

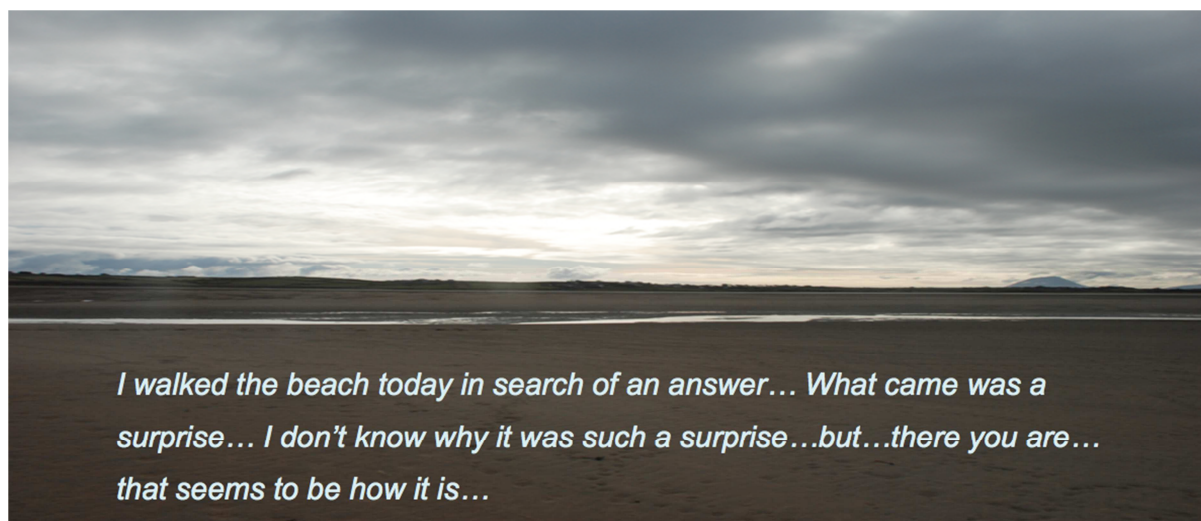
Sitting/Walking/Practice: Reflections on a Woman's creative process

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Abstract:

This article is a “musing on the processes of practice-as research in performance and screen when ‘self’ is the source of creative inspiration” and is a poetic attempt to give form, in word and image, to creative process. The writing is informed by and emerges out of experiences of Authentic Movement, Focusing, Jungian dreamwork, walking and photography. The aim is to articulate something of my creative processes when engaged in an explicitly subjective practice-led research process. This article embraces the imaginal and the somatic in an attempt to bring together symbolic material generated from a uniquely woman's experience.

1 The world of the body, of making and of creativity; of images, words and movement is a territory within which I inhabit and embody my research imperative. These pages comprise a sort of musing on the processes of practice-as research in performance and screen when "self" is the source of creative inspiration. In other words, this musing is a sort personification of the imaginal, hewn into word and image form, that might allow ego to know it too is merely a personification of personhood.



2 Maybe I thought there would a way in which the questions would find the air they needed and answers would arrive on the wing of a bird hovering on the current of the wind. New questions arrived, or should I say, both a new and an old part of me arrived. I am in a place that is both real and not real. Here surrounded by present, past and future. Here mythologies and histories, both mine and others', collide and coalesce. In this place I become present and alive to 'the profound and archetypal need for experiences of ecstasy and the transformative fullness of emotion and vision such experiences may produce' (Brinton Perera

18). I walk, back to the wind, and see the sand being forced toward the sea forming tunnels just above the ground converging and colliding as they approach the sea edge. I am part of the wind tunnels hurtling toward the sea, too small to make much difference, too insignificant to fight against the mighty wind. Then I sit for a long time looking and listening, then looking and listening melt into seeing and hearing. Maybe this is what Sara Maitland was searching for in *On Silence*. In her documenting of a personal journey and treatise on silence Maitland suggests there are two kinds of searching for silence, one shores up the ego boundaries and the other is a non-boundaried encounter that invites the Other. She continues

I have come...to use the terms 'permeable' and 'boundaried' selves, or identities, to sum up the two positions [...]In the West, we tend to see 'normal', healthy people as firmly, though not excessively, boundaried. Permeable selves...tend to be less rationalist and less atomised...a modern narrative will say that anyone who lets the (divine or delusional) Other too far in, who weakens their own boundaries, or has them weakened, is 'mad'...[w]hile in a religious or spiritual narrative will tend to sense that those who will not consent to be used by the forces of the Other are the mad ones. (252-3)

3 Perhaps the search for silence, as described by Maitland, articulates the human desire for experiences beyond our ego selves. Brinton Perera (2001) would have it that our 'symptoms can be read as symbolic expressions of our misaligned relations to archetypal structures' (19). And if that is so then even the search for silence, or I might call it a futile search for expansion, speaks to a search for realignment to something not yet known. Is this my artistic imperative? Is this what I am doing here? This *not yet known-ness*, is what Jung would have called the archetypal structures.

In this deeper stratum we also find the *a priori*, inborn forms of 'intuition', namely the archetypes of perception and apprehension, which are the necessary *a priori* determinants of all psychic processes...The instincts and the archetypes together form the 'collective unconscious'...Instinct is an essentially collective, i.e., universal and regularly occurring phenomenon which has nothing to do with individuality. (Vol.8, 133-4)

4 *Start again in another place...*My walking could be her walking or your walking or their walking. It seems to be a search for expansion, for something beyond ego boundaries that I long to experience and the words and image perhaps just a vague and inconsequential attempt to hold the experience, like an alchemical vessel. Eventually this walking leads to thinking of a sort I did not previously have access to and I find all the questions are different and realising this, I deduce that the answers might also be different, if there were answers in this never ending scheme of altering questions.

When I begin the return journey with the wind against me, the sense of being inconsequential is still present. It is almost impossible to walk, there is no space in me for thinking, only the present moment kind of thinking that knows to put one foot in front of the other whilst keeping an eye on the horizon. But that kind of being in the present moment has its own kind of forwarding impulse.



5 *Wait, look again. Who is this that has arrived?* Brinton Perera suggests that ‘whenever there is a sense of a living spirit, ecstatic relationship to it may be expressed and contained in rituals’ (387). Perhaps this ritualistic kind of walking and sitting, contemplating, taking photographs that capture my moving experience, attempting to be present to the visceral experience of what I can know in the here and now, invokes that which I do not know, invokes the archetypal realm. Now, here in this moment, a woman arrives, she is my own woman but also the Woman from before and beyond. The one from before is also the one present and future. I made you in 1999, performed you for several years and yet here you are again. Realising she is present allows me to come to know that there is much still to be done. The words from the performance piece *The Woman* (1999) are much the same, ‘one foot stuck, head looking up wondering how long she has been standing, waiting’, but also radically different. That old haggard woman screaming her insanities and scraping the crap from beneath her nails still speaks to me from within and without. I don’t scream or dance

much anymore. Well, not like that. Now it is an internal dance, a dance with an inner and unknown landscape that captures my attention.

6 *Pause, notice...* Now the body is different - less able, less willing, less, just less. And there is something there that wasn't there before, perhaps it is the green wellies and purple raincoat, perhaps it is the landscape. Anyway, she feels different to me. The processes of invocation are different now. No longer dancing in the studio,



now walking in this place where Neolithic tombs and artefacts litter the landscape. Can you see me?

7 *When you sit and just look it is as though seeing is for the first time. The tiniest of moves don't escape me now. I see sudden shifts in hue and intensity, I feel the alterations in my bones. Wait, what about recycling...there is a lot that is still unused. I don't want to waste.*



8 *Another beginning...* It seems such a long distance to travel, such a very long way. Or is it that I have been so far away from myself that travel in the landscape can only act as a personification for my own sense of distance from myself. It is as if I am constantly losing myself. I am reminded of Oliver Sachs (1985) and wonder if this is some version of his abnormalities. Am I somehow losing parts of myself like I might lose a favourite coat or a beloved scarf? It has not come to mistaking my wife for a handstand but who is here when the cereal can no longer be found in its usual place but has somehow taken up residence in the tumble dryer? Or who is it that drives for an hour and then finds herself somewhere unintended and yet it is I who sit in the driving seat? What would Damasio say about this? How is it that I have lost all connection to my 'somatic markers' in this moment? How could I allow this bodily inattention, this unminded body?

9 Another part of me seems to be saying that I need to keep tabs on my self – like scattering a leg here and an arm here, finding stomach lining in the branches of a tree and a liver buried in the back garden. Where will it end? Soon there will be no visceral sign of my self. Then what will happen? I can hear my daughter 'mum, mum...mum, where are you? Mum...?' And she has a point, it is such a good question...where am I when all these body parts begin to disappear, when the internal furniture is being replaced without ego permission?

*It was the way of the 60s, we all gave our bodies away
for something that we hoped might be love.*

*The body's resistance
in defense of integrity.*

Dissociation

*a sanctuary,
sometimes so vivid as if
the past were still present.*

*Mannequin dolls sell sex, for love
political resistance is little
as girls become mothers all too soon.*

*And the body remains
resistant of false authority.*

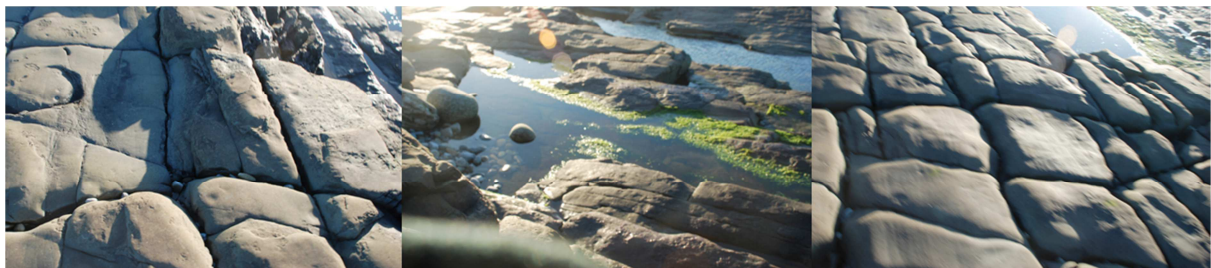
Dissociation

*a sanitarium,
sometimes so vivid as if
the present were still past.*

(Bacon, 2007)

10 Yes, I am still elsewhere, present in the past, and lost in the present. This isn't a place that can be explained or described. Not like the place I am now. This I can describe, and this place is a place where I seem to be able to find all my parts, this is a place where the creative is at my fingertips. It is as if all my internal furniture and all my bodily awareness comes flying back into me through some unconsciously manifest magnetic field that calls them forth. *But only in this place...*

11 *That place is different...* That place is a place where I am in constant motion, hardly sitting, hardly allowing my mind to rest in any one place for longer than a few moments. And when it is at fever pitch, as it was just the day before yesterday, it seems impossible to hold still even for a few seconds, impossible to allow my mind to settle anywhere. Like a hummingbird that keeps its wings constantly moving up and down so that it looks imperceptibly like stillness, like hovering in front of a flower in search of nectar. Not so...not me...no hovering imperceptibly for me...more like a rabbit in the headlights or Bambi waiting for the hunter to shoot. *Stop...*



12 *Begin again in another place...* Today I walked and as I walked I looked at the patterns in the rock, in the textures, the colours. Somehow it is possible for hours to pass and I am absorbed but if you were to ask me what I had done the stories I would tell you might sound foolish. I walked, I sat, I looked, saw, heard, felt, smelled, tasted. I was alive. There was no flapping of wings, staring at headlights or waiting for a hunter. Today there was only the woman that I am and the Woman.

13 If James Hillman is right, and I think he is, then it is not the job of ego to confront images of our inner world in order to train the personality or the job of the therapist to provide the discipline of a structure, method or process that allows the individual to journey into the unknown and bring up its riches and henceforth lead a more meaningful life. What that seems to do is to prevent the soul's freedom to imagine and our imagination is one of the foundations that makes us human. It is the bedrock of art, science and culture.

14 There are many methods for exploring our inner world and I guess mine is creating images, sitting, contemplative walking and Authentic Movement; but the aim, therapeutically rather than artistically speaking, of these methods would appear to be "less the realization of the images...than it is the realization of the personality performing the exercise, i.e., the ego" (Hillman 39). Hillman believes that the ultimate therapeutic aim is to depotentiate the figures and a "strengthening of the feeling-ego" (38). He goes on to say that "we sin against the imagination whenever we ask an image for its meaning, requiring that images be translated into concepts" (39). But this sounds to me like an artistic aim too. So my job is not a program of work with the internal images where ego trawls for meaning but more an attitude of giving over to the images and cultivating them for their own sake. Like Gendlin's 'noticing' (1978) that can give rise to something that we previously had no language to articulate. With this change in attitude we bring the imaginal perspective to all we see and so everything is transformed into images of significance and with that view we see ourselves differently and somehow we must overcome our own egocentricity. The ego will fight for wholes and unities and "will not want to admit that the imaginal realm and all its persons are actual presences and true powers" (Hillman 41). And so I guess I am trying to explore what happens when I bring this imaginal perspective into the world and try to 'allow' the images and cultivate them for their own sake. For me this is a process of therapeutic, artistic and spiritual significance. Here is a space and place where I can be present with the ebbs and flows, with the processes of my creative spirit, to a giving over to my embodied felt and imaged experience. *Stop again...*

15 *Another beginning...* Eventually I am running toward the sea, the sky opens out into the sea and my vision expands with each pace. Time, I hear ego saying, there isn't enough of it...then something more arrives and the 'problem' of my life is expanded and scattered about the landscape as imagination takes hold...who is here?



16 Seeing who is here is sometimes a more difficult thing to do that could possibly be imagined. If Hillman is right then the psychological territory is like an artistic process, it isn't a meditation but a working relationship. So what am I doing on this contemplative walk, in this sitting practice, in these poetics and images? Perhaps a word I am searching for is *process*, an artistic process imaged in both inner and outer realities. It is not the product created but the process of creation that enlivens. 'Queen Maeve's portrait is the land and its features... as well as the seasonal and transformative processes of nature' (Brinton Perera 195). Immerse myself in the imaginal and to do that I must allow imagination, welcome, accept and cultivate it but not necessarily *attempt* shape and form, simply *notice* and be *present*. The Woman that is Queen Maeve is present in the landscape, in the air, in my Woman. Perhaps the images and films I make are both a manifestation of my inner landscape and the landscape itself? Perhaps they are a personification of Queen Maeve or of personhood. Like Brinton Perera, I too want to 'relate to the physical/spiritual geography and its processes (and)...perceive both sensately through experience and intuitively through visions' (195) in order to support life in all its manifestations.

*Long held positions give way
to vague, mindless lapses as sky blue
begins to haze and meld.
Sea floating upward into sky*

*opening outward in linear progression
as if the union of sea and sky suddenly
split open - expansion Earth.*
(Bacon, 2008)

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