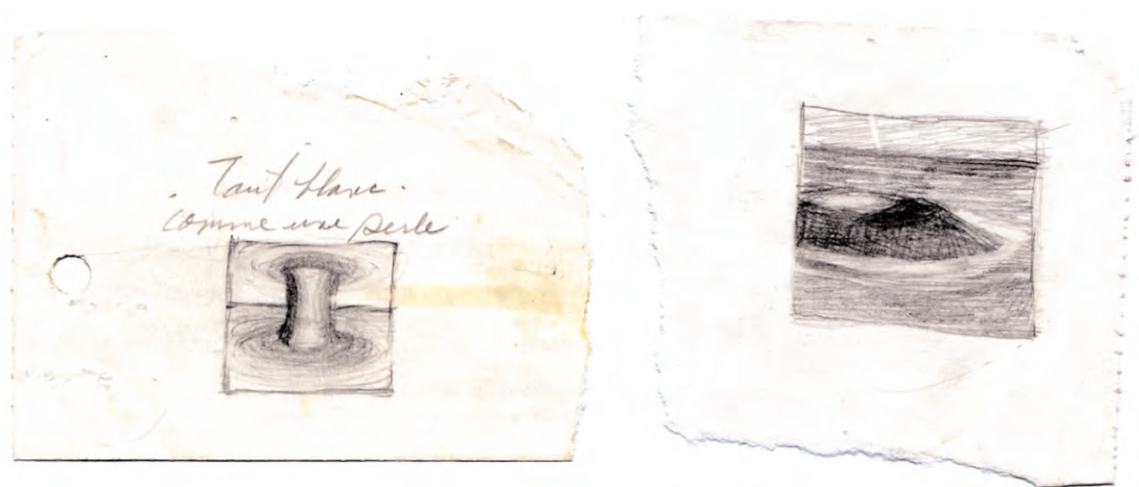


Fig. 12. Studio notes

sense of balance comes into play. My periphery widens and opens in the process. The whole of my knowledge of what that circle is in all of its fullness is there to help my hand render.

I look at my hands at work. They represent my will exercised through my practical and conceptual skills that have been achieved through experience. Whatever knowledge and ideas I have are put down on paper through these abilities. The process of trial and error contributes to what I can do. I sketch and write to work things out for myself and I see words and shapes that mean certain things to me, and they will be there again tomorrow for me to continue. They represent a sense of my thinking on paper. The existence of my body is defined by its tasks. It is there for its tasks in the world. It is there to interact with the world according to my will and my thinking (Merleau-Ponty, 117).

In terms of the plastic appearance of my work, my capacity as a painter is entirely dependent on my physical skills. My touch becomes sensitive to the weight of my brush when I pick up some paint. My vision calibrates the tints or shades of colour, the thickness of a line or the overall position of certain elements in a shape. Music, or silence, opens my awareness to the subtleties that make moments of quietude and reflection necessary. My body gives me perspective on the exterior while inside myself my mind thinks constantly, either about something in the present or in the future, through memo-

ries or in dreams (Merleau-Ponty, 114-120). Everything I know of life and the world was gathered through my senses. My awareness is what constitutes my sense of self.

The construct that I have of reality is based on what my senses have gathered since the beginning of my life. Even if I had been born blind, I would have built in my imagination an understanding of a three-dimensional world created through my alternate senses. My brain would simply be organised differently, enabling tissue that would otherwise deal in vision to take on other sensory duties (Bower, 2003).

The application of phenomenological approaches towards authentic self-knowledge is the closest I have ever been to a conscious appreciation of the present moment as it unfolds. We have separated ourselves from the natural world through language and what we refer to as experience can be confused with a purely mental perspective.

Hermeneutics

When I read in my sketchbook impressions that I have recorded at other times, I grasp in essence the moment when I was writing. My written descriptions of experiences, when read and reinterpreted genuinely through hermeneutic writing, may uncover deeper truthful meaning. Simple descriptions of actions and effects related to objects, expressed in plain unadorned language, speak explicitly and clearly of the matter at hand. Hermeneutics is not about the precision of a description of a human experience but rather a way to uncover some form of truth through simple words.

Words

Words are the tools that I struggle with as a way to communicate whatever thought, feeling or experience I deal with implicitly. In my imagination, I see rows upon rows of drawers filled with words in the form of lead fonts in a printing shop, classified as in a dictionary, but without definitions.

Words accumulate as we evolve and change. We are able to trace the etymology of many words and are quick to adapt when a new one comes into use. For every new idea, discovery, species or planet, we invent a word. AY278741 is meaningless until recognised, defined and identified as a strange and deadly disease that is now known as SARS. The anomaly that was Planet X is now named Pluto.

All disciplines and specialisations have their own vocabulary. There are languages like Esperanto, invented as a universal language, or C+, which is used to speak with computer processors. We even use the structure of languages to trace ethnic origins and patterns of human migration.

Certain communicative skills are needed to put into words what must be expressed. Words are strung together like beads in a necklace, they are stretched into sentences, compressed or made bigger or smaller in importance depending on how they are used. Words can be coupled with a prefix or a suffix to express all kinds of things that might not be related to an initial definition. Some words are like suitcases while others act like umbrellas. The words stored in my imaginary printing shop have limited extension of meaning and there can be such a thing as the literal significance of a word, where a spade is a spade (Plutarch).

Because it is an abstract construction, language itself is anchored in cultural subjectivity. Some writing tasks such as instruction manuals require efficiency while others, like a speech, rely on style and artistry to address different degrees of complexity. A complex language is made up of learned groupings of concepts and notions that might encompass many domains. Word-fonts from my printing shop can only be laid out in a simple language. A simple language struggles to maintain naiveté. Heidegger (1977) defines naiveté as accidental, immediate and unreflective beholding (85). He says that what is intuitive may or may not be related to spontaneity. There are situations where intuition is linked to something buried deep within where spontaneity might refer to something on the surface.

If I re-read a letter from a friend over several days, I might find that I interpret it differently each time. If someone else reads the letter, it can be interpreted in other ways as well. Words are defined differently from one dictionary to another. Social and cultural groups might also have different interpretations. These nuances can make a world of difference when the meaning of a text is put into question, for example, in a courtroom. Some words are ambiguous while others are meant to be precise. Orientation words like “left”, “right” or “up” and “down” leave little room for interpretation. On the other hand the word “sarcasm” is defined in various dictionaries as: a flaying or plucking off of the skin; a cutting taunt (from the Greek, σαρκασμειν [sarkasmo], to flay, tear flesh, speak bitterly); as a witty language used to convey insults or scorn such as, “he used sarcasm

to upset his opponent” and “irony is wasted on the stupid”. Sarcasm, in the sense of irony, can be a method to state humorously, as truth, in an incredulous manner something that is known to be untrue. This is associated with physical pantomime such as eye rolling ([Wikipedia](#)). “Belligerence” for example can be synonymous with “sarcasm” but when defined as a hostile or warlike attitude its sense is quite different. Even the symbols that languages use are arbitrary. “Ciel bleu” and “sinine taevas” mean “blue sky” but all three are different symbols for the same idea.

To establish some form of understanding and permanence within an ever-changing state of chaotic external forces, thinkers have tried to define existence and oneness in the perceived world. Language is not merely a communications device but a method to bring the world into existence (Heidegger, 2004, c.1945). Words and expressions are a system of meaning that seems to make perception real and functional. As knowledge expands and we create more and more explanations, it takes us away from our original beginnings as intelligent life forms in the natural world. Homo sapiens sapiens (wise man who thinks) lived in a natural world without divisions between physical elements, the universe or human presence. Palaeolithic drawings such as those at Lascaux are descriptions of observation and experience. More than simple mark making, they reflect the scientific and aesthetic record of human culture. At a time before the separation of art and science, the structures of logic were within the aesthetic, which ultimately developed into written language (Millette, 1997). For this reason the relationship between language and the creative process is tenuous since the object of art does not come from a written or spoken description.

If I could forget about the common definitions of existing words, I would rediscover a place where all is interrelated. My imaginary printing shop represents this proto-language, where words are read as symbolic objects and from where I construct phenomenological hermeneutics.

Interpretation of words

Hermeneutics, which in Greek (ερμηνευτικός) means to interpret or clarify, is a practice that has been in use for centuries for religious texts, the classics or legal documents. Hermeneutic phenomenology has been defined by Heidegger as a way to uncover the essence of what is hidden (buried over) in the meaning of one’s written words.

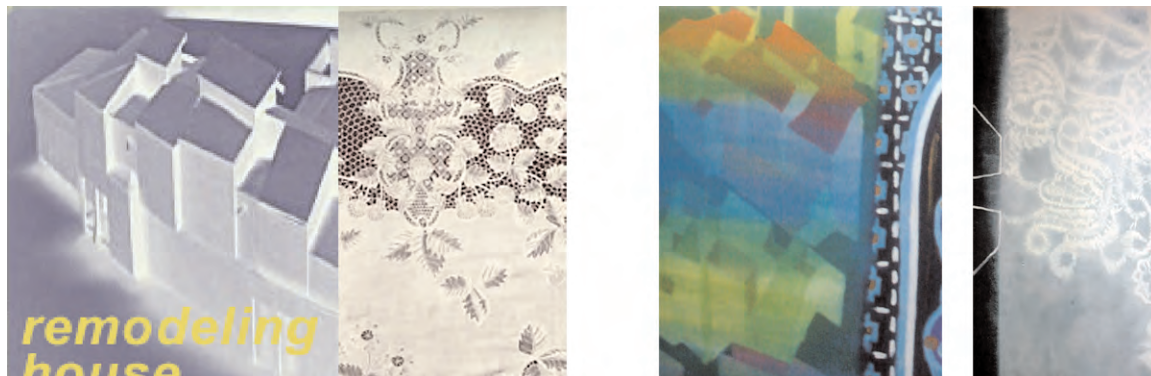
Focus on physical sensations as they are felt in the present opens a window to the nature of consciousness. Maintaining a narrow concentration on the body itself changes the position of perception from the intellect (thoughts about outside concerns) to the physical state (into the closed, intimate inner world of being). In written form and expressed in simple terms a text can be extracted from the introspective process. Through the identification and bracketing of reflective texts and images and through the analysis of these signs, I uncover meaning.



Fig. 13. Notes and drawings

I begin a project with sketches and written ideas that I pin to the wall at the studio (Fig. 12, 13). I may also look at previous work to see where I was. Occasionally, I have a clear idea of my objectives and will go right to work. Other times, however, more thought is required. As my work develops, this process becomes more difficult. Michel Foucault (1982) described symbolic associations as the separation between plastic representation (which implies resemblance) and linguistic reference (which excludes resemblance). The symbolic system of words and the perceptual nature of representations can neither merge nor intersect; subsequently, the subordination of one or the other must occur (32). In my art process, I explore my experiences in the phenomena of symbolic associations that occur within the imagination. Based on my capacities as an artist I will begin to sketch and in due course, pictures, drawings and paintings will materialise (Fig.

14, 15). I will find myself in the ongoing process of my artwork. To perceive within my mind's eye a mental image and then to transpose it into an image on a piece of paper or other medium is done without language. I may think with words as I am creating but I do not need words to do it.



above left: Fig. 14. Details of source images

above right: Fig. 15. Details from The Ends of the Earth, 2002-2003

My journal and sketchbook provide me with access to parts of my introspective process. My initial focus is on my physical state. A simple written description records the present moment as lived through my senses. I generate notes from questions to myself like: What is that physical sensation? Do I feel it in a specific area of my body? Would I qualify it as heavy or light? What does it look like to me? Can I visualise a shape?

As a body of work develops, I keep writing about physical sensations experienced while I am looking at my progress. If I wish to take these writings further, the words can be reinterpreted and further expressed to describe the mental images that words of the text create. Words that can clarify can confuse as well. If I were to ask several people the definition of the word “love”, I would get varying descriptions that revealed something related to their personal experience. If I were to ask the same people to define the word “table”, I might hear relatively consistent and pragmatic accounts of furniture. It is necessary to be aware of these intricacies when describing my physical state while being introspective. Plain unadorned language, with descriptions of actions and effects, speaks explicitly and clearly of the matter at hand.

Introspective writing

The words “What do you feel in your body now?” call attention to the somatosensory state and where consciousness is “scanning” the body now. Introspection is experience defined through the physical reality of one’s body. What makes the experience true is that it is described as lived presently and this is being witnessed in the now as it is being described. Impressions that I have recorded at other times grasp, in essence, the moment when I was writing. I can remember the time of the year, sometimes the weather; but mostly, I can recall the way I felt about the artwork that I was doing, the questions I had in mind and the way I was dealing with them. The physical effect of an experience felt through memory is being lived presently.

Why do I occasionally read letters that my mother sent me over twenty years ago? Unlike reading a novel, or the newspaper, I think it is an experience of another order. A novel provides an unfolding sequence of events that gives the reader an experience that belongs to someone else. A newspaper is made of reports anchored in daily reality. When reading the words of someone familiar, a certain kind of reflection sets in, a thinking in accordance to the voice belonging to those written words, as the reading is taking place (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 208). When I sort through e-mail, I delete most of my correspondence, keeping only the messages that matter to me. I know that I will read them all again. Old letters, postcards and my journals remain for me to relive and reinterpret.

When I read a page from something that I wrote when I was nineteen, I am taken to a time when I was inexperienced. As I read the words, I can recall what was going on around me at the time, the place where I was, and the time of the year. I do not always understand why I chose to write at certain times but I suppose that it had to do with the way I was feeling.

My first diary is filled with elaborate handwriting and occasionally I notice the spelling mistakes. It is embellished with pressed flowers that once were adhered to the page with Scotch tape but now have all but fallen and disappeared, except for the stem. Flowers that I had placed in a plastic snack bag have transformed to dark purple flakes and a curled pink ribbon has flattened and shifted to one corner of the bag. I cannot remember the occasion related to what seems to have once been a corsage. A dry, dishevelled maple leaf with the year written on it in pen reminds me quite clearly of a particular event that I would prefer to forget.

When I happen to come across this book unwittingly, the sight of it might awaken certain feelings within me. The thoughts that I wrote years ago express what I was living then, but now they resonate meaning that embellishes and expands on the same words. The greater the time that separates me from the journal, the more complex becomes my understanding of it.

My body state will affect my interpretation of words in the same manner as it changes my perception. My physical being is continually subjected to its environment just as my conscious self is subjected to a daily strain to deal with whatever disposition or mood may surface from my body. This interaction, mediated through emotions, ultimately influences my perspective on things. One day I may read ideas from my past and begin to make comparative judgements between what I saw as common sense in retrospect and my present view of the world. My stomach may twist in knots as I try to come to terms with the text. On another occasion and for other reasons, I may find the very same pages trivial.

Body and language

Language does not come out of nothing (Damasio, 108). If language operates for the self and consciousness, by symbolising in words and sentences what exists first nonverbally, then there must be a self that is nonverbal and a nonverbal knowing for which the word “I” or “me” or the words “I know” would have appropriate meaning in any language (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, 215).

Marcel Proust, in a celebrated passage from Remembrance of Things Past (1922), begins with, “Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray... had any existence for me.” Suddenly he realises that his senses provoked memories from tea and cake as he ate. He recalled childhood experiences in his aunt’s room. She would be there with tea and a little lemon cake, a madeleine. She would drop a little piece of it into her tea and scoop out the madeleine soaked with tea and offer it to him on a teaspoon. Years later, as he was having tea and madeleines, all of a sudden memories started to tumble down into his consciousness and then, as if through a chain reaction, it all fell together in his mind. Thus he recalled that moment of the teaspoon and the moment in his aunt’s room in Combray on Sunday morning before Mass. It was like finding some lost truth at the bottom of a chest. Proust realises finally that the truth that he searches for is not in the tea but within himself. The perceived world is created from within.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains that the body is perception. His observation becomes apparent through conversation, where two people mutually involved in communication experience a kind of physical switch-around, as if they are in each other's body, thinking, conversing and simultaneously reading each other's body language and facial expressions (215).

Damasio (1999) describes "body language" as the physical aspect of someone who is expressing background emotions. The internal perspective on life is perceived on the outside through body posture and the shaping of body movements (53). In my experience, the body plays a significant role in the creative process. Asking someone, in conversation, the question "What are you feeling right now?" brings the present into focus and favours introspection over aesthetic discourse.

I remember talking to a student of mine, whom I will call "Jessica", about a self-directed project. She had decided to select the topic of her grandmother's fatal battle with cancer. Her initial idea was to use the adage, "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil", commonly represented by three monkeys symbolising the actions of the phrases. Jessica intended to use three canvases to portray the sayings but rather than monkeys they would be characterised by mermaids. She wondered if her idea would adequately represent the experience of losing her grandmother to cancer, a battle that she fought for several years.

When personal issues and emotions come into play, it is not always about making art when making art. Psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, when working with disturbed young children, watched their interaction with their mothers. These observations led to his theory of transitional-object phenomena, which explicates the formation of a virtual place within us, where creativity is born. In Playing and Reality (1971) he described an intermediate area of experience that exists between the use made of an object that is not part of the body, for example a baby blanket, and that is not yet recognised by a child as being part of the exterior world (2). The third area of human experiencing, which is neither subjective fantasy, nor objective knowledge, involves a combining of both (Winnicott). When thinking, concepts (as cognitive abstractions) precede words and sentences. The proposed art object was an abstraction that afforded Jessica an opening through which communication was made possible. I questioned her about her choice for that particular saying.

She explained that her grandmother was a strong vivacious individual who had survived three remissions of the disease and that her grandfather's suffering over losing her took him as well. I could tell from her physical stance that she had been very close to her grandparents and that it must have been a considerable strain to lose them. I could commiserate with her because of my personal experience with family loss. I also know that loss has been expressed in my work through symbols and metaphors.

Introspection is when consciousness turns to focus on the inside. Until thoughts are expressed they remain in our minds at a subjective level where they are apt to change, depending on our emotional state. These thoughts can be made manifest by speaking and being heard by someone, or through written statements. I quite naturally try to express in words images that I see in my mind's eye. I feel a necessity to try out, through language, to externalise that which I feel needs to come out. Psychoanalyst Walter Poland (2000) maintains that any other individual, such as a close friend, can perform fragments of what an analyst does with a patient. Focused understanding of meaning that arises from within can be obtained from someone who has journeyed for some time deep within a person's thoughts. Witnessing, says Poland, "is a vital psychoanalytic function" (3). It takes two to witness the unconscious, as it matters that someone else understands and appreciates the implications of access to personal truth (11). Intersubjectivity, or the relation to the "other", addresses both the interior and the exterior and looks at emotional interaction as an outcome in itself (8). From Jessica's words, I began to understand that the three monkeys symbolised her grandmother's remissions. "Why that saying with the monkeys?" I asked, as I mimicked the words with my hands covering my eyes, then my ears and my mouth.

She replied that it was to symbolise the fact that she did not want to speak, nor hear nor talk about what her grandmother had gone through.

I added, "It must have been a difficult time for you."

She replied with a nod.

Language is only the external accompaniment of thought (Merleau-Ponty, 205). It is only one form of translation for the non-linguistic images reflecting events, relationships and entities that we constantly see in our minds (Damasio, 1999, 107-112). Oral commu-

nication possesses physical presence that also generates meaning through gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and intonation.

Posture and gestures were expressing Jessica's difficulty in discussing her experience. Her arms were crossed tightly in front of her body and her weight shifted from leg to leg as she talked. The slight tone of her voice hinted at a vulnerability and sensitivity akin to creative individuals (Csikszentmihalyi; Getzels, 1976, 38). As I listened carefully, her hands began to trace invisible lines in the air in harmony with her words. Her facial expressions expanded on the meaning of her words, with stresses and intonations where necessary. I sensed both of our bodies engaged in communication. She was emphasising and expressing thoughts that had never been put into words. She persisted and, for lack of words, paused and looked at me with a questioning gaze, "Do you know what I mean?"

Merleau-Ponty describes such an experience in terms of the other person's intention inhabiting my body and mine her body. The witnessed gesture outlines an intentional object. This object is genuinely present and fully comprehended when the powers of my body adjust to it and overlap it. There is mutual confirmation between myself and others when I assign a name to the external experience (215).

"What about the mermaids, why those?" I asked.

She answered that, while going through her ordeal, she had wanted to remain in her own "bubble". She just wanted to be happy.

I asked her if she was happy in that bubble world and she replied, "No."

I could see in her expression the frustration of dealing with emotions that had not yet been identified. The most familiar thing appears indeterminate as long as we have not recalled its name (Merleau-Ponty, 206). Thoughts that remain unexpressed to the outside seem undetermined until they have been put into words (207).

"Mermaids", she said, "were in their own world."

Someone who speaks is not translating what thoughts are in the mind but rather fulfilling

thoughts as she speaks (207). According to Merleau-Ponty, Jessica could not simultaneously think while speaking, it was through her expression of words that her ideas materialised (209).

At that point, the classic Anderson (1836) story, The Little Mermaid, came into my mind. Jessica was aware of the mermaid's wish to have human legs and to be with the prince she had saved from the ocean. Even though the little mermaid gets her wish, the prince's love for another drives her first towards contemplation of murder and then to suicide: "The little mermaid's hand trembled as it squeezed the handle of the knife, then she threw the weapon out into the sea... She threw herself into the sea and felt her body changing into foam" (236).

I suggested that her idea of using three canvases mirrored the three times her grandmother fought the disease. I asked her if the literal transposition of mermaids was necessary, "What if you think of the words that describe a mermaid?"

"Fish and woman," she replied and the term "fish-woman" pleased her. Thinking of a human amphibian life form hiding somewhere, secluded in another world, seemed to inspire her.

In my more recent work, I have chosen to create something that is about what is going on inside of me. I choose spirals because they are a device that allows me to travel on the picture plane, creating distance, height, bends, curves and even angles. When I saw that Jessica wanted to choose something that had to do with mermaids I could see her there, three steps behind me, trying to express what was inside. She had gone to the very extent of her knowledge to conceive her idea and through these fragments of thought she would conceptually express her implicit, personal experience. She did not have the accumulated experience of years or an extended art practice so she was still in the symbol world that, from her perspective, was about mermaids. Obviously, when she said mermaids, I was instantly transported into a media world with references to Walt Disney and so on. From these particular mental images, I came to suggest that she look at the mermaid from her alternate idea of a fish-woman. What would that be to her? It was a way of introducing her to her own idea. I work the same way in my conceptual and creative process. I could see through Jessica's gestures that she really had started pondering these thoughts. Her mind's eye had chosen the mermaid because the character was living in

her own world. She was living in her own bubble and wanted to be free to follow the mortal world. She wanted to leave this place that to her seemed empty.

I did an artwork called Dialogue muet (Silent Dialogue), 1994, (Fig. 16) that began with a photograph of a drowning victim of a typhoon. The source image was a photograph taken from a helicopter of a figure bent out of shape and floating on the ocean. Taken out of context, in my version of the image, the body on the water doesn't look morbid. The legs are bent a certain way and the elbows are out. It looks like a small hovering character subjected to its environment. There is a relationship between the image of a mermaid and this figure.



above: Fig. 16. Dialogue muet (Silent Dialogue), 1994
8mm film, wood, glass, mirrors, paper, paint
90 x 76 x 86 cm

Loss is more directly represented by another part of the piece. I transformed a small pad of paper for a sculpture. I had cut out a shape through the entire thickness of the pad. It would rest opened on a wooden school-desk-like table. To me there was nothing to say, so I cut the centre out of a book that had nothing written in it and I removed the place where you are supposed to write. To me there were no words to express what I was feeling. It just left a big hole.

Creating and manipulating the object; feeling its texture, its weight or the scent of paper, are all real experiences for my senses. The object was in my reality. I could walk around it, look at it from all sides; it cast a shadow. My representation was a metaphor for a personal abstraction and could, as an object in itself, be the source of subsequent metaphors for myself or for the viewer.

The existence of a particular artwork means that something has been defined and answered. Creation occurs away from what the world has judged and classified in terms of what art is right now. Creation belongs solely to me. It starts with my body and consciousness. The language of my organism suspended in the present through writing brings my body to the forefront of consciousness. This is where my creative experience begins.

Mental images

My memories project powerful images that surface at different times, for different reasons. Life's moments can never be quite the same since I find myself constantly in different contexts. I am in motion through time and space (literally at about 320 kilometres per second relative to cosmic background radiation). When I am interacting with the outside world, conscious memories do surface but do not call upon my attention as much as when I am making art. I know that occurrences are stored a certain way, and become interrelated, classified and reorganized in my memory. However, I do not know which moment I will remember or how different types or topics will be interrelated. This is how the mind works. But as an artist, it is important for me to know that I have self-knowledge in an extended consciousness that I cannot consciously access (Damasio, 195-196). My mind is a "big attic" filled with my stuff and I draw metaphors from an underlying pressure pushing to come out.

Everything is metaphor if I want to look at the world for what it is. What I see out my window is a metaphor because I don't know if it's really there. It is a construct of my perception. While I contemplate, memories of my life experiences that I am unaware of push to come out. I think that to a certain point that is what drives me to make art, along with the desire to draw that I had as a child. From my experience, all children like to draw. Some of them keep drawing because there is some kind of satisfaction in putting something on paper that is really theirs. As a child, I understood drawing as a whole world of possibilities. Some children just keep on drawing beyond ten or twelve years

old and they become artists because they are sensitive to the fact that the activity is like a mirror into themselves, an intermediate area of experiencing that keeps inner reality and external life separate yet interrelated (Winnicott, 1971). Finding a metaphor is the door to self-awareness—one way, at least for a painter.

Images precede words in my thoughts and sometimes they are produced naturally by my senses — the smell of bread might enter as an image. We think in mental images and they come to mind prior to language, but there is no way of recognizing the difference between words and images. Of course it seems like I think in language because when I am thinking I am talking to myself. The images come but my thoughts respond in words. For example, when I'm walking on the street and I say to myself, "Oh gosh, who's that?" I'm getting images as well but they are mental images and it doesn't mean that I can't talk. It all goes on at the same time — and you also feel like going to the bathroom while this is going on and you stub your foot. In addition, your heart is beating and you get a cramp and the wind is blowing your hair in your face. What we do not know is whether or not the representation in our brain resembles the object perceived. Mental images are a record of our interaction with perception (Damasio, 312). The difference between a mental image and language is that language is a formulation for the mental image.

When I say, "the planet is vast," I see in my mind my arm describing the immensity of the planet. I feel emotions related to that image of myself with my arms outstretched which I can put into words. Psychiatrist Arnold Modell believes that the cognitive capacity for metaphoric thought preceded language, with the conceptual metaphor and the acquisition of language evolving separately (Modell, 2003, 15). Although I might think in language, I barely see my thoughts go by in my mind as I think. I do, however, feel what my thoughts entail emotionally. Mental images come in sparks, barely noticeable. I wonder if early human beings, as primal creatures, before language, could perceive these mental images more clearly or slower than we do now?

I don't really give myself a command to "think in language" when I think in language, nor do I conjure up mental images. They simply appear in my mind's eye as the smell of fresh bread or the scent of summer rain. Personally significant occurrences might trigger a memory that will cause a rise in my emotions. If I expect to see a certain person when I open the door, and it is someone else, I will get a flash-like image in my mind's eye of the person that I was expecting.

I have always observed nature (Fig. 17). When I look at the sky I am reminded that I am on a planet that is hurling through space on the edge of a galaxy and that it is only by chance that I am here. So many things happen simultaneously, physically and mentally, as you are looking outside your body, or you are thinking inside your body. You have your five physical systems at work and your brain is at work. A painting is a bit like that. There are all these manifestations in there plus your thinking. My work represents my existence inside and my existence outside. It is my interaction with the “other”, my dream, my “dreams”, my subconscious, my conscious, my own vocabulary, my life experience — everything is there. I am on the canvas. What is really from the exterior is art theory; that comes in sometimes — colour theory or other practical concerns. All of my learning of art is also there, or not there if I choose not to use it.



Fig. 17. “I have always observed nature”

The metaphors that I have created in my work echo the time and place when I conceived them. I look at my entire production and memories come to mind. I can see my hands working, the time of the year and what was going on in my life. When I take an objective look at the content and the aesthetic appearance of these pieces, I have a better idea of where I am now. What I mean by “an objective look at” my work is to walk away from it and look at it a while later. When I come back in the morning, having spent twelve hours without seeing it changes something. Sometimes I will reflect my work in a mirror to look at it from a different perspective or I will bring it home in a digital camera and compare it with other things on the computer screen. The content and appearance of a work of art is the objective look to a certain point; but, of course, I remain attached to it because I am the one who produced it.

Metaphor

My paintings are metaphors. They are images, objectified constructs, of my perception of the time I live in. Within me is the sense I have of my surroundings, shaped by my knowledge and experience. All that I embody fluctuates with the day's reality, which colours my disposition as I paint. Words themselves, material and ideational, are no more than the shadows of their own representations. Ever present and infinite, metaphors seemingly distance us from the idea of true reality. A world within a world, divided within ourselves, we communicate to one another in metaphors. I paint not with words but with the images from my mind.

Recurring symbols in my work as primary metaphors

I remember when I became a mother, looking at my baby and thinking that she had no language; no sense of self, nor for that matter the conception of direction. Soon after she was born, I began feeding her and in a very short time she realized that feeding was very pleasant. I was amazed at how quickly she settled into her schedule, an absolutely new experience. I now recognize that the very first learning for a baby is related to survival and that the first mental association with the world outside the womb is established before language. The newborn being fed naturally discovers that "up" means more and that nourishment comes from "up". A link between mother and nourishment creates a primary metaphor in the mind.

Most metaphors in everyday language are structural in that they are about similarity and analogy, for example, John Donne's "no man is an island". Lakoff and Johnson in Metaphors We Live By (1980) describe metaphors as cognitive cross-mappings built from learned and forgotten primary mappings. What we refer to as "concepts" are neural structures that allow us to mentally reason about abstractions. The architecture of the brain's neural networks determines what concepts we have and hence the kind of reasoning that we can do. A distinct class of metaphors has to do with spatial orientation, for example, "happy is up; sad is down." These metaphorical concepts, rather than structuring one concept in terms of another, organise a whole system of concepts with respect to one another (14). When you look into a spoon you see yourself upside down. The back of the eye is curved very much the same way. Scientifically, we should see upside down. So why do we see things the way we do? Cognitive linguist Joseph Grady (1997) suggests that it could be explained through primary experience. For example, my child's

physical need provided her with the first information on the exterior world. The nourishment that was needed to sustain life came from “up”. When the experiential sense of pleasure was compared with the physical perception in the visual cortex, a primary metaphor was established for orientation. This is why we see things the way we do rather than upside down.

Grady first used the term “primary metaphor” to describe naturally acquired embodied associations that are dependent on our interaction with the world (25-26). He felt that these were the basis for the more elaborate blended constructions that we commonly recognise as metaphors (Grady, Oakley and Coulson, 1999).

We say a river is like a bed, a river is like a story, a person’s life runs its course. A metaphor is a comparison with something. Meaning comes from the metaphor. It is its intension with all the possible things that the construct might refer to (extension). Meaning can come from conversation. Meaning can happen spontaneously. Two meanings can come together to reflect another significance. Meaning comes from the meeting of ideas or from an extension on paper.

I think that the making of art is the most direct transposition of a metaphor in the mind to a medium, such as the image on the canvas.

There are many depictions of the horizon that figure in my paintings and I know that if I were to stop painting and resume a few years later, I would still paint horizons. This subject is probably the tip of a deep root in me. Each time I choose to paint a horizon, I see it as fresh and something novel in my production until I recognize it repeated in my entire body of work; and then I begin to understand its importance for me. The horizon is the kind of metaphor that persists as if it had a will independent of mine — a flag or a sign trying to make itself known to me. It is a kind of metaphor that is primary for me and instinctive in that it recurs spontaneously. It hints at something experienced that I am not normally conscious of, something that is either part of my identity or part of my life. Are such metaphors fragments of recollections deeper in me trying to signal their presence? Should I pay attention? I think that they probably are, because in me is stored every physical perception I have ever experienced (Damasio, 332). My entire life is recorded in some mysterious corner of my mind while I remain conscious of only a few moments.

I try to produce a painting that has emotion but emotions are intermediary to my mind and body. Damasio surmised that emotions are about the life of an organism. They are indispensable, found somewhere between the basic survival kit (the regulation of metabolism) and the device of high reason. In terms of evolutionary development, emotions are a fairly high-level component of the human body, quirky adaptations of the machinery with which organisms regulate survival (50-56).

My emotions are the concurrent interaction of my mind and body and this is quite complex, so for the purposes of my inquiry I will begin with my body because it is from within that I create metaphors, at least those that I think are linked to my art making. They are the ones that are based on my experience as a physical being. This experience is stored in my central nervous system in minute detail. All thoughts in my mind are somewhat interrelated.

I work with metaphors that are either constructions from selective memories – those with a source that I can trace, or metaphors that recur and that I have not yet figured out. For example, why do I repeat certain things such as conical forms or horizons? Why am I drawn to specific objects or to certain colours? Of course, metaphors can be blended from negative experiences as well. That some people are frightened of spiders probably has something to do with a forgotten life experience. I consider the creation of metaphors a natural occurrence that will gradually draw me in deeper as I continue to develop my artwork and this process will lead to some form of implicit truth.

In my conscious mind I have memories that reflect to me who I am. My identity is based on self-knowledge and my life experience. As these memories have accumulated, at different times in my life, I have struggled with them by imagining extreme scenarios, reversing facts and twisting perspectives, as a means to help me determine who I am in different contexts. Many of these recollections have been somewhat resolved and they find a chronological place within my life story and reinforce my self-identity. They come to mind at will depending on outside occurrences or they may simply appear in random sequences.

When I am painting, I am oblivious to the intimate traces of subject matter that I am leaving on the canvas. I would call these signs primary metaphors because they are from

my physicality and have not yet blended into complex meaning. As I work, images of my past come to mind in a way similar to a slide show, affecting my mood and making it fluctuate. These elements are simply rendered into my paintings and only later will I recognise aspects of my past — natural elements and motifs, objects or scenery that mean a great deal to me. I have traced much of my subject matter to certain memories. I realise that reflective waters and waterfalls appeared in several of my paintings and that these resembled the river that passes through the centre of my hometown (Fig. 18, 19). It seems as though the part of me that is closed to my awareness finds its way into my artwork through meaningful symbols and metaphors and it is only after a while that I capture their significance.



above left: Fig. 18. Waterfall on the Yamaska river
right: Fig. 19. From Sur naturel (On Nature), 1996
Oil on paper, glass, wood
23 x 23 cm

These representations are particularly important in my experience as an artist. Painting is my natural manifestation of a form of communication that is purely subjective and seems, at the moment of conception, devoid of language. I am working with the frontal lobe and I am a conscious entity. What I don't know is that when I paint a waterfall it is a painting of the dam in my hometown. That came later and once I realised where it came from, it strengthened my understanding of the image. Then everything made sense. The profound subjectivity of a single perspective of the world is a form of consciousness. Through the slow process of art making, recognisable clues inform my self-awareness.

Meaning from mental images

Time has determined the shape of my artwork. Some elements that I require for art making are from within me while others are related to the exterior world, the places and the people that I interact with. Written and spoken words enable us to communicate with others more efficiently than the mental images that are constantly being produced in our minds.

Inner reality is known through the imagination and outer reality by observation. In the third person “I” witness my budding thoughts and I marvel and listen. When I think to myself “I” in the first person singular, I imply a separation from within me. The French poet Rimbaud (1871) said, *Je est un autre*, “I” is the other. Defining “I” as distinct from “self” creates a discrepancy between self and the other form of thinking that I engage in when my focus is towards the outside. I think, when you say “I” there is a social identity in it. It is where I am trying to define myself in situations where the self is being looked at from the exterior. It echoes or supposes someone else listening. It also changes the kind of thinking about oneself. You can turn it around and look at it. Even when I am by myself writing a text, and I write “I” this and “I” that, I imply someone else listening.

How does a mental image that lingers in the mind’s eye of an artist, put down on paper in the form of a drawing, compare in terms of communication to the word that describes the same object? I will use the example of a knife. You, as my reader, will have in mind your own version of a knife as you read the word for that utensil. When you are presented with a drawing of a knife, an artist’s personal idea of a knife will stylistically describe the object. The placement of the knife on the sheet of paper has meaning, as does the material used to draw the knife. The artist projected a subjective idea of a knife on a sheet of paper. The drawing of a knife will give every detail of the knife: the style of knife, the make, even the size of the blade, the size of the handle and the material of the handle. Is it a serrated knife or is it a smooth blade? The word “knife” says knife. It could be any kind of knife. It could be a machete, a fine piece of cutlery or a potato knife. This is the essential difference between a written representation and a rendering, where in the case of a knife, a picture is worth a thousand words. The word and the drawing are metaphors of the object knife. Both communicate in different modes respective meanings about the same object but I don’t think that it is the same kind of metaphor. A poetic description of a knife might share, in essence, some similarities with the drawing but most of the meaning remains in the mind of the individual who receives

the communication. A significant amount of information is transformed, reinterpreted or completely shifted from what a real knife is about.

Damasio described language as a translation converted from non-linguistic images (107). Consciousness must pre-exist language because language cannot materialise from nothing (108). Modell (2003) sees metaphors as being generated from within the human body and then projected outward (75).

Latent mental images are expressed both internally and externally through language, but internal language in the form of dispositional images is only partially structured for communication (Damasio, 1994, 102). It is important to remember that all spoken and written words were originally abstracted from symbolic pictures. Our very first attempt at a recorded permanent communication came in the form of drawings, at least from any evidence that remains. As humans we must have had sounds and gestures to communicate with each other in the moment, but in terms of a message to be communicated later, drawing shapes seems to be right.

The same conceptual structure that helps me rationalize and juxtapose mental images into ideas that can be communicated is also present in common language (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 4). The kind of thinking conducive to creativity combines the domains of language already categorized in the mind with the blending of conceptual metaphors. A visible metaphor in the form of language or art embodies the sum of many different mental associations, including a physical sense, in the construction of a personal abstraction. For these reasons I tend to think that mental images can be both rooted in the body and be the cause of physical sensations that engender creation.

Temporality

To have an awareness of how a particular experience is felt through my body as it occurs requires me to bypass emotional and reasoned interpretations to focus on the moment itself. Consciousness is always preoccupied with the body but our mind keeps it in the background except in extraordinary circumstances. An acknowledgement of now has the effect of slowing down my sense of time in the usual meaning, where the future and the past make the present moment practically obsolete, invisible and imperceptible. It is obsolete because when I am just living, going about my day, I am involved with many things all at once. Of course, I'm in my body, but I'm thinking, I'm painting, I could be

walking on the street, going to school, running errands; so I'm busy thinking and I'm busy in my body. My organism is my vehicle and as long as it is healthy, I go about my day. If suddenly, I sense a sharp pain in my side, I stop and for a while I'm really feeling my body here and now and when my body draws my attention — I know that there is something wrong. If I cut my finger, I'm right away in the present moment watching the blood run out of my finger, looking for something to stop the bleeding there in the moment. I can also pay attention to my body when I want to listen to my thoughts, focus on mental images and the state of my body standing there in the moment. My body lives in the present.

When I think that I am sick I focus on my body's state. I become fully conscious of the present moment as it comes, sensing my body. Only through my thoughts can I go into the past and future. My perception of time is subjective, relative to my interaction with the world. In contrast, time on a clock is objective.

We consider time as something that is in constant "passing", in that it is leaving the past and in the process of going towards the future while touching upon the present, in a constant state of becoming. In Phenomenology of Perception (1945), Merleau-Ponty outlines this state of the present in terms of our own cultural and philosophical way of living life. He describes the nature of temporality through a metaphor of a river. "The water I see before me prepared itself a number of days ago in the mountains when the ice was melting. Now, it passes before me in the river. It is heading towards the sea into which it will flow. If time is like a river, it goes from the past towards the present and into the future. The present is a consequence of the past and the future, a consequence of the present" (470). According to Merleau-Ponty this understanding of time is convoluted. In order to suppose this sequence of events, one must imagine an observer watching the melting ice turn into water and flowing into the river. This observer is placed within a "spatial-temporal" objectivity. The observer is watching the piece of wood that he tossed into a stream a few days ago float by on the river. The successive events are considered by an imaginary observer who is placed within the finite totality of the spatial-temporal objective world. If I consider this particular situation in itself, there is but one observer. The idea of change, in this case, supposes that I stand in a given spot where I watch things unfold. Based on this notion, one's perspective is the basis of one's individuality. "Time is not like a flowing stream," says Merleau-Ponty. We support this idea because we imagine an observer witnessing the river running its course. The past does not push

forward the present that in turn pushes the future (471). The future is not being prepared behind the observer; it is premeditating itself before him “like a storm on the horizon.” If the observer is placed in a rowboat on a river, we may say that he is flowing towards his future. The future for the observer is the scenery that awaits him around the bend. The passing of time is not within the flowing stream itself but rather in the unfolding of the scenery for the moving observer. It is unlike a successive occurrence of events. Time is born of my own relationship to things:

Past and future exist only too unmistakably in the world, they exist in the present, and what being itself lacks in order to be of the temporal order, is the not-being of elsewhere, formerly and tomorrow. The objective world is too much of a plenum for there to be time. Past and future withdraw of their own accord from being and move over into subjectivity in search, not of some real support, but, on the contrary, of a possibility of not-being which accords with their nature. If we separate the objective world from the finite perspectives which open upon it, and posit it in itself, we find everywhere in it only so many instances of “now”. These instances of “now”, moreover, not being present to anybody, have no temporal character and could not occur in sequence. The definition of time which is implicit in the comparisons undertaken by common sense, and which might be formulated as “a succession of instances of now” has not even the disadvantage of treating past and future as presents: it is inconsistent, since it destroys the very notion of “now”, and that of succession (Merleau-Ponty, 478-479).

When I look out my studio window, I think about time. My painting shows the moment-to-moment development of the slow reflective process of my mind and hand at work. Whether my image is painted or spontaneously taken with a camera, the particular time it was made is recorded and time is frozen in the image (Fig. 20, 21).

Words in an aesthetic object

The art that I make manifest through metaphors is a human phenomenon that reaches beyond intellect, knowledge, experience and memory but it is brought to my consciousness through all of these faculties. I am addressing ontology as an occurrence within a specific work of art or through an artist’s entire production. Visual art manages to do something that language, in the sense of ordinary communication, cannot touch upon. To



left: Fig. 20. Brush on Mount Royal

right: Fig. 21. Sketch in chalk on slateboard

my knowledge, only the poet can express the intricacy of the contents of an art object in its fullness. Poet John Keats writes of the difference between the art object and words in Ode on a Grecian Urn (1819):

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:

Poetry and literature are, of course, art forms in the sense that they exhibit the nature of an aesthetic object. Keats chose a vase for his subject (the precise vase of his contemplation has never been identified). Some art works are aesthetically interesting but not necessarily beautiful, some are troublesome or troubling. There are works that I have seen that make me think about death, while others make me think about how superficial, irresponsible or socially incompetent we are.

As I work at painting, I think in plain words, not in poetry. I love words and I love writing, but at the same time I see language as very structured in comparison to my thinking. I look for words that at least touch upon what I am getting at. I write a text about what my thoughts might look like through words, what I felt like, or what I was trying to do as I worked. Writing hermeneutically is not like ordinary writing. I don't use concepts, I stay away from hyphenated words, bracketed words; I just explain everything. Even so,

the words that I use have their own meaning and where I place these words in a given sentence will influence meaning. This can be frustrating because I am not a poet and when I do find the right word, I am relieved. We use words to put across what is in our minds and we think in language because we have been living with it for so long.

If I were to use words and reach the expression that I think I have with my paintings, it would have to be poetry. For the lack of mastery of words, or for my natural preference for art materials, I have to make a drawing. But it is not the initial process of drawing that will lead to my understanding of an image in my mind. It is when I look at that drawing again later that it might reveal something useful to me.

A poem does what a painting does. A poet is someone who picks up meaning all the time and creates new ideas as much as possible. All artists are meaning-makers. The meaning of words in poetry radiate beyond the scope of the words themselves. Much like a painting, they will reformulate conventional concepts and abstract the common properties of visual representations.

For example, in Poem in October (1946) Dylan Thomas relives a moment of his thirteenth birthday. In this excerpt, the poem exemplifies the emotional implications of remembered experience:

There could I marvel
 My birthday
 Away but the weather turned around.

It turned away from the blithe country
 And down the other air and the blue altered sky
 Streamed again a wonder of summer
 With apples
 Pears and red currants
 And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
 Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
 Through the parables
 Of sunlight
 And the legends of the green chapels

And the twice told fields of infancy
 That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine.
 These were the woods the river and the sea
 Where a boy
 In the listening
 Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy
 To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.

The poet can make words float like ghosts, as in the image of a momentary possession through the sensation of tears and a felt presence. Dylan Thomas' words run into each other transparently and suddenly meaning happens. Poets do that with words. They can do it softly or they can do it with power. You can hear the echo of the colliding and crashing together of words in Howl (1956) where Allan Ginsberg writes, "with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls." The poet can undress words and the words can shock you. Poets do extraordinary things with words.

When I read a poem the words may say things to me that are far beyond the significance of any particular word by itself. In The Tower (1928) W.B. Yeats' imagination fuses with his mastery of language:

I pace upon the battlements and stare
 On the foundations of a house, or where
 Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth;
 And send imagination forth
 Under the day's declining beam, and call
 Images and memories
 From ruin or from ancient trees,
 For I would ask a question of them all.

Thoor Ballyle (Fig. 22) was a tower that Yeats bought in 1915 and restored as a permanent home. A battlement is the fortifying wall of a building. The author stares into space as he thinks. He looks down upon the foundations of his tower as he paces. He observes the structure surrounded by trees, dark perhaps because the sky is overcast or the sun is setting. The twisted tree roots and branches resemble contorted hands. One sooty finger

draws in a gesture a black stroke that carries the reader's eye from earth to sky, as do the trees themselves. The fading light contrasts the shapes of stones and beams and the poet's thoughts go back in time to when the forest was young and the Normans were building the tower he so loves. Yeats muses about the questions that he would ask of these ruins.



above left: Fig. 22. Thoor Ballylee

Photo by Brian Thomas McElherron, 2001, adapted with permission.

above right: Fig. 23. Murray Mac Donald, untitled, 2000

Welded steel

14.5 x 21 x 0.5 cm

Collection of Lynn Millette

From an alternate viewpoint, I read the poem as part of an artwork that a friend gave us when we moved into our house. He is a sculptor with a background in architecture and his work deals with structural interventions installed in existing public interiors. Our piece is a small steel silhouette of a perfectly symmetrical house (Fig. 23). The sculpture suggests the harmony and equilibrium that most households seek. One stanza from the poem The Tower hangs on the wall, hand-written in soft grey pencil on graph paper. When I read the poem as part of an artwork from someone I know, Yeats' words give way to strong images in my mind's eye. I see my artist friend's work boots pacing the beams of Thoor Ballylee. The trees in the poem are not so present to me; instead, I see a builder and artist. I sense a love of building materials and an enthusiasm for innovation. It is as if the sculptor slipped inside the poem, as one puts on an overcoat, leaving little room left for the poet.

Meaning beyond language

I think that we made images before we invented language. Language is thought described through communicable symbols that compare and define mental representations. It is the metaphor for what we perceive of the outside world compared with our mind's eye. Perception happens so quickly, simultaneously and in multiple layers that we are compelled to separate and categorise stimuli into metaphors, signs and symbols. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) described the conceptual system as primarily metaphorical and what we fundamentally do and say is structured through metaphors (3).

I know that I think in images. They are there even before I make sense of them. The minute something affects me, like the smell of fresh bread, there is typically an image in my mind. When I hear a train, I see my father the railroad engineer. A mental image comes with emotions so strong that they precede my realisation of the stimulus. I sense the smell of creosote as I see the train yard. It's not that a train reminds me of my father but when I hear the whistle of a train, it is my father.

I think that when I look at paintings or poetry, I look for meaning because I want to understand all the mysterious things that I do when I make art. I don't think that I want to use poetry to express painting or paint the words of a poet. Art in all its forms helps me understand myself and how I think. We embrace meaning in visual art in a similar way and through it, we share metaphors. Through my work in the studio, I can come close to understanding but there is always going to be that little part that slips away. I hope it keeps doing that because if it doesn't, I will have to stop being an artist.

3 Relevant theories on the creative experience



Fig. 24. untitled work from Interior Experience, april 2005
Acrylic on canvas
122 x 160 cm

Once, at a seminar that I attended, an emerging artist was asked to lecture on her recent work. As she spoke to us about the different steps that had led to her findings, she started to cry. This artist was not unhappy, rather she seemed to be expressing some deep state of release. I was fascinated by the spontaneous behaviour. It was as if she had touched upon some kind of truth akin to what I had read of catharsis in psychotherapy. As she spoke, I began to think about how I – or any other artist – came to amass a body of work through very different circumstances.

I know that creativity is relative to resourcefulness, cleverness and invention. Rather than considering creativity as a quality attributed to things that have a potential, I see creativity as a particularly human faculty of functioning that implies movement, interaction and agency. Like the will, reason and memory, creativity is one of the powers of the

mind. Its manifestation varies from one individual to another since it is related to sensitivity, defined through one's own awareness of the changing conditions inside and outside the organism. My art-making process involves a process where I create through the idea of body sensations, images of my inner experience (Fig. 24).

In this chapter, I will relate the nature of creative thinking as understood through ideas in the literature concerning creativity and with insight from my studio practice.

I will begin by outlining some general perspectives on creativity that have been put forth through studies in the behavioural sciences. It has been difficult to categorise creativity because conscious experience does not occur in discrete stages. Some researchers have concluded that the only means by which we can come to an understanding of creativity is through the language of the process.

The creative personality has been investigated through quantitative and qualitative methods. Creativity is a kind of intelligence but devising a means to gather quantitative data on it has been elusive. The creative personality does appear to be different but personality by its very nature cannot be precisely defined.

Some interesting research has emerged from the cognitive sciences. By comparing the philosophical and behavioural aspects of conscious experience with the study of cognitive structures (metaphor, perception, representation and language) scientists through the use of information technologies and neurological studies are providing some insight on the thinking process involved in creation.

General perspectives on creativity

It is thought that the creative process progresses through a series of distinct stages (Wallas, 1926). The initial idea is selected during a preparation stage. The incubation stage allows the idea to germinate or lie dormant for a while. In the illumination stage, the idea emerges and a verification stage allows for the elucidation of the creative thought. I think that the stages of creativity overlap. An idea will present itself to my consciousness in an intuitive manner and then I will follow through on it and eventually develop a sketch or some kind of aesthetic work. It is actually difficult for me to divide this experience into stages.

Psychologist J. Paul Guilford (1967) made a distinction between convergent and divergent production in creativity. Convergent thinking applies linear means to deal with an idea. Generally, there is a direct logical answer to an inquiry. In my mind, the notion of convergent thinking refers to the things that I rely on, such as the proven phenomena with which I construct my self-in-the-world. In the quotidian I am not conscious of my application of divergent thought. I remain in a practical world, where, like most people, I have a little kit of preconceived expressions such as “Let’s not complain about the sun because we will be freezing in January!” to fit into conversations to use in my daily interactions.

Where I actually sit down and brainstorm is when I apply myself to working or to studying, and especially as I am creating. Divergent thinking may produce multiple and seemingly unrelated responses that ultimately lead to novel conclusions. Everyone has a time when they use divergent means to consider, for example, how to invest in a certain way or how to plan an event. I consider it divergent production when I am working in the studio trying to express something that I don’t even know that I’m feeling. It seems especially divergent when I find out a couple of years after I completed a work that it somehow defined a hidden aspect of myself. Freud (1965, c.1932) used the term *preconscious*, which he defined as “latent unconscious that can easily become conscious” (Lecture xxxi). All my symbolism comes from the *preconscious*, and so I have to trust my senses and intuition. Everything that I feel comes in as I work and I eventually paint it regardless of what I know from my learning or of the art world. I take notes or sketch what comes forth in the temporal present and ask the questions later. This, to me, is the nature of divergent production.

Psychologist Jacob Getzels noticed that originality is highly related to problem finding and discovery orientation. He adds that creative problem solving could be linked to the heightened sensitivity of creative people (Taylor & Getzels, 1975, 15). I tend to define originality through authenticity. The body’s senses are what generate thinking first and foremost. In my experience, a one-of-a-kind object or an idea that qualifies as original comes from implicit experience. It is through an awareness of my body in the present that my memory and experience are active through my senses. Getzels adds that creativity does not come in sudden bursts of inspiration but rather through a persistent drive.

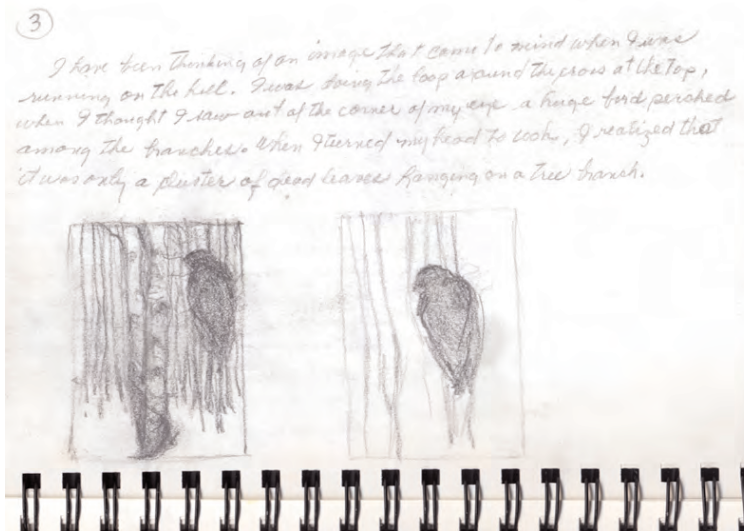
The creative process finds original and unconventional solutions through the discovery of unexpected links between bits of information. The creative product subsequently generates creative activity and new creative findings can lead to new problems.

Artist and educator Kenneth Beittel (1972) felt that the new idea stems from a broad range of possibilities, including a superior intelligence, working with novel phenomena or reacting to a mixture of external cues. The role of the preconscious is particularly evident in the incubation and verification stages where the reasons why an artist chooses a creative path are simply unknown (62). Creative thinking is at the top of the hierarchy of problem solving. It is most difficult when a problem has been identified independently of its resolution. Beittel suggests that solution finding is done through a “blind search” that requires a long-term tolerance of ambiguity. Intuition and ideas come from the pre-conscious alternating with consciousness. The artist is involved in a process of selection and critical evaluation while art making. There is no precise knowledge on the way artists choose a path while developing a work of art. The outcome of a specific creative process is seen only through the work of art. Creative thinking occurs before language and its symbolic products come from intuition (62-65).

In the creative process an idea does not necessarily fall out of the blue but to me it sometimes feels like it does (Fig, 25, 26). My mind keeps working while I go on about my life but all the while I feel like the problem or idea about something persists in the back of my head. This is my preconscious working it out. Somehow, all of a sudden, a result comes and it makes sense. I can write it down or intellectualise it in whatever way I wish. I suspect that Beittel was able to live that experience through his own work and know it through his practice.

In the social sciences, a perceived need for procedural objectivity and veridicality in empirical research has often led to the avoidance of difficult or unmeasurable subjects (Eisner, 1998). Inquiry into the creative process, however, cannot proceed from the outside through procedural tests or ethnography. It requires an objective dialogue stated from within the experience of the primary creative producer. Beittel’s research tends to correlate with more recent literature on the creative process based on studies into consciousness (Damasio) and the cognitive sciences (Lakoff, Gabora). It is precisely because Beittel was an artist that he was able to describe the creative process.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1999) used the term flow, which he defined as a total state of involvement in an activity that completely engrosses an individual in deep concentration. It is an experience that is so enjoyable that it becomes autotelic. Creative activities, music, sports, games and religious rituals are typical sources for this kind of experience. Csikszentmihalyi began with the Aristotelian principle that happiness is the basis of all desire and the only intrinsic goal that people seek for its own sake (821). In the course of human development, an association was made between challenge and pleasure. The desire for increased pleasure led to the state of flow, which is dependent on increasing skill and challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, 2).



above left: Fig. 25. Notebook page

above right: Fig. 26. Detail from The Ends of the Earth, 2003

Oil on panel

20 x 20 cm

"In the creative process an idea does not necessarily fall out of the blue but to me it sometimes feels like it does."

In my studio the kind of satisfaction that I usually get is intellectual in that I can finally join my ideas with materials through my skills. Occasionally things begin to materialise as my ideas are manifested in my work. I gain self-awareness as I am working. I am able

to make connections – not necessarily on the spot with my brush in hand but as I am in the process of working out a large piece. As I see my work progress, I discover things about myself. My ideas begin to gravitate toward new work. These are wonderful moments but they happen rarely.

I understand Csikszentmihalyi's flow as what occurs when someone gains control after struggling with something technical or with new materials. At a certain point a barrier is crossed and it suddenly becomes easy and spellbinding. The novelty of making an aesthetic object somehow introduces pleasure. Flow is a useful model in, for example, art therapy. Flow allows for the communication of a lived traumatic experience through an image or an artefact. Creation as an abstraction of language affords the subject an opening through which expression of repressed feelings can be made communicable. The professional artist, however, through formal training, has most likely assimilated the tools to manifest primary relationships through art objects. There might still be a good feeling when the paint is right or when things work out; however, from my view the flow experience is less evident.

Cognition and education professor Howard Gardner (1983) prefers a holistic approach in assessing human intelligence where all aspects of the mind are equally valued. Individuals seek different things in life and Gardner categorises some of those things into what he calls intelligences, as a means to manage the diversity of human attributes. Humans possess a mixture of behaviours and he provides a framework. He outlines seven distinct intelligences, including: Linguistic Intelligence present in writers, Logical-mathematical Intelligence that reflects abilities found in scientists, Spatial Intelligence or the ability to form a mental model of a spatial world and to be able to manoeuvre and operate using that model, Musical Intelligence or the ability to understand and create music, Body Kinaesthetic Intelligence, the ability to use one's body in a skilled way, Interpersonal Intelligence, which consists of aptitudes for dealing with other people, and Intrapersonal Intelligence, which he describes as the ability to form an accurate verbal model of oneself to be used effectively in life. Creative people use the same cognitive processes, as do scientists or mathematicians. What differs is the manner in which the artist will use these faculties. According to Gardner an artist will use them more efficiently and in a more flexible manner, and for the purpose of reaching a more ambitious and riskier goal (Gardner, 1993, 171).

Instrumental research into creativity

My inquiry into the creative process is grounded in my art practice and its objects. Recent discussions about the creative process tend to emphasise the importance of an art practice, where art making can be considered as instrumental research into creativity.

Educator Harold Best (2000) holds that research into creativity must occur in the language of the process. He emphasises that no matter how erudite thinking about something might be, it is no substitute for actually thinking in the language of creation (4). The discourse embodied within the aesthetic image is described in terms of the relationship of language and temporality in a dissertation by Graciela Hollm (1989). Beyond its basic function for communication, language is a means of revealing truth through intersubjective discourse. In art, subject and object are intertwined in a two-fold structure that expresses both the time of creation and the symbolic imagery that is constructed by experience (347). Hollm feels that aesthetic truth arises from an ontological condition, through which the artist autonomously and wilfully conceives an existential body of work.

In research, I often come across descriptions of hands-on work methods; similar to those found in recipe books and home-building manuals (for example, Finkelstein; 1982; Haworth, 1994). In filmed interviews (for example, Picasso, 1999; Pollock, 1987; Duchamp, 1997), significant artists are generally asked about the application and choice of their materials. But creativity is not really about the work in the studio. It is more like when you are observing something extraordinary in nature. You go out and you find a strange flower in your garden and you don't know what it is but you don't really research it. You kind of look at it every day to see how it's doing and it opens up slowly and it turns into a different shape. It becomes more and more interesting to look at until it finally wilts and you are through with it. Looking at an artist's career is a little bit like that. There is as much of an element of surprise in there, I believe, for the artist as for the viewer. When you look at art, you relate to it as if it was a natural process but when you ask the artist about it the discussion becomes very intellectual. From the artist's viewpoint, it is half intellectual and half natural, all at once. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) described creative people in terms of contradictory extremes, exhibiting "antithetical traits that are integrated with each other in a dialectical tension." The artist will tell

you how she felt and how this and how that but at the same time she might be thinking about other artists who are working somewhere else in the world doing similar things or she could be relating her work to historical tradition, all the while wondering about her progress as she is doing the interview. There is a natural part in the art-making process like that, and there is a part that belongs to the intellect. Artists who actually make significant contributions to contemporary culture are very well-educated and must be well-versed in their discipline, so even within the interview process the artist may be involved in fresh moments of self-awareness.



above left: Fig. 27. Detail from The Ends of the earth, 2003

Oil on panel

20 x 20 cm

above right: Fig. 28. Detail of source image

"If I am involved in research into the aesthetic process, then I should also be involved in such a process myself."

If I am involved in research into the aesthetic process, then I should also be involved in such a process myself (Fig. 27, 28). It is by living the experience that I can most accurately identify authenticity but for it to be useful in an inquiry about the creative process it must be situated in a rigorous phenomenological study from within subjective practice. Studio work is where I began my personal and academic research, where I received my training and where I formulate my methods. In the studio, I also go to a place in my mind where I am in reflection. I contemplate memories that may be brought to the surface by my subject matter, things that I have read about or perhaps discussions that I

have had. As much as the creative process is best described through its product, the artwork, the expressive object itself cannot provide a written record of the nature of the phenomenon. Dewey (1934) makes a distinction between empiricism, which states meaning, and expression that embodies meaning within the object or situation (84). In the context of my dissertation on creativity, the only truly objective thing that I am doing is making art. In art making, unpredictability and chaos generate results that are as significant for qualitative inquiry as those obtained through skills and planning (Regent, 2002).

Artist and educator Graeme Sullivan (2005) reminds us that the institutions and disciplines that talk about the creative process must have a perspective that is grounded in the theories and practices of art (220). I think that the emphasis should be on the practice itself. Criticism, art history and philosophy can explain the components of art that have been resolved. The existence of an art theory means that a particular aesthetic question has been defined and so it is distanced from the present where art is being made now.

Sullivan states that the artistic process is the way humans negotiate meaning (65). He says that art making is often coupled with science as a method of inquiry and that the new technologies encourage the removal of disciplinary divisions (181). He adds that the visual arts generate a unique form of knowledge that is no less insightful than that provided through any other research discipline.

Australian artist Barbara Regent (2002) provides an analytical synthesis of the literature of the creative process and offers an approach towards the comprehensive understanding of this process in the context of her art practice. Citing several sources in her literature review, she concludes that the creative process varies in detail from one individual to another simply because people are different. She feels that artists must be implicated in the explanation of the creative process since they do provide a direct frame of reference for creativity research (5). Her basic premise is that the reflective element of the artistic creative process precedes all other discourse. I tend to believe that this is where research into creativity starts.

Creative personality

I feel most of my brain when I'm creative. It keeps trying and trying to do something right and if it can't do it I just start again. I'm not very creative when I do math, I'm just thinking, but in piano I do about the same thing as in drawing (Mikelle, 11 years old).

In a broad study on the creative personality, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Jacob Getzels (1976) described artistic people as withdrawn, introspective and independent. Although creative personalities are rarely controlled by social norms, they excel societally at cognitive tasks such as restructuring old problems or discovering new ones. Creative individuals have an ability to adapt to almost any situation and to make do with whatever is at hand to reach their objectives. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) has surmised that the most distinguishing characteristic of a creative personality is its complexity.

It is fairly clear that behavioural, temperamental, emotional and mental attributes are unique to the individual. I think that creative personality is categorised because artists are often misunderstood. In public functions, during exhibitions, artists smile, or laugh, or politely accept the attention that their art works generate but then they return to their studios and work. I feel that I have a very quiet, normal, perhaps even ultra-normal life. I don't set out to break rules or create dissonance. I simply wish to be left to work undisturbed.

Liane Gabora (2006) thinks that creativity is a human capacity that stemmed from the development of a model of the world in humans during the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic period. This worldview came about through the use of concepts in a flexible and context-sensitive manner. With creativity, humans could spontaneously shift between analytic and associative modes of thought, which could allow for planning and multiple solutions to problems. Meaning, in the complex human sense, does not occur through natural selection. How does a newborn develop such capacities except through what she describes as a cultural analogy to the origin of life, which occurs when the first creative thought is generated from an individual's brain? She suggests that as an adaptation for human survival, and in order to understand anything, there must first be a fully assimilated conceptual framework (Gabora, 1997, 9). Neurologist Semir Zeki (2001), who investigates the methods by which the brain forms abstractions as a central problem in

neurobiology, feels that the artist uses creative methods similar to the physiological processes that are now under study, but in a much more complex manner in that the abstraction itself mutates as the artist is conceiving it (52).



Fig. 29. untitled work from Interior Experience,
acrylic on canvas
121 x 152 cm

“Being an artist is linked to my personality but much more so to my perception of the world.”

I know that my brain is continually challenged when I am being sensitive to my external environment, or reading diverse material, or writing down my ideas. My studio work chronicles daily efforts to understand myself as a creator. I know that I am an artist and that I am trying to create at the highest possible level. In my art practice, I am fascinated by the things that I supposed were dormant in me, or I apply my skills or explore my shortcomings. Invariably my paintings appear as pictures of me from an ontological perspective. Committed musicians, dancers, writers, sculptors or painters possess inherently unique approaches to their art practice that reflect their individual personalities. I think the most distinguishing aspect of a creative personality is that it does not fit into defined parameters.

Being an artist is linked to my personality but much more so to my perception of the world (Fig. 29). I am very sensitive to my feelings. As a child, I would go outside and feel the wind on me and it would make my emotions rise. The first time that I sat on a swing, I was breathless. I spend a great deal of time trying to capture the mental images in my mind's eye, attentive to what my thinking is giving me in terms of the outcome of everything that goes into my consciousness. This includes all information that I perceive from the outside, in the moment, as it comes. An idea is always being worked out in the back of my head because the mind, awake or asleep, is at work constantly making abstractions. I know this because the underlying physiological structures of feeling are not dependent on consciousness, but are rather intermediaries between our biological self and our construction of knowing (Damasio, 1999, 43).

Gabora (2002) has worked on the issue of how creative thought is physiologically possible. She explains that in a state of defocused attention or heightened sensitivity to detail that is present in the creative personality, stimulus properties that are less significant to an immediate goal are encoded in memory. Since more features of stimuli are involved in the process of storing to and evoking from memory, more physical memory is involved and implicated in the encoding of an instant of experience. As more memory is activated, more memory locations are made available and become active in the encoding and preparation for the next instant. This stream of thought tends to more thoroughly assimilate a worldview at the same time as it delays an immediate interpretation of stimuli, and there is a higher probability that a thought will lead to a somewhat unrelated thought within a short period of time. Gabora refers to this cognitive state where the memory network plays a greater role in conscious experience as conceptual fluidity. Creativity is associated with both high conceptual fluidity and an inherent capacity for extraordinary control within an individual, but she cites that it has also been linked to "psychoticism" (one of the three personality traits, along with extraversion and neuroticism, from psychologist Hans Eysenck's 1976 model of personality). She states that creative people appear to be simultaneously labile and changeable and yet can be controlled, predictable and stable. In creative individuals, the perceptual standards that make up a normal perspective of the world are more deeply penetrated and efficiently traversed. There is some support for this hypothesis from a recent study into "latent inhibition", a cognitive inhibitory mechanism that refers to the varying capacity of the brain to screen irrelevant stimuli in all mammalian species. Creative people do appear to be more open to incoming stimuli from their environment. In humans, reduced latent inhibition

has been associated with psychosis; however, when combined with high intelligence and exceptional flexibility in thought, it can be manifested in creative accomplishments (Peterson, Carson and Higgins, 2003).

Research has shown that creative people are often exposed to suffering and pain because of their vulnerability and sensitivity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Working alone creating prototypes leaves the artistic personality open to criticism. At the highest levels of creative achievement, the generation of novelty is not the main issue. Deep interest and involvement in obscure subjects often goes unrewarded, or even brings on ridicule. Divergent thinking is often perceived as deviant by the majority, and so the creative person may feel isolated and misunderstood (Csikszentmihalyi).

Csikszentmihalyi notes that creative people combine playfulness and discipline with its antithesis, a quality of doggedness, endurance and perseverance. Artists may appear to be as crazy as loons but when it comes to their art practice, they are disciplined to the extreme. Creative personalities alternate between imagination and fantasy but are rooted in reality (39). They seem uninterested in the world around them as they are working out their ideas on the inside. When it is time to try out an idea in the real world, I get very serious. Will people understand the metaphorical symbolism that I put together in my work?

I think that artists are constantly working. I look for something and at a certain point it comes out through sketches and finally in a painting. When I am looking for an idea, I seem more receptive, like a catcher crouching with an open mitt, waiting for the unexpected. It might be a curve or it might come right across the plate, so I'm just paying attention. In the studio or at home I might be listening to someone interesting on the radio, doing laundry or reading a book, but the moment something responds to that open gap, I am immediately focused. Ideas only seem to come instantly.

There is nothing physical and very few behavioural cues that would allow me to identify a creative personality. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) says that creative people have a great deal of physical energy. They work long hours with great concentration but also have an ability to moderate themselves while projecting an aura of freshness and enthusiasm (38). I have been acquainted with creative personalities who complain a great deal about

how hard they work and how many long hours they put in. They go around with a cynical disposition but they are nevertheless artists. Michelangelo (1475-1564) is reputed to have said, “If people knew how hard I worked to get my mastery, it wouldn’t seem so wonderful at all.” As artists, we perhaps have a tendency to express our experience in a different manner, when formally interviewed, as opposed to the more intimate circumstance of conversation among peers. Andy Warhol (1928-1987) would often give the public impression that he was more of a bizarre impresario than an artist, while at night he would produce his immense body of work. In my experience, artists don’t generally hang out. Artists wake up early; they go to bed late or they are up at night. They are not there in the “art milieu”, unless, of course, they are obliged to be there as a part of their work. But in that case, it is work.

Creative people tend to be naïve, not in the sense of credulousness but rather in the sense of spontaneity, ingeniousness and freedom from the contrived (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1976) surmised that this attribute is necessary for the inductive nature of problem finding in artistic creativity (44). Naïveté not only feeds a creative drive but also shields it from practical realities. Naïveté is present in my personality in the sense that I don’t close doors, even if I have committed myself to a belief. I prefer to leave a bit of room for reinterpretation. I think that naïveté is part of the construction of authenticity and is implicit to creation. Heidegger (1977) suggests that it is necessary to identify intuitive as a quality distinct from spontaneous:

The idea of an “originary” and “intuitive” grasp and explication of phenomena must be opposed to the naïveté of an accidental, “immediate” and unreflective “beholding” (85).

Only a person living the experience can really distinguish spontaneous from intuitive and this can only be done with considerable effort. I would say that intuition is linked to lived experience and memory. It keys into authenticity, which I hold to be the originality in a work of art. I think that naïveté in the artist differs from the spontaneity of a child in that it incorporates the application of knowledge and ability.

When looking for links between visual aptitude and creativity, Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) noted a reversal of sex-typed behaviour. When gender behav-

our tests are given to young people, creative and talented girls appeared to be more dominant and tough than other girls, and creative boys seemed more sensitive and less aggressive than their male peers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). A psychologically androgynous person, in effect, doubles his or her repertoire of responses.

The creative personality escapes gender role stereotyping. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) refer to studies that maintain that female artists don't readily identify with traditional female roles. They possess a strong need for achievement and are dominant. Male artists generally appear to be not as physically aggressive as average males and are inclined to demonstrate a predictable routine. Attributes that have been observed as highly gender-specific to the average male and female population seem to be skewed in creative personalities (78).

Culture is a societal construction linked to historical tradition and geographical location. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) states that it is impossible to be creative without having first internalized an area of culture. He states that creative people are both rebellious and conservative. I don't see the creative personality as particularly rebellious, rather I would describe the attribute as having an aversion to being controlled by an external influence. Independence of thought is necessary for creation, but at the same time, there is no desire for control outside of an object or situation of expression. I exercise control on myself, but I have no aspirations to political or societal ambitions.

Art develops unique and important mental skills such as the understanding and creation of metaphor, awareness of subtleties as well as non-linear thinking. Creativity is well respected when it is seen in a work of art; otherwise, it seems to be shunned inside the pragmatic culture that we have constructed. Certain questions about anything—human behaviour, rituals or philosophical issues that might have seemed resolved to the rest of society at any given moment in history—remain somehow problematic to the artist. These ideas are challenged and meaning is embodied within artworks. Is this a unique cleverness or is it the same kind of thinking that mathematicians do? My work engages all of my intellectual capacities. It reflects implicit self-awareness and a kind of original knowledge necessary for its evolution. All of this must be translated aesthetically into art. I certainly hope that what I am doing in the studio is relevant.

The issue of general intelligence has had a long history of debate since Spearman (1904) first hypothesised the notion. Alfred Binet developed the first intelligence test in 1905 to

help students who were falling behind in their studies (Aby, 1990). Howard Gardner (1993) holds that society puts linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities on a pedestal and since psychometric tests are designed with this bias, chances are that they will be an incomplete assessment of intellectual potential. Gardner's notion of "Multiple intelligences" (1983) was his attempt to address these issues. Psychologist Robert J. Sternberg (1988) offers an alternate method of determining general intelligence that encompasses a wider sample of intellectual abilities. He feels that intelligence is a combination of traditionally tested analytical intelligence; contextual intelligence, or the wisdom to put abilities into practice; and creativity, which he describes as experiential intelligence.

The first steps towards understanding creativity from a psychometric perspective came in the form of post-war creativity tests that were designed to measure "ideational fluency", issuing as many unusual associations to a stimulus as possible, and "divergent thinking", the ability to come up with a number of solutions to a question (Gardner, 1993). These tests were based on specific tasks, which, in themselves are counter to the very idea of creativity (Taylor; Getzels, 1975). There are other problems in attempting to quantify a creative intelligence. Is the subject very creative, a little creative or completely off the scale? Some creative personalities are very whimsical about the way they think, whereas others go about their work in a very rational and practical manner. Results depend on who designs the test, who scores and what kind of answers are expected in the model. For these reasons, creativity tests failed to predict an individual's level of creative potential; however, the tests did measure some things, the most obvious being that creative personalities show considerable dedication in areas where quantitative tests cannot predict success (Csikszentmihalyi; Rathunde; Whalen, 1993).

There is little correlation between creativity and measured general intelligence. This has also been a source of considerable debate. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) alludes to studies suggesting a threshold intelligence level, where it would be difficult to do creative work at lower levels but a higher measured intelligence quotient would not necessarily mean more creativity. Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1976) described creative personalities as intelligent in their abilities to see problems in novel ways. Gabora's (2002) exploration of computational models of the brain seems to support the idea that creative personalities may be simultaneously naive and knowledgeable. They can cope with primitive symbolism or rigorous logic, making it possible for them to adjust to academic and scientific surroundings. I think that if creativity has a tenuous correlation with intelligence it is

because it is not intelligence. For Damasio (1999), creativity is an intelligent manipulation of the consciousness that requires knowledge, ability, available working memory, reasoning and a mastery of language (315).

Creativity is a distinct function of the brain that seems to perform at a higher level when there is a higher level of intelligence. Artistic ingenuity does not occur at lower intellectual levels. It simply will not happen.



Fig. 30. Joseph Beuys (1966), Infiltration homogen für Konzertflügel
(Homogeneous Infiltration for Piano)
Mixed media
100 x 152 x 240 cm
Paris: Georges Pompidou Center
Used with permission. © Estate of Joseph Beuys / SODRAC (2006)

What is the nature of creative intelligence? I can experience its qualitative nature through art making. A work of art contains all of the components of intelligence blended in a metaphor. The art object or situation may not necessarily be understood immediately, or be relevant to a wide range of people, but if a work of art is respected by other artists, it is a very good sign. Most artists are very passionate about their work, yet they can be extremely objective about it as well (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). The knowledge and craft of the artist is clearly apparent in the most difficult aspect of art making, which

is to keep it simple. All artwork uses visual metaphors to express a meaning beyond its literal form. How does a simple object like a musical instrument, covered in burlap with a red cross painted on it, become a metaphor? Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) had the ability to make typical objects communicate poetically. Wrapping a grand piano (with its smooth shiny black surface) tightly in rough burlap on which is painted a red cross may symbolise that art suffers in times of war, that music is silenced, is healing, or that we care so much for art universally that we protect it in times of war (Fig. 30). By addressing the blended effect of the piece, we read the signs that Beuys orchestrated for us.



Fig. 31. "I still see it complete in my mind and then I notice the missing half and I remember what happened."

Creativity as a cognitive process

In my back lane, an elm tree had two beautiful arms reaching upwards (Fig. 31). Because it was an old tree they had to remove one of the arms that was threatening to break and fall. Sometimes I forget that and when I turn around to look at it, I see the tree the way it was for a fraction of a second. I see it complete in my mind and then I notice the missing half and I remember what happened. I sense the outside world with the same substrates and processes of the brain that I use for abstract reasoning. My initial perception of the tree combined mental images from my visual system and my memories.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1999) there is always interplay between the perceptual and the rational in vision with the perceptual system always looking for what is latently possible in a stimulus (24). Creativity stems from the latency.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) make a distinction between cognition as a philosophical and behavioural inquiry into conscious experience and the empirical study of structures such as metaphor, perception, representation and language (12). New technologies such as MRI (magnetic resonance imagery), neuroimaging, computer modelling and information systems can serve as a basis for looking at the cognitive processes involved in creativity. The cognitive sciences investigate the categorisation of language and thinking into cognitive domains as well as the neurological methods by which concepts are constructed.

In my conscious mind I have very little information about the cognitive processes involved in my dual perception of the elm tree. Somewhere beneath my consciousness the creative process is grounded on how my organism associates external stimuli with embedded memories. I do not know how much information I retrieve from my memory but I do know that all experience, inherited from evolution, acquired from learning or necessary to regulate my biological system, exists in latent form waiting to become an explicit action or image (Damasio, 1999, 332). I am also limited by my biology. There are only a certain number of neurons, electrical and chemical synapses that are dependent on units of potential and there are a restricted number of memory locations available at any given instant.

The terms “abstract concept”, “abstraction” or “concept” can be used interchangeably (Turchin, 1991). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) think that rational inferences are computed by the same neural architecture used in perception and bodily movement and that human reason is a neural structure that is actually part of the sensory motor systems of our brain. What this means for creativity is that concepts are neural structures that allow thinking about concepts. The neural pathways in any individual will determine what concepts they will have and what kind of reasoning they will be capable of doing (19). Every individual’s conscious experience is unique and based on their physiology. My intuition is the product of cognitive mapping, in the sense of the conceptual blending of primary metaphors (early sensory-motor and subjective experiences that have been buried) with more conscious logical decisions (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

Artistic creation also explores and reveals the brain's perceptual capabilities (Zeki, 2001). With no conscious intention on my part, the elm tree has somehow entered my creative process. I am exploring trees in my sketchbook and doing something with branches. A tree has become a symbol for some kind of system and, as I am drawing, my ideas come into reality.

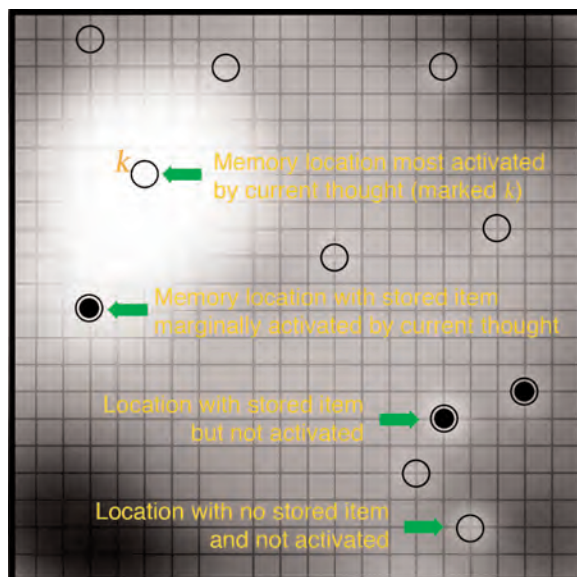


Fig. 32. Gabora's (2002) diagram represents each possible memory location by a vertex. Each ring represents a location in a particular memory architecture. Rings with circles inside represent locations where a memory has been stored. The degree of whiteness indicates the amount of activation by a current thought. It is greatest for location k . In this case, only one other location in the activated region has something in it, and it is only marginally activated, so a retrieval event may or may not take place. If many memories had been stored in locations near k , they would blend to generate the next experience. (Adapted with permission of the author)

Liane Gabora (2002) has been associating the cognitive process with computation. In the computer processor, there is always a relationship between the content of a binary calculation and the memory location where it is retained. The one-to-one nature of this correspondence in a neural network is called “content addressability”. Any experience that evokes memories of previous moments would have to be identical to that experience. A “fully distributed” memory is a situation where an entry or thought occupies every memory location. In computers, this creates interference that results in a problem called “crosstalk”, which can create false and spurious memories, or “ghosting”, which is where the trace of one image obfuscates another.

In Gabora's model, many memory locations contained in a large area of the brain become activated during the initial intuitive phase of a creative idea. The diverse contents of these many locations come together to form a thought. Due to the content-addressable structure of memory locations, as one focuses on an idea, the locations from

where the information was retrieved narrow and the next thought is a product of a concentration of memory locations. Gabora has estimated that a human being would require more physical memory sectors than there are particles in the universe to encode all colours, sounds and sensory experiences. This leaves an encoding situation she has called “sparse” memory (Fig. 32).

A fully distributed, content-addressable memory has advantages for creativity since the process of remembering can be more accurately described as reconstruction rather than retrieval, which corresponds well with Damasio’s idea of dispositional images. This neural mechanism can be useful in the construction of abstractions, primary neural concepts that Gabora associates with the creative act.

Gabora cites research that has measured increased associative richness, or having a variety of verbal responses to a stimulus word, in creative personalities. The associative mode in cognition is intuitive and remotely links things in a subtle manner. Items are correlated but not causally related. An analytic mode, on the other hand, is conducive to analysis through cause and effect, where a solution can be worked out logically into a form. Creativity seems to call upon the associative and analytic modes at different times, depending on the requirements of the problem that is progressing toward completion. The physical structure of memory locations suggests a relationship of correlation rather than one of causation between memories and concepts stored in overlapping regions. Correlation and the resulting interference that may occur suggest why familiar creative characteristics include defocused attention, heightened sensitivity and an awareness of subliminal impressions (stimuli perceived unconsciously).

When I have access to some understanding of the physiological dynamics of behaviour, it objectifies my emotional responses, which because they are intermediary to the mind and body are difficult to rationalise. This is especially true for the things that are disconcerting. I find that I am particularly sensitive. What is painful in the studio is the frustration of wondering whether the art will be understood, if the developing ideas make aesthetic sense or is it a wasted effort? What am I thinking about? Why am I doing this? Inability to deal with uncertainty makes creation difficult. Knowledge from scientific exploration of heightened sensitivity as a cognitive-neurological adaptation may remove, or at least lessen, the enigma. I know that if I just keep on sketching and keep on going

to the studio, it will involve some struggle but the science assures me that ideas will come because I am sensitive. It is not mysterious and I am not devoid of ideas, losing my abilities or being rejected. I am simply at work.

Gabora (2002) thinks that an incubation period may be unnecessary in the categorisation of the creative process. When deductive or rational approaches fail, a creative individual will attempt brainstorming, a creative activity that is neither random nor causal. Inductive and generative, it consciously avoids preconceived models of reality and works to weaken inter-conceptual relationships. Through defocused attention and heightened sensitivity, brainstorming allows for the processing of more features of an idea under consideration. New ideas arise through a sort of conceptual meltdown (Gabora, 2002).

A novel idea will appear in a state of potentiality. This preparatory stage of the creative process is immediately followed by an evaluative focusing stage. In the brain, because of saturation, fewer memory locations release their contents to participate in the formation of a new thought. The creative mind now has a finer control over which concepts are evoked and thought becomes focused and logical. Continuing the process of brainstorming at this point would be a distraction. This model tends to suggest that the generative-evaluative process is cyclic and when a novel product is created new objectives are set and there is a resumption of the cycle.

I get physically tense when I sense the clock ticking, yet nothing is happening in my imagination. I have found that if I relax, chances are better that I will find a resolution. I imagine that the subconscious is working things out. I know that I have to keep sketching and writing until it happens. This is apparently not unique. Picasso (1881-1973), grappling with his painting of Gertrude Stein, for which he had her sit for eighty sessions through 1905-1906, erased her face on each occasion. According to Stein (1961, c.1933), upon returning from his 1906 vacation in Spain, Picasso had apparently resolved his problem and completed the portrait without the sitter. While this story may be apocryphal, it does tend to illustrate some of these notions on the cognitive construction of creativity.

4 Crossing over from memory and experience



Fig. 33. Detail from The Ends of the Earth, 2002-2003

In this chapter I am discussing the interrelationship of memory and experience through some of the literature that I have surveyed. Language has a close interrelationship with consciousness and for this reason I will describe cognitive and social aspects of language, as well as the notion of a private inner experience. I have also noticed that when I paint, I am engaged with the materials, and language, except in the form of gestural expression, fades in importance.

What goes on inside a person, how much is shared with the outside world and how much remains inside the self? These are useful questions for understanding the creative process. I know that I cannot directly access my preconscious or subconscious mind; however, to truly grasp the meaning of words and recurring mental images I have to relate to that level of awareness or at least try to be close to it as I believe that what

remains in proximity to the inside self is the authentic component of creativity. My creative process is an interaction of memories, physical sensations and rational decisions. Most of its dynamics occur beneath conscious awareness to cross over to the outside through the conduit of language, which is also an agent of creativity. Because language uses so few of our conscious resources, we may have been led to believe that it is an unconscious process.

Language can be discussed as a culturally determined communication that is referred to as common language or as a component of the brain that allows for the organisation of conscious thought (Chomsky, 2005). Although it uses the same cognitive pathways as common language, inner language is private and intertwined with emotions. Inside, thoughts are prone to change or become distorted. Spoken or written language is necessary to bridge the inner world and outer reality. I know, however, that words cannot encompass a whole interior experience. I have an awareness that reacts as to grasp a disappearing image or a trace of memory. Inside, the memories of an entire lifetime are potentially available to me. As I draw or write to record introspection, it leads me to wonder about the intimate symbolism and meaning that comes from mental images and how they occur in my mind.

When I paint, it is not the same as when I write or speak. As I work, my skills become all important and silence sets in with tension as I require all of my senses to paint. Meaning happens through my movements and I know what my brush is going to do by the weight of the paint.

I have wondered why I contemplate certain things when I am making art. I think about memories, aesthetic theory and what I have read. I wonder about my art and how it has been understood by others. I am aware of thoughts that are related to outside matters and I find them disruptive compared to the natural sense that I have inside. I often refer to recurring memories. For example, the river that courses through my hometown is definitely present in my work. From my notes, I read that as a child I went swimming at a small beach on the river and I almost drowned. This event appears as a metaphor, in several works, including *Dialogue Muet* (1994) and *The Ends of the Earth*, (Fig. 33) through references to water and drowning, but the emotional memory, embedded beneath my consciousness, has become part of my being an artist. I do not understand

why certain thoughts enter the creative process but I suspect that they provide me with a larger picture of my life.

Empirically, consciousness can be defined through many levels and conditions, including dream sleep state, coma, low-level attention, absentmindedness or even daydreaming.

There is an inherent contradiction in terms when I speak of what comes from the unconscious since perception can only occur in a conscious state. The concept of unconsciousness comes from the duality of consciousness – the physical sense that I am awake and my autobiographical brain map constructed from memories. Damasio (1999) defines consciousness as sustained attention for a substantial period of time – minutes and hours rather than seconds (90-91), although he adds that the unconscious and conscious are so closely interwoven that they cannot really be categorised (300-301, 302). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) use the term “cognitive unconscious” to describe all autonomous mental (sensorimotor) operations concerned with abstractions, meaning, inference and language (12).

What is still very mysterious is that there are no boundaries of the brain that can be mapped between the conscious and subconscious. There are no neurological structures to bridge when I am dreaming. I might be involved in absurd scenarios where there is a monster running after me, or I am in church in my pyjamas. I am asleep, but in my recollection of these events and sensations, I recognise that fears and hopes have been metaphorically represented as my body and mind was working out inhibitions. The physiological pathways used by the creative mind are considerably easier to describe than the actual experience of the creative process where mental images cross over to an object or situation. Philosopher David Chalmers (1995) thinks that the manner in which consciousness is mediated by the brain could eventually be satisfactorily resolved through the cognitive sciences. However, the difficult problem of experience cannot be explained through physiological mechanisms because the human mind is more than a machine for processing information.

Damasio (1999) has written that many physical reactions present in the body are the result of emotions (51-52). The dynamics between the body and feelings come to me in intimate thoughts about where I fit in the outside world and who I am inside. As I work, the hot weather makes me uncomfortable and I begin to think about the gravesite in my hometown where my parents are buried. I see the grass and the colour of the polished

granite baking in the sun. The heat makes the tips of every blade of grass pale and dry. In the distance, the tall trees of the countryside are framed in the atmospheric ultramarine that separates the distant mountains from the greenery. In the cemetery I am next to my parents with an emotional feeling in my chest that is confused and hard to define. Part of the sensation is similar to the one that I used to experience on a visit home when I would be sitting with them at the kitchen table. In my imagination, I can now clearly see the cemetery, as if I were there, as nothing really changes in those places. I see myself walk over to my grandfather's grave, a man I do not recall meeting since he died when I was two. They tell me that he really loved me. My grandmother is buried alongside him. By the time she died at the age of eighty-seven, she did not recognize anyone and although I remember her well, my grandfather always seemed to be more important. I remember our family visits to the gravesite after Mass. I remember my father's anecdotes and his childhood memories. Now I visit with my own daughter and observe her face as I tell my stories. Year after year, when I go for my summer visit, things unfold in the same manner. I work out small pieces of my life that still puzzle me and, as I gain more experience, I come to understand why things were such as they were. Slowly, I come to accept and make peace. There is something beautiful about this life process. Art making involves the will, where life is determined through nature and fate. Existence can be compared with the vulnerability of a little piece of paper floating on a river.

What I have learned about the body is that I can open or close my awareness of my physical senses. Body senses affect my imagination and certain things that I perceive from the exterior will resonate with memories more easily than others. I cannot conceptualise every living moment in consciousness and I am only aware of the moment that I have somehow selected to remember. From those memories that I recall, I can create through a process of reasoning but, alternatively, mental images may enter my thoughts spontaneously. In this way there are aspects of my thought processes that I am conscious of when I am working and others that come from conceptual areas in the back of my mind. When I am in the process of figuring out something, waiting for an appropriate concept, I am not unconscious. A part of my mind is problem solving while the rest of me, including my senses, is still living in reality and open to stimuli. There are multiple levels of perception and a part of me operates autonomously.

Memories are the residue of experience and I know that the memories from the first years of my life have shaped the person I am, yet they have been forgotten. My physical

senses retrieve traces of memories that my brain reconstitutes, organises, revises and adjusts in relationship to situational ideas. When I smell creosote, a preservative chemical, my thoughts are transported right away to my father. Within me, the smell evokes railroad ties and the sound of a diesel engine. If I stand close enough to a train as it rumbles by, it elicits tears. When I was little, my father would, on occasion, call us up to his train engine and he would talk to us from high up. When these moments of significance are in my thoughts, they come in a flood of images that might reappear as metaphors in my artwork.



Fig. 34. La Simulatrice (Chimera), 1994
Mixed media
190 x 69 x 90 cm

Thoughts from current events, fears and memories are blended in a sculpture that I painted with creosote. La Simulatrice (Chimera), 1994, (Fig. 34) has the form of a truncated obelisk a metre high, with a circular cavity that contains a cylindrical mirror that creates an anamorphosis of a kneeling female apparition contrasting against the blackness. Although many things inspired this work, in its transformation into a metaphor few of them are easily traceable. Even though I can analyse the work for apparent meaning, situate it in its cultural context and describe my use of materials, it is an artefact. I cannot

verbalise how it came to me as a subjective understanding of experience. Walter Benjamin (1968) valued the human experience that he perceived in an artwork and described its uniqueness in terms of an “aura”, or the moment of creation embodied in the work. In the description of my creative process, I am simply tracing the path between what was inside of me and how I bring it out through my artwork. I have a need to make art to bring out through another medium what is going on in my mind. I cannot predict its form or direction because it is accomplished layer by layer. While I am going around with an idea I have all kinds of preconceived thoughts, but as I finish the work its meaning is always more complicated than I imagined. Something happens between my intentions and the outcome. Sometimes it is my negotiation of technical aspects. Other factors, such as the lack of material resources, time or even a surplus of time can change meaning and symbolism. All these things occur through the process of laying down paint, constructing shapes and contemplating colour.

For the inexperienced artist that I was when I was first asked to talk about my work, it was one of the most difficult things because I felt like I was taking myself apart as I was trying to verbalise the process. In the formulation of any experience, the mind comes in and categorises things that should perhaps remain whole. With time, I learned to say what I wanted to say in the appropriate manner. This provided me with a kind of bridge. Although it is still difficult for me to talk about my working process, when I write, my inner wholeness is pieced and transformed into little packages that are words. Through writing and rereading the texts, I acquire freedom because it allows access to an alternate form of expression without compromising my initial ideas. The form of my artwork is dependent on the way that I change intimate and private thoughts into a dialogue with the rational world. The faculty of language, both in the external social sense of communication and in the private sense of contemplation, allows preconscious experience to transpire to consciousness. Language is the way we logically structure consciousness internally, a method of communication with others, an abstract system of symbols with grammar and, from the perspective of art making, the instinctive relationship between an idea and the materials that bring a concept into form. For all these reasons language bridges my inner world into reality.

Linguist Noam Chomsky (2005) separates language into the culturally determined communications system that we call common language and an internal cognitive and physiological component of the brain. Human language is unique in its hierarchical, generative

and recursive properties. It is hierarchical in that it is composed, at its base, of discrete sentences that can be constructed into complex concepts. This is possible through generative grammar that Chomsky finds to be inherent to the structure of language and which allows for creative understanding of meaning. Human language is recursive, a mathematical property that can establish a procedure from a series of sentences. Recursiveness is the process of running the procedure over and over again. It can best be described through the way computers are programmed. All binary calculators work with sets of instructions written one digital unit at a time. The process is very low on an evolutionary scale of systems. Even in the form of computer code, human language must be simplified by a compiler to instructions that a machine can process. Although the level of abstraction increases with the sophistication of the compiler, the machine code by itself cannot describe the level and scope of worldviews, even though they might be essential in the calculation. Human language is an example of a hierarchical multi-level system, where higher levels and lower levels work together and where the top level cannot exist without the bottom (Turchin, 1991).

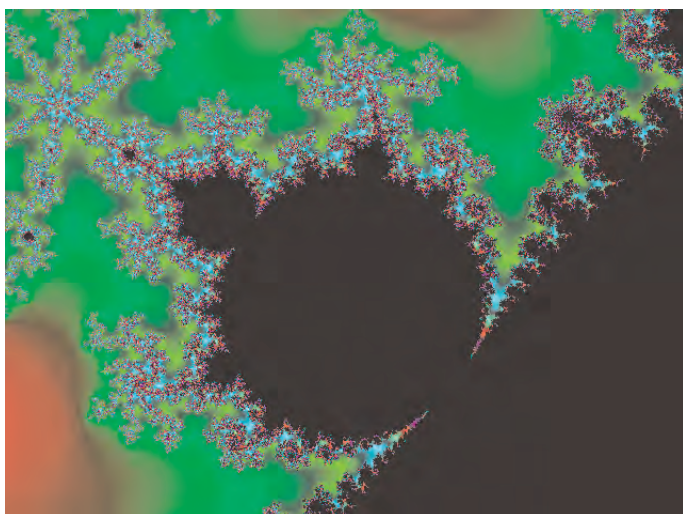


Fig. 35. Mandelbrot fractal generated by XaoS 3.2.1 Beta 4. (GNU General Public License)

A “fractal” (Fig. 35) is a graphical representation of recursiveness, where a shape can grow infinitely from a simple mathematical base. In language, from a subject and predicate, sentences are enclosed within sentences, and through each rereading, a higher level of abstraction is communicated while the base meaning is preserved. The computation system of recursion appears to be recently evolved and unique to the human species.

An important aspect of language is that you have to know the whole language to understand the context of its symbols. Language works within a system of rules called a grammar because the content of words alone does not suffice for the purposes of communication. Linguists and psychologists have theorised that if a grammar is not established between the ages of two years and puberty, there will be no language in an individual (Nova, 1997). An innate grammar and the presence of recursion suggest that language not only defines us but also affects the nature of human activities. Cognitive scientist Lera Boroditsky (2003) refers to linguistic relativity as the means by which language effects representations of space, time, materials and objects. She further suggests that individuals from different physical and cultural environments actually think differently as well.

Chomsky (2005) observed that human language appears to parallel the manner in which genetic instructions are carried out in the replication of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Because the human conceptual process emerged from the same molecular structures, Liane Gabora (2000) thinks that it is likely that it would share, at least at the base, similar mechanisms. She imagines that the origin of an interconnected conceptual network or worldview is analogous with the emergence of biological life. She cites theories that support an autocatalytic origin of DNA from a saturated mixture of proteins. At a critical point, perhaps through an external electrical stimulus, a network was created between all of the components simultaneously, resulting in the emergence of a self-replicating molecule. "Conceptual closure", or the networking of all the components, occurs recursively from within the structure of the mind. Gabora (2002) argues that the more that thoughts saturate the memory locations of the mind, the higher the possibility of a spontaneous development of an interrelationship between all of the abstractions and memories stored within.

My mind requires a conceptually amalgamated network for art making. I have to know about what I perceive in its completeness before I can abstract it. When I transform a subject to include my meaning, I am inducing into that subject matter my perception and intention. As I am doing it, the meaning that I am adding has to be open enough and broad enough to communicate. I have to assure myself that others will understand the symbolic associations that I create. Nothing on the canvas can be void of meaning because in any artwork everything means something. The bit of linen that appears

between the colours on a painting by Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) was left untouched by his brush because he was working quickly and assuredly. The untouched area represents spontaneity and temporality.

In my creative process I am never very far away from language because it is a bridge from me inside to the outside. However, I think that the nature of my internal language while I am thinking is different from that which I use for outside communication. My internal language is situated in a place that knows absolute intimacy, in the sense that I am not sure of how things are, myself, and I am really not willing to share because I am unsure of the peculiarities that may appear to the external world. I do think that other artists have these kinds of feelings and I think that the creative process may start here. The pathway to my self is where I get quiet and meditative and allow myself to be introspective and to focus on my senses in the present. Through that channel, I can retrieve memories that engender mental images. The images are preliminary to words and there are some fairly good arguments for their structural innateness. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) use the term “conceptual metaphor” to describe semantic units embodied in the cognitive unconscious. I am afraid sometimes to bring these incomplete mental images directly into my work because I imagine them to be unorthodox and it is my apprehension that I do not think like others. I think that this is where the creator’s uncertainty comes from.

When I look at my creative work over time, I recognize that the images and objects being produced are revealing something that does not necessarily come from my learning and conscious reasoning. I think that a part of what surfaces in my artwork is instinctive in the sense that it is already present in me in one form or another. Damasio (1994) says that the mind stores every experience that we have ever had in the form of latent images. These neural representations differ from what we consider to be pictures, in that they are “dispositional”, which he defines as abstract records of potentialities not directly accessible by the conscious mind. Conscious images are reconstructions or reinterpretations of dispositions stored in the brain (96-100). Gabora (2002) thinks that these mental images are generated in a particularly unique manner in the creative individual.

Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (1996) thinks that language is generated from both the physiological perceptual mechanisms and from the logical and intersubjective experience

of consciousness. She sees language as “semiotic”, or communicating with the constituent significance of mental images, and “symbolic”, with meaning being rationally and automatically constructed from abstractions.

My own interiority and the functioning relationship between its parts is called the “intrapsychic”. In an area between what I know and a stimulus is an environment where past memories, the current situation and my relationship to the other are implicitly present and affecting the senses. There are operations in the brain that function whether I am aware of them or not. As I am coming out of the unconsciousness of sleep, the autonomic nervous system controls my ears, my vision and my sense of being. My physical self regularly bypasses verbalisation and enters my brain directly in the form of bodily fluctuations from sensations and emotions. There is no language yet because being aware of myself precedes language. Inner language is close to this tuning in to my body. The closer I am to the unconscious, the more there is a likelihood of an inner language. It is the spark of awareness that defines consciousness.

Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1968) argues that a private language could not work because if everyone really did have unique definitions for all words, there would be no communication (P.I. 243). If I call a “bowl” a “bowl”, you know that it is a bowl because you have the identical sense that I have of a bowl (P.I. 261). The fact that language works at all is logical proof of commonality of experience. I do use the same words as everyone else and at the level of the definition of words, there is no conflict. Whether I use the word “smart” in my mind or in the external world it has the same meaning, although inside, I have a similar but personal definition. I implicitly understand myself and with no external challenge to my statements, I have no need for explicit meaning and communication is always perfect. So if you see the bowl that is on the counter as a certain shade of blue, you are going to agree with me when I name it a bowl. Therefore, there is hardly ever any doubt about the definition of things. What you do not know is whether or not I have the same perception of the bowl.

It seems to me that the question is not whether there is private language and common language but rather why there is an intimate language? Why do I hear myself talk and why do I use a language similar to written words when I think and what would I have used before proto-languages were structured ten thousand years ago? How did we think when there was no written language? I am sure that we thought in images. Images are

still the major factor in cognitive processes but they are fleeting because they are instantly being replaced with words. I see images and I think that it is language.

Inside my thoughts are prone to change but when they are vocalised they can be witnessed by another person through physical gestures or conversation. However, the limits of a spoken language are evident in the absence of documents and in the impossibility of accurate recall of thoughts due to the sparseness of human memory. The written language, on the other hand, is made of symbols that have meaning and a system of grammatical rules that provide a record of inside thinking crossing to the outside to communicate with the other.

My project Média/medium (2001) (Fig. 36) developed from my investigation of philosophical notions of language, temporality and perception. The paintings explore differences in my perception of images from the media and those that come from inside. Literary critic and philosopher Jacques Derrida (1967) argued that all texts and by extension thoughts are organised in binaries, with the “presence” or concrete existence dominating but not eliminating absence or non-existence. All language contains both parts of a binary and it is in the “difference” between the binaries that we find meaning. There is coherence in a contradiction because, like a negative and positive statement, an opposite will allow a perspective on the whole argument. In the inner mind there are no contradictions. What may appear to be a contradiction in thought means that both sides of an issue are being considered within the entire scope of an idea. At the base, the predominance of any thought is a desire and meaning is determined through choice (410). Because the perceived world does not present itself in polemic binaries, Derrida’s deconstructions could be construed as theoretical chimera until, of course, the computer provided an interface for precisely the kind of abstract structures that Derrida was discussing.

I began the paintings by rendering images taken from a geographic magazine. Over these exact representations, I pinned some abstract scenery that I had previously done. I continued painting, attentive to the different kinds of thoughts, however insignificant, that surfaced as I worked. With one painting, I copied the photograph exactly and it ended up a monochromatic dark green with highlights of yellowish green shimmering on an image of water. I made oil paintings in sets of two with the intention of expressing binaries pictorially. Placing an abstract landscape beside a figurative scene allowed for comparison and reinterpretation.

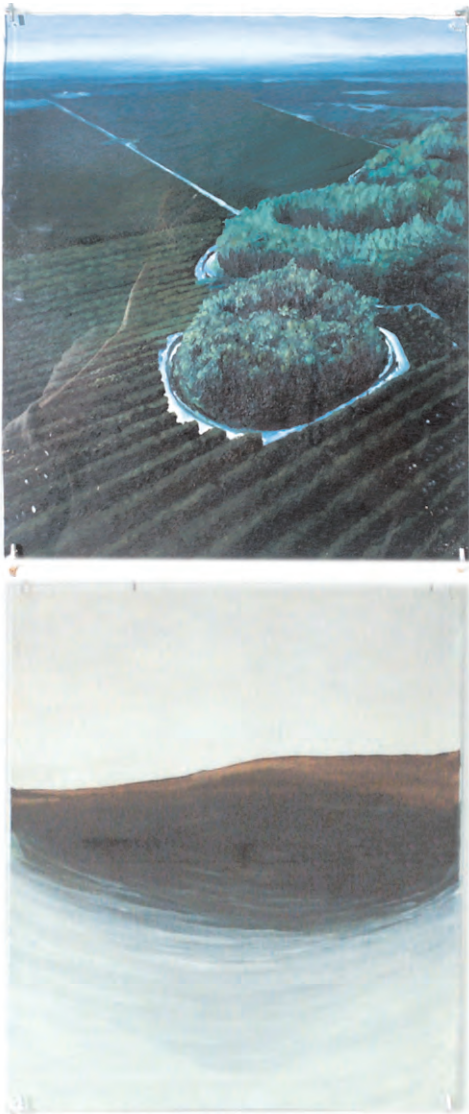


Fig. 36. Detail of *Média/medium*, 2001
Mixed media
80.5 x 105 cm

I wanted this work to be uneventful (meaningful/meaningless) in a binary sense. I wanted to express temporality as a constant state of becoming. I was identifying the condition of going toward something and leaving something as an ongoing process, like the present. My focus on natural settings in different conditions defined the objective view for this project. For example, I painted an image of a flooded road with a background sky filled with big cumulus clouds that are reflected in the clear ocean water. I shifted the meaning of the subject matter by associating the rendering with another image that

deconstructed representational familiarity. I exaggerated the proportions of one or more elements within the picture or I contorted the perspective. I was interested in representing the natural elements: fire, air (as clouds), water (especially) and earth from my internal subjectivity. In the work illustrated, I painted an abstraction of a dark valley resembling a quarry or an open pit mine. A small lake sits at the bottom of this concave shape as it delineates the curves and slopes that form the base of the elevations on either side. The water reflects a milky coloured sky. Média/medium explores the difference between my internal language and shared concepts of representation.

When I am painting, and when everything is going well, I am cautious and attentive. I will, of course, alter things as I work. When I look from a distance at what I have painted, I use my judgement and think to myself that “this side needs work,” or “let’s see what happens.” I will also be aware of the bigger surface of the canvas as physical dimensions factor into my approach. Painting is an intuitive process where automatic cognitive structures and rationality work to a common purpose. I am conscious of what I want, but as I paint from the palette, and as I am filling my brush, things occur and develop. My judgement stems from my goal but I am open to potential outcomes. In the movement from the palette to canvas I feel the weight of my brush, I am aware of how much paint is in there, and I know what it is going to do. If that particular brushstroke does not work, I will start over again. The events leading to the gesture involve rational thought and contemplation but the gesture itself is tentative.

I know the difference between an internal language and silence because language subsides when my senses require all of my attention. When I paint, there are intense moments when I am fully engaged in the process. For example, when I have worked a number of hours on a painting, and have more to do, the experience becomes unsettling due to my investment of time and materials. To add to practical concerns, everything on my canvas at the moment appears the way that I want and I don’t want to lose it. At this point, the sum of everything I know of painting is present yet there is no inner talking taking place. Everything is working through perception and my hand holding the brush and silence. I pick up the dark and light pigments on the brush. I work in a mute instinctive manner. I express metaphors through a series of articulated strokes. I know what I want and I must focus on the changes that occur on the canvas.

The bridge I cross from the inside to the outside when I make a painting is not the same bridge that I cross when I write or speak. The one that I cross when I am painting is the bridge of authentic meaning. Meaning flows into the painting, it flows through my understanding of colour, it flows through my knowledge. Theory tells me what to avoid. I know where I should not venture and I look for the unexplored. I trace a path that I call my own. I look for a sinewy little bridge that belongs to me. The parts that belong to me are there. What I choose to do must be authentic because I know that within authenticity there are still some bare areas of inquiry that have not been touched.

5 A phenomenology of my consciousness: processes of perception and introspection as they relate to my studio practice

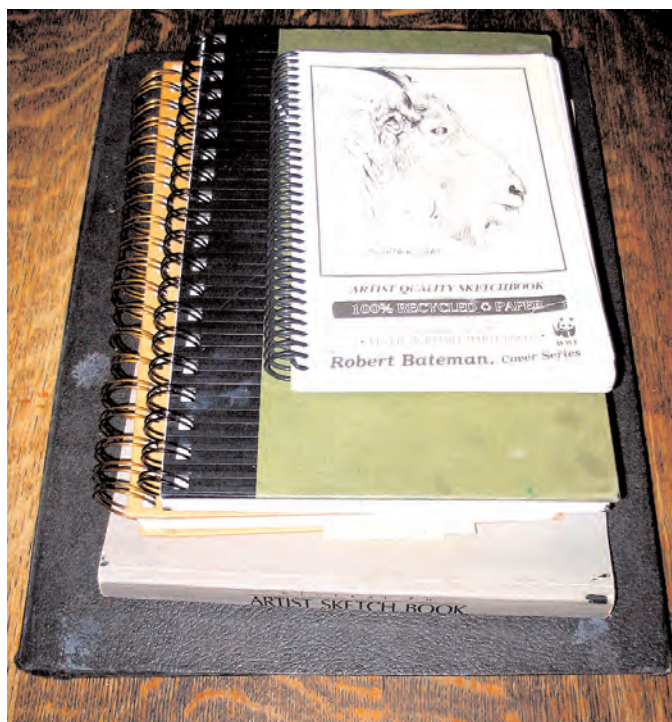


Fig. 37. Several sketchbooks and notebooks

I am inside my body looking out at the world. I know that I will live my whole life as myself and will never experience it through another person's perspective. The type of thinking that occurs when I am making art concerns the perception of simultaneous inner and outer perspectives of the body as I experience them. Mental images appear continually in my mind's eye like memories. These images have an effect on my emotions and my body, which, in turn, affects my artwork.

In this chapter, I will describe and outline the manner by which my body consciousness — in the sense of physical awareness — is translated into perception and how this may be recorded through witnessing, text or image.

I begin by discussing my experience with sensitivity. Sensitivity emerges from different levels of perceptual and emotional consciousness. Phenomenology is a means to access

this kind of thinking. I will relate some notions of consciousness from philosophy and psychoanalysis and describe them through my own experience.

Language and metaphor bridge inner existence and the outside world. I will identify how introspection is a means to access intimate thoughts and how these thoughts must be communicated by some means to the outside to be relevant.

I have a direct relationship to the materials and environment of art making through my senses and this affects the outcome of my work. Creative thinking is different from imagination, which seeks variety and amusement, because mental images form and become coherent just beneath consciousness. Art making is a unique way to manifest such ideas.

The experience of sensitivity

I have often been told for different reasons during the course of my life that I am too sensitive about things that most people would not bother to acknowledge. With time and through many conversations, I have determined that the way I think is somewhat more rigorous for details than average and that I tend to notice things that may be unrelated to the main issue of focus (and that this may be a disadvantage depending on the particular social situation).

My initial understanding of the term “sensitive” was physically manifested through a heavy and uncomfortable feeling in my stomach that I carried throughout the school day. The sensation would only leave me on Friday afternoons when we would do arts and crafts and it would slowly return to me on Sunday evening. My mother would use the word “sensitive” whenever I would get upset about school. I thought that being sensitive was a bad thing.

In school, my daydreaming was somewhat of a problem. Once, a teacher attempted to enforce my concentration by making me stand in class for an entire afternoon. Another teacher, in order to get my attention, threw a blackboard eraser at me in history class. I was not actually misbehaving, I was simply thinking about prehistoric civilisations, which I still do. At the time, it was difficult for me to make sense of myself. I thought that I was different and I felt out of place, which tarnished my entire experience in mid-

dle school. Studies have observed that when consciousness loses control over its psychic energy, irritability, sadness, anger, frustration and loneliness emerge and the focus on goals becomes blurred. Such experiences can cause a teenager to temporarily lose the ability to relate to the environment (Csikszentmihalyi, Larson, 1984, 19-20). Creative students see themselves in a less positive light than average students. This may be due to their high self-expectations and a repression of instinctual interests, such as their desire to make art, that require the energy that is being rechannelled to other purposes (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, Whalen; with contributions by Wong, 1993). Art making is often set aside because schools are socialising institutions. The relative learning capabilities within any group of students often necessitate working under controlled conditions that, for practical reasons, require copying or uniformity in projects. In such an environment, notions promoting self-expression are nearly impossible to apply (Efland, Freedman, Stuhr, 1996). In my small-town high school, creative skills were considered superfluous and forced outside the core of utilitarian subjects. By the middle of tenth grade, I had lost all interest in school — but not in learning.

By the time I was in my twenties, I worked split-shifts and weekends and smoked a pack of cigarettes a day. I was unhappy with my situation and I was experiencing emotional fluctuations that caused me much grief. The possibility of having a good education as well as my job and my physical health was in peril. While visiting my parents for a few days, I went to see my family doctor about a bad cough. Because he had known me quite well, after telling me that I had pneumonia, we began to talk about my life in the city. Many things came out in that conversation. He reminded me that if I were not as sensitive as I was, I could not have painted the pictures that he so admired. It was the first time that I heard something positive about being sensitive, and it began the process of restoring my identity. It was only later and independently that I realised through visiting museums and exhibitions that I lacked the formal training that an artist requires. I now consider a sensitive individual as someone with a gift, an ability to uncover what would otherwise remain hidden to society in general (Taylor and Getzels, 1975).

Damasio (1994) describes emotions as a collection of changes in the body state in response to an external stimulus. “Primary emotions” are effectively wired into the limbic brain, where instinctive feelings have evolved to protect us from threats to our physical being. They are manifested through displays of anger, a quick move to escape or a speedy concealment from a predator. “Secondary emotions” appear in various somatic

guises such as blushing, the pounding of the heart or muscular tension. Damasio observes, however, that “Nature, with its tinkerish knack for economy, did not select independent mechanisms for expressing primary and secondary emotions. It simply allowed secondary emotions to be expressed by the same channel already prepared to convey primary emotions,” (131-139). Because the mind does not discriminate why it is emotional, some things must be instinctive. A creative impulse might have nothing to do with the logic of language. I have to make sense of that reality when I want to transpose something on to canvas. The way that an experience is making me feel could be a primary physical mechanism. Primary and secondary emotions are the same to the organism. I draw from both the instinctive and the rational when making art.

I spend my days associating things with no particular objective in mind. It occurs simultaneously with all of the other things I have to think about, like work, running a household and raising my daughter. Intertwined with those tasks I am half thinking about my artwork and a portion of my attention always tends toward that purpose. The mist that comes out of the refrigerated vegetable display in the grocery store fascinates me and I think of orchids growing on a damp cliff in South America. I look at elaborate packaging and mountains of merchandise and I start analysing people’s behaviour, including my own. I realise that I have a sensitive disposition and I use it in a creative way, knowing that emotions are simply the changes in my body that contribute to creating mental images in thought (Damasio, 1999, 280).

My moods fluctuate continuously and in many ways they arrive and dissipate like changing weather patterns. My purpose is to define in pictures my experience of the world as it is in my lifetime. I draw parallels between the multiple functions that link my mind and body into one continuous flow of perceived experience and the apparently seamless unity of the painted surface and the intellectual meaning of a good painting. Where can I begin to separate the paint from the meaning? Where does the mind’s function stop seeing and start thinking? Fixed in the present, my senses fade invariably into my perception to then affect my thought. My body reacts simultaneously to the resonances of a twofold perception; that which perceives the outside of the body and that which manages my intimate existence within. I have worked on paintings that trace, to some extent, my experience of sensitivity in the studio. The results take the form of phenomenal landscapes (Fig. 38).

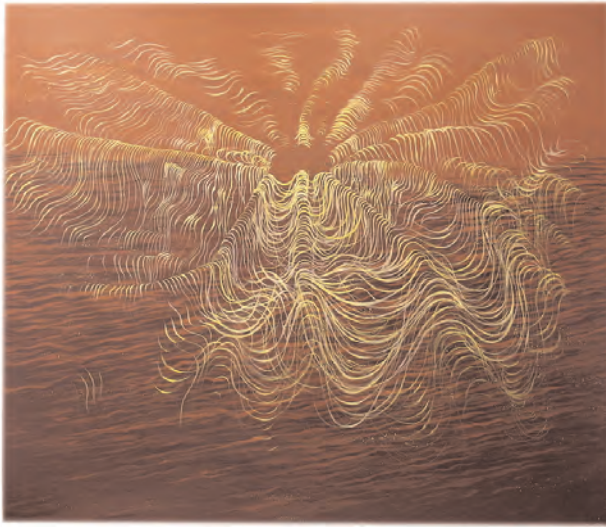


Fig. 38. untitled, 2005
Acrylic on canvas
165.5 x 188 cm
"The results take the form of phenomenal landscapes."

Consciousness and physicality

My perception functions within the a priori of the body. My sense of physicality comes from the consideration of whatever my senses are bringing into my consciousness. My mind creates mental images that represent smells, sounds, tastes and whether I am cold or warm, whereas ambient noises, visual stimuli, the feel of my skin and the weight of my body on the ground are things from nature. Awareness is about how these things cross over from the outside to the inside and the thoughts that they might provoke. If I am particularly sensitive to all this unfolding before me, my preoccupation with details will bring me into the present. In this state, I am mostly oblivious to the future and the past (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, c.1945). When the past finally does enter my thoughts, it will be through mental images from memories. The smell of fresh bread will remind me of its taste. When I stay in the present, I focus on the sensations from my organism. If I am standing outdoors, I think about the breeze and how it feels on my body as it happens.

Damasio (1999) has described areas in the brain that create an imaged, nonverbal consciousness of everything happening outside the body. If the body's sensory processing system requires further information, the image becomes perceptually apparent (169). Everything that we assume to be unconsciousness or consciousness is the direct result of

the interaction of internal physical and neurological events. My body can be described as a projection from neural synapses, but I am living in a world constructed from external experience. René Descartes (1824) imagined the body and the mind as separate realms of existence (Meditations VI) but I can find coherent arguments that explain how my organism provides me with the world outside (Damasio, Lakoff, Gabora). I can surmise that I exist because of the sensory interactivity that I entertain with exterior objects or situations. I know from scanning technologies that it is my organism that provides me with an inner voice, the capacity for contemplation and my concept of self. I could not have fathomed such things in the Baroque, but in my time I sense that my physical self and my consciousness are one and the same. Perception is the process of connecting the body with consciousness.

Psychoanalytical theory situates the latent self, or the “ego”, Freud’s term for the coherent organisation of mental processes, in the preconscious. The body gives birth to the preconscious, from which emerges the conscious. At birth, I developed my sense of being-in-the-world through my primary encounter with another. The initial experience created within me a polysemic internal object in the form of a mental construction and dynamic model for the self. My primary experience with the other also created within me the internal metaphors that describe space, time and direction (Grady, 1997). André Green (1998) observes that it is the child in distress that calls, so need must somehow be embedded within the intrapsychic self. Consciousness of my body precedes the knowledge of the other, initially the mother; however, the complexity of the self might stem from other things (46). In the process of introspection, there is a kind of need for the defined object (in this case, a desired solution) that creates the potential for expression and transformation. Problems of communication can interfere with the attainment of this freedom (47).

Freud (1965, c.1932) described the dynamics between the body, the “soma” and the “psyche”, or subliminal mind as “drive”. Drive is the work necessitated by the psyche and the energy implicated within the relationship between the soma and the psyche. Drive is primal and strangely prior to consciousness of self. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, believed that drive is purely narcissistic. He saw it as a kind of “acephalic” knowledge that brings about satisfaction. For Lacan, drive has no relationship with truth or subjectivity since it precedes both (Zizek, 1997). Psychoanalyst André Green (1998) agrees that drive is intertwined with the physical, stemming from deep inside the body

and tending toward the psyche. It is not simply determined by the psyche but is the core and the product of such dynamics (31).

The relationship between the object and drive is such that the object is preconceived, projected, presented and constructed, while the drive is dynamic, active, self-organized and subject to transformation. The construction of the object leads retroactively to the retracing of the path defined by the drive that constructed the object (48). The object is what I see in my mind and drive considers whether the object is relevant to me or not. The object is my senses bringing in the world continually, or it is my senses thinking about the world out there, but it always implies an interaction with the exterior. Dynamic thought is embodied within the object. It describes me and gives rise to my self inside through looking at the world and thinking about it all the time. It is how I know that I am alive. As I am considering the world inside of me and outside of me, the conscious self tells me that I am an entity.

All things of consciousness, perception, language, creativity and sexuality stem from the physical and are manifested through visual perception. The visual system itself, however, provides very little information about the body because perception occurs from within the body and is intimately linked to a sense of being (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 241). The body is the organism that echoes the outside inside.

In consciousness I sense the layered transparencies of my inner and outer existences merge into my own sense of reality. I know that, from a physiological perspective, there are topographically distinct parts to me. My mind, my body and my senses are divided into so many parts. However, I cannot distinguish between physical components as life flows through me, as everything works together to project sensation. Affixed in the present, I scan my body for subtle movements. This is the place where I live and from which I see the world and the other. My body is a physical barrier to the outside world as I realize that within, all my self is at work connecting me to the outside. From my body, it is evident to me that I am a unified being. I see through my eyes and I hear what my ears can capture from the environment.

I have watched my body change. I remember my knees and hands when I was a child. I have seen my skin transformed through time. When I became a mother, I went from a sexual being to a source of life, providing sustenance for another. For a while, I began to

see myself in a completely different way because what had been my physical identity was now an organism of gestation. I was happy, but there was a part of me that found it curious and puzzling in the way that it had shaken my sense of self. Freud observed that among the vicissitudes of the sexual drive is the fact that it is sublimated into the creation of knowledge. The excitement of the body involved in all of its sensations is a source of pleasure which, when displaced from the object of desire, is sublimated into intellectual exploration and creation (Green, 1999, 218). Green agrees with Freud that alterity enhances pleasure. The life drive offers a greater opportunity to sustain existence and an erotic life offers the opportunity to grow and surpass oneself by including a not-self that can physically unite (230). However, through the transformation of the internal object and its abstraction into the sublime, it is disassociated from narcissistic concerns and leads to the creation of a new object of a different nature – the art object (242).

I will never be able to distinguish my perception from someone else's experience by being someone else. Pondering the "object", whatever that object may be, from the exterior, gives rise to the self inside. It is the phenomenon that tells me that I exist. When I make art, I am simply sharing my subjective understanding of what it is like to see and feel like me. I look at art in general as a reflection of others' experiences of the world seen through similar human senses.

In my painted conception of the real world, I find that the experience of nature in all of its manifestations reinforces my sense of presence in the world. My physical body is the part of me that is truly related to nature since one day it will expire. My mind though, distorts my impression of reality in many ways. My thoughts shift quickly, from the future to the past. Social life and interaction with others also affect my perception of reality. The human mind seems distanced from the natural world. When I am outdoors, I feel that I am not part of the rain falling. I am not the leaf on the tree. I am challenged and inspired by nature but because I have a mind, I question my existence. When I make art, it is about all aspects of my human experience and my passage through the temporal present.

Physical sensation could be my weight seated in a chair, dryness in the throat, an itch, pain, heat or cold. When I am being physically aware, I am sensing everything coming in. I am not thinking about anything yet, and I am in the moment. If I want to feel the breeze right now, I will feel it coming and I will be sensing the fluctuations in the

breeze, its temperature and when its velocity rises and falls. Then I contemplate the movement of the breeze and what it does to me. If I know what that breeze does and I am inattentive to what it is doing but focus rather on what it does to me, then all of my body, my thoughts, my identity, personality, everything comes in and that, I think, is consciousness. My organism is in the physical and temporal present but my consciousness is all encompassing.

My creative process becomes phenomenological when I focus on things that might attract me or when I associate objects of consideration. When I am working from an idea or intuition, I am looking for connections that might open up a subject. I become precise and direct my attention to my senses. I need to touch my thoughts to see them. On a piece of paper, I can form them and shape them. I can compare lived feelings with remembered experiences and investigate similarities. When I am moved to draw something, for example, a group of trees, it becomes a means to acquire them, to change them into the way I feel about them as I am looking at them. I can modify their shape a little bit to render them a little more slanted or straighter vertically, and that would say something of the way the trees that I am observing are making me feel. Their shape changes into my experience of looking at them, and they become a part of my worldview. From this perspective, I touch them and share the sensation. Phenomenology brings to light that which is already visible (Heidegger, 1977, 75). Artists are born phenomenologists through the introspection that occurs in the creative process (Van Manen, 1996). The art object is phenomenological because nature is not mine, but when I draw it, I claim it. Trees can become a recognisable piece of my experience. In the shape that I create I have recorded the phenomena and the moment of perception and I have created a new object open to subjective reinterpretation.

Consciousness focused on the inside

Introspection is consciousness focused on the inside where the experience takes place. It comes into reality through witnessing, which can occur through speaking and being heard by someone or by writing texts for reinterpretation.

In my art-making experience, I am introspective as I am focusing on my body senses to see what images might come to mind. I concentrate by simply being there and listening

to the outside world, trying to see how my body responds. I sit on the couch at the studio, I close my eyes and hear the usual traffic going by below, people chatting, birds singing and then, if suddenly there is an unusual noise, I react to it and usually see something in my head. Being introspective is a state of mind where I am opening up all of my senses to the world outside and at the same time looking at what might show up on the screen in the mind's eye.

The mind is always creating images (the autobiographical self) that I perceive as the reality of my body and my world (Damasio, 1999). This reality is acknowledged through emotions, a process that is present when I am creating art. I cannot escape the effects of my organism. Motor and emotional properties are what make the reality of having a mind. Only when I can map the relationship of object and organism and consider all of the reactive changes taking place can I be truly conscious of my own perception at work (147-149).

I suspect that my thinking process often uses a unique internal language. I sense that there is an inner language because the whole world continues to happen around me as I am thinking to myself and other things will come in as I am inside of my head working out things. If, while in the process of contemplation, I happen to drop something on the sidewalk, I do not have to interrupt myself inside to say, "Oh! I dropped something on the sidewalk." I simply bend down to pick it up. An internal language has an exclusive nature. No one has access to what I am saying or hears my chatter. I cannot address someone outside in the manner that I speak inside my head. My inner language makes sense to me, of course, because there is no need for justification or clarification of meaning. The outside world requires a certain social agreement and a conventional vocabulary to allow for accurate communication of ideas. As I think and paint, I constantly test my abstractions against the outside world by asking myself whether this can be understood or whether people would be able to grasp the connection. There are boundaries or limits to how much can cross over from inner to outer meaning; although they are both dependent on language, only common language is perfectly adapted for the purpose of communication. Things that appear appropriate inside may be outlandish or contrived on the outside. Without the social constraints of outside language, inner language says anything it wishes. It talks out loud as the physical person appears silent and that is often a good thing.

I initially tended to agree with Wittgenstein (1968), who argued that private language was illogical (P.I. 243). However, the more I think about an intimate language, the more I suspect, through working as an artist in the studio, that it does exist. This is because, in the context of my inquiry, I am always looking at myself in the language of objectivity and noting my creative experience from an exterior viewpoint. Private language makes sense to me because I am the one crossing my internal thoughts over right now to the exterior as I am working. When I begin another painting it will happen again. I am doing



Fig. 39. "I see the knuckles of the roots showing up far from the trunk."

pencil sketches of maple trees in my book and I am trying to do something with the branches. I am thinking about some kind of system in my mind and I am crossing it over into reality. I sense what I want to do, but I do not see it yet. I know that these thoughts remind me of a poem by Joyce Kilmer (1914) that my mother used to quote when I was little. She would say that "only God can make a tree... whose hungry mouth is prest / Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;" and that struck me. When I look at trees I see them drawing everything they can from the earth, I see the knuckles of the roots sometimes appearing far from the trunk (Fig. 39). I imagine the whole system that is in the ground. All of that makes me feel a certain way, but that is all it does, for the moment. I was in the metro recently and I could see the wiring attached to the track, carefully

placed and bolted down. As I was looking at that, I could hear all the ambient noise. What I am doing when I see these things is placing them. For example, I was not aware that I was checking out the transformers on the electric posts behind my house. It just seemed to me that everything was so neatly tied down and stretched. My eyes are drawn to these things because, right now, my mind is looking for such things to resolve some obscure question, I suppose, that I have concerning systems and I am not always conscious of it. All that I can rationally assume is that this is what I am working at right now. It has become the object of desire — the object of drive for me.

I have to live an experience before I can rationalise it and create with it. I have to see the scenery or be in the environment to feel it. I must be with people in the metro and feel everything until a combination of these influences affects the direction of my work. This is the material that I work with. If I were to go into the vacuum of a dark room and never see anything, I would not be able to do anything. It is the effect of the outside world that gives the shadows in Plato's cave their character.

I can also sense that there is more to my mind than the thoughts that I control and organize. In my imagination, obscure images with a quality of their own come as though they were buried deep within me. Fleeting and immaterial, they engender emotions as they surface and I experience something similar to deja vu. There is an awareness that wakes up in me and reacts as if to grasp the disappearing image or a small trace of memory. I know that words cannot encompass the whole experience of such a moment and only a hint of what my thoughts are alluding to will transpire and make me think that I may have had a similar moment — or perhaps not. As I begin to sketch or write down these things, I bring my thoughts into the outside world, where the fundamental nature of my language must change. After a notion of mine has entered the exterior world in a drawing, I can deal with it objectively and formulate aesthetically the meaning that I wish to express. As I begin to paint my thoughts shift between internal and external language and with time, I will gradually see my ideas cross over into material reality. I am transposing inner meaning onto the canvas from my self to others.

According to philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, anything that is not part of the collective self-in-the-world is the “other” (Davis, 2003). The object that I am making represents the “other”. It says that I am here now and this is how I express being-in-the-world. I define the time that I am living in and I put my identity and experience into the shape of that

object and as I am doing it I am trying to temper the uncertainty I might feel while crossing over from the inner language of introspection into the realm of otherness.

My self is represented by my artwork and a part of my self is there for communication with the “other” because bringing to consciousness that which comes from the deeper parts of the mind cannot occur in existential isolation. Lévinas stresses that there is always a feeling of strangeness or constitutive alterity that is the self-in-the-world aware of the irreducible idea of being (Davis). My lived experience is nourished through my knowledge of the other (Beavers, 1990). As I paint I breathe, my heart beats and my brain is working. The content of my work is intellectual, in that it must be relevant to my cultural environment, but the aesthetic is closer to my self-identity because authenticity is unique. My work must come from my lived experience.



Fig. 40. Detail of sketchbook, “I do not always share everything that I know with my conscious mind.”

The workings of the mind and body are entirely intertwined. Different parts of the brain share various functions. However, all that I need to know about my existence can be revealed through my experience as an artist. When I focus as I paint, time slows down. I do not worry about the past and the future. I am making a mark that states that I am here now. I think that there is intrinsic pleasure in the confirmation of existence. What I



Fig. 41. "I am presently dealing with a tree or trees."

recognised in my first class in 1999 that I had with Cathy Mullen (ARTE 806, Inquiry through art production), when she had us focus on our physical presence, was that we were getting involved with temporality. To respond to the repeated question, "What are you feeling right now?" required me to experience time slowing down. I found myself suddenly in the present through my physicality. I had never really been conscious of the present from a phenomenological perspective. From that exercise, I knew that I am very close to that particular consciousness of time when I paint.

I am in the present when I am creative. Initially, I might get ideas mixed with feelings and emotions and, sometimes, memories. This varies from one painting to the next. Then I may start working out the conceptual idea. For example, I am presently dealing with a tree or trees (Fig. 41). I want to do something with the idea of connections. It has been in my mind and I have sketched and written about it. My idea concerns roots and branches. The roots go into the ground and the branches go to the sky and I am trying to

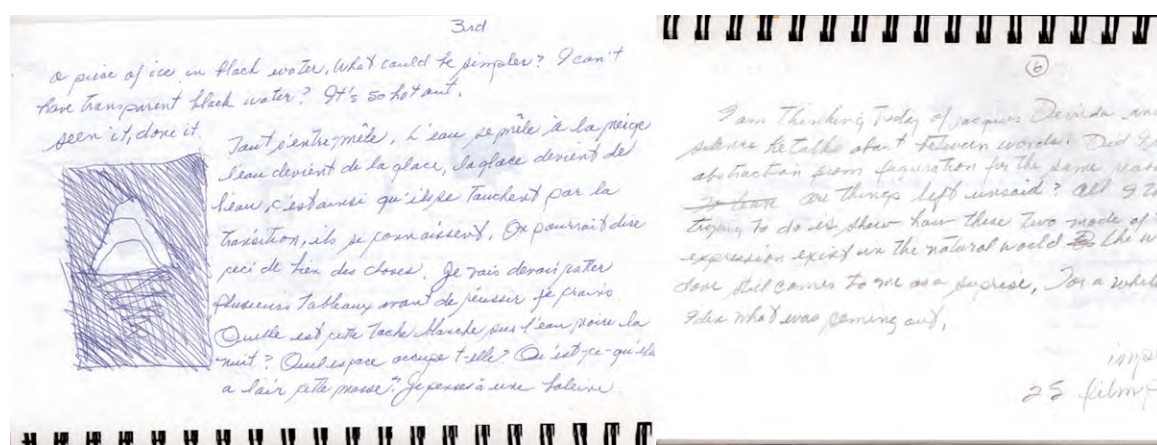


Fig. 42. Pages from my notebooks

create a system because I know that it is a system. I am also trying to see the tree trunk as a connector between the sky and the ground. I see the tree as a cylinder that is open ended, where life is in transit. Then I see an image of a tree as a brace between the sky and the earth. I imagine that a kind of force is channelled through that. Sometimes I see the system of trees all woven into the ground like nerves. I have not resolved these thoughts yet but it will come. The abstraction of a subject is always full of questions that I have asked myself. I keep accumulating the things I see and I do not know what will ultimately happen with them. I persist in sensing that nature is much bigger than I am.

Sometimes I will associate things and get an idea that may not necessarily relate to what I am doing, but it could serve for future work. I write these things down because such ideas are so involved in the moment that they are easily lost (Fig. 42). It is similar to the

experience of waking from a dream where I was figuring out something important, and then it suddenly evaporates. Mental images that occur as I am painting are a bit like that. When the painting is done, I cannot recall those ideas as they were closely related to a specific moment as I was painting.

Introspection is a way to access the mental images that I perceive and focus on through all my senses. They have something to do with my identity, my memories, my past and, of course, there has to be something that reverberates from what is behind consciousness. Transfixed on the passage of idea into reality, I see from the interior to the exterior. The language inside when I think is not quite the same as the one I use for the exterior and that is where changes come in as I shape my images. Once I sketch or record ideas orally, they evolve into reality that must express a certain significance. I am within the realm of reason when I am in the studio because art must have meaning. Painting is about ontology directed outwards. I want to bring my perception of the world inside through my senses but I also wish to bring it out again and express it for the other.

I suspect that the part that remains highly personal inside, and that I find difficult to identify, is authenticity. I do not always share everything that I know with my conscious mind (Freud, 1960; Damasio, 1999) and what remains in the preconscious or subconscious often is the source of metaphors that I create (Fig. 40). But to access such things, I have to be aware of the phenomena involved when my conscious self dialogues with the intimate self, and of the nature of the vocabulary of my internal language through a hermeneutic understanding of the words I record.

All of these things are quirky and bizarre in a “I am not quite sure of the way things are” manner. They are explorations that I do not normally want to share. Artists have to go through an introspective path deep into embedded memories. Contemplation does not occur in discrete areas of the organism. Everything — physical feelings, emotions and perception — is intermixed when I become quiet and meditative. The pathway to the self is not always a rationally comfortable experience. Uncertainty comes with pushing a bit beyond what I have learned (the accepted procedures in the traditions of art making). The existence of theory means that someone has already stated something in an objective manner.

In internal conversations thoughts may fluctuate from genuinely frustrating notions to tolerable and relatively lucid ideas. Things become particularly intense, so I tend to

direct my thinking toward my finished work stored in the studio and try to look to my surroundings with my mind responsive to whatever might connect. If my thinking tends toward preconceived notions I will not generate interesting ideas; then frustration sets in and stifles my creative process. I must remain confident that my mind is at work somewhere in the back of my head, and, if I have any doubts, I will sketch whatever initial objects come to mind and they will serve as a starting point from which my ideas might develop. Once my interior thoughts have been rationalised through my knowledge of the exterior world and I have judged them to be worth pursuing, I will begin work. As long as ideas are in the form of mental images, they remain intertwined with emotions and the body's own physicality. Once I record them on paper, the thoughts cannot change until I choose to alter them in the concrete world. Bringing thoughts into rationality makes them stop in time. Following Wittgenstein (1968), if I can describe something through



Fig. 43. Details from The Ends of the Earth, 2003
Oil on panel
20 x 20 cm each

words then it is not private, and if I understand something to be private, then I cannot talk about it. I might have something completely different in my mind but as soon as I use words, everyone assumes that I am referring to the same thing that they understand to be in their mind (P.I. 293). I think what is indescribable about painting, that language does not express, is that it encompasses everything about the inner world and the outer world. A private language is in the work of art. Because I can look at them for what they are, drawings objectify what is happening in my mind. They enable me to project my ideas onto something real, away from a changeable imagination. Because they have a presence, they also allow me to begin to work out formal issues.

The sensory perspective

My body separates me from the world and links me to it at the same time. I scan my surroundings through my vision, my sense of smell and my skin while my mind thinks about what my body perceives. I pick up a tube of paint and see pigments that reflect their origins from metals, earths and dyes. Colours come sliding out of tubes onto my mixing surface. The texture is so thick and glossy that it affects my taste buds. Acid reds and yellows echo the tanginess of fresh lemon and hard sour candies. When cerulean blue comes out of a tube, I remember a school notebook cover that had an autumn scene



Fig. 44. Details from The Ends of the Earth, 2003
Oil on panel
20 x 20 cm each

with the sky in that colour. As I begin to mix my colours, fruit, hard candies, purées, cream and vegetables come to mind. I look at my sketches and see the areas where contrasts of light and shadow will be needed. Openly conscious of the links that I make while combining the hues and tints, related metaphors surface. I remember places, weather, sounds, tastes and felt emotions related to particular experiences (Fig. 43, 44). The mixing process is a physical activity where memories surface independently of my initial ideas for the project. Even though I refer to my images and notes to choose colours that I will need, as I select the hues and open the tubes to push out some paint I sense new experiences in textures, smells and tastes. They often remind me of things such as food and liquids, mixed with external sensations of mud, slush and sand.

The weight, the feel and the smell of acrylic paint is not the same as oils. I consider for a moment that I have worked with oil paints through most of my art practice and acrylics now seem relatively new to me, but my choice of materials is dependent on the kind of painting I imagine and nothing else. These paints have a very subtle chemical smell compared with the odour of oil blended with mineral spirits that lingers and changes the atmosphere of the studio. I spoon out a dollop of white paint from a large jar and let it fall onto the mixing tray. I add a touch of manganese blue to the shiny mound of stiff peaks. I press my palette knife downward into a pearly mixture and drag it until I see beautiful blue stripes in various tints. I scrape up the whole amount of paint and press into it again and again, until it transforms into a homogenous blend. I judge it too milky and decide to add a little more blue and mix it some more. Now it seems too cool (temperature) and too sweet (taste) so I decide to bring down the brightness of the sky with a little earth. Burnt umber will soil the postcard blue just enough to give me the kind of colour I want — a warm greyish blue. I often work with winter colours.

The studio inside my head

There is an intermediate place where creativity is in proximity to the self. It is the one place which permits me to go deep into the self and come up again with some form of truth.

Winnicott (1971) refers to an area of experience that is neither flight of fancy nor knowledge, but involves both. In flight of fancy, the mind is unorganized and chaotic as it passes from image to image in search of variety or distraction (Croce, 1964). Reasoned thinking has clear motives or objective beliefs in its resolution of a problem. Imagination is more like when I am playing with my daughter. We will have four stuffed toys and all of a sudden, they will have personalities and names. I will be in a scenario where bed sheets become a home and pillows will transform into another. When play is over the objects revert to stuffed toys that I pick up and the things that we imagined are gone. When I decide to look at something in another way for a while, and then it goes away, that is imagination.

I think that the place inside — unlike imagination which is flight of fancy — is the part of consciousness that figures out things, but not quite as literally as in the logical/mathe-

mathematical realm. Drawings in my books are about figuring out things. In them, I start trying to piece things together without a particular end in mind. I wonder how things work as I shift motifs around to determine an optimal composition. I think about the meaning of things because the choices I make signify things. My decisions invariably represent such intimate symbolism that I wonder where it happens in my mind. There is a place inside where imagination, memory and emotions are blended together into mental images that change dynamically like clouds in the sky.

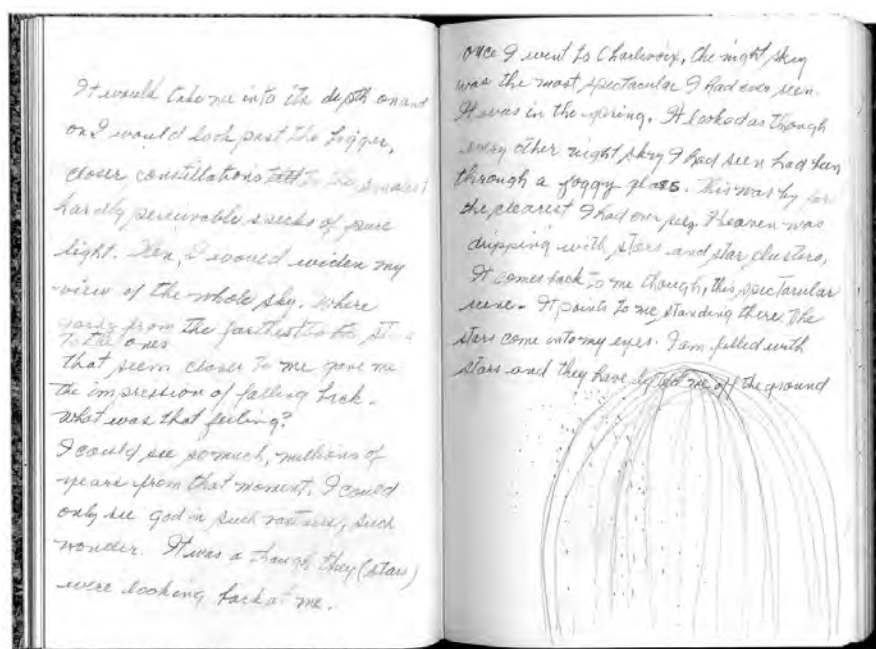


Fig. 45. "I write because ideas change rapidly."

The place inside allows freedom to think, create and work. Freedom is an important part of my cultural vocabulary, omnipresent in songs, the news and around the dinner table as a teenager and it still holds meaning for me. Within, I can judge to what extent I can think and say what I want and that, in turn, allows me to be my own person. The place inside cannot be described as it changes every time. It is sometimes the best place in the world, where I can be at home inside my body and mind.



Fig. 46. "...the view of eastern Montreal from my studio window — the weather and the Olympic stadium."

Perception as sensory experience aims at whatever consciousness (cognizance) is focused on while the reasoning mind heeds what the initial sensory experience delivers. My mind does not know everything and, at a certain point in a creative engagement, knowledge is not enough because to get to that point, the last phase before authenticity (my conscious self coming to terms with being-in-the-world), I have already applied the notions of art, the discourse of criticism, art history and philosophy. All that I am left with is my own baggage, my expression. It is at this moment that I find my identity and, by probing deeper still, I will find what makes me authentic. It is from this place that I create what is my own. Creation calls upon my perspective, identity and experience of the world. The singular predicate that comes from the self is authenticity. When the mind looks at itself, it remembers the past and its identity. It thinks in terms of "I am" and emotions come into play; but when perception is occupied with scanning physical senses that the logical mind transcribes in plain words (to remain true to the moment), the present comes into focus. That part of art making that comes from the frontal lobe is looking for something. Aesthetic thinking implies problem solving or problem finding and the mind reasoning its own knowledge may disrupt what needs to be perceived but is not yet rationalised. A focus on the physical body makes perceptual sense of the moment. Preoccupation with the outside world is distracting from the reality of being in a mortal organism.

The place inside my mind seems to change with my disposition and if that part of me is not doing well then it is simply not accessible. Ideas come to mind, of course they do, but what I am addressing here is a kind of quiet state of openness, of suspension. It is the type of focus that waits for something to materialise from many possibilities without a question being formulated. (This is the way I think. It may not be the same for others, since each person understands concepts from their subjective viewpoint).

My creative experience in the studio

I work in a section of the fourth floor of a large manufacturing building. The idea of the physical studio is intertwined with the intellectual space that I occupy when I am in my studio. There is something about the ambient sounds that describe it as a working place. The people next to me sew all day in their factory. I see them go in and sometimes we all leave at the same time. The trucks come and go all day downstairs, while I am in my little cocoon where I do my thinking and where I go to define things. Everything is made at the studio. It is also where everything is stored. Even my work stacked and facing the wall affects my mental space. I look at those works and I remember, through the shape of the canvas, the path that I have taken and that helps me continue.

I am closest to my self in my studio. As I go from one project to another, I make important decisions about what elements to conserve and what elements to discard from the last production. I make notes as I work. I write because ideas change rapidly (Fig. 45). Sometimes, even a few hours later, I cannot remember exactly what I had considered to be a precious thought. I see that my notes refer to my impressions concerning the meaning in my work and its relationship to everything else around me. I have notes about photography and reflections on debates about the idea of the pragmatic in art. There are descriptions of the view of eastern Montreal from my studio window — the weather and the Olympic stadium (Fig. 46). There are physical descriptions of places that have left an impression on me and notes that discuss how my work should be presented to the viewer — how it should be mounted and things of that nature. There is a page about current events, things to be done, a daily schedule. I talk about the music playing as I work and there are, of course, drawings and sketches in pencil and pen.

I have always kept diaries (Fig. 37). My creative process is in the sketchbook but not explicitly. I cannot write everything. When I am writing notes, I express the way I per-

ceive. I use plain language as directly and genuinely as possible. I record the idea that I am contemplating, its source and the links to where it might take me. My writing is like thinking aloud. Sometimes I relate ancillary thoughts and memories that are internalised or personal and, for this reason, I do not normally wish to share my writings openly. This is not unusual in an artist. Artists are reluctant to make the contents of sketchbooks public because they prefer to keep private thoughts to themselves (Gilbert, 1998).

Every studio has had a distinct influence on the shape of my work. I was sharing a live-in studio (1985-95) when I was an undergraduate student. Everything about art was new to me. I was thinking about art theory, I was discovering photography and imagery was beginning to mean more to me. When I made larger paintings, I had major problems with transportation. The space in my studio was also cramped so I decided to do smaller works that I could place together and assemble into larger projects that I could transport to and from school. With The Staalmeesters (1989) I painted nine oil paintings, repro-



Fig. 47. Details from The Staalmeesters, 1989

ductions of details of Rembrandt's last group painting (Fig. 47). I applied elaborate Jacquard and satin fabric to double mats that were around each painting to convey a baroque atmosphere. I framed the pictures in red enamel protected by Plexiglas that also reflected the viewer.

I really felt the outsider when I worked as an undergraduate in the school studios. To start with, I was older than most of the students in my class. I had been living and supporting myself for ten years so I was mature in many aspects. I had a salary, a loft; I paid bills and had insurance. When I was working on the portraits for The Staalmeesters, the studios at school were open to all kinds of disturbances. It would actually push me to perform for an audience of people who would look at my work and encourage me. A part of me was uncomfortable having to work at school while another part of me liked the social atmosphere. On the other hand, while I was working on the same project in my studio at home, I could listen quietly to a selection of Gregorian chants. I can still hear that music in my head when I look at the completed paintings. The process of making that work was very intense. It was the first project where I could freely innovate creatively. On my way to class, I would go up the escalator and hear Gregorian music in my mind as the brick arches of the Lucien-L'Allier metro station took on the appearance of a seminary with the way that morning light came into the space. I had completely absorbed the music, the red paint and the rich fabrics.

When I presented The Staalmeesters to the class, I prepared for it as if it was a real exhibition. I got permission to set up in an empty studio and I installed the works precisely with the right tools. When the class came in and I had my critique, many were impressed and supportive of what I had done. In school, I saw who I was in a group. I know now that I needed to be around other people who were learning about making art because I could see how they went about their creative process. Even though we were all in a learning process, I still tended to compare myself with others and I think that it helped me begin to develop a sense of identity as a creator. Not a single painting that I did in the school studio ended up being used in the final project but they did allow me to resolve problems. I would go home and pin the studies on the wall and in the quiet of my own working space, I would repaint new ones.

Because my second studio (1995-99) had more space, I thought that I was going to do work of larger dimensions, but I still found myself involved with piecing together smaller works. I used to do drawings and notes on little time slips (Fig. 12). I would work out things without being self-conscious about making a work of art. Quite a few of those drawings were relevant to my Master's thesis project, On Nature (1997) (Fig. 48, 49). Working at a day job created an appropriate distance between my artwork and my preconceived notions of what an artist should be. It was a stressful but, in another sense, an effortless job and the company provided me with a pencil in my hand with which I could approach creativity in a relaxed manner. As I would work with my client and focus on a call, I also had this window of opportunity to explore things. I enjoyed the way I pieced these little squares of paper together in novel configurations. It was particularly useful for those paintings where the composition was all-important.

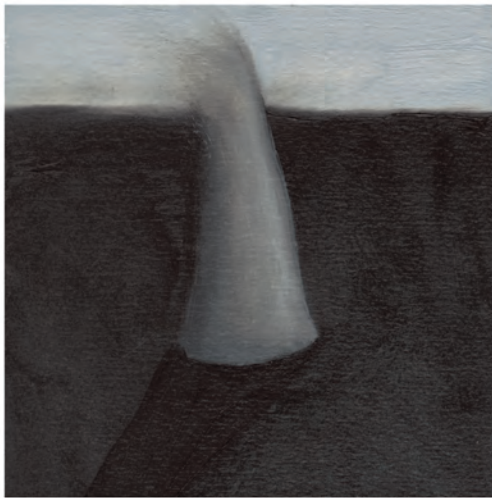


Fig. 48. Details from Sur naturel (On Nature), 1998
Oil on paper
11 x 11 cm

As an artist I look everywhere. I see things but I do not recognize them instantly. I rack my brains on form or to try to give three-dimensional depth to something flat, so sometimes I see things that twist my perception. Because of the kinds of forms I might be looking for, I sometimes intentionally flip things around or I might see a picture in a

newspaper upside down and perceive a completely different thing than the photograph. What I notice is usually far more interesting, with a quality and atmosphere full of mystery. When I finally see it right side up, it will turn out to be something banal. I remember when I was working on the paintings for On Nature, I saw something in a shop window that appeared strange but, at the same time, there was something attractive about it. As I got closer, I saw that the reflection from the window glass had changed my perception of what was in the display. I imagined something that was not there. I thought to myself that I was seeing things but I had been biased by what I was involved with at the studio. Merleau-Ponty (1962) refers to a similar experience. The phenomena of perception precede rationalisation and the object is only gradually revealed in relationship to my expectations and previous experience (20). The project, On Nature, was dealing with the idea of man's intervention in the landscape. I was abstracting shapes like bridges, monuments and parks. When I compared a park with the forest, I saw rational thinking in the form of sidewalks, trim gardens and colour co-ordinated flowers. The form I saw in the store window was in fact related to these kinds of abstractions.

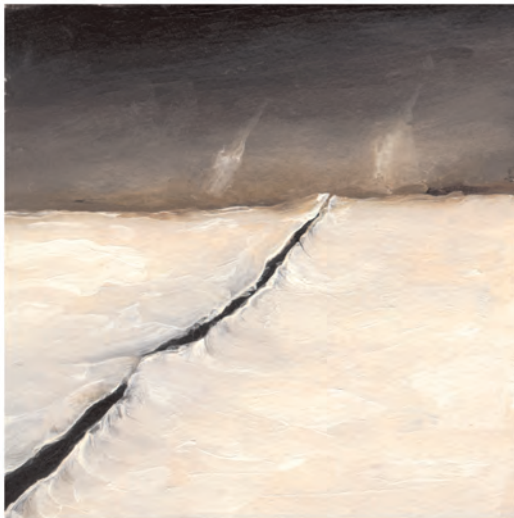


Fig. 49. Details from Sur naturel (On Nature), 1998
Oil on paper
11 x 11 cm

My second studio was important to me for several reasons. I developed my first professional work there. I had my first experience with a solo exhibition. There were many changes in my private life. This studio is where I brought my baby daughter to work

with me, where I completed my graduate degree work and was awarded a Canada Council Grant. The time I spent there was meaningful and when we were unfortunately forced out because of a condominium development, I was sad to let it go.

I know that it is important for me to have a place to work. I am a twenty-minute walk from my studio (1999-), and that creates a physical space between the building where I live and where I work. Sometimes I wish I could snap my fingers and be there, especially when it is very hot in the summer or when there is a snowstorm, but the rest of the time the path that I take is usually pleasant. I go through a thinking transition from the moment I leave home. I look back at the garden in front of my house and then I engage the street. The more I move toward the studio, the more I get into my artwork.

When I walk into the studio in the morning, the first thing I do is look at my developing work. I can stand there for quite a while imagining different outcomes and evaluating the work I did last. A great deal of my thinking occurs when perception is fresh and my mind is rested. Based on my experience, I prefer to ignore what I call “ghosts”. These second thoughts, if they appear interesting to pursue, are written down or sketched for future work.

Novel issues surface constantly as my work develops, but once my sketches are pinned to the wall I remain as close as I can to my initial ideas because otherwise I would never complete a painting.

The kind of thinking that I experience when in the studio is like brainstorming. I work out my thoughts and hope for an all encompassing common denominator to gather into one kernel all of the elements with which I am working. I cover a canvas with a black ground and I place it on the floor, where I paint these big, white serpent-like lines (Fig. 50). A couple of days later I paint them with a smaller brush. The motifs imitate knots that occur in weaving — they loop, one upon another. I take a digital picture of that and say to myself, “What’s the point of painting this, because it’s not really very interesting,” and so I cover it with a new ground. This is how I work on certain days in my studio. I think that there must be some way that I can put all of these ideas together and come up with something really interesting. In brainstorming, I am waiting for the memory locations in my mind to reach a point of saturation where, through some kind of conceptual meltdown (Gabora, 2002), I will suddenly realise an answer.



Fig. 50. Detail of untitled study, 2006
acrylic on canvas

I begin to explore the effect of different types of lines over certain painted surfaces. I paint thin lines that look almost like a fringe and they end up appearing a little bit like an aurora borealis, then I have another kind of line that looks like a spiral or string (Fig. 29). I have continuous wide brush strokes that look like tubes and suddenly I am thinking of putting things into those tubes. I have all these different ways of applying the paint and putting an image together. I feel like I have everything necessary but I am holding back some things in my mind. I try to put something down in sketch form on a small canvas, but when it does not seem to come out instantly, I begin to panic because it feels like I am not doing anything. I keep looking at the clock. Oh my, it's twelve o'clock! It is one-thirty and I say to myself that I have an hour-and-a-half. I'd better hurry up and so I go and make another cup of coffee and I wash my brushes and keep on going, starting from the beginning. Then I put down the brushes and say to myself that I have an hour left. Now I am going to sit down and read. I start reading and then I say to myself that I had better write something because I have not written anything yet. I go to the computer and start writing and then realise that I am just correcting sentence structure and looking for alternate words and it's three o'clock and I have to go. I say to myself that I have not produced anything. Where did the day go? Then I say that it is the

end of the week and I haven't done anything. I've spent three days running around in circles and I start to panic and I sense that I am on the wrong track and I can't wait to get home and put this aside because I'm tired of suffering. When I get home to my daughter and feel like I am in her world, all of this goes on a shelf for a few hours. By the time I write about it, I feel like I am giving a lab report. I don't want anyone to think that I might be failing. I am reminded of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) wondering about the quality of light and the depiction of light and shadow in his paintings. He did three versions of Virgin of the Rocks. My daughter asks why he did so many of them. I say that it is because he was trying to work out something. I imagine that in the first versions he did not quite get what he had in mind and so he painted another one to push it a little further and to correct something that to him was not quite what he was looking for. Now there is one in the Louvre (Fig. 51) , another one in London (Fig. 52) and a third in Switzerland.



left: Fig. 51. Leonardo da Vinci
The Virgin of the Rocks, 1483-86
 Musée du Louvre, Paris
 right: Fig. 52. Leonardo da Vinci
The Virgin of the Rocks, 1503-1506
 National Gallery, London

Creation has something to do with the enormous stock of memories of which I am unconscious but nevertheless feel. My body remembers because my organism has a memory of its own (Damasio, 1999). My body was there when I was born. My mind was registering memories that are still in there. A melody touches something deep inside and I remember when I was a child I would hear Brahms and my eyes would fill with tears. I sit here in my studio perch, five floors above ground, where for several summers now I have worked on my inquiry. I see treetops poking out from rows of rooftops and chimneys. From here, they are compressed and seemingly flat without streets and people in view. I have seen the trees change with the seasons year after year and it is a dramatic metamorphosis. It always amazes me how life forms go on about their existence. I muse that a digital program is somewhat like a seed in which a giant tree is potentially waiting to be planted. It is rather small and does not look at all like what it is capable of doing. I am aware of the complexity of the seed, but like a seed, our capacity for invention is involved in a metamorphosis, which is what human experience is about.

6 My engagement as a creator



Fig. 53. Intuition, 2005 (Interior Experience)
Acrylic on canvas
106 x 318 cm

In this chapter I will describe the thinking process that I experienced while painting the series Interior Experience (2004-), and the difference from the kind of thinking that occurred while working on the project The Ends of the Earth (2002-2004).

The Ends of the Earth is closely related to language. The paintings evoke memories, sometimes represent the banal and could serve to stimulate a viewer's consideration of social concerns. Generally these issues deal with matters outside my body. I then describe how, quite unconsciously, I began to cover over my representations and abstractions. I began to cross over into another kind of interpretation where I was able to express on canvas my involvement with both my inner and outer perceptions. Through my investigation of phenomenology and hermeneutics, I became aware of a part of my existence that had been left practically unexplored.

With Interior Experience, the object of consideration is my physical state as I am painting. As I sense my body my thoughts are of a different nature - focused inwards. Finally, I describe the similarities that I see between the workings of the physical body and the many systems found in nature. I relate how the temporal present comes to the forefront

of my consciousness when I engage in an activity of physical endurance in the same manner as when I am painting. It is my sense of physical presence in the moment as it occurs that stimulates my awareness of myself as a creator of meaning.

We all make art differently. How we act or think when we make art might appear similar from one person to the next but each starting point is different and each justification unique. In my studio I am exploring the perceptual capacities of the brain. How can I disassociate myself from the subjectivity of my own perception? From the beginning of my inquiry into the artistic process, I have observed myself attempting to describe something that comes naturally to me. My creative thoughts surface and submerge randomly in an intuitive manner. I have learned, however, that this does not mean that they spontaneously materialise in irrelative thoughts. As an artist, I make meaning through aesthetics and I suspect that a part of why I make art is related to memories. When I do remember things either from lived experience or from deeply embedded dispositional images, I sense that I am closer to some kind of truth about myself and the world I see. What is between the perception of inner and outer worlds is my organism, through which life itself resonates. My relationship with the world confirms the existence of my self inside of me. For me, making art objectifies the complexity of experience as naturally as certainty is born of doubt itself.

When I planned my project The Ends of the Earth (2002-2003), it was to continue my inquiry into formal concerns that I had with On Nature (1996) and Media/Medium (2001) both of which expressed my relationship with the natural world. When I hear the sound of a thunderstorm, I know that I am physically linked to nature, however, when I see the structural interventions that humans put in the landscape, I wonder about how our faculty of reasoning seems to be at odds with nature.

I wanted The Ends of the Earth to be a means to describe, through painting, human culture and what it changes in the environment. The idea of a frieze enticed me because of my desire to bleed images of their objective content. I knew that grouping images formally dilutes literal and representational content, and in a patterned border their aesthetic quality is enhanced. I wanted to choose recognisable pictures that would create a kind of chaos through variety. Source images were selected for visual qualities rather than narrative content. They came from newspaper cuttings, magazines, as well as my own photographs and videos. They all went through a process of transformation and abstraction to broaden the scope of interpretation.



Fig. 54. Detail from The Ends of the Earth, 2003
Oil on panel
20 x 20 cm

For the first part of the project, I completed a series of uniformly dimensioned oil paintings on thick plywood panels that I wanted to hang at eye level around the perimeter of an exhibition space. The installation was organised through chance formal similarities in the panels. I wanted to surround the viewer with an ambiguity of meanings as well as challenge them to examine the individual paintings at close proximity.

I look at a project that I am working on in terms of what it is saying, and I know that it reflects a certain meaning, but it always feels peculiar to me that it reflects something different from what I had initially planned. I think that this occurs when an idea crosses over from the inside to concrete reality. As if by instinct, embedded dispositional images cross over and I am only aware of them after they are processed through my technical skills into a material form. My initial notion will change in appearance as my work



Fig. 55. Details from The Ends of the Earth, 2003
Oil on panel
20 x 20 cm each

seems to develop in its own direction. I feel that I do not have absolute control over my creative process, yet I do bear full responsibility for its outcome. In its gradual materialisation, a mental abstraction is difficult to grasp because it reveals too much or is not logical. I obviously cannot entertain whatever comes to mind so my thoughts are moderated by an internal rational system constructed from my experience that censures the forbidden and prevents a loss of control. Each individual creates within themselves a culturally and socially mediated degree of ethical logic (Green, 1998, 47). I use intellectual and artistic discretion to assure clarity and situate my work within a context, but I will even-

tually have to accept the work as it transpires. If I wanted to contrive perfection, I could work at it my entire life and complete nothing. Through my experience I have learned that every painting is a stepping stone to the next one.

While perusing images for The Ends of the Earth, I began wondering about language, codes and meaning. The concepts of classifications and taxonomies came to mind as I surveyed the diversity of metaphors that I had to work with. I sensed, along with the narrative content, a kind of meaning that is present in religious icons. In the Judeo-Christian tradition icons were meant to be read symbolically since it was forbidden, for religious reasons, to see them as representation (Mitchell, 1994). There is a certain logic to this kind of representation within iconoclasm because meaning, for the most part, is language. I see the picture of an object and a word describing that object will replace my mental image. I have to consider language when I make an image because I am a part of the outside world when I make art. I have an inner language but my social language is related to the written word.

The close relationship of image and word has existed since the beginnings of symbolic systems of communication. Perhaps as an empirical record, paleolithic artists recorded animal behaviour and aspects of culture (Millette, 1997). Pictograms, ideograms and hand tracings left on the walls of caves communicate as signs. From the aesthetic came the first symbols and then around 8600BP the earliest examples of written language (Rincon, 2003).

Language is a hierarchical system. Although concepts may be complex, the words and grammar used to describe them are not. When language is written, it is dependent on convention to ensure that only certain words within a comprehensible set of rules are used to accurately convey thought. A base subject and predicate cannot be removed from a sentence without it changing meaning or becoming incoherent. Language, through words, is the foundation of discourse in philosophy, the arts, the social sciences and the physical sciences. Even so, in a culture where words are the primary method of communication, artists have created objects and situations throughout the centuries to express meaning. Archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan (1993, c.1964) believes that from the outset, at the end of the Mousterian period (c.35,000BP), the written language was an abstract symbolic system and as soon as language could be transcribed and understood by others, art split away from writing (192).

There is a difference between pictures and words. Through the project The Ends of the Earth, I was exploring the hierarchy and grammatical structure of symbols. Images, for example, a picture of a cat or of a bottle, can be directly representative and objective structure for visual language emerged from the Bauhaus in 1923. Formalism provided a framework to unify the functional and aesthetic aspects of art making. Early in the twentieth century the discipline of semiology had already begun to address the language of signs and the relationship between human behaviour and symbolism. However, an important distinction between language and art emerged from formalism. Written languages acquire meaning through the conventionalisation of symbols and signs, whereas

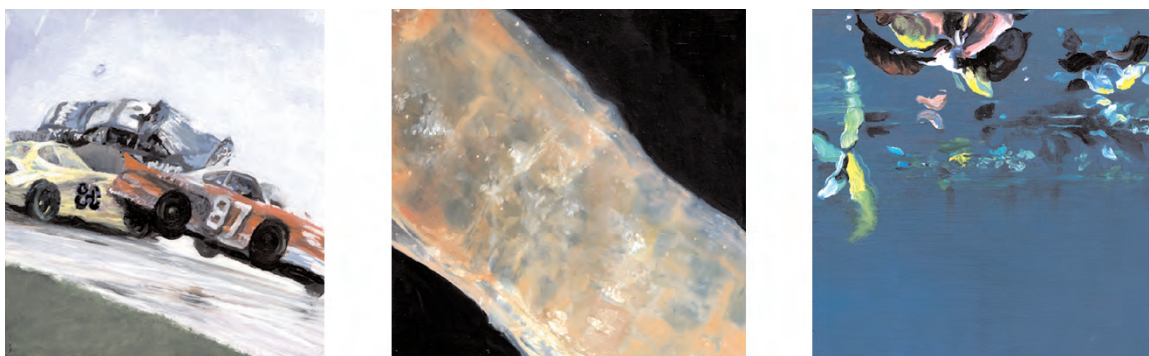


Fig. 56. Details from The Ends of the Earth, 2003
Oil on panel
20 x 20 cm each

an aesthetic representation refers to itself for meaning. Another difference is that written language describes awareness but a picture is an object of such perception. Art is neither symbolic because of its prototypical nature nor semiotic because the sign in an artwork refers to linguistic references that may not have the same meaning as the aesthetic representation (Foucault, 1983). Art directly mediates human meaning and reflects a subjective sense of presence, provenance and temporality.

In The Ends of the Earth the paintings generally emerged from the objective and formal choices that I made. The explicitness of the source pictures tended to shift my perspective outward toward social, moral and ethical issues. The figurative content had been largely retrieved from language-oriented sources such as the printed media which I organised through colour and shape. I noticed that in some instances I had intentionally selected pictures to provoke a reaction while at other times I preferred banal or superfi-



Fig. 57. The Ends of the Earth, in progress, December 28, 2002 to June 16, 2003

cial ones. I was expressing narrations from a perspective that was outside my body whereas I felt that my inner thoughts were of a different nature. There is a difference between truth and authenticity. If an observation fits into my physiological system of senses, it is true because my five senses tell me that something exists; or if truth is proven by an empirical method, I accept it as part of my logical world. Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues, however, that in the matter of perception, reason fails to acknowledge that inquiry necessitates a certain ignorance that insists that I should be looking for what I do not know (28). When I am looking at my self-in-the-world phenomenologically, the object of consideration is the me inside. There is no object of inquiry because the magnifying mirror is turned on a truth that is already within me and if I dig deep enough, I will find something just beneath consciousness. Authenticity comes from self-awareness.

The Ends of the Earth became a literal manifestation of my inquiry into the phenomenological method. Because phenomenology is so intimately linked to the written word (Heidegger, 1977), it was natural that I would initially use images conventionalised and with discrete meanings, like words. I decided to use an alternate approach for a large canvas that I was working on in the same theme (Fig. 57). With the large painting I

decided to go through a process of covering over the images that I found and transposed onto canvas. Some of them I glazed over, while others were partially covered by another image. The entire surface of the painting became a busy multicoloured compilation of pictures unified through a horizontal and vertical grid made of bands of transparent blue or white. I dispersed recognizable flag icons throughout the painting, suggesting that I was dealing with global issues from a particular worldview. Where, in the frieze, the images were individual depictions that could be freely exchanged without affecting the overall meaning of the artwork, in the large painting I literally buried the source images.



Fig. 58. Detail of lace from The Ends of the Earth, 2002-2003

The frieze was, in many ways, conventional through its association of complementary images, where the large painting was conceptual in that it was about the creative process of choosing and filtering source images.

In one of the last stages of my large painting for The Ends of the Earth, I had traced a detailed picture of a lace motif onto a dark background on my canvas. When I started to paint over the tracings, the lines appeared sewn in and out of the canvas (Fig. 58). I liked the way in which the shapes seemed to go sideways into the picture plane. When I distorted them, they seemed to recede, creating a novel sense of depth of field. These motifs begin to appear in Dream Interrupted (2003) (Fig. 59), an intuitive response to the moment of crossing over from sleep to consciousness. Painted in two parts, the left side of the canvas has a number of transparent multi-levelled surfaces in a space devoid of light. Like overlapping islands, images float within a pitch-black atmosphere. When perception is in a relaxed state, free associations occur. In this painting I express a dream state where thoughts roam. Thin white lines appear to vibrate as they move upon the surface of other transparent islands, creating ripples, cones and tubes. A large black shape, at first hardly perceivable against the dark background, comes into view as it overlaps a

white gesso ground and continues past the picture's edge. This black shape is literally cut off the picture, along with the canvas that it is painted on. On the right panel of the picture, in a greenish ochre atmosphere of paint, the black elliptical shape collides with an ambiguous object. I have created the impression of a tear that violently pulls apart the worlds of dream and reality.

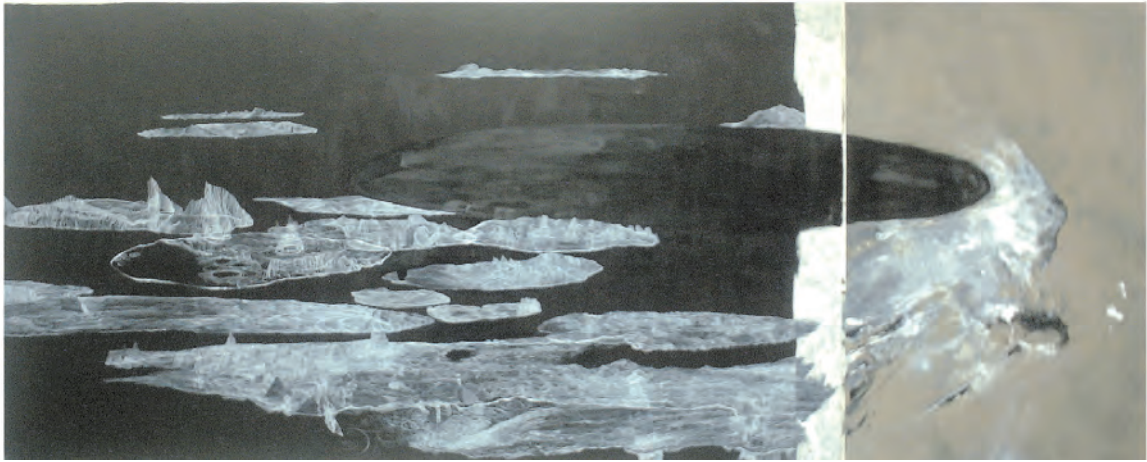


Fig. 59. Dream Interrupted, 2003 (Interior Experience)
Acrylic on canvas
160 x 300 cm

I began Dream Interrupted with information that I had assimilated from working with The Ends of the Earth. I painted a metaphor about the crossing over from dream to consciousness as a physical break because between consciousness and sleep there is no language. I called it Dream Interrupted but only later did I discover that neurochemical activity in the thalamus literally breaks sleep to spark consciousness. The body comes to life autonomically with the self emerging from an acephalic synapse. The merging of perception and a sense of being is so primary that it happens before thought itself (Alexandera, Kurukulasuriyaa, Mub and Godwin, 2006).

The creative process has access to what seems to be inherently known. By what means did William Blake come to the idea of eternity in a grain of sand? Chalmers (1996) suggested that experiential knowledge might be a fundamental but experimentally unproven

property like electricity or mass. He notes that theories are not only based on empirical evidence, but also on the principles of plausibility, simplicity and aesthetics (216). Although the things I make come from a synthesis of knowledge both learned and inherited from my biology, it is my mind that makes the connections and I may not be immediately aware of it. Later I realise that I knew about this from science or I painted that from experience, but direct references are always an oversimplification. Although I had read about perception and consciousness, in Dream Interrupted I distilled the knowledge into a metaphor of lines. I simplified things to a point where I was not saying anything representational. A metaphor is hardly anything at all and in this one I am not actually saying much in terms of language, but the painting uncovers something relevant about the way things actually work and like Blake's grain of sand, it accrues truth as empirical knowledge expands.



Fig. 60. Detail from Process, 2004

"Through spirals I could create the impression of masses that accumulate in perspective."

Midway through my research, the reading that I had been involved with in my inquiry into creativity did not appear to have affected the work that was on the walls of my studio. However, when I started experimenting with Dream Interrupted, something happened and my hands were suddenly transcribing on to canvas what my mind required. Through spirals I could create the impression of masses that accumulate in perspective (Fig. 60). I felt that this would allow me to create something that I had never seen before in my work. My lived experience, I suspected, had traced patterns within my self like the

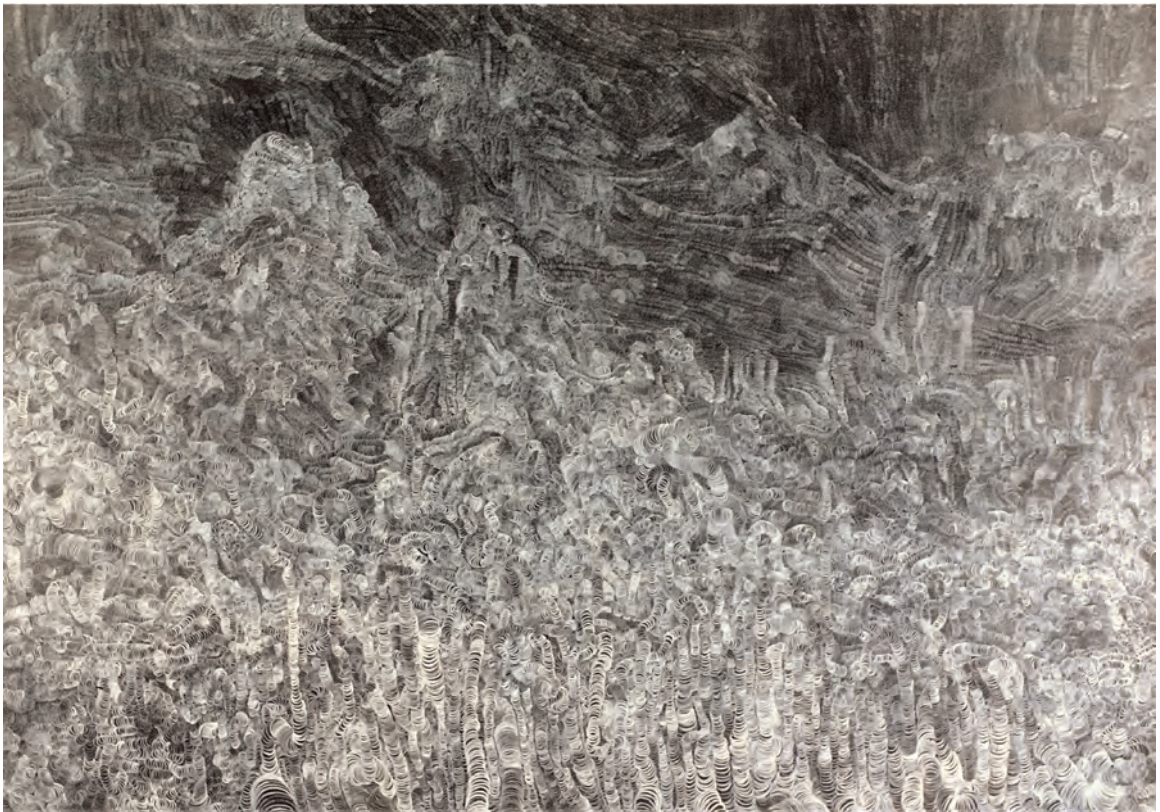


Fig. 61. Process, 2004 (Interior Experience)
Acrylic on canvas
155 x 202 cm

wind does on sand. I physically sensed these gestures inside my body from which I found images that faded, surfaced and changed. I painted a line, like a thread, something simple that would enable me to trace moment by moment on the canvas my process as I worked. I felt peculiar twitches, barely noticeable, that permeated my organism and quickly vanished only to be replaced by other forms. I visualised these sensations as half



Fig. 62. Viscera, 2004 (Interior Experience)
Acrylic on canvas
160 x 300 cm

image, half physical and I was a captive audience to my self as I experienced a continuous flow of my own recollections. My painted lines evolved into long continuous tubes that congregated in shapes. In Process (2003) (Fig. 61) these shapes start at the bottom of the picture and gradually form piles in an upward direction toward the top of the canvas. Structures of different sizes come into view, as if they had slipped in from a source at the very bottom of the canvas. White forms twist and coil as they fade into undulating heaps. As I painted I imagined the darkness of a warehouse fading to grey in the corners, filled to the ceiling with discarded pipes and tubes. My gestures in themselves represented nothing recognisable, but inside a picture plane, I could do anything that I wanted with them. I could change scale, create perspective and work with values. Gradually, the sharpness and the size of the forms diminished as they approached the upper part of the canvas to reveal a surface of hills and valleys — an interior landscape.

Moving away from the semiotics of The Ends of the Earth shifted my focus inward, heightened my physical awareness and made explicit the sensation of time unfolding. Art reverberates something that cannot normally be verbalised. Unique forms materialized within my mind's eye that represented what I was feeling in my body. Conscious of the process occurring, I attempted to hold in mind the moment as I painted and I recognized that the exterior of my self was different from what I felt inside. With Process (2003), I felt the present and the passage of time seemed slower.



Fig. 63. Detail of Viscera, 2004

"...a simple linear device that would (ideally) permit the eye to see time within every coiled line and that would express, "time is passing — my time is passing."

After I had finished painting Process, I was curious to see what kind of depth of field I could render through the use of complementary colours. I had a larger painting in mind that would address some of the obscure mental images that occurred to me as I was working on Process and I also wanted to elaborate what I had learned from the gestures that I had used. I had never applied colour theory in a literal manner and I was curious to try it out from a technical perspective. I was still thinking about my body and feeling all of its fluctuations. I was visualising movement up and down like waves in flux with holes, because things fall in the body in response to gravity. I wanted to paint these depressions and a sensation of movement downwards — or upwards depending on orientation. Viscera (2004) (Fig. 62) is a direct outcome of painting Process. It represents



Fig. 64. Weaving Emotions, 2005 (Interior Experience)
Acrylic on canvas
122 x 160 cm

the many systems involved in blending together discrete elements in a seamless way to make an organism work. The painting is a metaphor for the sum of an ongoing synergy of many subtle bodily sensations, practically indiscernible from one another as they occur. I wanted to describe the quietness of that experience. As in the case of my body where there is no empty space, I left no place in the painting in which to rest the eye. I wanted the coloured spirals shaping the forms to remain separated as if they were electrical wires within some kind of organic system. I chose to use a simple linear device that would (ideally) permit the eye to see time within every coiled line and that would express, “time is passing — my time is passing” (Fig. 63). As I painted, it was like saying, “I was here.” I started at the bottom of the canvas and as I worked my way up it became a landscape. I saw shapes that I could directionally manipulate with colour and the form of the landscape took the shape that I felt from within.

At a certain point I began visualising some emotions as tension in the form of rubber bands or elastics. I did not know how such a metaphor would work and I needed some guidelines from nature. I had already tried some things with sketches on a black surface, but I was not sure that they would make sense in a painting. I consequently started looking at trees but they seemed to be too complex for what I had imagined and then I began to look at photographs of icy surfaces. I chose a source image of an ice gully with contrasting shiny and opaque areas. Because I wanted to orient my painting vertically, I turned the picture on its side and from that I started sketching and planning a painting. In the process, I started to explore ancillary things and strayed from the source image. As a painter, I naturally want to push paint rather than follow particular structures or plans. However, I did not have the time or material resources for too much experimentation, therefore I disciplined myself to continue what I had initially intended. The surface of Weaving Emotions (Fig. 64) is made of lines that represent, to me, links of time that could be unravelled like string. In the back of my mind I knew that I was involved in my literature reviews and that I was considering Merleau-Ponty’s notions of temporality in particular. At the same time I felt a need to work at the studio and to be free from the parameters of figuration that seemed to be so tightly linked to a representational language. I wanted to express a state of something or a condition. Weaving Emotions touches the senses in that it symbolises the way human beings put things together. It is like the fastidious organisation that weavers apply recursively to strings. People make things from nothing — great walls from pieces of brick. I wanted to make a picture of some-

thing that I feel but do not see. I wanted to recreate the inside of myself by interlacing time. The painting is a metaphor for the becoming and passing of time

Weaving Emotions (2005) conveys tension through the vertically oriented sinewy shapes that go from the top of the canvas to the bottom. A wall of white is tightly rendered through lines that imitate ramiform shapes covered with spun string. There is little depth of field in the painting. Close to the surface of the picture plane, rows of vertical forms of similar size compose the right hand side of the canvas. Thin ribbed columns, some tubular and some angular, traverse the picture. To the left there are things that seem to be covered in gauze, while other forms are bent by the tension of woven strings. There are



Fig. 65. Chaise cocon (Cocoon Chair), 1999
Oil on paper
76 x 57 cm

shapes that appear to have been wrapped with silken threads. In the lower middle section of the picture, there is a release of tension where cascades of lines flow in a downward direction. With the completion of the painting, I saw that it had encompassed ideas from Process but also metaphoric imagery and painting techniques from my 1999 work, Cocoon Chair (Fig. 65).

As I was thinking about making a picture I began considering what it actually was to make a metaphor. I realised that it was nothing or rather, it could be anything. What if I intentionally chose to paint nothing? I had a mental image of a spiral and I wondered

how it would manifest itself suddenly appearing. In my perception, nowhere is the sky and I decided that rather than making it pale blue and far away, I would paint a sky the colour of earth to bring it nearer. I began inverting things pictorially by placing cool colours in the foreground and warm colours in the background. Although I could do anything with this kind of metaphor, I began to ask myself inside how such things should be expressed, because when voided of external references, images must come from the mind and that is precisely how this metaphor came about. I said to myself that it would start forming from nothing as if something in the air begins to take shape. As it becomes something a tube forms. My painting, *Intuition* (2005) (Fig. 53), is oriented horizontally. To the left, a purple net materialises in a burnished sky. Floating in mid-air, unattached, a tube-like shape extends to the middle of the picture plane. Behind, other shapes navigate the dusky atmosphere. On the right hand side, a transparent yellow mass fills one quarter of the picture from which extends a mangled formation. Toward the centre of the composition, blue and yellow extensions gravitate toward each other. In the dim illumination of a rust atmosphere shapes stretch and become fine points. Far in the distance they will eventually touch. *Intuition* depicts the workings of instinctive knowing. In the face of many possibilities, reason is always overshadowed by intuition. When engaged in understanding, the will is viscerally attracted to spontaneous insight. An inkling comes from deep inside to finally crystallize into an object of inquiry.

The idea of assessing my own organism through my senses has become my access to metaphorical exploration. My work is a way of saying, “this is what it feels like in my body” and from that temporal physicality I make things. I imagine awareness as sonar scanning the inside surfaces of my organism. I swallow and my neck is a massive column through which air and water follow different channels. There is a contraction and the flow squeezes downward into a pool. The air remains higher up and like a warm cloud, it sits there for a while until it is expelled, leaving room for another breath to blow in. There are echoes from the outside that resonate against arches upon arches, toward an apex, somewhere, but I know that my body possesses no cavernous place. This is my imagination making mental images from the sensations I feel. This is not phenomenology; it is rather the inner self creating metaphors through language. Metaphors come about as extrapolations of some of the shapes I visualise, like a neck as a column or the stomach a pool. Metaphor involves language whereas phenomenology is about authentic experience.

With Interior Experience I am producing metaphors of what I imagine my body to be inside at different moments as I paint. To express meaning that reflects my physicality, I need to remain as true as possible to the transposition of my physical awareness into my visual perception on the canvas. As I work I feel as though my body separates me from the outside world but then I realize that all of my senses are at work, bringing me into the world. It is through my senses and by no other means that I perceive the world. My body is the primary initiator of what constitutes my perception of reality. Once that is firmly established, my mind proceeds to think.

All things possess a generic shape. In the forms I invent I see the lines of a river traced through the land, the shape of a mountain or the effect of clouds being pushed by the wind. A dam imitates a waterfall but the waterfall seems to work better than the dam. Within that dissimilarity, I distinguish man from nature. The shape of human thought is made manifest through the post and beam, the inch and the metre or the street grids of our neighbourhoods. A computer motherboard resembles a cityscape with the skyscrapers, boulevards and industrial parks that represent human culture. The computer seemingly has the generic shape of human reason and we have now begun to imitate ourselves through computation. I am beginning to understand how the mind is hard-wired in such a way that we have some circuitry that is related to operations on the outside of the body and some that is meant exclusively for the inside. In my conscious mind I have very little information about the cognitive processes involved in thinking out a problem. My nervous electricity closely reflects the phenomena I observe in my exterior environment. Human nerves trace a system of jagged lines analogous to the shapes that cut through the night sky during a thunderstorm. I carry the traces of the planet within me. Multiple commands move at light speed overlapping other multiple functions that take place to keep my mind aware of my inner and outer worlds. Travelling in tunnels, messages and commands leave their portals and move toward their destination. While in transit, other commands and messages are being received, conceived or are in passage as well.

Imagining that the electric energy that activates the heating elements in my toaster comes from some remote area in the north is difficult for me to grasp at this moment. It is complicated to explain the workings of electricity, let alone understand how it gets to our homes. The knowledge that energy travels like the blood in my veins recedes to the back of my mind as I go about my business. Electricity does not ooze out, as when a

vein is punctured; rather, it is invisible as it struggles powerfully with whatever happens to cover the conducting line or cable as it goes through the system that I depend on. It is easy to forget that electricity is a natural phenomenon like the blood in our veins.

One kilometre along the road on the mountain I see the forest bed with a soft airy surface of rich browns from twigs and dried leaves. Ferns and saplings are interspersed with boulders and stones that combine into a swaying pattern of sunlight and shade. The sound of the movement of leaves rises and falls with the humid breeze. The birds are silent for a moment, I am only aware of the insistent tune of a cicada. The occasional crunch of bicycle tire against gravel brings me back from solitude and compels me to glance outside from my inner world to reveal a couple of young people walking. I am still close enough to the city to hear traffic now so I will go further.



Fig. 66. "As if to examine something inside myself that I cannot see, I look at roots in the ground..."

Near the top, a panoramic view of downtown, the bridge and the South Shore stretches into the haze. The sounds of urban busyness have subsided except for a faint persistent rumble that hangs in the air. Because I run here, this place is more in my body than in my mind. I am aware that it is an urban park but it is embedded in my emotions.

As if to examine something inside myself that I cannot see, I look at roots in the ground, comparing them to my organism (Fig. 66). I know that the roots belong to trees but I like to think that they belong to the ground so that I can imagine the earth and the soil having a system like mine. If I open it up, I will see nerves, tendons and veins like my own. I have sensed many things about this place close to nature through my body. It has

become a metaphor for my physicality. As much as I can look down at my own body and remember my life, I can look around me on the mountain and remember in the same manner and with the same depth. I have felt the present here and I have felt it when I paint in my studio. When perception renders a moment authentic, it is like picking out a stone from a shallow river bed. By looking at it in your hand, from all the other stones, this particular one is singular. I create from a moment that lingers in the present and from so many moments in life it will become singular and authentic.



Fig. 67. untitled, 2006 (work in progress)
Acrylic on canvas
152 x 268 cm

I am working on a two-part untitled painting (2006) (Fig. 67) that addresses the landscape. The terrain is painted fire red and there are black and branchless trees as if they had at some time been consumed by flames. A forest floor is strewn with cables, cords and wires that make their way through the woods, crossing and twisting between pole-like beams. In the foreground, a few basic structures signal the presence of man in the environment. Built of the stick-like timber of the forest, these spindly structures seem held together by intertwined lines and cables. A large sooty pipeline sits on more contorted cables and cords that lead the eye to the lower right-hand side of the canvas. A

quarter of the size of the painting, the right portion represents the innards of something that seems to have been knotted together into a free-flowing system. Painted in reddish-brown, it has the appearance of dry blood or decaying flesh. Entrail-like structures are defined by a black contour line that separates them from the scarlet background. There is a central element in the composition that I call the “hub”. It joins the cables and lines from the forest, the man-made structures and the large black pipeline. Inside the hub, I see different lines joined in an active chemical solution that bubbles in greenish hues. The composition of the painting appears somewhat oriental with sparse trees like sticks devoid of branches. I can see the surface of the earth rising like a hill in the background. At this moment, the picture encompasses all of my ideas. I am content that I made sense of my thoughts and was able to conceptualise them into a depiction of all these man-made and natural elements connecting into a kind of machine, or hub.

The nature of perception requires me to be dependent on my inner world to know that I eat and drink the outside world and that it feeds me. My outside includes everything except my self. I can see my hands pick a blade of grass and feel the delicate thing between my fingers. I can physically move in the environment but I can only see what my inside believes. I cannot leave my body to walk around me or casually pass by myself on the street. I want to know more about myself because of the difference between the inside and the outside. At times I live in a grey area between my inner world and the one outside of me. In this place I feel as if I could put my ear to a wall and listen carefully, not to what is happening on the outside of my body or within my imagination, but what is stirring there, between my two worlds. The creative process is self-awareness. I see my self in the art that I create and it is in my nature to want to know more. I am sensitive to looking at the world outside from inside and I want to share my wonder at being a part of the exterior world. Learning about art is important for creation but I am alone when I paint and I do not need anyone else in my studio. In the course of my inquiry I have learned that aesthetic truth is inside. The path inside is one end of the bridge to authenticity and the other end is the painting. Between the two, there is my body.

Everything is tentative in my art-making process but when I examine my completed work I can see that it encloses the time in my life that it was developed and clues to my self that I cannot normally access. They appear through signs and traces left by felt sense and intuition, a result of the interaction between the preconscious and the conscious. The

authentic rendering of my experience within the space and time I live is an ontological statement that remains in the artwork. Mental images occur to me in the temporal present and perception of the present is dependent on an awareness of the body. It is for this reason that I believe a means towards authenticity and the self is through focus on physical presence. The athletic activity of running is a complete physical engagement for me, where my body is in the forefront of my consciousness as my mind constantly evaluates my physiological limits. As weight shifts from one leg to the other, I fill my lungs to replenish my heart and muscles. Until I physically adjust to the energy level required by my body, my attention remains affixed to my body state. I feel as if I am in a time tunnel, where the perception of the moment is where the present passes through me physically. As long as I remain in this active state, I will sense myself as being in this particular place.

In my need to grasp the mysteries of my surroundings, I have recognized that the course of my life and the direction of nature run on parallel paths. Through my art practice, I have developed a body of work that expresses my fascination with our existence on a planet that overwhelms our capacities to understand and master nature. I think that this might be why I see running as a metaphor for my life. It symbolises that I must persist no matter what. Every step tells me that I am my own person and that I am the best that I can be. When I used to sprint, as a child, the pounding in my heart made me feel like I was alive. I liked the effect of the endorphins but at the same time, it was intense. When running, as I get tired, I try as much as possible to synchronize my step and my breathing. I know that it is my will that pushes a little more and tries to dig down a little deeper for energy and resources to finish the run. Every bit of my body is wanting to stop, but because I know how my body works, I simply bring in more air and push through the activity.

On an icy day my physical body comes to the forefront of my mind. My perception is focused on the road and I am completely in tune with my organism as the sensation of my body, my weight on the ground and my breathing becomes very loud. These are my feet that hit the ground, fighting gravity with each step. I push my weight off the ground and then it falls back and I have to catch myself so that I don't lose balance, always trying to keep my body light. In the cold of winter, my vision is limited to my periphery. I listen to the background noise of a city already at work. I see white sky that tells me that it is a regular day. I see sticks of trees, as tree trunks reverberate in rhythm as I run by

(Fig. 68). I look at the road and I see the marks of people who have walked, of dogs and of other runners. Sometimes I put my step right into those footprints and I will follow their steps for a while as the road curves and dips. I notice trees in rock that persist and grow up straight from the open face. I see things that survive in the form of twisted tree trunks with lumps and holes and families of squirrels. When it is windy I hear the pine trees in the little piece of nature that I have in the centre of the city.



Fig. 68. "I see sticks of trees, as tree trunks reverberate in rhythm as I run by."

When I run I notice very ordinary things that are very important. This place keeps growing every season. In the spring, when I come back from a run, I close my eyes and all that I can see is green. Everything on the floor of the mountain seems to float in young bright greenery and then I see the brown of last year's leaves. They too were green last year and now they are on the ground and that is life. I see myself involved in this cycle when I run. There is always a moment that I am reminded that I am mortal. I have this body that I have to address all the time. My organism reminds me that I am human in every way, that I have a thinking mind, that I am a mother and that one day I will face mortality. Running is humbling, and beautiful and healthy and sane. As I run I am reminded that my life is for a limited moment. I sometimes realise that all the people that I see are sharing my life and living the same moment. I imagine the people in the cemetery, who shared this city together. At one time they could walk on this mountain

and greet each other and one day our lives will end as well and other people will take over. All of this reminds me that I have things to say. There are feelings in my heart and many experiences that I want to express. I cannot foresee what will happen, but while I am in the process of being, there are times that I simply must persist. Sometimes it is difficult but I will not stop until my body cannot go on. Drive has to do with my will. It takes over the person inside me who wants to quit or take the shorter route back. Something in me says no. The best is within me and so I pull and I refuse to quit.

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