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Connections to the living body

**Module: Embodied Spirituality and the
Sacred Dimensions of Practice**

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Forgotten Land: A Sacred Search for the Wild Woman

The making of 'Forgotten Land', a movement installation, was a sacred search for the Wild Woman Archetype. According to Jungian psychoanalyst Estes (1992), this archetype personifies a woman's deepest nature; a place where she feels free to follow her own natural bodily rhythms and move in ways innate to her. Due to an overlay of cultural abuses and expectations which have frozen my flesh, silenced my voice and in many ways severed me from my wild-self, there was need of extensive reclamation. This process paper highlights significant times within the movement installation creation from which out of darkness, a light was shone, and the 'Wild Woman' began to find form. One movement installation witness described this as *'she emerges out of the roots...how long has she been... how far has she been... under the cover of darkness...the secret is out'*.

In seeking theoretical framework for the 'Wild Woman' resurrection, I am naturally drawn to Jungian analyst Marion Woodman. Woodman (1982) addresses how cultural patriarchal hegemony grossly overemphasises masculine principles such as a drive for perfection and a hunger for power, at the expense of the feminine principles such as a sense of wholeness and being grounded. Estes (1992) offers an illuminating example of how adhering to the dominant masculine sense of eternal strength can bring about an unwarranted sense of failure when the body's cry for rest is acknowledged. However, when perceived through feminine principles tiring and rest are a vital and necessary phase in nature's life-death-life creation cycle.

Woodman (1982) offers a thinking on the presence of the Goddess that is deeply grounded in the flesh of the body through sensation, feeling, emotion, intuition and dream with the unconscious viewed as a creative inner dynamic or process. Hayes (2007), further suggests that movement, in addition to emotion, image and thought, is energetically woven together as

a relational system of Body-Mind-Spirit. This movement installation creation was experienced as a journey firmly rooted in the senate body. It took me out of the realm of everyday activities into sacred 'forgotten land', where within the psyche, emergent imagination became a life-affirming resource (Tufnell 2000).

Levine (1992) cites Post-Jungian James Hillman's view on imagination in the light of Jung's work. Hillman postulates that if the psyche is as Jung suggests an image, then this imaginal place resides in the world, rather than outside of it in the individual's private place. In the words of Hillman, I found my body as 'concrete flesh *was* a magnificent citadel of metaphors' (1975: 174). However, these images I felt did not belong to me personally, but rather dwelt within the collective unconscious (Jung 1961) whereby individuals have access to the experience of all previous life forms that are inherent in our genetic coding and reflected in the myths of the world. For example, one witness of the movement installation wrote '*soft flesh nuzzling...a dragon rising*' which echoes my imaginal encounters with a bear and a dragon. Moreover, these embodied images had a life of their own and it was as though 'the soul of the thing corresponds or coalesces with ours' (Hillman 2007: 101-102).

The transpersonal dance practice of Authentic Movement, Hayes (2013) suggests provides a container for the psyche's process of unfolding. Additionally, it is valued by Stromstead (2001) because it connects women with their innate instinctual wisdom and enables them to re-inhabit themselves. Therefore, without its customary ritual and ceremony authentic movement, not capitalised to distinguish it from the specific discipline of Authentic Movement, became central Somatic Movement Education (SME) practice to the movement installation creative process. My focus was on listening and responding to inner impulses which organically arose in my body and took me into movement (Chodorow 1991).

Witnessing took place twice, once at the beginning of the creative process and in the final sharing.

The seed of my movement installation found root in a luminous landscape creation made from distorted driftwood draped in dusky-blue material folds. Inhabiting this fertile land were a myriad of wild animals, amid which lay my ragdoll-self, yielded to the soils of the earth. Deeply connected to the animal and plant life, I felt I could lean against the cheek of the Goddess (Eller 1993; Woodman 1982). Like Indra's Net (Malhorta 2014), found in Mahayana Buddhist tradition, I was part of a universe conceived as an infinite net woven of interlocking threads. In response to this landscape I moved with audible breath, twisted torso and bodily suspensions. In contrast, my witness who moved next, embraced a light and humorous movement quality which brought about a sense of alchemy within me. When I returned to the landscape, my hands moved the yellow frog in a leap of faith onto an awaiting branch, while tropical fish darted in new directions. Then, my ragdoll-self, as acrobat, turned somersault and landed hanging from the central piece of driftwood (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: 'Landscape'

Blackmer recognises acrobats as animus figures indicating that 'a content of the unconscious is on the brink of becoming conscious' (1989: 6). My somersault appeared to have set in motion a significant change within me. In the spirit of creative discipline, I was keeping the field of activity open and responsive to whatever wanted to emerge (McNiff 1998). Suddenly,

my guardian horse from its hidden cave in the landscape, morphed into my body. My journal recalls that

Shakely my legs started to mould their shape to the muscular flow of its flank.

Ears twitching, nostrils flaring and veins popping,

there was a mighty push of hooves into the ground.

We flew soaring skyward until we landed with a thud on the earth.

Again! Again! my body urged. Hurray! Hurray! A clear round, I cried.

Raised from the unconscious was an imaginary childhood game of show-jumping which evoked in me the emotional expression of sheer delight. Jung (1976) claims that to truly know oneself, one requires the guidance of an animal, while Halprin (2000) invites the presence of *animal allies*. The appearance of this elegant horse, in all its power and regency, became the first of five significant creatures to accompany me on my journey. Of importance was the home of this horse, which was found within the feminine essence of a deep, damp, dark cave. It was as though a container was required for the emergence of this horse as an embodied image. In a similar manner, during the following day's workshop, a cave became home to my next *animal ally*. My journal describes that

my tender hands cradled the winged-bones of ribcage.

My ear was placed to my partner's four-chambered heart. I wanted to nuzzle.

Then swoop I descended into the ground of a great ancestral cave.

Sounds arose like drops of water dripping from stalactites.

*Each sound-drop lit a candle until the blackness
was ablaze with light flickering flames of brilliant white.*

With the ending of this activity, a thread to deeper knowing, my 'Wild Woman', was momentarily broken. Familiar with cultural calls drawing me away from myself and an inner witness deft at sewing together broken threads, I needed to wait until the workshop's guided visualisation to re-enter the cave. Here I was reminded of Eckhart's words 'when the soul wishes to experience something, she throws out an image in front of her and steps into it' (cited in Cashford 2013: 43). I had stepped back into the cave of burning white lights and became party to the following encounter.

*Grizzly bear, I found you in the cave-lit chamber of lungs.
You invited no fear, no desire in me to run away.
I felt you encouraging me to experience myself differently.
You allowed me to nuzzle up into your thick soothing fur,
burying my tensions and dropping into our sensuous senate bodies.
I was awoken to the surrounding textures
and the layered vibrations entwined in our breathing-selves.
You carried me in your powerful arms. I felt protected.
You reminded me that hibernation is a natural part of existence.
I felt the need to find a place of retreat in my life
and take a season to rock on my inner reserves.*

With my bear image encounter I could as Hillman suggests ‘look at it, listen to its words and restate its phrases so that I might hear the metaphorical implication of the image’ (2007: 38). There were words regarding my need for rest. Although during the process I could not take a whole season in hibernation like a bear, I could honour as previously discussed, the feminine principle towards tire and rest and find valuable periods of deep relaxation. For this I was drawn to experiencing my cerebral spinal fluid, which Hartley (1995) describes as almost imperceptibly slow.

Moreover, the sensual, tactile relationship I had with the bear was an experience absent from my early life. Abandoned at birth, I failed to receive the mother-child bonding necessary to ground me in my own physical body (Blackmer 1989; Montagu 1986; Woodman 1982). As I write these words my heart softens and folds into my *rib-cave*. My arms cradle my chest and tears of loss create streams down my face and I long for the tender moments in the bear- hair. During the reflective phase of the workshop, I found myself drawing from bodily micro-movements and vibrations which moved through my hands in strokes of browns, yellows and whites. It appeared as bear-hair so textured and life-like that I could feel its pulsations (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: ‘Bear Hair’ Drawing

The making of the initial landscape, moving the embodied image of show-jumping, the cave container with the bear encounter and reflective drawing heralded week one of a six-week creative process. During week two I took my bear-hair drawing into the studio as movement stimulus which my journal documents below.

Crouched to the studio floor,

I gently pushed the crown of my head into the wooded earth.

A spiralling current ran down through my spine until whole-bodied I began to nuzzle myself into what was now the hairy underbelly of my bear companion.

I smiled, and a glow of pleasure rippled through blood vessels of reds and blues.

Suddenly I froze. I saw myself standing icily still.

A sharp comb was scratching my inflamed scalp.

Snow-white psoriasis flakes fell slowly to the newspaper ground.

A crimson blood-oozing sore remained.

I shuddered.

Then as quickly as it emerged my memory of abuse melted and once again, I was

buried, in the nurturing, heart-beating mass of belly-hair.

Adler identifies that '[s]ometimes a specific gateway into the numinous is experienced within the exact same movement pattern that held the significant childhood trauma' (1992: 91).

Amid the pleasure of the bear-hair, I was transported to a time in my childhood when I was frozen with fear. Levine (1997) informs that we can readdress the frozen state in ourselves by

echoing the fluid adaptation of wild animals when they shake out in order to pass the immobility response. The drawing of the bear-hair through bodily shakes and vibrations felt like a method of melting of the iciness which lay within me. Something new was being born. I wanted waves of black paper, the colour of descent and the fertility of mud (Estes 1992) alight with glittery colours. Throughout weeks three to five, I had painting sessions where paper and paint flowed into written responses (see Figure 3 and journal extract).



Figure 3: 'Cosmic Vibrations' Painting

Empty river of paper black-hole vortex within the universe.

My moving molecules resonated with the constellations

Wild joy was surging through my arteries

exploding from out of the blackness

into a billion Katherine Wheels

Running parallel to this artwork and writing were authentic movement sessions. These sessions became a playground of emergent developmental movement, in which ‘a kaleidoscope of all species’ (Conrad 2007: 3) both past and present, were moving through me. Then deep within a pine forest, appeared my third *animal ally*. My body tightened, waves of aggression coursed through my flesh. My ilium bones fanned out flaying my legs in rotational appendages. I became a predatory T-Rex on the hunt. Years of childhood images manifested in an upright embodiment of this bipedal carnivore (see Figure 4). However, more accurate presentation today finds the posture of this creature as parallel to the ground and in respect I explored moving in the horizontal plane.



Figure 4: ‘Dino Legs’

Mayor (2000) reveals that ancient discoveries of dinosaur fossils have inspired some stories of dragons. In week four, during a studio session, I was present to my fourth *animal ally*. My skeletal muscles started to pull inwards, to tighten with feelings of intense frustration. I was squatting, straining. I had become a small dragon desperately trying to find my belly-fire. For Hayes (2007) an image can compel the body to produce it. Here I was embodying a dragon who had a story to tell so I listened and wrote of a baby dragon who had material comforts in abundance but felt lost and alone in her luxurious jewel-encrusted chamber. When the night of her naming ceremony arrived

the small dragon opened her quivering jaws releasing a soft, stream of breath.

With at first frustration and then desperation

she tried to find her belly-fire to meet her dragon-life expectations.

They were not forthcoming. The mountain night was left in darkness and silence.

Suddenly, there was a flutter. There followed strong flapping sounds.

The fireless and nameless dragon flew away never to return.

Similarly, to this dragon, I felt my own pangs to run away and hide when expression eludes me. I was reminded of childhood abuses when frozen in fear, I failed to cry out '*stop, this is wrong*'. Fortunately, during week five, in a studio session there was a metamorphosis. With a flutter and flutter, a ripple and rustle through the bony-scape of scapulae, humerus, ulnar, radius and carpals, bronze-orange feathers began to sprout. There was a strong impulse to spread my arm-wings in continuous reach to the sun. I felt life tingling in me. I was a proud joyous phoenix rising from the ashes. I took reflective time to draw my embodied image (see Figure 5).

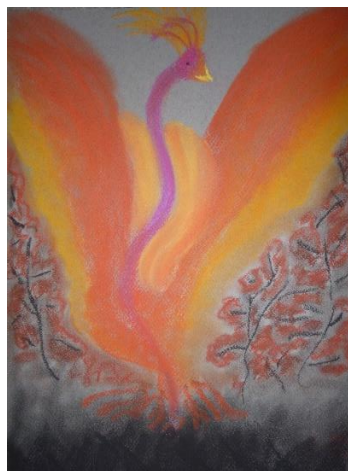


Figure 5: 'Rising Phoenix' Drawing

The phoenix as metaphor spoke of the resurrection of my 'Wild Woman'. I was discovering valuable rest phases, while my own 'animal body' (Abram 2009), a 'forgotten land' of movement below socialisation was finding expression. The movement for the installation started low to the ground. Traces of each *animal ally* found resonance within my bodily tissues until my creature-self extended and grew upward to find its wings. One witness to the final movement installation sharing offered the words '*rose like a phoenix*'.

The container for my movement was created from the six rolls of paintings created in weeks 3-5. As 'one movement, leads to another' (McNiff 1998: 13)) in week 6, an outer manifestation of my psyche-cave dwelling emerged. It framed a window looking out upon a wooded site which had resonance within the creation of the initial landscape and gave motif to the on-going connection between my inner and outer worlds. Around this dwelling, witnesses responding from 'their own internal images, memories, sensations and impulses' (Smith 2007: 197) offered an outer holding container. However, with one mother who abandoned me and another who abused me, uncomfortable emotions arose, as I felt thirty eyes upon me. My journal recalls

heart-beat booms vibrated my body.

My sympathetic nervous system registered hyper-alter,

with breathing noisily fast.

Soft skin on the left-side of my face rubbed against navy-wine carpet piles.

As I yielded to the earth, my fears were melting.

I embraced claw- hands, suspended twists and bird-like balances;

rising was an offering of my creature-self (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: 'Creature-self'

The creative process of the 'Forgotten Land' movement installation offers a significant three-fold resource for my (SME) community work. Firstly, in the reclamation of the 'Wild Woman' I was open to personal loss, rootlessness and pain which Hayes (2013) suggests is supportive in meeting clients who may bring with them their own broken lives. Secondly, through embodied visualization, I experienced metamorphosis and transformation which in the words of one final sharing witness became *'ice crystals thaw...black moist loam...shell breaking...seed stirring...toward light'*. Such personal participation provides a foundation for journeying with clients in discovery of their own insights and transformations. Thirdly, having honoured the Wild Woman Archetype within myself, I feel able to accompany clients in accessing their 'forgotten land' of natural bodily rhythms and innate movement.

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