



AN INSPIRITED ARTISTIC CO-INQUIRY WITH RAW ENERGY

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Abstract: This is the first article of an in-process, creation-centred research project exploring raw energy through the authors' distinctive and complementary inquiry practices of creation-centred research (St. Georges, 2020, in press) and spontaneous creation-making (Bickel, 2020; Bickel & Fisher, 1993). Raw energy, as conceived, is

experienced as spirit-in-motion in a process of manifestation—of making the invisible visible—and is rooted in an intra)inter-relational aesthetic. This creation-centred inquiry is a relational and animated approach to creating, inquiry, learning, unlearning, and teaching. It resists the colonial lens by virtue of exploring inner subjective space, relinquishing colloquial aesthetic constraints, and enveloping a sacred space in which to restore, heal, and decolonize the imagination. Led by breath)spirit, touch, intuition, experiential and conversational exchanges, and compassionate relationships, creative life force is activated to forge new ways of knowing—moving toward the extraordinary. This article engages with theoretical and explanatory text, visual and poetic storying, and interactive breath that invites the reader into this inquiring journey.

Keywords: creation-centred research; spontaneous creation-making; inter)intra relational aesthetic; storying; métissage; visual art; poetry; decolonizing

Spirit and mind, soul and body, are one, and together they perceive a reality greater than the vision experienced in the ordinary world.

—Gloria Anzaldúa 2015, p. 24

We consider raw energy to be a source of creative beingness. In our artistic inquiry practices, we experience raw energy as spirit-in-motion, in a process of manifestation—of making the invisible visible—an embodiment of spirit that operates through the “inner-net,” a cosmic field of interconnectivity (Mercurieff, n.d., n.p.). We understand this cosmic energy field as a conduit for our ancestral connections, which include more-than-humans and diverse ecologies. We situate ourselves as spiritual-feminists-artist-scholars who identify respectively as Métis, French, English, and a descendant of German immigrants. We live with gratitude on Turtle Island (known as Canada) having been born, raised, and shaped by its diverse and distinct socio-political environments and geographies.

Working with raw energy is a conscious act of re)connecting¹ with our creative lifeforce, which assists us to “move into a sensual spirituality, returning us to embodied ecstatic experiences and ultimately come to our senses” (Bickel, 2020, p. 3). It is akin to what Black feminist poet Audre Lorde (1984) understands as the spirituality of eroticism, which she recognizes as “a lifeforce ... [of the feminine]; of creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our living, our work, our lives” (p. 55). Raw energy guides us to this reclamation. “[I]n a culture of domination that recognizes the production of a pervasive feeling of lack, both material and spiritual” (hooks, 1995, p.124), working with raw energy returns us to our inspired creative beingness. Raw energy refuses to be confined or defined by a dominate-capitalist-product focused aesthetic, thus it is a decolonizing aesthetic rooted in ethical relationships, resistance, resurgence, and renewal.

Our mutual desire to inquire with raw energy called us to collaborate—to move toward the extraordinary through our imaginative capacities. In this article we present the initial phase of our inspired artistic co-inquiry, forefronting a collection of visual and poetic storying vignettes. This creative *exhalation* gives rise to transformation as we relinquish ourselves from colloquial aesthetic constraints, and envelop a sacred space² in which restoration, healing, and a decolonizing of the imagination ensues. Led by breath)spirit³, touch, intuition, experiential and conversational exchanges, and a compassionate relationship, our creative lifeforces are activated and the ordinary is transformed. Mestizo poet Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) teaches us:

the universe is conscious and the spirit and soul communicate by sending subtle signals to those who pay attention to our surroundings, to animals, to natural forces, and to other people. We receive information from ancestors inhabiting other worlds. We assess that information and learn how to trust that knowing (p. 24).

As we learn to trust this knowing, that crosses human and more-than-human realms, we centre raw energy in our distinctive and complementary inquiry practices of creation-centred research (St. Georges, 2020, in press) and spontaneous creation-making (Bickel, 2020; Bickel & Fisher, 1993). The intention of spontaneous creation-making is to enter a nonjudgmental free-flowing exploration of play with materials and processes. Steeped in a relational ontology, it is about openings rather than closings, and does not focus on teaching or learning technical skills, content or interpretation. It invites openings to arational and aperspectival ways of knowing and being, releasing the creator from reliance on any one perspective or way of knowing. Spontaneous creation-making is a co-emergent relationship that entwines the creator, witness, and the creation itself to initiate trust, interconnectivity, and individual and collective understandings.

Likewise, creation-centred research relies on creative-experiential-engagement and interaction. Uniquely, it is rooted in *métissage* (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009) and storying (Archibald, 2009; Archibald et al., 2019). Theoretically, it draws on insights from Indigenous scholars (e.g., Ermine, 1996; Meyer, 2013) who tell us Elders sought knowledge about the outer world through their subjective inward journeys, and that the connections made between inner and outer realms of experience is a way to expand knowledge relationally. This journey is a vital source of knowledge about how we come to know the world.

Creation-centred research explores the inward and outward journey through the mystery of creative insight, somatic knowledge, intuition, memory, dreams, and ancestral connections. It is a fluid method that enables us to explore these inscapes and offers an entry point into *multitextural dialogues* (St. Georges, 2020, 2021), dialogues rooted in the complexities of our living and being. Creation-centred research generates and weaves the threads of our stories with the intention of deepening awareness about our interconnectedness with Others.

In these ways our co-inquiry is generative, holistic, and a relationally ethical way forward in learning and teaching. It enables us to discover, explore, and experiment with

unbound ways of being and knowing. It activates our creative energy and imagination and our capacities to un)learn. As a relational and animated approach to creating, learning, and teaching, our creation-centred research generates visual and metaphoric exchanges in the ways of storying, that is both a “singular and relational act of re/creation” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p.10). Hasebe-Ludt et al. (2009) explain, “when we claim and perform our stories, our subjectivity, we in effect remember our Self into the world and assert the relevance and the legitimacy of our humanness” (p.10). In this way, our inquiry with raw energy is a storying praxis that resists the colonial lens by virtue of exploring our inner subjective space. This enables us to “forge new truths and to transform our consciousness and perception from ordinary reality to a spiritual/magical/other reality, and enter states of non-ordinary reality” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 45).

Our inspirited artistic co-inquiry with raw energy allowed us to connect through an *intra)inter-relational aesthetic*—a significant finding of our research. The relational collaboration cultivated the formation of this aesthetic, which is immersed in affective, sensorial, intellectual, somatic, spiritual, and collective aspects of inter-personal and intra-personal experiences. We believe this intra)inter-relational aesthetic essential in order to navigate the paradox of the journey—the travel inward to connect outward—to re)create and tell our stories as part of an expansive relational whole, that includes the human and more-than-human.

The intra)inter-relational aesthetic was present in all aspects of our artistic co-inquiry. In transcribing our data, studying the video footage, engaging in dialogue, and having conversations while co-writing, this unique aesthetic became evident. We realized, for example, that in choosing to create simultaneously, co-creating sacred studio space, engaging with breath)spirit practices, and actively co-writing via Zoom, our thoughts, experiences, and insights merged synergistically. Here we encountered un)knowing within material and spiritual realms that extended beyond the conceptual, leading to the ethereal and ancient.

Our Becoming Process

Our visual-poetic⁴ rendering is the storying—a gift generated from five studio sessions. To begin our co-inquiry, we returned to early source materials of our crafts. For Barbara, this was clay which then moved into photography, and for Darlene, this was graphite drawings which then moved into photo-digital rendering. Unable to be in the studio together, due to fissures created by pandemic protocols, we joined our home studios via Zoom. To support our co-inquiry processes we created conditions that assisted us to move toward inspirited attunement with each other and our parallel

inward and outward journeys. Specifically, we created sacred space with ritual. These simple rituals were unifying and centring practices that moved us away from daily task-driven ways of thinking and being. They included meeting routinely once a week in the mornings, opening our sessions by lighting a candle, and engaging in selected breath practices from healing bodywork teachings of Laurel Atwell (n.d.), Donald Epstein (1994), and Resma Menakem (2017). We found the rhythmic connection between our breath and creation-making to be a visceral experience of spirit itself, flowing through us, connecting our bodies through time and space with each other and with our ancestors. Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa (2008) reminds us how art-making can be a type of meditation practice “attune[ing] us to the fissures present in our current ways of being and thinking; it provokes the ways in which we relate with the world, it changes our visual system, our hearing system and our speaking system” (pp. 22–23). We also made a ritual of closing our art-making sessions by symbolically offering our creations to the world while synchronously blowing out our candles.

Held in our shared space, we often worked in silence. Intermittently provoked by the sounds of a pencil gliding across paper, a spark of insight spoken out loud, or hearing a sigh of recognition, we would at times look up to witness each other creating. At the end of our creation-making we shared our experiences and insights through animated conversation. The follow transcriptions, along with Figures 1 and 2 provide a glimpse into these conversations and discoveries with raw energy:

Darlene (D). There is a translucency right here. This line moves here and wraps around this shape. I am thinking about the spaces you created to contain the seeds in your clay sculpture, it's like a wrapping. Although as you are working with clay, it's a bit different. It feels that way and maybe also because you put that surface designing on, showing the flow and movement too

Barbara (B). Wow, and there is something in that centre form of your creation. Like it's an infinity symbol or lemniscate. I am also getting a feeling of grasses

D. Yes, if you look close up top, this is where things are wrapping or, even a type of braiding—a type of co-mingling of elemental being. So, this is actually one of the main points or a place of meeting ...

B. Yes, interesting. I found a seed. I just planted another seed

D. Planting seeds. Yah, yah! So, then in that sense, grass is growth. We were talking about the Earth in our emerging expressions

B. Like caves, holding spaces

D. Containers, that symbolize protection

B. Definitely protection. It's taking care of us

D. Unfolding, folding and unfolding. Layering of life growth, the seeds, new life. And I guess for me, right from the beginning, I took in the mediative breathing in of courage and exhaling fear. So breathing in courage would be creating space for new growth. Look, see my seeds

B. I see this all as absence of anxiety. My creation piece is the breathing in the joy. It does not necessarily make me think about joy but it sure makes me feel good. So maybe that is joy

D. Yes!

B. My creation is like the calm nervous system in this mother of all these seeds

D. And so very grounded in her positioning. Grounded but in a connected way

B. And her human feet grounding on the Earth and these are wings that are also containers

D. Yes, that's what I was thinking about—protection. The movement. That's what's happening here too

Darlene turns her creation drawing 180 degrees (Figure 1) ...

B. I just saw your creation in 3D when you moved it like that!

D. The movement and the folding. Wonderful, I look forward to continue working on it

Figure 1

Creation research studio process, [Zoom video still]. Dec 21, 2020.



At the close of our sessions, we individually considered ways our creations might want to continue their unfoldment as animate beings within themselves. Barbara's clay figurines for instance, became walking companions, leading her to places where they wanted to perform, while she witnessed, through her camera lens, their interaction with the Earth. The experience of these walks and photoshoots became visual text(ures) that informed her poetic expression. Barbara recognized the clay figurines as avian ancestresses, with much to teach humans; birds being an elder species to humans by millions of years on this Earth. At the close of the conversational sharing Barbara recalled:

I was watching a documentary about the Australia burnings.⁵ Scientists went into a burned forest looking for birds from their pre-fire study and finding a mother bird who only lays one egg a year. A bird that walks on the ground and helps the earth resist fires by altering the ground cover. They found a hole in the hillside with her one egg inside. As I worked with the clay today, I was aware of the deep significance of that egg surviving. Some creatures bury deep to survive fire and others fly or run away. This bird did not run and was not happy with the biologist's presence as she took action to protect her egg. But it's not easy for a little bird to protect an egg from a human.

The avian ancestresses emerging for Barbara, while working with raw energy, reminded her that these beings have stories of their own to reveal. We have so much to learn from the birds in terms of care, resilience, and adaptability, as we rest precariously on the edge of a sixth mass extinction (Kolbert, 2015).

Darlene's raw drawings are archetypical art forms—materialization of her inward journey. In her extended creation-making process she photographed these forms and further engaged with them digitally. Digital technology allowed her to magnify images, aiding her deep dive into the intricacies of the mark-making to discover meaning within the work. Inspired by Carl Jung's concept of active imagination⁶, Darlene engaged with her raw drawings with sustained concentration through artistic-active-imagination, a method she has developed and uses in her creation-centred practice. This method includes digital magnification, micro-visual-exploration, spontaneous rendering and free writing of words, thoughts, and imaginings. For her, this method generates an intricate metaphorical dialogue multitextural dialogues that informs her creation-centred storying work. Her underground studio supports this work while roots of large Spruce wrap around her home:

D. Trees are outside, near my house, and I feel and think about their roots holding my studio space. Very much a cave that I feel is protected by ancient/ancestral roots. There are about seven mature Spruce here. Feels very protected

B. I love that image of the tree roots all around you down there. I work upstairs with the sky and see above-ground trees out my window

We close our sacred space with Darlene activating her Tibetan bowl in the spirit of joy and courage ...

B. Thinking how these creations today embodied joy and courage

Darlene rings the bell ...

D. This sounding is to honour the four directions, and the Earth and Sky and the Centre. Raw energy moves through these seven directions, beyond our personal space and sends this offering to the world

B. I think you are working the direction of the centre in your drawings, Darlene. I love that we are manifesting joy and courage with the help of raw energy moving through our bodies. A beautiful offering for the day

inhaling courage
exhaling fear

holding space
co-mingling
braiding

unfolding
[folding]
unfolding

found a seed

calm nervous system
in this mother
of all seeds

inhaling joy
exhaling anxiety

layering of life
translucency
wrapping
around caves

Our storying (the visual-poetic text⁷) mirrors our creation-making that unfolded through a dynamic interplay of visual, textural, embodied, and affective elements—an “epistemic modality” (Boutet, 2013) of visual and symbolic manifestations of our inner world; “forms of knowledge epistemologically comparable to gnostic knowledge and ancient forms of thinking” (p. 32). Like alchemists, according to Boutet (2013), artists think through matter by way of “aesthetic/symbolic operations ... a thinking process where one contemplates and experiences situations, themes, feelings and complex ways of being” (p. 30). In this way, as Barbara mapped her external journey on the surface of the Earth with her ancestral clay figurines, Darlene traversed an internal landscape with her archetypal beings. Figure 2 captures moments of our five co-inquiry studio sessions with raw energy.

Decolonizing the Western paradigm that oppresses insights generated from non-ordinary ways of knowing and learning is a crucial step to encourage the re)telling of a cosmic story that honours our relationships with each other and the Earth (Gunn Allen, 1991). As such, we believe that an intra)inter-relational aesthetic is an opportunity to change the future co-becoming of humans with all sentient beings. Creation-centred research fed by raw energy and spontaneous creation-making offers us a critical and sacred place/space for much needed unravelling, re)learning and discoveries to take place.

Figure 2

Creation research studio process, [Zoom video stills]. Nov/Dec 2020.



We now invite you into our visual-poetic storying journey, where you can enter the cave of your imagination and breathe with us fully and deeply. Breath practices⁸ are woven through this storying to encourage pause and reflection of this inspirited pedagogical encounter. Let us begin to cross time and space—to connect our shared ancestral breath and being.



Sit comfortably in your chair. Let your shoulders drop. Close your eyes and allow a yawn to form. Let your jaw drop and allow a gentle breeze to enter through your open mouth. Feel the breeze travel down your throat, into your lungs and spread through your body

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plays in electric fields of
other worlds
crosswinds angling
whole bodies Earthward



[veneration]



traveling through life spirit
lands
on heart wings
(re)verberating up
choke cherry spine
(re)storied seeds
gently dislodging
scattering into fields

[patience]



inhale joy; exhale hastiness

pouring
eyes

in
ward

settling nesting

in
the heart

arms eddying

in
to

[spacious libations]

enfolded protection

explicit

grand patience



inward flow

the tenacity of
dropping
to
ones' knees

in
attendance to
other



Wide winged



Dry heat of sunfire
lines kisses on exposed stones
reveal sedimenting stratigraphic breaks
in time
 overlain by
 amnesia

In a sunken plateau
on Nose Hill
emerging from
periglacial gravel and sand
a multi-hued stone labyrinth's path
lays covered in packed snow

Wide winged
earth footed
avian ancestress
gravels the winding cold white path
melds memory
beds of animated sand, stone, clay

Lake tumbled smooth stone
secreted in cave
formed legs of this avian earth being
prevails protected while
leisurely alighting
path marking sentinels
divining nascent ecological balance



Walk the labyrinthal path
into the womb of the earth
balance to remember
the bonds before
abandonment
resuscitate the genesis stories
of our winged parentage



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Feel your sit bones on your chair. Place your palms on your belly. Take a deep breath and on your exhale release your breath with a sound or a hum. As you take more breaths try varying the pitch of your hum. Notice the resonating sound of your humming breath.

Shifting plots and fleeting metaphors
manifest before my eyes in uncharted
territories;
translucent memories
imprecise encounters
delicate whispers





[long solstice shadows]

With fluid keys dangling between point
I traverse portals and corridors,
seeking the wild things beneath my skin;
perching on smooth edges in caves and
wombs,
drawing out silences,
storying into existence
a view beyond my own horizon ...

[frontiers]

Resetting my consciousness
I squint, to take in an edge of light through
needled lashes,
where space shifts, multiplies and refracts
through one breath and then another;



🧘 inhale trust; exhale fear

hyper-linked with luminous amplitudes and the efficacy of dreaming

tuning into the frequency of *being*,
where the world remembers me.



[sterling capacity]

Winds rise in the pale darkness of a
clear moonlit night
a web of stars
tea-coloured rivers
reflect bitter contradictions
enchantments come undone:



[witness]

seeded tongue

slowed breath

glint of eye

Into the reverend night
on kindred soils
lateral roots embellish
windswept tangled hair;

Raven's headdress pins the scene;

carved out of time and flesh and bone and blood

fluent

slick

she became what she loved:
a voyageur in the discipline of Raven;

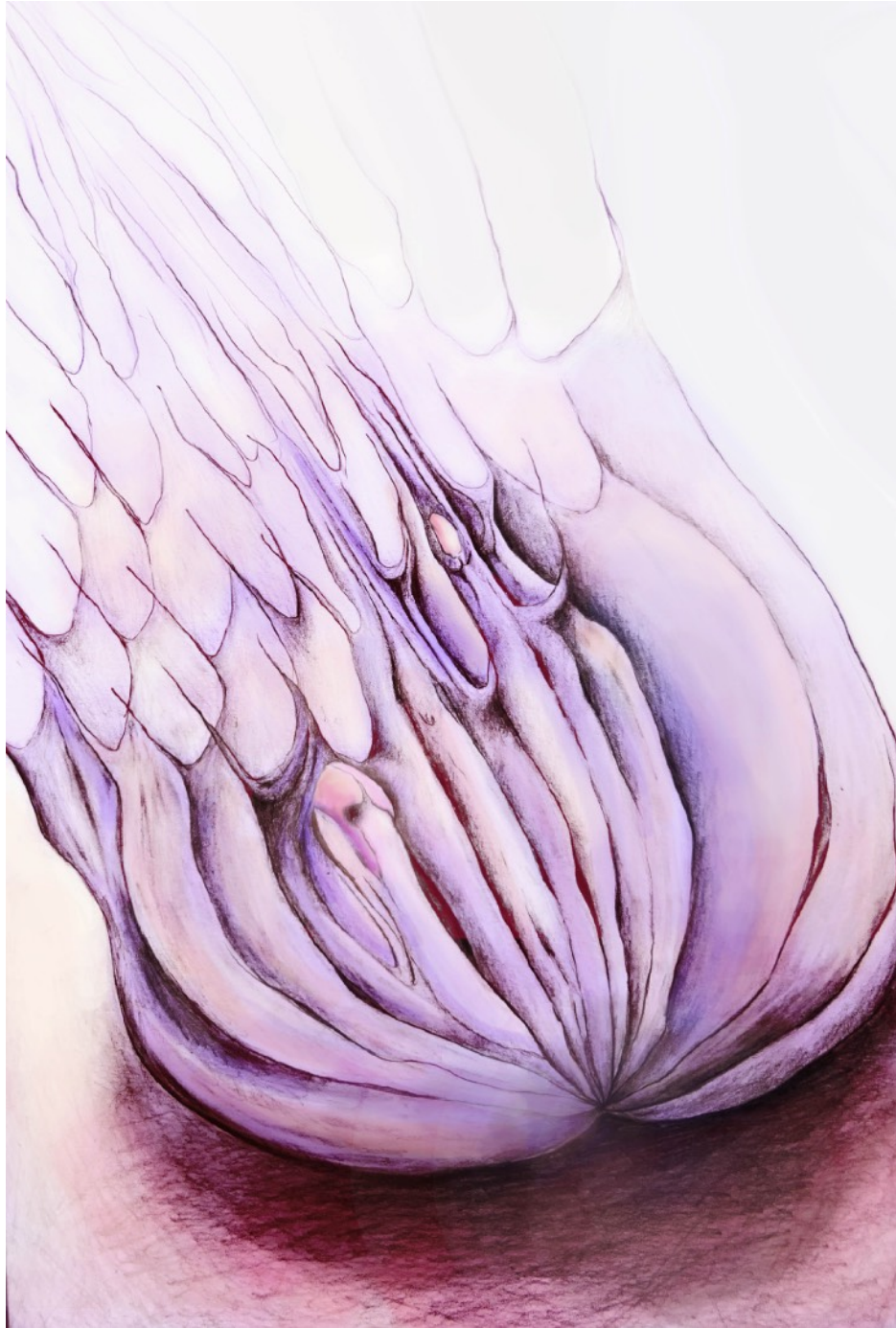
🌀 inhale courage; exhale sadness



[Earthen acrobatic omen]

We will have fire;
flames,
ascension of smoke,
arching tale,
deviation,
and epiphanies,
picked up by talented winds
that dip behind spruce and cut across diligent
fields
in persistent concentric circles
uncloaking obsessions
threading the light
snatching up breath

These frontiers reside in mélange of
myth and dreams,
junctures, cracks and openings,
in moments of truth that unlock rivers,
marine skies and hearts



I quiver in an aura of chance to

transcend

connect

retrieve



Under swift stars
circuits synchronize with time-like curves
enflamed
glowing

we stare—
gawking with suspended disbelief at the origins of these victorious anomalies;
sky walkers that braid sunsets,
transform light,
lure silhouettes,
bridge northern passages with vintage mutations

These are matters of spine,
narratives of becoming before daybreak
that disappear and reappear in the flux;
in the songs of innocence;
manifestations
notations
art - i - facts
stories
memories...

Briskly re-routed along shadows and edges of wild fires;
murmurations in trees;

we vanish



*Close your eyes. Inhale slowly through your nose and exhale gently from your mouth.
You are inhaling the same air your ancestors breathed. In your exhale you share breath
with all that has come before and all that will come after you.*

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ENDNOTES

1. Signifies the relationship among concepts. It symbolizes a disruption of dichotomous thinking, such as *this or that*. It acknowledges and emphasizes the movement and flow that occurs within a relational dynamic of seemingly contrasting ideas, thoughts or concepts (St. Georges, 2020, in press).

2. Sacred space in this context means that we created conditions for reverence and creativity to unfold. We understand sacred in a relational creation-centred way. Jacqui Alexander (2005) teaches how “[t]he central understanding within an epistemology of the Sacred is that of a core/Spirit that is immortal, at once linked to the pulse and energy of creation. It is that living matter that links us to each other, making that which is individual simultaneously collective” (p. 326).

3. We conjoin breath with spirit as breath)spirit drawing upon the etymological root of spirit from the “Latin *spiritus* ‘a breathing (respiration, and of the wind), breath’” <https://www.etymonline.com/word/spirit>

4. We consider our poetic expressions as visual elements and likewise our visual expression as poetic text. For us these expressions are collaborative and interchangeable. For this reason, our aesthetic layout for the poetic text responds to the space of the page visually, thus visually interacting with the images with spaciousness, with breath. This is the storying capacity of the totality of our creation-work. In addition, we purposefully exclude figure captions for the art works as they are creative expressions as opposed to Figures.

5. See Holden & O’Clery (2020). *Wild Australia: After the fires with David Suzuki* (Season 60, Episode 3). *The Nature of Things*, CBC. <http://gem.cbc.ca/media/the-nature-of-things/s60e03>

6. Active imagination is a Jungian meditation technique that can connect us to our unconscious material, which can be then translated into images, narrative, or stories with which we can learn from and gain deeper insight into our experience <https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691015767/jung-on-active-imagination>

7. All photographs in the visual-poetic storying are documented by each respective artist-scholar.

8. Breath statements are from Laurel Atwell’s healing sounds meditation [Link no longer active].