

Taking Representation Seriously: Epistemological and Ontological Congruence in Hypertextual Research/Representation

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ABSTRACT: This study addresses ways in which an over-reliance on thinking limits our ability to effectively conduct research which honors and engages with the more-than-human, natural world. Drawing on feminist poststructuralism, an animist ontology which is seldom engaged in Western cultures but has existed worldwide for millennia, the tools of energy work (e.g. Yuen Method™ Chinese Energetics), and my own research journey, I address three questions: (1) how might a researcher intentionally and respectfully engage and acknowledge animate Earth and spirit as key sources of knowledge in the process of academic inquiry? (2) in the field of education, what are some of the discourses which have made the twinned acts of research/representation¹ in ongoing dialogue² with animate Earth and spirit difficult to engage and acknowledge? And, (3) acknowledging that research representation is itself a form of knowledge production, and all representational forms have limitations, what kinds of representation might be

¹ I speak of research/representation as a singular concept since how one can represent research determines, in part, how one can know, what one can know, and who can produce knowledge (Nolan, 2005, 2007). The twinning of research/representation also impacts what can be considered legitimate research. For instance, if the hypertext was not an available and permitted form of representation, it would be much more difficult to include insights from animate Earth in research. Without this opportunity, more-than-human persons risk continued re-constitution as Other (Haraway, 2004b; Russell, 2005), their insights remaining outside the legitimate, and legitimizing knowledge-making processes of the Academy.

² I speak of 'ongoing dialogue' as a way of representing the emergence of insight prompted by an energetic interchange that can occur in the presence of plants, rocks etc., as well as telepathic exchanges with non-human animals.

congruent with the epistemological and ontological premises of animism? At this point in history animist research may be particularly significant, given increasing demands for a decolonized academy together with frequent and intensifying admonitions that alternative ways of thinking and being are necessary to address increasingly pressing environmental concerns. Hypertextual representation of research, I argue, provides multiple spaces for both research and reading *through* an animist ontology.

This doctoral research is a deliberate response to what Berry & Tucker (2006) refer to as a “deep cultural pathology” that enables continuing devastation of the planet (p. 17). Poised at the cusp of what many call “the great turning” (e.g. Korten, 2006; Macy, 1998), it both calls for and provides beginning tools to support the ‘shifts in consciousness’ long called for by those working in the environmental field. It is a reconstructive text in that it both engages and talks about a different form of consciousness many (e.g. Stirling, 2007) claim is required to respond to the ongoing and persistent gap between what is known about anthropogenic environmental degradation, and what appears to be the limited effectiveness of educational and other responses to prompt significant or lasting change (Stevenson, 2007a, 2007b). This does not mean a rejection of Western scientific or rational conceptual knowing, but rather a creation of more opportunities for both/and texts: research texts which demand different forms of consciousness from both 'writer' and 'reader,' and texts that enable 'reading' and researching through an integrated mind, heart, body and spirit. Paraphrasing the oft-cited quotation from Einstein, we cannot solve the human-created environmental and social problems with the same kind of thinking, (and I would add, consciousness, and knowledge-making processes) which created them.

The dissertation emerged as an effect of my own de-colonizing journey as an academic working in the field of education where most conversations are based on assumptions of reality as material or discursively produced. It is also contextualized within continued and increasing calls for different ways of thinking (e.g. Stirling, 2007; Hart, 2005; Haraway, 2004a), a different paradigm (e.g. Capra, 1982), and different languages through which to conceptualize and engage with the more-than-human (Abram, 1996; Cole, 2002; Dunlop, 2002; Haraway, 2004b; Harvey, 2006a, 2006b). Yet to engage in such difference, as Harvey (2006b) suggests, may require “a reconfiguration of academic protocols” (p. 9). It may also involve a reconsideration of who we can be as individuals, and academics (see Dillard, 2006a, 2006b).

The research is based on the recognition that all research is a political act (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fine, Weis, Weesen & Wong, 2000; Vickers, 2002) and is accompanied by a cacophony of calls for decolonizing methodologies which push research (both in its methods and forms of representation) to engage ways of knowing beyond dominant Western norms (e.g. Dillard, 2006b; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Four Arrows, 2008).

Processes to access these different languages, as described in my methodology section of the dissertation, include 1. quieting the mind, 2. finding methods & practicing, 3. being open and attuned to communication with an animate Earth³, 4. finding ways to re-present this process so that both researcher and reader can make meaning *through* rather than just *about* an animist ontology, and; 5. recognizing that, like all research, this work is

³ This included using a variety of strategies such as Yuen Method™ Chinese Energetic Medicine to open one’s channels and clear stubborn, colonizing discourses that prevent effective use of the research methods.

contextual, and any possible meanings are dependent upon locally available discourses and individual interpretations.

I conceptualize this work as a process of decolonization⁴. While decolonization is often spoken of in reference to Aboriginal peoples, decolonization of the European Westernized mind is also a critical part of addressing issues of colonization of all peoples, and was a central part of this dissertation process. In fact, decolonization of the Western mind may be critical if we wish to open spaces to simultaneously invite in and re-present insights created in collaboration with the more-than-human world in research processes and 'texts'. Fawcett (2006) identifies the importance of this decolonization in environmental education and decision-making: “we need to decolonize our relations with other animals, and our ways of knowing their consciousness, in order to expand the spaces that they inhabit in our imaginations, in public environmental discourse, and decision-making” (n.p.).

What the dissertation is

My primary thesis is epistemological in nature and based on the ontological assumption that there is much more to the universe than material reality (Berry & Tucker, 2006; McMaster & Greene, 2003). I am suggesting that as long as conceptual reasoned thought

⁴ Living where I was between the fall of 2005 to the winter of 2007, the idea and practice of *researching through* what I have come to describe as ancient ways of knowing and *with* the more-than-human was very difficult, given the many storylines, or discourses, prevalent in my social, personal, and physical locations that suggested that legitimate knowledge was housed in texts already written, that legitimate academic work seldom included collages and artwork, and citing conversations with trees and other more-than-human persons would be an act of academic suicide (see site map: “academic openings”). To be able to speak and write explicitly of all of this has required a five-stage process as identified above and described more fully in my methodology section.

remains the dominant and privileged way of knowing, animate Earth,⁵ and spirit will continue to be either marginalized or excluded from explicit contributions to educational (and other) research. Consequently, more space needs to be provided for inclusion, and acknowledgement of, contributions of animate Earth (plants, animals, and in some instances, spirit⁶) to research/representation. Ancient ways of knowing such as those engaged throughout this research project, provide some helpful access points to knowing that occurs beyond thought. These ways are trans-rational (Astin, 2002) and supported by a reanimated perception (Bai, 2009). At this point in history animist research may be particularly significant, given the frequent and increasing admonition that alternative ways of thinking and being are necessary to address increasingly pressing environmental concerns.

As many including Haraway (2004b) suggest, engaging in everyday conversation across socially constructed boundaries between human, nature (and for some, spirit) may make a significant difference in our ability to live harmoniously and sustainably on a finite planet (see also, Abram, 1996; Berry, 1999; Buhner, 2006; Harner, 1988⁷; Harvey, 2006a,

⁵ Within the context of this dissertation, animate Earth refers to a more-than-human world which is imbued with conscious energy, or spirit, and can exhibit consciousness, and in some instances, independent agency.

⁶ When I refer to the word spirit in the context of this dissertation, I do not conceive of any particular religious affiliation, but rather refer specifically to sources of insight from beyond the human (see Laszlo, 2008). I deliberately use the word spirit because of what I feel is the importance of reclaiming the word in the context of the academy generally (see Astin, 2002, 2004), environmental education specifically (e.g. Beringer, 2006), and perhaps most importantly in the context of this particular project, research methodologies, methods (see Dillard, 2006a, 2006b; Ezzy, 2004; Hurtado, 2003; Shahjahan, 2005) and representation.

⁷ I recognize the tensions inherent in the work of Harner and his associates, given that he first learned shamanic journeying from Aboriginal Peoples and subsequently taught the techniques and processes to others. Yet I also value many of the ways of knowing he acknowledges, which are accessible to all Peoples.

2006b; Jensen, 2004; Montgomery, 2008; Plumwood, 2002; Smith, 2004). This does not mean a rejection of Western scientific or rational knowing, but rather a creation of more opportunities for both/and texts: research texts which demand different forms of consciousness from both ‘writer’ and ‘reader’, and that enable ‘reading’ and researching through an integrated mind, heart, body and spirit. Paraphrasing the oft-cited quotation from Einstein, perhaps we cannot solve the human-created environmental and social problems with the same kind of thinking, consciousness, and knowledge-making processes (i.e. epistemologies) that created them.

Theoretical and methodological framing

This research unfolded in the spaces between 1) feminist poststructural analysis (St. Pierre, 2000), which made visible the constant (re)inscription of assumptions that only humans can be involved in the production of research texts (Bell & Russell, 2000; Haraway, 2004b; Plumwood, 2002), 2) arts-based inquiry, which enabled access to understandings beyond conceptual reasoned consciousness (Barrett, 2007; Finley, 2005), 3) an animist ontology, which, as I engage it, is about relationality (Harvey, 2006a) and based on assumptions that that the universe is both “psychic-spiritual” *and* “physical-material” (Berry & Tucker, 2006, p. 57; see also Turner, 1993/2003), 4) discussions of issues of the importance of attending to issues of representation in research practice (e.g. Butler-Kisber, 2002; Nolan, 2005, 2007), and 5) emerging ontological assumptions articulated by quantum theory (e.g. Goswami, 1993; McMaster & Greene, 2003; Laszlo, 2008).

Poststructural theory has been particularly helpful in identifying discourses in the way of researching and writing through an animist ontology. Poststructural theory can be used to highlight ways in which certain meanings can be made in certain contexts, among specific communities of people, and using particular social and textual processes (Scott, 1988). It has helped the tracing of many ways in which power works through discourse to normalize particular knowledge and ways of being, enabling certain things to be said and not said, done or not done. As Britzman (1995) puts it, power produces “regimes of truth that regulate – in a given history – the thinkable, the recognizable, the limits, and the transgressions” (p. 156). Poststructural theory can also make visible how those “regimes of truth” work to maintain particular assumptions about what it means to be and perform academic in appropriate ways (i.e. write in traditional forms; use readily recognizable and peer-reviewed references; use accepted episto-ontological frames (Dillard, 2006b; Lather, 2006) and research methods, while at the same time finding ways to critique them). In other words, it has helped make visible ways in which power and discourse work together to place boundaries around who one can be.

To complete this research also required using Yuen Method™ Chinese Energetics to help identify and release many of the deeply inscribed discourses which made it difficult to fully engage in an animist ontology. Some of the most powerful of these include assumptions that the human intellect should be the privileged place of knowledge production, that being busy is both useful and necessary for productivity, and that academic work takes place behind a book or in front of a computer rather than in front of an artists’ easel, outside sitting in a park, or weeding the garden. Other inhibiting discourses include concerns about anthropomorphizing, essentialism and cultural

appropriation.⁸ Some of these were the effects of technologies of power, others an effect of self-policing (Foucault, 1988)⁹. For example, what will be the effect on my career as I include the following insight, referenced not to another human, but instead, to an interchange with Blue Spruce tree sap which courses through the tall tree in my front yard:

The interaction between humans and us is reciprocal. It is not only humans, but Earth too that needs to participate; while sometimes I offer insights spontaneously, I also do need to be asked. (Spruce tree sap, personal communication, July 8, 2008)¹⁰

In this context of uncertainty, it is perhaps not surprising that I struggle to acknowledge tree sap as a contributor to this paper, to move beyond the many powerful discourses that insist not only that this is an impossible occurrence, but also that it is much too dangerous to say.

Ultimately, while it is not clear *how* this communication happens, it is clear that there is something going on worth paying attention to (see Young & Goulet, 1994). Some would argue that the communication is entirely an effect of one's own internal psyche, while

⁸ For a more exhaustive list, see site map: "academic openings"

⁹ Anthropological records of human-tree conversations are not new. Yet while scholars do not hesitate to document and share accounts of others in conversation with trees (e.g. Pike, Haberman & Taylor, 2008), until more recently, academic conventions have seldom provided the security to allow them to directly acknowledge insights from trees in their own work (see, for example, Young & Goulet, 1994).

¹⁰ Note that I revised the original sentence for clarity and did a 'member check' to make sure spruce was ok with my revisions. The original was as follows: "it is not only humans but earth also that needs to participate. While sometimes it adds insights spontaneously, it does need to be asked". It may also be useful to note that I originally wrote my citation as spruce tree, but was prompted to change it to 'sap'.

others are insistent that other-than-human-persons, including plants, are intentional in their involvement in the meaning-making process (e.g. Buhner, 2006; Montgomery, 2008). Perhaps more than pinning down the mechanism of action at this point in time, the important points to consider are: 1) cultures around the world have reported significant insights from interaction with plants for hundreds of years, 2) assumptions within Western science (classical physics) which assume plants have neither agency nor intelligence have precluded the possibility of sufficient research in this area to establish more definitive explanations, 3) recent and evolving developments in quantum theory may provide new possibilities for research in this area, and 4) these insights might just enable us to live more sustainably on the planet (Harvey, 2006b).

In sum, researching through an animist ontology involves being in dialogue with the more-than-human world. It assumes that humans and non-humans (including non-human-persons¹¹ such as rocks, clouds, etc.) do not exist solely as separate, physical entities, but as energetic forms which are imbued intelligence, intentionality (Harvey, 2006a), and some claim, spirit (Taylor, 2009). In this ontological¹² context, dialogue is not limited to only those beings which Western science had defined as animate, but can also include

¹¹ Other-than-human persons (a phrase some animists now use) can be assumed to not only possess self-consciousness and intentionality, but also be able to "communicate intelligently and deliberately" (Harvey, 2006a, p. 187). Harvey's discussion of the notion of person is useful. "Persons," he says, "are those with whom other persons interact with varying degrees of reciprocity. Persons may be spoken with. Objects, by contrast, are usually spoken about. Persons are volitional, relational, cultural and social beings. They demonstrate intentionality and agency with varying degrees of autonomy and freedom..." (xvii). Some persons may look like objects to some, and in other instances, may have more human-like qualities...; neither material form nor spiritual or mental faculties are definitive" (p. xvii), nor critical elements to determine subjecthood (see also, Berry, 1988).

¹² Where Ontology "raises basic questions about the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 183).

rocks, clouds, thunderstorms, etc.. These other-than-human persons are often more than willing to communicate; perhaps the task is to learn the appropriate etiquette, protocols (Harvey, 2006b), and skills (see Montgomery, 2008; Smith, 2006) to engage with them. Writing and researching as an emerging animist, I have invited, and been joined by, many non-human persons as research partners in the creation of this paper, numerous other published academic texts (e.g. Barrett, 2006, 2007), and the multi-media hypertext that constitutes my doctoral dissertation (www.porosity.ca).

Communications with the other-than-human persons may be received and offered in a wide variety of forms (Buhner, 2004; Montgomery, 2008) and are often accessed through what I describe below as ancient ways of knowing. These ways of knowing have not only been highly valued and used in many cultures across the world for thousands of years (Walter & Fridman, 2004), but have also been central to the well-being and survival of past and present civilizations (Abram, 1996; Harner, 1988; Harvey & Wallis, 2007).

Techniques (or methods) include (but are far from limited to) various forms of meditation (e.g. Bai, 2001), dowsing (e.g. Conway, 2001; Graves, 1989), dreaming (e.g. Bernard, 2007; Castellano, 2002), telepathic communication (e.g. Sheldrake, 2003; Smith, 2004, 2006), shamanic journeying (e.g. Harner & Doore, 1987; Walter & Fridman, 2004), prayer, and vision quests. They can also include artistic practice (e.g. Bai, 2003; Lipsett, 2002, 2005) and simple, quiet attention. Messages received can be perceived as visual images, dreams, a felt sense, or a feeling. They may be experienced as a gut feeling, serendipity, a sense of being drawn to pick up a particular book, go a particular place, or as words that pop into one's head. Some messages are metaphoric and require

significant interpretation,¹³ while others appear to be more literal (Harvey, 2003; Harner & Doore, 1987; Smith, 2006; see also Bell, 2003). Sometimes these kinds of interactions are referred to as psychospiritual or as transpersonal psychological experiences (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Astin (2002) refers to at least some of these ways of knowing as trans-rational.

Insights from animate Earth can often (but not always) be distinguished from everyday thought in that they are frequently ideas one has never thought before, proposals that are clearly from outside of one's normal frame of reference, or even beyond one's wildest imagination (such as the idea that I should represent my dissertation in hypertext using short bits, rather a more linear prose comprising chapters). In sum, dialogue with animate Earth may be most easily engaged through re-animated perception (see Bai, 2009), where the constantly thinking conceptual mind is quiet and can access openings to wisdom and insight through different forms of consciousness.¹⁴ These forms of consciousness may not be far removed from a normal working/waking state, but are often not acknowledged given the cognitive imperialism demanded of academic discourse (Battiste, 1998). Since much of the communication between humans and animate Earth is based on assumption of an energetic/spiritual rather than a solely material reality, close physical proximity is often not necessary for communicative interaction to occur¹⁵ (Buhner, 2004; Smith, 2004).

¹³ Similar to all research data, these are always interpreted within cultural frames.

¹⁴ These alternate states of consciousness are not chemically induced but rather are the effect of the practices noted above.

¹⁵ In a somewhat similar way that a Reike practitioner is able to work with clients at a distance.

Although various descriptors and explanations exist, there is no definitive convergence on a single scientific explanation, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to seek convergence here. Suffice to say that explanations differ widely, and often identify the importance of engaging with energy and accessing a different kind of consciousness (Buhner, 2004; Harner, 1980, 1988; Montgomery, 2008), which may be achieved through many of the ancient ways of knowing described above. Explanations also point to electromagnetic or bioenergy fields, as well as chemical messengers, telepathy, morphic fields, the Akashic field and/or spirit (see Buhner, 2004; Sheldrake, 2003; Laszlo, 2008; Montgomery, 2008)¹⁶ as the source or conduit of the message. The most significant, consistent factor in accessing communication with animate Earth is to let one's cognitive thinking mind 'get out of the way' (e.g. Buhner, 2004, 2006; Montgomery, 2008; Smith, 2004, 2006).

The processes used to access these ways of knowing are sometimes difficult to speak of, given that in particular cultural contexts the training required, knowledge gained, and strategies used are considered sacred, or have, at various times in history, been outlawed, belittled or condemned.¹⁷ Finally, the social, cultural and academic positioning of the speaker can make the speaking of this knowledge problematic. One of the challenges encountered in the completion of this research has been that for a white Canadian woman working in the field of education, there are limited accepted cultural and/or academic

¹⁶ Quantum theory appears to have begun to bridge science and spirituality, but at this point in time, though evidence is suggestive, it is not conclusive.

¹⁷E.g. use of the drum in Scandinavia (Walter & Fridman, 2004), use of dowrsers in fourteenth-century Rome and sixteenth-century France (Conway, 2001), and ceremonies like the Sun Dance in Canada (Witt, 2006).

traditions to support direct research through dialogue with the consciousness of plants, animals and other more-than-human persons.

Religious studies scholar Graham Harvey (2006b) suggests there may be significant value in conversations between animists – those who speak with other-than-human persons – and academics. To engage these conversations, researchers just might need to "a reconfiguration of academic protocols" (p. 9).

While it might be assumed the ability and practice of receiving insights from animate Earth is the gift of a select few, or a practice that belongs to particular cultures, the skills are both teachable and learnable (e.g. Buhner, 2006; Harner, 1980; Montgomery, 2008; Smith, 2004, 2006); in fact, if careful attention is paid, one begins to notice that communication occurs more often than most people either are aware of, or perhaps, are willing, to

notice. However, in the absence of any normalized explanatory framework, “when confronted by these kinds of experiences, the Cartesian-based impulse is to explain them away” even though “it may be more constructive and life potentiating to realize we live in a world in which they can occur” (White, 1998, cited in Buhner, 2006). Perhaps it is necessary not only to acknowledge that such exchanges take place, but to recognize that these kinds of knowledge- and meaning-making processes just might be what is needed in the context of what some are referring to as “the great turning” toward a more sustainable earth community (see Berry & Tucker, 2006; Korten, 2006; Macy, 1998).

Unfortunately, however, dominant cultural assumptions embedded in discourses of much of Western science, psychology, economics and environmental resource management, reinscribe the notion that the Earth is neither animate nor possesses an active intelligence.

Western educational programs offer little access to opportunities to learn how to hear and interpret the many voices of animate Earth, and leave little place for an animistic world view and the kinds of interactions it deems possible. Children are discouraged from having extended conversations with plants and animals (ones in which plants, animals or other other-than-human-persons actually ‘talk’ back), and are carefully taught by Western science school curricula that such things as rocks are not animate. In Western culture, for an adult to tell someone that a tree gave them a song (Lyons, 2005), or that they were able to negotiate a deal with coyotes to keep them from killing ‘their’ chickens, could be grounds for being thought of (or thinking of oneself) as insane (Jensen, 2004; see also Plumwood, 2002). Layered on to the many discourses which make it both difficult and sometimes dangerous to speak explicitly of this knowing, engagement with, and more specifically, acknowledgment of, communication with animate Earth is difficult¹⁸. Little wonder it was not until last Christmas that, as I talked about my research, my mother spoke to me for the first time of having received messages from a loon, deer, and rocks when I was growing up. Yet in many cultures, these kinds of exchanges are both normal and expected (e.g. Harvey, 2006a; Young & Goulet, 1994). It is worth attending to the processes of colonization which have made these kinds of exchanges an impossibility (see Bai, 2009; O’Riley, 2003). Perhaps it is those of us who have been convinced that we cannot or should not communicate across socially constructed human-nature, or human-nature-spirit divides, who need to be decolonized.

¹⁸ See site map: “academic openings” for a more extensive list of discourses which make access to and acknowledgement of these ways of knowing more difficult.

All the above has significant implications for knowledge access and meaning-making in the context of academic research generally, and this research project in particular. This research deliberately engages re-animated perception and ancient ways of knowing in order to access knowledge that emerges when in dialogic interaction with animate Earth. To engage in collaborative knowledge production has required moving beyond discourses which suggest this is not possible (Plumwood, 2002). It has also required intensely multi- and trans-disciplinary work, as well as an ongoing dance across borders between more commonly accepted knowledge-making processes, and ancient ways of knowing. In the process of completing the research I have drawn on poststructuralism, feminist, queer, and anti-racist theory; on literature from anthropology, religious studies, and quantum theory, and on the practice of Yuen Method™ Chinese energetic medicine; on knowing that comes through music, poetry, prose, photography, and other forms of visual art; on meditative insights obtained through the body, heart, mind and spirit; on decolonizing research practices, arts-based inquiry, and discussions of the place of spirit(s) and indigenous epistemologies within the academy. The main argument is epistemological, and is based on the ontological assumption that there is much more to the universe than material reality.

Research foci and questions:

As I immersed in cross-border dialogue, the focus of my doctoral research shifted from an investigation into ways discourses of teaching, learning and nature worked to constrain and enable environmental educators¹⁹, to an exploration of ways in which research

¹⁹ see Barrett, 2005 for an account of earlier shifts in research questions.

methods, methodologies, and representations could both invite and support an animist ontology. More specifically, I explore research processes which support inclusion of insights from more-than-human persons in academic research and texts. To do this required attending to and disrupting many technologies of power and the self (Foucault, 1988), as well as the frequently held assumption that insights acquired are simply effects of one's own intellectual prowess, metaphoric fabrications of primitive cultures (Harvey & Wallis, 2007; Young & Goulet, 1994), or projections of one's own mind. I offer this research as one response to Russell's (2005) request for research representations to, "in their multivocality, create space for the 'voices' of 'nature' to be more audible" (p. 439).

In addition to the ongoing and persistent gap between knowledge and environmental action noted above, the final research focus was prompted by:

1. Continued calls for new ways of thinking, a shift in consciousness (Stirling, 2007), and a different language (see site map: "writing about") through which to conceptualize and engage with the more-than-human world. Ironically, these claims were most often expressed using the same modes of thinking, consciousness and language that the authors were claiming we needed to move beyond (for notable exceptions, see Cole, 2002; O'Riley & Cole, 2009);
2. The puzzling discourse-practice gap encountered by one of the teachers in the beginning part of the study, which led to the development of the final research questions (see Barrett, 2007, and site map: "study context" for a more detailed exploration of this gap);

3. My own struggles to find languages and forms with and through which to disrupt human/nature binaries and dominant discourses related to anthropocentrism;
4. A committee member's advice to write about "how difficult it was to talk about" my research methods (at the time of the conversation, I was beginning to use a pendulum dowser as a way to access insights beyond intellectual knowing);
5. Increasing calls for a voices of the more-than-human to be included in research, and;
6. Insights from dialogue with the more-than-human world (see Abram, 1996).

Eventually, the following new research questions emerged:

- How might a researcher intentionally and respectfully engage²⁰ with and acknowledge animate Earth and spirit as key sources of knowledge in the process of academic inquiry?
- In the field of education, what are some of the discourses which have made the

As I struggle to fine tune these questions, and the paragraph below, I hear basil calling me from the deck. She wants to tell me something. I choose to tune in, hear her message. She wants me to speak more directly of spirit. I reply: "not right now. 'They' are not ready for the word spirit to permeate this essay." Or is it that I am not ready to say it, I ponder to myself? She is wise, and blunt, in her reply: "Subjectivity is the production of a socially constructed culture. The slang that you use to euphemize the word spirit is pathetic." My inner voice, coming from a place beyond fear, kicks into the conversation: "Just say it is spirit and get on with the work". Basil replies: good. Carry on.

²⁰ The many courses offered in animal communication, plant spirit healing and communication, shamanic journeying, and even basic meditation, attest to the fact that these are skills not unique to particular cultures and individuals, but exist worldwide, and can be learned. Like any new skill, however, some people may have fewer blocks to this learning (see executive Summary), or have a stronger aptitude, and thus learn it more easily than others.

twinned acts of research/representation in ongoing dialogue with animate Earth and spirit difficult to engage and acknowledge?

- What kinds of representation might be congruent with the epistemological and ontological premises of animism?

The 'final' product is an effect of my re-animated perception (see Bai, 2009) which supported many ongoing interactions with more-than-human persons, together with much more familiar academic theorizing. As I continue to bring my research forward, I have received much support from Aboriginal colleagues, and begin to find other non-Aboriginal animists who also live and work beyond many of the discourses that maintain socially constructed human/nature boundaries.

From ontology to form:

So why is this dissertation in hypertext? Butler-Kisber (2002) suggests that form mediates understanding. It determines not only *what* but *how* we can know (Nolan, 2005, 2007). Form can also help mediate the ease with which other-than-human persons can contribute to human readings of a text, a move which just might support increased "understanding [of] animals, humans and the world we coinhabit" (Harvey, 2006b, p. 9). I did not set out to write this dissertation in a non-traditional format; rather, as Latta (2008) says about her own doctoral research, "the data demanded it" (p. 111). In my case, it was the research process, and underlying episto-ontological assumptions, that 'demanded' the non-linear, hypertextual format.

In its ten-year history, hypertextual representation of research has been particularly effective at disrupting the privileged positioning of the author and ‘authority’ (Morgan, 2000). It offers spaces for multiple voices and layered texts, and puts agency in readers’ hands, offering them more control (McKenzie & Timmerman, 2007; LeCourt & Barnes, 1999). Readers of hypertext are often presented with an infinite number of choices, enabling them to choreograph their own textual performance (Morgan, 2000). Such analyses of the value of hypertext can be extended to address the implications of an animist ontology and the significance of hypertext for supporting dialogic reading practices (i.e. reading with animate Earth). When filtered through an animist lens, choices made by a reader may not solely be attributed to the reader’s intellect, and so-called “random” choices (Protopsaltis, 2008) may not be so random after all. Statements such as Morgan’s (2000) claim that “on any occasion, the ordering [of links chosen] depends on the reader’s decision” (p. 131) can be revised to acknowledge the possibility of “received knowledge” from an animate Earth guiding choices that have heretofore been attributed to humans alone. Perhaps, as Harvey (2006b) suggests, the task is to determine who it is that is we are talking to, or in the case of a hypertextual reading, who might be guiding our choices? At any moment it might be one’s intellect, one’s higher or intuitive self, spirit, or one of many possible other-than-human persons which constitute animate Earth. With practice, the reader can choose to be more intentional about who they wish to ‘read’ with, or can also leave the selection of reading partners up to ‘chance’. The hypertext enables all these possibilities, and thus, exhibits ontological congruence with the method(ologies) that generated the dissertation content.

Time and again as I presented my work at conferences, after a brief introduction, I turned the hypertext over to the group to which I was presenting. Where should we go next, I would ask? What link are you drawn to? The serendipity that always ensued was striking: the text, image or music that emerged from the audience choices would inevitably be 'perfect'. It would respond to a question asked, provide a probe to further thought, or push me to be more open and explicit about my ontological positioning than I would have chosen had I stuck to a pre-prepared script. When I prepare to present, I listen for my starting place, foreground my intuitive knowing, set my intention for the 'performance', and let the rest take care of itself. No matter how much I may desire the security of a pre-prepared paper, when presenting, a pre-formulated text or power point seldom works for me anymore.

In a research project that has required traversing epistemological and ontological 'divides', the representational form has been a primary place to invite readers to experience congruency with the epistemology and ontology I engaged in the creation of the text. The hypertextual form, including the music, images, art and perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to 'randomly' choose links, encourages readers to engage in meaning-making processes beyond their discursive, linear rational minds in ways that enable reading *through* rather than just *about* reanimated perception. Thus while the use of technology to enable communication with animate Earth may seem ironic at first blush since technology often distances us from the natural world (Payne, 2003, 2005), the multimedia hypertextual form both enables and encourages engagement with animate Earth in its various manifestations. It also enables an element of mystery to be part of meaning-making processes. In sum, the form supports replication of many of the dialogic

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reading and research practices that were central to the methods and methodology engaged in the research project itself.²¹

It works like this. In the moment of decision-making, I encourage the reader to ask: What was it that caused me to make that decision? To choose this link over that? While acknowledging that readers of hypertext will and do make many of their decisions independently of contributions from animate Earth, when open to re-animated perception, at least some of these decisions may be attributable to previously unacknowledged reading partners. This opening is particularly significant in a culture that regularly assumes only humans have consciousness and agency, even though there are numerous accounts (e.g. Allen & Bekoff, 1999; Buhner, 2006; Jensen, 2004; Sheldrake, 1999; Tompkins & Bird, 1973) and cultures that suggest otherwise. While I have little control over whether or not the reader engages animate Earth in their reading of the hypertext, I suggest that Earth has its own agency too. It is the spaces-in-between, provided by links, images, song, and poetry that offer invitations for one to quiet the discursive mind enough to allow other ways of knowing, and ‘voices’, to guide one’s reading (see Bai, 2003, 2009). The challenge, as I see it, has been in creating spaces for listening and opportunities for readers to consider not only what the other voices may be conveying, but who it is they might be reading with.

The hypertextual representation of this work is responsive to (and, I hope) productive of, multiple ways of knowing (Morgan, 2000; McKenzie & Timmerman, 2007) and being in the world. Together, these rhetorical-technical moves work to encourage readers to attend

²¹ See site map: “learning to read dialogically”, “proposing a form” and “dialogic reading”.

to their own patterning as they move through the text, and in doing so, consider the possibility of an animist ontology and the notion that there may be multiple forces at play in our reading processes. This is not an attempt to reify particular methodologies and their episto-ontological premises, but rather to put them to the test of mobilization (Hart, 2005). After all, Western lives and lifestyles, lived out under a paradigm of scientific rationality, are at times not rational (Plumwood, 2002) and often not sustainable (Wackernagel & Rees, 1996).

My challenge, and goal, has been to provide spaces through the combination of content and form, for reading *through* rather than just about an animist ontology. It is to encourage readers to move through the text in their own wisdom journey, and in doing so, provide multiple openings to animism, which readers may then *deliberately* choose²², reject, or continue to explore. It is my hope that this ontological positioning just might offer access points to more "ethical imaginings" (Fawcett, 2000, p. 146) or "sustainable fictions" (Gough, 1991, p. 40) than those currently accessible in most Western, and academic contexts.

For those who are used to the "comfort text" (Lather, 2001, p. 205) of linear explanatory prose, the disruption in form can be quite unsettling; for others, whose life is guided as much by intuition or spirit, as by reason, it often provides a much more 'natural' and fluid 'read'²³. It certainly took me awhile to get used to it, and given the privileged place of

²² This choice is available within the constraints of dominant discourses – a notion some poststructuralists refer to as limited agency.

²³ This statement is based on feedback received from variety of readers thus far. Interestingly, it has most often women, rather than men, who have expressed comfort with the non-linear form.

rationality within Western cultures generally, I find myself continually being challenged to hold spaces for listening, rather than thinking, as I do my work. Yet it is in those spaces where one can let go of the discursive rational mind, that Earth's voices can more easily enter (Stuckey, Barrett, Hogan & Pete, 2009). And it is in those moments that the boundaries of Western thinking, and the dualisms that are so much a part of Western understandings, can become more porous.

Implications for research

To 'read' this work as it is intended to be read (i.e. dialogically), is to move beyond “categories of containment” (Lather, 2006, p. 47) vis-à-vis what constitutes a research text, and hopefully, to arrive at places where readers are pushed to not only reconsider the ontological basis of Western thinking, but also to “think about the very process of knowledge making itself” (Reason, 1996, p. 22; see also, Harvey, 2006b; Lather, 2000; Tuhawai Smith, 1999). This has significant implications for research methods, methodologies and forms of representation which can find spaces for and ways for other-than-human persons to be part of research texts, both in the ‘writing’ and the reading. As many writing in the field of environmental education suggest, a different language is needed in order to represent the many voices of 'nature'. Yet to simply ask for a different language using the dominant one (as I am doing here) is not enough (see Bai, 2003). To do this requires engaging in research methods, methodologies, and forms of representation that extend beyond current boundaries of

“Haven’t you ever happened to *read while looking up from your book?* (Barthes, 1986, p. 29).

what is normally used and valued in academic (and other) knowledge-making contexts, thus opening up more spaces for epistemological and ontological difference.

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