

“Summonses to Awareness:”

A Meditation upon  
Wisdom and Artful Inquiry

By

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
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**Abstract**

In his writings Thomas Merton ponders the relation of contemplative experience and the arts within a meditation upon the spiritual life; one whose seminal character is “a life of wisdom” (Merton, 1972, p.141). With Merton as a guide post, my inquiry explores whether the kinship of wisdom and spirituality with the aesthetical, which is offered in his writings, can be extended to reinforce a relation of *wisdom* and *artful inquiry*. While the inquiry into the relation of the art and wisdom is informed by the discourse of wisdom studies (Curnow, 2015; Baltas, 2004; Walsh, 2015) it also departs from it by pondering wisdom not in relation to the text, but to the artful. Such different alignment in turn underscored by the question: *While we speak of texts that are wise can we, in kindred spirit, speak of art that is wise?*

The exploring of such question departs from rational and empirical methodologies and instead is nested within a contemplative approach (Hart, 2004; Miller, 2006; Palmer, 1993; Zajonc, 2006); one which immerses inquiry within the life of the researcher and embraces strategies for research which are seeded by an aesthetical presence. Amongst such strategies narrative is embraced in tandem with visual retellings of aesthetical encounters both within and outside the classroom and intermingled with dialogical

conversations with Merton; the latter strategy inspired by Merton's own way of engaging with his readers and writings.

The emergence into this inquiry is nested within this writer's narrative and reflections upon the work of Merton; and draws upon the fields of holistic studies, narrative and arts based inquiry in curriculum studies and their kindred view of the presence of the personal in inquiry. While informing my methodology and nurturing reflections upon its principal question, their presence within inquiry also enriching the thesis that the promise of wisdom is one which flowers from within our selves through the unity of the personal and the aesthetical.

For  
Gianna & Oriana

No blade of grass is not blessed  
On this archetypal, cosmic hill,  
This womb of mysteries.

Merton, *Grace's House*, 1977

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O paradise, O child's world!  
Where all the grass lives  
And all the animals are aware!

Merton, *Grace's House*, 1977

In an aesthetic experience, in the creation or the contemplation of a work of art, the psychological conscience is able to attain some of its highest and most perfect fulfillments. Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time. The mind that responds to the intellectual and spiritual values that lie hidden in a poem, a painting, or a piece of music, discovers a spiritual vitality that lifts it above itself, takes it out of itself, and makes it present to itself on a level of being that it did not know it could ever achieve.

Merton, *No Man is an Island*, 1983

## Letter to the Reader

### Following Merton's "Summonses to Awareness"

In *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) Thomas Merton offers us his Zen like sketches and speaks of their aesthetical presence as invitations or "summonses to awareness" (Merton, 1966, p. 182). Within an aesthetical encounter, Merton seeks to traverse into a place of awareness. His retelling of his own aesthetical journey in turn foregrounded a starting point for my own reflection upon inquiry. Following Merton I ponder: *what summons me to awareness in this inquiry?* What conveys me to the question of the relation of wisdom and art?

Understandings of wisdom are diverse and straddle millennia and cultures; an observation which has led some commentators to observe that wisdom defies a singular understanding (Curnow, 2015, p. 8; Walsh, 2015/2011). How does one begin inquiry when its key word defies a consensus on its definition?

Seeking to emerge from such conundrum follows Curnow's suggestion that, in lieu of a universal definition, we select one from the many though our selection may depart from other understandings of wisdom (Curnow, 2015, p. 8). In this inquiry, a working definition is broadly informed by Hadot's historical exploration of wisdom as both "a discourse and a way of life" (Hadot, 2002, p. 4). Wisdom is not knowledge of the world; instead "a mode of being" (Hadot, 2002, p. 220). Of wisdom as a way of being in the world, Hadot observes

If philosophy is that activity by means of which philosophers train themselves for wisdom, such an exercise must necessarily consist not merely in speaking and discoursing in a certain way, but also in being, acting, and seeing the world in a specific way. If, then, philosophy is not merely discourse but a choice of life, an

existential option, and a lived exercise, this is because it is the desire for wisdom. (Hadot, 2002, p. 220)

While such understanding of wisdom is rooted in Hadot's study of ancient philosophy, a second aspect of its working definition is informed by recent work in the spirituality research paradigm (Lin et al, 2016); one which ponders wisdom through such notions as Oxford's thesis of "deep education and mysticism" (Oxford, 2016, p. 207); Bai's exploration of spirituality and wisdom (Bai et al, 2016, p. 78); or Miller's reflections upon wisdom as embodied (Miller, 2016, p. 133). While such notions configure understandings of wisdom they also enrich the question of the relation of wisdom and the aesthetical.

With my working understanding of wisdom as a starting point my inquiry begins its reflections upon such question. However, while an inquiry into the exploring of the relation of art and wisdom may follow the path of historical chronicle or philosophical investigation, my study seeks to traverse a different terrain. Departing from the inquirer-subject dualism which marks the methodological canon of such research my inquiry seeks to ponder the relation of wisdom and arts within a different territory – one which departs from the methodological binary and is instead nested with a contemplative spirit.

While empirical research from such fields informs my study, it is not guided by them methodologically. Instead, my exploration endeavors to follow in the spirit of Tobin Hart's proposal, within the field of transformative learning in education, of "a third way of knowing" (Hart, 2004, p. 29); that is, of contemplative knowing - one which departs from the rationalist and empirical paradigms (Hart, 2004, p. 29) which, as Hart observes, dominates the understanding of what counts as legitimate knowing today.

Instead of eroding the phenomenon in order to understand it, contemplative knowing embraces the fullness of its complexity within a strategy which is inclusive, about connection and non-dualistic. Instead of the binary of inquirer and subject which marks empirical methodology, contemplative knowing seeks another path; one which is reflected in Merton's critique of Cartesian thinking in *New Seeds of Contemplation* (Merton, 1972, p. 8) or Parker Palmer's observation that we embrace the "voice of the subject" (Palmer, 1993, p. 98) within a spirit of connection. Within such embrace, binaries dissolve and inquiry, within a contemplative strategy, is in turn nurtured, as Hart observes "...through a wide range of approaches – from pondering to poetry to meditation" (Hart, 2004, p. 29) which extend beyond the narrower lens of empirical investigation.

### **Drawing on Stories and Stories of Drawings**

It is within such range of approaches and, in particular, one which draws on the rich seed bed of our stories in tandem with encounters with art that my inquiry is both set and summoned. Its summonses marked, by nurturing presences: a story; or an image; or a dialogue with Merton's writings which collectively form entry points for reflections not only upon the relation of wisdom and the aesthetical, but kindred ones on the contemplative child and wisdom in the landscape. The arc of the inquiry is nurtured and sculpted about such presences; together forming the thread that weaves the inquiry.

It is within such realm that my exploration into the relation of wisdom and art was summoned. By allowing narrative to emerge with the aesthetical in inquiry - an amalgam which was ever present but never stirred in my previous studies - I journeyed onto a terrain which became nurturing of the authenticity I sought in inquiry.

Of its transformative arc I ponder its various ingredients.....

*Retellings, reflections*  
 &  
*palimpsests,*  
*Childhood memories & school book*  
*astronomy,*  
*Serendipitous discoveries,*  
*old sketches &*  
*photographs,*  
*Pauses, doubts &*  
*epicyclical returns,*  
*....Fra Angelico & Tycho,*  
*Of paradoxes, paradigms &*  
*awakenings*  
*Of memories which emerge &*  
*stir the alchemical transit*  
*Of conversations with Burtynsky,*  
*Brother Louis & you*  
*Of questions which beget more questions*  
 &  
*forever recycle*  
*towards the Sophia*  
*which emerges from within*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, October 2017)

Of that journey three moments from my story have broadly informed its trajectory. The first one is configured by my encounters with post secondary education in the fields of philosophy, history of science and architecture; while the second is informed by my experiences within graduate studies of education to which I turned later in life. While the first moment constituted difficult pedagogical experiences, they also served as verdant fodder for the subsequent chapter of my studies. Returning to a graduate school of education nurtured the idea of knowing shaped by contemplation and drawn from a different paradigm of holistic and transformative studies in education. Within such return the third moment of my story emerges; that is, of the presence of the aesthetical within inquiry, one which was welcomed by this different terrain of knowing that I had journeyed onto.

Viewed through this new paradigm, my complicated encounters with post secondary education were interpreted afresh bringing into focus the question of the nature of knowing in general and critique of the binary nature of Cartesian knowing in particular. Such critique, which follows Parker Palmer's observation of the "...one-eyed lives" (Palmer, 1993, p. xxiii) with which he views reductionist knowing and which was echoed in my own encounters with post secondary education, also foregrounded Palmer's appeal for the return of "wholesight" – a knowing whose inclusive reach embraces the intuitive, empathic and emotional in addition to the rational (Palmer, 1993, p.52).

My encounters with learning in post secondary settings brought into focus the problems of knowledge that Palmer speaks of – a focus which was nurtured by the



entangled relation of my narrative with my philosophical interests in epistemology. In so doing they also highlighted how the topic of wisdom in general, with which Palmer's "wholesight" can be associated; and the relation of wisdom to the aesthetical in particular, was largely absent from my schooling. Collectively such narrative moments sculpted of encounters both difficult and meditative summoned me into the present inquiry – one which is explored in the following seven chapters.

### **The Weave of Inquiry**

The question into the relation of wisdom and art would not have become foregrounded within this inquiry were it not for the presence of formative experiences in my narrative – ones which, in addition to encounters with post secondary schooling were also enriched by experiences growing up as a child of post-war immigrant parents in southern Ontario. Together such episodes formed memories which remained unsaid but ever present; while also seeding my later intuition that the question of the relation of wisdom and art was in the same instance nurtured by such presences. Forming Chapter One, reflections upon those memories marked an engaging with a narrative presence in the methodology of my inquiry. It also marked a significant departure in the direction of my thesis which is pondered through the idea of abandonment as transformation from within the transformative learning paradigm (Gunnlaugson, 2007; Hart, 2004; Burrows, 2015). While engaging with narrative became a transformative event which was seminal to the life of this inquiry, the stories of encounters with post secondary education also foregrounded the critiques of higher education put forth by Palmer and Zajonc (2010) and Zajonc (2006) in the fields of holistic education. Together with my narrative retellings, Zajonc's observation of the "epistemology of separation" (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1744) and

Merton's criticism of Cartesian thinking (Merton, 1972, p. 8) are introduced as an entry points for a general critique of the rationalist paradigm dominating higher education.

While Chapter One introduces Merton within a critique of Cartesianism, Chapter Two is focused upon an exploration of Merton's aesthetical ideas and their relation to the idea of wisdom. The evolution of Merton's thought is explored through selected texts from his vast body of writings and interpreted through the contemporary lens of writers in the fields of contemplative and transformative learning in education. The exploration of Merton's ideas is guided in part by the strategy of dialogical speaking with *Brother Louis* which was the name he was known by in the Abbey of Gethsemani. While the methodological interpretation of such a strategy is explored in Chapter Five, the strategy is introduced in Chapter Two as a way of beginning to explore the relation of Merton's aesthetical ideas to notions of wisdom, the paradisaical and wisdom image. Such relation is foregrounded in Merton's writings, in particular his observations on the desert landscape in *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1998). The rich visuality of his journal evokes photographic interpretations; one which is in turn used to reflect on the work of the Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky and how his landscape photographs nurture us towards the divine by visualizing connection.

The questions of an inquiry sometimes feel ephemeral; evolving into presence, sometimes departing while at other times lingering within our journey. Their ephemeral nature in turn sustaining the life of the "perpetual researcher" (Miller, 2016, p. 138). Chapter Three attempts to corral such transience within an overview of questions into the relation of wisdom and art which have emerged during the journey of my inquiry and are of two broad configurations. The first are questions about the relation of wisdom and art

that were sparked by a synchronous reading of three texts: *Transcendental Learning: The Educational Legacy of Alcott, Emerson, Fuller, Peabody and Thoreau* (Miller, 2011); Ferrari's & Potworowski's *Teaching for Wisdom* (2008); and Thomas Merton's *Love and Living* (1979). Pondering these texts in tandem with Merton's other aesthetical writings and his strategy of direct engaging with the reader which is found in some of his texts, formed the second set of questions. These questions touch on methodological reflections and explore the strategy of dialogical speaking as one which follows in the spirit of Tobin Hart's thesis of contemplative knowing as one which embraces a multitude of approaches (Hart, 2004, p. 29) and Gunnlaugson's thesis of "generative dialogue" (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138).

While the relation of art and wisdom is pondered through reflections on Merton's aesthetical writings, such reflections are also enriched by explorations of texts from researchers in the fields of Merton studies (Labrie, 2001 / 2014; Labrie & Stuart, 2012; Inchausti, 2014; Higgins, 1998; Del Prete, 1990), wisdom studies (Ferrari & Potworowski, 2008; Baltés, 2004; Curnow, 2015; Walsh, 2011 / 2015), transformative learning in curriculum studies (Hart, 2004; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Burrows, 2015; Gunnlaugson, 2007) and contemporary research into the spirituality research paradigm in education (Lin, Oxford & Culham 2016; Miller, 2016; Ergas, 2016). While the literature review in Chapter Four seeks to enrich a reading of Merton's aesthetical writings through such writers, the chapter is also underscored by pondering how the texts that we are drawn to are not disencased from the life of the inquirer; and instead are intimate with it within a relation which extends beyond their referential status in inquiry. This observation builds on Parker Palmer's thesis (Palmer, 1993, p. 99), which encourages the reader to be

in dialogue with the subject of inquiry, and Tobin Hart's notion of the power of texts as embodying "living words" (Hart, 2008, p. 236). The spirit of such ideas is imagined in the first person strategy of dialogical speaking with Merton which is used as a tool for nurturing reflection in the present inquiry.

To speak with a first person voice, as the present inquiry does in the exploration of some of Merton's texts and in my own narrative retellings, brings into focus the methodology of this study whose exploration forms Chapter Five. While the third person voice is present, it is also supplemented in my inquiry by a first person approach which is inspired by Merton's *Letter to an Innocent Bystander in Raids on the Unspeakable* (Merton, 1966, pp. 53-62) and dedication in *A Thomas Merton Reader* (Merton, 1974, N.pag.). In these writings Merton addresses the text and reader respectively; a strategy which is reciprocated in the present study as a tool which nurtures pondering. In so doing, as a theoretical exploration into the relation of wisdom and art the methodology of my study departs from a third person approach exclusively by acknowledging a strategy for inquiry which follows Hart's understanding of contemplative approaches in knowing. That is, one which is holistic in spirit and embraces tools of inquiry which are artful (Hart, 2004, p. 29).

Dialogical speaking falls within the broader range of creative tools which Hart ponders in his exploration of contemplative knowing. Such strategy is also nurtured by Gunnlaugson's notion of "generative dialogue" within transformative learning studies though departing from it in this inquiry by being an internal dialogue instead of one nested within a community of discourse and second person voice (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138). Dialogical speaking also follows in the spirit of arts based researchers who

encourage ways of doing inquiry which are marginalized with the academy (Diamond & Mullen, 2001, p.10); and researchers in spirituality studies such as Parker Palmer who advocates we embrace and listen to the subject (Palmer, 1993, p. 98) within a strategy which is holistic and not binary in spirit. In this inquiry, dialogical writing to Merton was generative of questions and meditations; and following Susan Schiller's observation becomes a form of writing which becomes meaningful by being connected to "something in the writer's world that allows the writing to be both *desirable* and *worthwhile* to that person" (Schiller, 2014, p.x).

In this study, that "*something*" which connected me to the writing, in addition to my experiences in post secondary education, was my childhood story; a connection which in turn guided me towards viewing the subject of methodology holistically, that is, as not disencased from my narrative but in intimate relation with it. As a child I was raised without siblings until the age of eight and my first experiences with socialization, in the absence of preschool or Kindergarten, did not happen until Grade One. Until then I lived within a fantastical world of my own making – one whose reality was not brought into focus and meaning until its emergence within this inquiry. Dialogical speaking with Merton in adulthood echoes the imaginary world of my childhood; and in this nurturing the idea of how my present inquiry was also seeded in my childhood narrative. Such notion inviting us to ponder the relation of the child to contemplation; and evoking Montessori's idea of the "spiritual embryo" (Montessori, 1970, p. 18); Hart's notion of children as "natural contemplatives" (Hart, 2004, p. 43); or Merton's notion of "child mind" (Gardner, 2016, p. 3).

Dialogical speaking forms part of an inward looking strategy for inquiry which is theoretical and not empirical in its focus. As such my inquiry excludes analyses based upon data collected from participant involvement; and is theoretical insofar as it will focus on my encounters with primary and secondary texts. Conversely, such focus does not preclude reflections upon how encounters with images in general and Edward Burtynsky's images in particular can inform teacher's work. Chapter Six explores the use of Burtynsky's images in graduate seminars amongst practicing teachers; and offers resources for teachers interested in exploring, through his images, connected themes of environmental stewardship, sustainability and social responsibility.

While my study is seeded by narrative reflections, its framework is nested within a holistic lens – one in which the scintilla of narrative is intertwined with the fullness of creation. My inquiry concludes with reflections on the terrain of such interweaving which forms the transit of such journey. Standing apart from the binary nature of rationalist thinking in which I was schooled, my inquiry traveled onto a different terrain of contemplative knowing; one which follows Byrnes' thesis that contemplation “begins with the most intimate relationship possible – relationship with oneself” (Byrnes, 2012, pp. 36-37); and the kindred observation by Diamond, in the field of arts based research, that inquiry is nested within the “inner journey” defining who we are (Diamond, 2008, p.5). While my journey led onto the terrain of contemplative knowing, it was also one which travelled back onto *my-self* in the observation that wisdom is a journey onto the self; and one whose map is configured by an aesthetical presence within us.

The thesis explores the relation of the aesthetical to wisdom within a meditation which is interwoven in part by narrative moments and dialogical speaking with Merton.

Another component of such interweaving is the use of images. While some of the images, such as Edward Burtynsky's photographs, are intended to illustrate contemplative notions of "wholesight" (Palmer, 1983, p. xxiii), others are intended to reflect the interweaving of narrative and inquiry; and the power of art to teach and move us.

The latter images are drawn from my story and bookended by ones taken from my earliest experiences of schooling in grades three and four and other more recent encounters with art. Of the latter, a trip to Florence and Venice to be with painting and sculpture marked a generative moment in my thesis journey. The encounter with art invigorated my writing by informing it with rich visual presences – ones which in turn nurtured my interpretations of *transformation* and *connection* as I read through the literature of transformative and holistic education in general and Merton's writings in particular.

While the images provide visual references for the writing, the use of images also follows in the spirit of W.G. Sebald's novels (2004), in particular, wherein images are used in tandem with the text to enrich the story which is offered. While the use of images reflects the spirit of arts-based inquiry, it also acknowledges the contemplative embrace of creative tools in inquiry (Hart, 2004). Standing apart from the Cartesian paradigm which unweaves experience in order to understand it, images are used in inquiry with the intent of nurturing imagination and reflection within an inclusive and holistic strategy.

## Chapter One: Narrative Beginnings: The Seeds of Inquiry

*And you must know that the sacred land  
where you are is full of every seed  
and has fruit not plucked in your world.  
(Merton, 1974, p. 455)*

### **“How do you expect to arrive at the end of your own journey if you take the road to another man’s city?” Beginning Inquiry by Reflecting on My Story**

*I liken the beginning of my inquiry to a planting; one whose end point is a harvest whose yield I hope towards but cannot know assuredly in advance. My planting is seeded by a mixture of seeds: images I am drawn to like Burtynsky’s water photographs (2009-2013), the curvilinear architecture of Borromini’s church San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (1638-1641); the filmic quality of Caravaggio’s Calling of Saint Matthew (1599-1600); the magical narratives of cinematographers like Mallick in *The Tree of Life* (2011); and fragments of writings from Merton’s *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1972).*

*Such seeds, which I have taken from places afar, are mixed together with others taken from places closer to home. The seeds of my parents’ narrative – immigrants from the impoverished mezzogiorno region of Italy – my mother, Agata, from a seaside village in Abruzzo which was destroyed during the war while my father, Antonio, from the Lucania region where Carlo Levi (1945) set his novel *Christ Stopped at Eboli*; and where the Normans settled during the Middle Ages and ancient Greeks many generations before. My father’s mother, is surnamed Atena after the Greek Goddess of wisdom, echoing the legacy of those ancient settlers. Within such tapestry was nested my parents’ retellings of their lives - therein also becoming part of my memory; their retellings in turn re-cycling into the formation of a living palimpsest that configures who I am today.*





John 1962,  
Central Avenue

*Their seed I carry with me along with others: my memory of a solitary childhood until my sister Lucia was born eight years later; growing up in a conservative southern Ontario town; and the home of my co-opted Canadian grandmother neighbour who sang lullabies to me and taught my mother English. My memories of school are mixed amongst such seeds: my first day of school standing by the school yard fence; my supportive high school art teacher; intensely working on my painting in the school's art studio; my parents' encouragement to my sister and I to pursue higher education; my difficult memories of architecture school and graduate studies in philosophy; my trepidations of returning later in life to graduate studies in OISE and finding that my worries were dissipated by a different pedagogy which nurtured inquiry within a coming to knowing within the re-covering of one's authentic self.*

*Into this mixture of seeds were added others: that of my Catholic schooling in the wake of the Vatican II reforms; and my subsequent life as a recovering Catholic who had become distant from the church's dogma on original sin.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, January 2013)

**Abandonment as Transformation:  
Entering the “Sacred Land” of Narrative**

*...it takes heroic humility to be yourself and to be nobody but the man, or the artist, that God intended you to be.*

(Merton, 1972, p. 100)



My inquiry into the relation of art and wisdom begins with my story – one which is methodologically informed by such thinkers as Schiller (2014) in the field of holistic education; and Eisner (2008) and Diamond and Mullen (2001) in arts-based learning; and their kindred notion of inquiry as a process which is seeded by the fertile terrain of our narratives. Such approach is in turn broadly nested within the idea of inquiry as contemplative process; that is, one which follows Hart’s notion of contemplation as a way of knowing which “...complements the rational and the sensory” (Hart, 2004, p. 29) while embracing strategies for inquiry drawn from, for example, the arts or story telling or meditative practices which are not generally associated with the former.

In this study understandings of narrative and arts-based inquiry in curriculum studies are viewed as kindred with such strategies within contemplative inquiry. Hart’s view of contemplative knowing invites us to ponder how a contemplative methodology for inquiry is not separate from the life of inquirer; a view which is shared by others such as Arthur Zajonc in his criticism of dualistic epistemologies (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1744) which dominate higher education or Parker Palmer’s observation, following the physicist Fritjof Capra, that “...we can never speak of nature without, at the same time, speaking about ourselves” (Capra, 1991, p. 69).

This inquiry seeks to follow in the spirit of such writers; *speaking about my self* through narrative retellings, visual explorations, and dialogical engagement with Merton's writings, within the spirit of contemplative inquiry, has nurtured the life of my project by fostering a sense of connection between *I* the inquirer and the subject of my inquiry. Of such connection, Parker Palmer speaks about listening to our subject (Palmer, 1993, p. 98); one which in turn invites the subject of inquiry to join us in our journey. Such intimacy of the inquirer with the journey underscores the spirit of contemplative knowing; one wherein my narrative as a former philosophy student participates in such knowing while also informing the broader configuration of this inquiry as one which is theoretical and not empirical in spirit.

As Hart observes of contemplative knowing, by opening onto ourselves we also open onto the world (Hart, 2004, p. 29). By mediating upon our narratives, Hart invites us to ponder how they nurture such openings where transformation happens. Reflecting upon narrative nurtures the "contemplative turn" (Ergas, 2016, p. 2) where wisdom is seeded; and which for Merton resides within the artist within us (Merton, 1972, p. 100).

In *New Seeds of Contemplation* Merton observes,

It is not humility to insist on being someone that you are not. It is as much as saying that you know better than God who you are and who you ought to be. How do you expect to arrive at the end of your own journey if you take the road to another man's city? How do you expect to reach your own perfection by leading somebody else's life? His sanctity will never be yours; you must have the humility to work out your own salvation in darkness where you are absolutely alone...

(Merton, 1972, p. 100)

Reading Merton's journey returns me to reflecting upon my own; and the shift that it had undergone.

*Writing my story that introduces this chapter followed an earlier project in my doctoral studies which I had abandoned. That project felt inauthentic and its harvest was meagre. Feelings of unease set in. I threw out what I had written; not knowing where I would go next I started anew with my story. I was only assured that, following Merton, I needed to sculpt my own journey to my city - one whose map was marked by the presence of the artist; and which was nested within the nexus of contemplative knowing with the richness of narrative. I shifted onto another terrain; one that I now view as Merton's "sacred land" (Merton, 1974, p. 455) filled with seeds and fruits which awaited their harvest. Seeking this sacred place marked an entry point into my inquiry.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, October 2017)

Of the nature of transformation, Gunnlaugson, following Mezirow, observes how it is marked by shifts in one's "frame of reference" (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 135). Of such transformative events, Dencev and Collister (2010) also observe them as shifts in consciousness which are nested within acts of creativity (Dencev and Collister, 2010, p. 179). While my earlier project felt inauthentic, abandoning it also marked a shift and transformative event; one in which my project of inquiry entered a new territory where it was not disencased from the life of this inquirer. While the map of my study within such territory was unknown when my story was written, its horizon was distantly apparent and broadly marked by an epistemological turn. That is, one which departed from the analytical rationalism in which I had been schooled to another which turned towards a knowing which was nested within re-integration of the self; one characterized by notions of "nondual knowing" (Miller, 2006, p. 10); connection and non-propositional knowing (Palmer, 1993, p. 52); or Merton's idea of "a hidden wholeness" (Merton, 1974, p. 506).

My turning away from the analytical paradigm marked an opening onto inquiry. Of the configuration of such opening it often feels serendipitous and non-linear; a feeling evoking John Coltrane's observation on his own musical process as one which starts from the middle rather than the beginning of a composition (Coltrane, n.d.). Coltrane's reflection in turn echoing Tobin Hart's kindred observation about the non-linearity of contemplative knowing (Hart, 2004, p. 29). While opening onto narrative is a portal into the sacred land that Merton speaks of, my story is also, following Coltrane, a beginning in the center in order to seek the periphery.

### **The Seeds of Inquiry as Recycling of Memory**

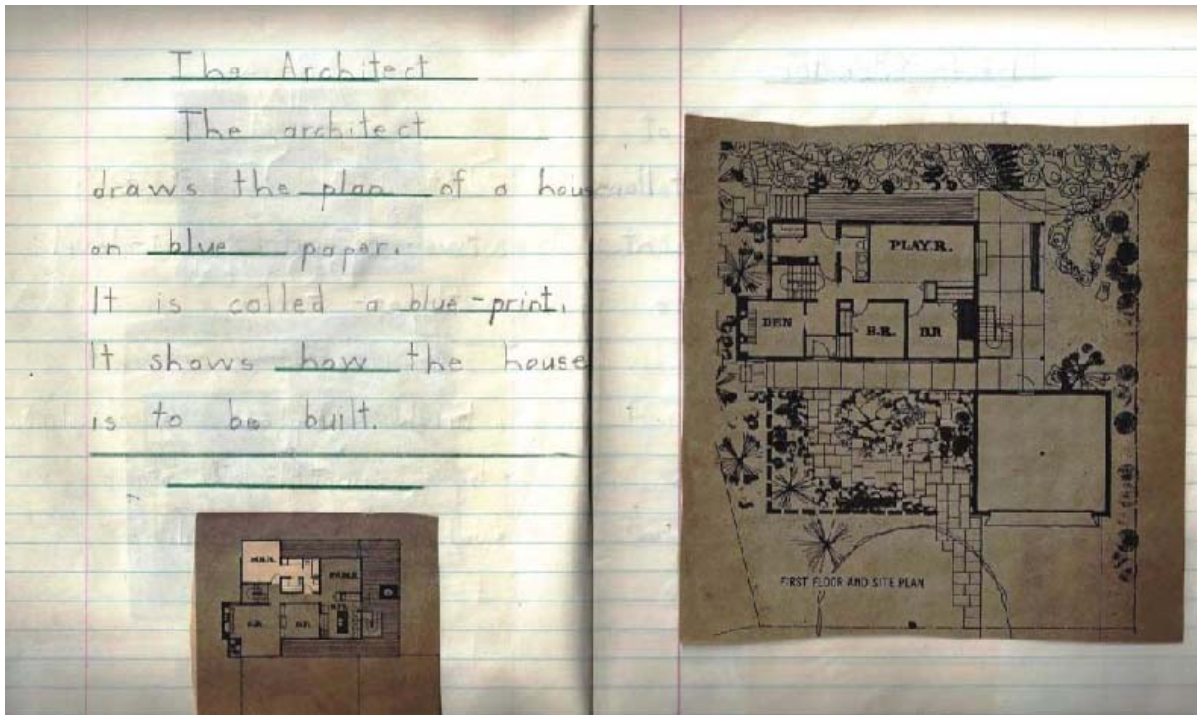
*I kept all my school work books from elementary through to secondary school and university. They had become precious artefacts.*

*I return to my Grade 3 workbook and ponder the exercise on "The Architect." It tells how the architect makes the plan of the house. Many years later I had become an architect.*

*While reflecting on the interesting synchronicity between my schoolbook exercise and later career, I also reflect on how my childhood journal offers a metaphor for inquiry. The plan of the house which I ponder in my workbook is like the seeds of inquiry. Both are important to the genesis of the house and the flower respectively.*

*I cycle back to my workbook while writing my inquiry. I seek to complete the house.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, May 26, 2017)



*Beginning Inquiry*  
*My Grade 3 Workbook,*  
*c. 1966*

My reflections upon my family story, which are interweaved with encounters with art and difficult memories of post secondary education, which opens the chapter, served as a transformative seed and is one amongst several stories which were nurturing to my inquiry. Along with it were others, such as the discovery of my Grade Three work book, which collectively formed a hodgepodge of fragmented yet ever present memories; in turn forming seeds which have been carried by me for a long time.

Of the forms and colours of their flowers I do not yet know. I feel only assured that amongst them is inextricably rooted the possibility of inquiry; its authenticity configured within an aesthetical presence and the entanglement of my inquiry with the narrative seeds that I carry and allow to sprout.

What harvest will follow?

Carl Jung (1955) writes of the synchronicity of events; that is, the co-happening of seemingly unrelated events whose coincidence becomes meaningful (Jung, 1955, p. 36). I read Merton and am comforted by a curious synchronicity between a passage in *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1972) wherein he ponders the plantings of the soul and my meditation upon my jumble of seeds.

EVERY moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them: for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love. (Merton, 1972, p. 14)

Pondering Merton's words in turn sculpts my inquiry. He writes of seeds and becomes a seed; and from his words I extract one which joins the hodgepodge of my seeds. Reading Merton returns me to pondering how inquiry is holistic inextricably nested within the fertile landscape of our stories. Neither the disencased dualism of subject and object, as was the enforced way of knowing when I was a philosophy student, nor the disentangling of my narrative seeds from my inquiry will suffice to sculpt it. Instead, the possibility of my inquiry rests within another expansive landscape wherein my seeds seek to germinate within Merton's "good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love" (Merton, 1972, p. 14).

### **Seeking the "Epistemology of Love"**

Merton guides us to reflect upon how the domain of inquiry is one of love; a linkage which the holistic educator Arthur Zajonc also recognizes and extends into his teaching as an "epistemology of love" (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1742). Standing apart from the

reductionist knowing which Zajonc views as perilous to truth (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1744) and one which dominates the academy; an epistemology of love is holistic and embraces life in its fullness within inquiry. Of the richness of such epistemology Zajonc, following Palmer, observes how “ ‘every way of knowing becomes a way of living, every epistemology becomes an ethic’ ” (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1744).

Zajonc’s and Palmer’s holistic embrace of life within inquiry nurtures the idea of contemplative knowing and evokes Merton’s observation on how *contemplation is life and not apart from it* (Merton, 2004, p. viii). Their observations, along with Merton’s view of contemplation, in turn bringing into focus how our stories, which are echoes of our lives, become intimate with inquiry and the epistemology of love.

Of the process of thesis writing Diamond observes “Who we are affects the kind of research we do and how we do it” (Diamond, 2008, p. 6). The inextricable presence of our narratives underscoring the idea that what I write about is who I am. That who I am being sculpted by what Diamond speaks of as “...the inner journey involve[ing] re-living the same central or inciting incident over and over again but hopefully in ascending spirals” (Diamond, 2008, p.5).

Such has been my journey – a life lived within the re-cycling of memory. To such psyche recycling I am inextricably bound and too is my inquiry. Life and inquiry entangled; such entangling muddling their ontological status, but in the same instance their entwining naming a different research terrain – that is, of lived inquiry wherein such muddling is welcomed. From such verdant terrain is configured the transit of interiority both sculpting who I am and the emergence into inquiry within an epistemology of love. As I venture across such terrain I return to my Grade 3 workbook and reflect upon how



the seeds of my inquiry were planted early in my journey; yet were to be followed by others as I cycled through my encounters with the academy.

**“You are Not a Philosopher!”  
Encounters with the Philosophical Canon**

*One day I met with a professor of the history of metaphysics to discuss my work. His dislike of my work was palpable. He said “I have seen students like you before who try to figure out the world by themselves. Before you do that, you need to study the philosophical canon.” Hearing this I felt I could not discuss my work with him and left the meeting feeling dejected.*

*The professor’s comments were symptoms of a transmissional curriculum (Miller, 2008, p. 10) wherein student driven inquiry was constrained by expectations of a philosophical pedagogy. Of such expectations, the mandatory program requirement for graduate students to pass the examination in propositional logic echoed the restricted pedagogical focus. Propositional logic is about binary thinking wherein language is eroded into symbols, axioms and rules. I could not advance in the program unless I proved that I could reduce the world linguistically in order to understand it.*

*On a different occasion another professor responded to one of my graduate school papers by recording “You are not a philosopher!” The professor taught within a department specialized in the philosophy of science. His comment and my refusal to be complicit in sustaining what I felt was a corrosive pedagogy of teaching and learning led to my eventual departure from the graduate program.*

*Years later within the context of doing an inquiry into the subject of wisdom, I ponder how such pedagogy had long departed from the first philosophy of the Greeks. The philosophical pedagogy in which I had been schooled foregrounded the absence of wisdom.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April, 2016)

Of the malaise which they perceive within higher education today Arthur Zajonc and Parker Palmer observe how the university has lost its soul. In their book *The Heart of Higher Education* (2010) they lament how the university’s essential purpose to nurture reflection upon the mysteries and deep questions of life has been lost (Palmer and Zajonc,

2010, p. 3). Echoing Miller's observation on the nature of transmissional pedagogies (Miller, 2008, p. 10), they appeal for the university to transcend the "balkanization" (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 4) of higher learning which marks today's universities.

Palmer's and Zajonc's observations are foregrounded to contextualize my own encounters with such pedagogies within the university. The university has been a significant presence in my narrative; and it is within the centrality of such encounters, both formative and difficult within my story, that the inquiry into wisdom is in part situated.

To relive such story in inquiry, as Diamond observes, both embraces the centrality of narrative and contests the binary in research practice. Standing apart from a study of wisdom which is nested within a dualism of inquirer with subject of inquiry, my exploration of wisdom is instead set within a research strategy where such dualism is eroded; one which follows Palmer's kindred advice to his students "...not only to look at the world that [the] story portrays but to put themselves in the midst of it" (Palmer, 1993, pp. 99-100).

Palmer's critique of dualistic thinking is echoed by others in contemplative studies in education. In his critique of higher education Arthur Zajonc, like Palmer, advocates for seeing in ways which look beyond the horizon of such thinking; instead, encouraging learning in interconnection and one which is configured within the presence of the aesthetical. Zajonc observes,

How does one see a painting whole? Or the human mind? Or an ecosystem? Or for that matter, the educational project itself? We are well schooled in "seeing them" into parts – into brushstrokes, neurons, and molecules – or seeing the university apart into departments, disciplines and specializations. What kind of attentiveness will enable us to see a true whole? What is the

pedagogy for beholding interconnectedness as a primary reality and not a derived one? What are the implications of a deep experience of interconnection for knowing, teaching, learning and life? What would be gained if, as the Dalai Lama says, we were to cultivate “ ‘a deep sense of caring for others, based on a profound sense of interconnection?’ ” (Zajonc, 2010, p. 77)

Zajonc’s observations about a higher education which is ethical, aesthetical and about connection returns me to pondering my different experience in graduate school in philosophy as so does a second story about my journey through architecture school which follows. Both stories reveal pedagogies which depart from notions of holism and transformative learning in education. Neither interested in the idea of connection or the ethical thesis of caring within a pedagogy, they stand apart from holism; one wherein the absence of wisdom is set within a pedagogy of disconnect and what some have described as a “hidden curriculum” (Dutton, 1991, p. 167).

**“What is your Style?”  
Encounters with the Architectural Canon**

*For my final thesis project in architecture school, I designed a museum in Rome. The idea for this project originated in my study abroad experience from the previous year when I had chosen to spend a studio term in Rome studying architectural design and history. The experience was rich and memorable. The serendipitous encounter with Caravaggio’s “Calling of St. Matthew” (1599-1600) in San Luigi dei Francesi (1518-1589) and the exploration of the mythological garden of Bomarzo (16<sup>th</sup> century) amongst my lasting memories. Visiting and sketching the joyous dome of Borromini’s St. Ivo alla Sapienza (1642-1660) was another whose memory years later would foreground itself in my inquiry.*

*My thesis project was an architectural palimpsest and involved the reuse of the Augesteo (28 BC), an ancient Rome temple dedicated to Augustus Caesar. The existing building was round and the presence of the circle became a major presence in the design. Its mandala like design a prophetic moment foretelling the*

*turn towards holism and holistic education my journey would take many years later.*

*Amongst my drawings were the expected plans, elevations and sections of the proposed museum. The drawings were done in sepia tones to evoke the sense of historical memory and the earthy tones of Rome.*

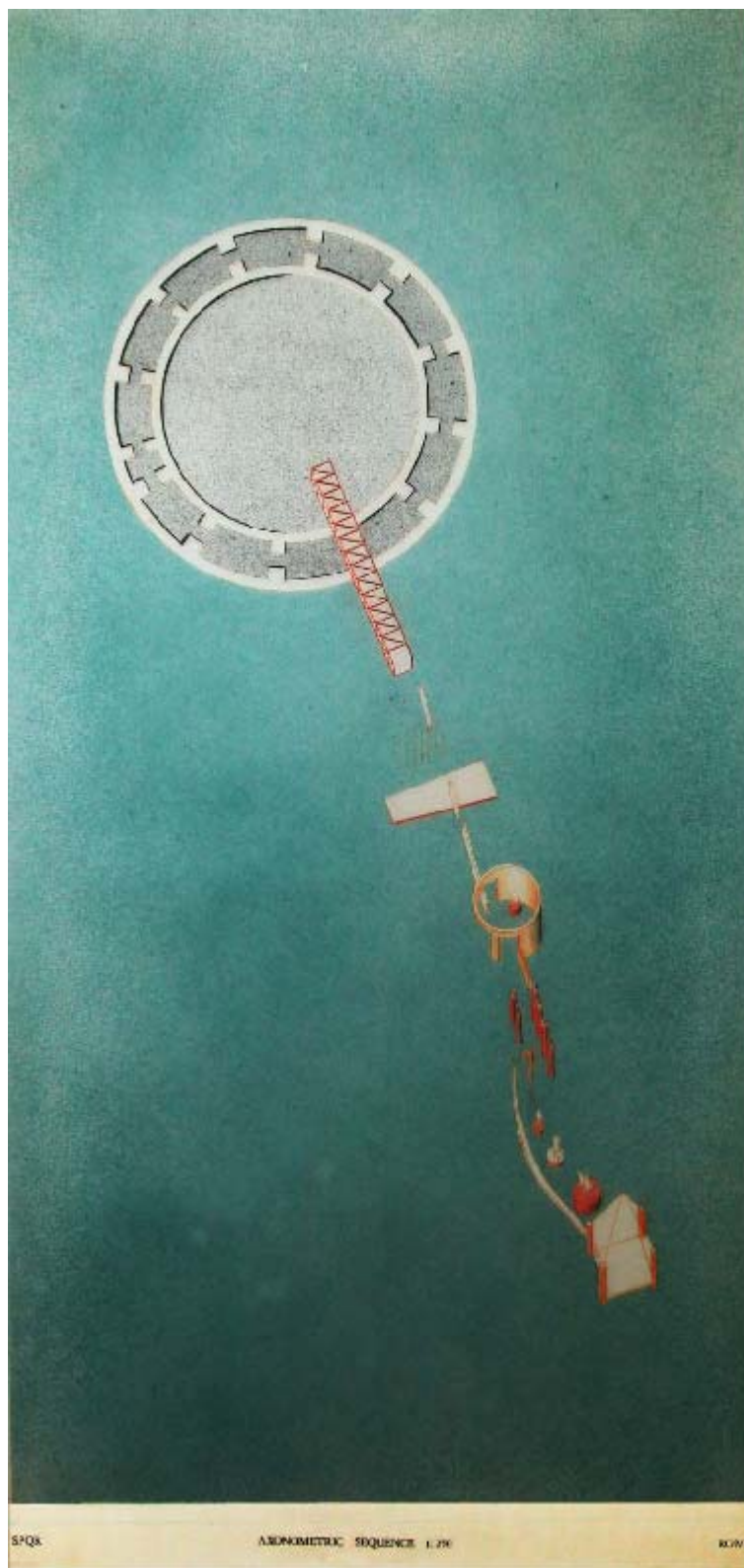
*But amongst the drawings was one which was different from the others. An orphan drawing. One drawing which did not meet the expectations of the architectural teachers. The drawing was a theoretical axonometric view intended to show a concept of architectural circulation for linking the museum to the principal street 100 metres away.*

*Unlike the other drawings the axonometric was abstract and did not seem like the other architectural drawings. The drawing was more about an idea than a representation.*

*The invited critic was dismissive of my project and complained – “This drawing is not like the others. What is your architectural style?”*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, June 2016)

On the nature of transformative shifts in consciousness Gunnlaugson observes how they can be either “dramatic or gradual shift[s]” (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 135); an understanding which is co-opted to interpret my journey from graduate school in the humanities to undergraduate student in a professional faculty of architecture. While Gunnlaugson describes transformation as either a “dramatic or gradual shift” such shift was both dramatic *and* gradual in my story. While the initial shift from graduate studies to architecture studies marked a dramatic change from the analytical to the aesthetic, such shift was but one stop forming part of a greater and gradual narrative towards holism which would take many more years to mature.



*Orphan Drawing*  
1988

Of the aesthetical Susan Schiller invites us to ponder how, in order for it to be meaningful, writing in particular and the aesthetical in general need to be connected to the life of the artist (Schiller, 2014, p. x). While the shift to architecture school nurtured the aesthetical my training was also configured within pedagogical expectations of the architecture student; one which in my story in turn tangled with the goal of exploring design which, following Schiller, was meaningful to my life. Of such expectations the researcher and teacher of architectural education Thomas Dutton (1991) writes of the “hidden curriculum” within architecture schools; one whose focus is the ideology of architectural knowledge and the presence of practices of power which accompany such ideology (Dutton, 1991, p. 167). Observing how the architectural studio is marked by hierarchical relations, Dutton observes that within them, dialogue which he feels is important in studio learning is absent. While Dutton’s focus is architectural education, his observation on the absence of dialogue within its pedagogy, stands in juxtaposition to the centrality of the idea of *dialogue* in learning amongst educational researchers in transformative and holistic learning, such as Gunnlaugson (2007 / 2011) or Palmer (1993).

Of the hidden curriculum that Dutton observes in architectural pedagogy, the retelling of my experience with the critic at my thesis defence is offered as an example. The memory of the encounter lingered and years later it returns and recycles itself within the space of a doctoral dissertation on holistic education. While the orphan drawing was intended to explore an architectural problem in a creative and artful manner, it was not received as such. Instead the critic’s response revealed telling expectations of an architectural pedagogy – one in which the idea of a consistency of drawing style was

important - and how that pedagogy had been disrupted by my orphan drawing. Instead of a pedagogy which was nested within the creative explorations of the student, it was framed by conditions outside the student within a top down and transmissional understanding of pedagogy (Miller, 2008, p.10); and one which as Dutton observes revealed the veiled curriculum (Dutton, 1991, p. 167) of architectural education; or as Palmer has also observed of higher education in general (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 26).

### **Tycho's Compromise: My Epicyclical Transit through Graduate and Professional School, *A Circling of the Scintilla***

*The stories of my architectural thesis project and encounters with philosophy professors form part of a greater narrative which circled through diverse post secondary learning environments.*

*Both stories are prefaced by my first experience of graduate school in the history of science, which like my other post secondary school experiences, was marked by difficult pedagogical encounters with teachers and the eventual decision to leave graduate school behind. My decision had been prompted by the graduate director who said to me point blank "Why postpone the inevitable?"*

*Leaving was difficult as I was drawn to the rich story of science and fundamental questions of philosophy. My goal to become a teacher and researcher in a university would not be fulfilled. What would I do now? What direction would my transit now take?*

*In my angst I decided I would "break" with philosophy. I would leave the old questions behind. I would turn to a new field which looked in a different direction – towards the future.*

*My favourite class in high school was being in the art studio. I remember the feeling of doing my paintings – how they consumed me; and studying and recreating drawings of the medieval cathedrals on the kitchen table. I would become an architect.*

*I cycled away from graduate studies into the study of architecture. I studied within a faculty of architecture for five years followed by an architectural internship of six years. I eventually became licensed specializing in the field of building rehabilitation.*

*While the study of architecture has a rich design history and is associated with creativity, the practice of architecture can be less so. While design is important in architecture, it is only one component of a process often dominated by activities which have little to do with design.*

*Architecture posed a conundrum for me. The profession is associated with the artful and engineered, yet the architecture I practised did not nurture the former. Neither did it fulfil my intellectual curiosity and wonder. The fundamental questions were always present and nagged at me.*

*After nine years employed as a project architect in an architectural and engineering firm, I quit my position and became a student again. I cycled back briefly towards philosophy. My transit though was short and my failed second attempt at a PhD in a department of analytical philosophy led to my return to architecture.*

*When I decided to return again to graduate school years later I applied to different programs in critical and cultural studies. By the time I had applied I had already transited in my intellectual growth from the blinkered paradigm of analytical philosophy – one which I had experienced and now felt foreign and lacking in its vision.*

*Critical and cultural studies seemed then a release from the shackles of the positivist philosophical paradigm in which I had been schooled. During my earlier graduate studies in philosophy I had gone against the grain of my department by taking courses in critical studies. These thinkers were shaking up the study of philosophy by the way they thought of philosophical problems, the way they wrote about them and the way they incorporated the aesthetic into the study of philosophy. I felt that the study of philosophy should always be expansive in vision, prepared to take risks and see things in a different light and not one corralled by restrictive expectations about what a student should believe; or what they should read; or how they should write. I wanted to break free from the third person.*

*I was drawn to the different view of the cultural theorist that the study of philosophy cannot be done in isolation from the broader community. I felt that these new philosophers showed promise. Their philosophical perspective was expansive and one which allowed for the artist. Though it was not fore grounded in my vision at the time, my attraction to such thinkers anticipated my transit towards holism in which I would later nest my inquiry. The*



*promise of cultural studies though remained short lived; my application to the program had been rejected and my journey onto this terrain of inquiry becoming a brief transit and not a final destination.*

*I returned once again to architecture.*



*In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the astronomer Tycho Brahe had the sun and moon circulating the earth while the planets circled the sun (Kuhn, 1976, p. 202). His system was a compromise between the earth centered and epicyclical Ptolemaic astronomy and Copernicus's new sun centred cosmology.*

*Tycho's transit is a metaphor for my journey through graduate and professional schools. Like Tycho's transit, mine is epicyclical in nature. It circulated about intuitions about the nature of knowing*

*which were deep and ever present, but remained unsaid and unnurtured. Approaching and then receding; returning and then cycling away again. Like Ptolemy's planetary epicycles upon which Tycho based his cosmology, my academic journey turns and returns; cycles and recycles. My journey into cultural studies marking that in between paradigm, like Tycho's compromise - a paradigm between the analytical philosophy that I had left behind and that of holism – the seeking of my inner light of the Copernican sun.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, September 2016)

In *The Heart of Higher Education* (2010) Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc observe a spiritual deficit in post secondary education amongst faculty and undergraduate students (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010 p. x); and one which in my retelling was configured by my epicyclical transit towards and away from the university over a trajectory of forty

years. Their observation about their own teaching frustrations to “ ‘colour within the lines’ ” (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 2) mirrored my own spiritual deficit and frustrations about being in learning environments which, as they observe, had lost sight of their goal to encourage students to reflect upon their purpose in life (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 3).

In my inquiry reflecting upon Palmer and Zajonc within the narrative of my academic transit resonated with a parallel reading of Thomas Merton’s views on the purpose of education and the university. In *Love and Living* Merton reflects upon how the purpose of education is not to press upon the student a definition of the world. Instead the “fruit of true education” ponders Merton is “...the activation of that inmost center, that scintilla...” (Merton, 1979, pp. 9-10) which is the true self. Authentic learning for Merton emerges organically from within the student.

Following Merton, I ponder how my transit to and from the university circled about the spark. Of my journey I layer my words onto his and reflect,

*I sought the fruit but could not find it as I flew on Tycho’s  
epicycles.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, November 2016)

Reading about Merton’s *scintilla* marked a paradigmatic shift in my epicyclical journey. The scintilla that had been absent in my previous studies perhaps now coming into fruition within narrative writing and the embrace of an aesthetical presence within inquiry that felt focused and authentic. The scintilla corralled the epicycles around the inner light – the metaphorical mandala of the “Copernican sun”; breaking free from the third person; and sparking inquiry which transited from the epicycles of analytical philosophy and cultural studies towards a holistic meditation upon the nature of wisdom and art.



*The medieval mandalas of the Baptistry, Florence*

### **Pairing Stories of Disconnection: From the Personal towards a Shared Narrative**

In his photographic essay *Essential Elements* (2016), the Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky pairs images which at first view seem different from the other. An image of a circular pivot irrigation farm is paired with an image of a circular baroque church ceiling. Standing on their own as individual photographs, the meaning of a single image is limited; but when placed side by side the paired images nurture interpretations of the sacred and the profane which transcend the presence of a single image. By pairing the images Burtynsky expresses a story which both reflects and transcends his narrative as a photographer. The images can be viewed in Chapter Two of the inquiry.

In similar spirit my stories, while set within different academic settings of the aesthetical of architectural studies and analytical of philosophical studies, when paired seek to bring into focus criticisms that researchers in holistic and transformative learning have made about higher education. With such narrative pairing and *out-turning* I seek to

move from the personal to a shared narrative of higher learning which transcends my personal journey; and is captured in the kindred criticisms of Cartesianism by writers in holistic and transformative learning in education such as Zajonc (2006), Palmer & Zajonc (2010), Hart (2004) and the spiritual writings of Thomas Merton (1972).

The critique of Cartesianism amongst these writers is nested within a broader criticism of rationalist thinking which encompasses both historical and contemporary critiques. Of the former, the historian of wisdom Trevor Curnow explores how the rise of Cartesianism was accompanied by the displacement of wisdom from philosophical study – one which he attributes to Descartes' influence in realigning problems of knowledge with mathematics and rise of the scientific method in inquiry (Curnow, 2000, p.10). Such displacing in turn marking a critical shift in how philosophical inquiry was to be conducted; one which following Kuhn's theory of paradigms (Kuhn, 1962) marked both a shift from and incommensurability with the idea of philosophy qua wisdom in favour of another which identified inquiry with experimental method.

While researchers such as Curnow locate the critique of rationalism within a historical study, a Kuhnian interpretation of such history also aligns with contemporary criticisms of Cartesian thinking in particular and the direction of contemporary philosophy in general. Like Curnow, other commentators have lamented the direction the practice of academic philosophy has taken – one in which wisdom has a diminished presence.

Philosophers Frodeman and Briggie, for example, observe how the institutionalization of philosophy within the university in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and demand upon it to become specialized like other fields caused it, following the French

philosopher Bruno Latour to be “ ‘purified’ ” and disencased from society (Frodeman & Briggle, 2016). The institutional pressure placed upon philosophy to emulate the practices of the sciences – such as having a defined domain of inquiry, sub-specialities, and strategies for academic accountability have resulted in a dire outcome which Frodeman and Briggle see as the failure of philosophy (Frodeman & Briggle, 2016). They remind us that if philosophy is to be restored, then it must be embraced with an original understanding of its domain; that is as one being “...present everywhere, often interstitial, essentially interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary in nature” (Frodeman & Briggle, 2016). Against the view of philosophy as being “purified” Frodeman & Briggle argue for seeing it as having “dirty hands” - “Philosophy is a mangle. The philosopher’s hands were never clean and were never meant to be” (Frodeman & Briggle, 2016).

Frodeman’s & Briggle’s observations upon the practice of philosophy, as one which is nested within complexity, evokes similar critiques from writers within the field of holistic and transformative studies in education. Amongst these, Gunnlaugson’s observation about how inquiry is configured within messiness (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 139); or Parker Palmer’s kindred observation about how integrative education “...involve[s] a communal exchange that is fluid, complex and confusing” (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 39). In a similar spirit Tobin Hart criticizes rationalist understandings (Hart, 2004, p. 28) of what constitutes legitimate knowledge today; and advocates for a different way of knowing which embraces holism and the nonlinearity of inquiry (Hart, 2004, p. 29). The shadowy and blurred image of the Venetian Calle is offered as a visual metaphor for the messiness of inquiry that Gunnlaugson describes and which Hart and Palmer view with kindred language.



*A Narrow Street in Venice known as a Calle  
May 1, 2017*

**Reflections on Cartesianism:  
A Philosophy without Mystery**

*In philosophy school I had taken a reading course on Descartes' Meditations. The philosopher with whom I studied was one I greatly respected as he was both knowledgeable and empathic towards others. Together we worked through the Meditations. Though we analysed the text in detail following Descartes' step by step argument towards the Ergo, we did not focus upon the importance of the role of narrative within its meditative structure.*

*Years later, when I journeyed onto a different terrain of holistic education and became interested in reflective writing the irony of having studied Descartes Meditations was brought into focus. Descartes' journey is complicated. While seeking to reduce the world into binaries of mind and body, he does so within a narrative journey configured as meditative writing. That the seeds of Cartesian rationalism were rooted in narrative I now view as both ironic and germane to the reading of the text – one which I did not then appreciate and perhaps was not yet ready to understand.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, March 2016)

While researchers in holistic education and philosophers such as Frodeman & Briggle share kindred observations upon the practice of philosophy Merton is more direct and forceful in his criticism of Cartesian thinking. Writing in the 1950s and 1960s, Merton's criticisms are prescient to the return to contemplative practices which Ergas' (Ergas, 2016, p. 2) identifies and which marks the rise of holistic and transformative learning studies in education.

For Merton, the criticism of analytical philosophy is rooted in its philosophical reductionism – one which approaches the understanding of the self within the disassembly of experience into pieces and not within an understanding of the mystery of its whole nature. Within such reductionism there is no room for that which cannot be

measured, observed, tested and categorized. There is no room for complexity and messiness. There is no room for mystery.

While philosophers revelled in Descartes' *Cogito Ergo Sum* (Descartes, 1960, p. 24) as the triumph of a new way of knowing, the mystery of being remained. Though Descartes strove to banish the mystery within the binary of the cogito, his *Meditations* did not mark the end of reflection upon the nature of being. The mystery remains; it tugs at us and we are impelled to return to its presence.

Of such mystery, Thomas Merton in *New Seeds of Contemplation* criticizes Descartes' *Cogito*,

Nothing could be more alien to contemplation than the *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes. "I think, therefore I am." This is the declaration of an alienated being, in exile from his own spiritual depths, compelled to seek some comfort in a *proof of his own existence* (!) based on the observation that he "thinks." If his thought is necessary as a medium through which he arrives at the concept of his existence, then he is in fact only moving further away from his true being. He is reducing himself to a concept. He is making it impossible for himself to experience, directly and immediately, the mystery of his own being. (Merton, 1972, p.8)

For Merton, the Cartesian paradigm is spiritually wanting and a colossal philosophical failure. Within such thinking, man is reduced to a thing as is also God. Philosophy is reduced to an ontological project from which the transcendent has been excised – one which Merton questions as misguided (Merton, 1972, p.8).

Merton's discomfort with philosophical rationalism recurs frequently in his writings. Elsewhere in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton writes of the "dead, selfish rationalism" (Merton, 1998, p. 208) he had encountered in his studies. His unease with philosophical rationalism is a recurring theme in his writings – one which is also examined in depth in Ross Labrie's study *Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination*



(2001) where he observes how the rise of Cartesianism was for Merton synonymous with the growth of alienation in society (Labrie, 2001, p.31).

Others have commented upon Merton's critique of rationalism. Merton had a life long interest in William Blake having studied his writings at Columbia University before entering the monastery. In his text *Heretic Blood*, Higgins explores Merton's critique of rationalism and how such critique was manifested in Merton's preference of Blake's cosmology over that of his contemporary Newton. Of Newtonian thinking, Higgins observes how for Merton "...Newtonians live in the very heart of nature and yet do not know it" (Higgins, 1998, p. 252). For Merton reductionist thinking did not quell the longing for the mystery of existence (Higgins, 1998, p. 252).

Higgins' observations on Merton's view of Newtonian thinking are kindred with Merton's criticism of Cartesian rationalism. Together with Labrie's exploration of Merton's views and those of researchers in holistic and transformative learning such as Zajonc (2006), Palmer (1993), Hart (2004), and Miller (2008) they provide a framework for meditations on my own encounters with Cartesianism; and in particular the retelling of my experience of studying Descartes' *Meditations*.

Many years later within the context of writing a doctoral dissertation within the field of holistic learning, those gaps in my reflections upon Descartes' *Meditations* are filled by a different reading through Merton's criticisms. While Merton is critical of Descartes' reductionism in the *Ergo*, he is also troubled by the philosopher's journey to such reductionism through the path of meditation. Descartes conveys his argument as a meditation, but of such meditation Merton views it as being problematic and inauthentic. In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton reflects on Descartes' *cogito* and observes,

Contemplation, on the contrary, is the experiential grasp of reality as *subjective*, not so much “mine” (which would signify “belonging to the external self”) but “myself” in existential mystery. Contemplation does not arrive at reality after a process of deduction, but by an intuitive awakening in which our free and personal reality becomes fully alive to its own existential depths, which open out into the mystery of God.

For the contemplative there is no *cogito* (“I think”) and no *ergo* (“therefore”) but only *SUM*, I Am. Not in the sense of a futile assertion of our individuality as ultimately real, but in the humble realization of our mysterious being as persons in whom God dwells, with infinite sweetness and inalienable power. (Merton, 1972, pp. 8-9)

Reflecting upon Merton’s criticisms returns me to a surprise encounter in Florence with a fresco by Fra Angelico.

*In the fresco Mocking of Christ (Convent of San Marco, Florence, 1440), the artist Fra Angelico depicts the torments of Christ. The torments are represented by the hands of his abusers who slap him and place the crown of thorns on his head; and a soldier who spits on Christ. The hands float freely within the image as does also the head of the soldier.*

*Within the image Christ rests calmly as do also the saints at his feet seemingly immune to the torments.*

*I am struck by the representation of the body parts which float within the fresco disconnected from a body. The image is unlike others I have seen. It has a timeless feel.*

*The image causes me to pause; it has a power which invites psychological reflection. For a few moments I ponder this image from the threshold of the monk’s cell and I take pictures – adjusting the camera settings for close up shots and others standing farther back. I allow for the light.*



*The "Centered Self"*

Fra Angelico

*Mocking of Christ*

1440

Convent of San Marco, Florence

*While the image is meditative, it also offers a rich psychic metaphor for the nature of self. While the free floating body parts provides a metaphor for the dismembering of self, Christ's calm amidst the clamour of his torments – represented by the blindfold while sitting on a stone plinth - also invite reflection on the aspect of a core self which resides beyond the clamour.*

*Beyond the din the core self resides in the centered Christ – a presence which is symmetrically composed within the geometry of the triangle which is formed by the figures of Christ and the two saints.*

*The image guides me to reflect upon the notion of the integrated self – the “Sum, I Am” - which Merton seeks in the criticism of Descartes.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, June 2017)

While the image of the soldier offers a metaphor for the Cartesian bifurcation of self, the image of the transcendent Christ offers another vision of Merton's *SUM, I AM*. That is, of a self not eroded by reason, but one which instead stands beyond it within its own unity and mystery.

Of the return to transcendence, which Parker Palmer explores within the context of holistic education, he observes,

To experience transcendence means to be removed – not from self and world, but from that hall of mirrors in which the two endlessly reflect and determine one another. Prayer takes us out – not out of self and world, but out of their closed, circular logic. (Palmer, 1993, p. 13)

In Fra Angelico's fresco the inward looking and blindfolded Christ defies the Cartesian mirrors within a vision of an integrated, centered and transcendent self.

## Reclaiming the Binary: “SUM, I AM”

In dialogue with Merton’s observations on Descartes’ *cogito*, I reflect

*Rationalism allows us to know much about the world; yet in the same moment we feel incomplete in our knowing. We are taught to see with rationalist eyes, yet in the same moment we are blind and do not see whole (Palmer, 1993, p. xxiii). To see with eyes guided by intuition, feeling and empathy in addition to the eyes of reason has little place in the rationalist vision.*

*The feeling to see holistically with all embracing eyes; to cast them towards and contemplate upon the mysteries of the creation in inclusive relation to our being propels us beyond the rationalist vision. Rationalism does not quench our desire to know for we feel that it is not the only way to know. Mystery remains and our desire and deep ancestral need to reflect upon it seeds the critique of rationalism’s absolutism and guides us to look beyond its horizon with whole vision; as “SUM, I Am.”*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)

Mystery leaves questions but the complexity of mystery also enriches inquiry. Of such complexity, the Cartesian canon in which I was schooled endeavoured to eradicate it. The holistic learning paradigm, in contrast, embraces mystery within a pedagogy which, following Miller, is about connection and transformation (Miller, 2007, p. 12). While higher education has a central presence in my narrative - one which has been formed by encounters with the pedagogies of architecture school and graduate studies in philosophy – the pedagogy of holism and integration which Miller (2007), Hart (2004), Palmer & Zajonc (2010) write of and which Merton alludes to in his writings has been absent from such encounters.

Pondering Merton’s views on the holism which is hidden but (Merton, 1974, p.506) present to the creation has been prescient to exploration of kindred sentiments in the fields of holistic and transformative learning in education. It has also been nurturing

to my own inquiry – one whose journey, while originating in encounters of pedagogical disconnection, is also seeded by Merton, artists and writers in holistic and transformative learning. A journey onto the aesthetical which seeks its own transformation towards an integrative terrain of Merton’s “SUM, *I AM*” (Merton, 1972, p. 9) and Fra Angelico’s depiction of *Christ*; and which endeavours to reclaim from Descartes the binary by embracing the creation in the fullness of its complexity and beauty within an inclusive domain of contemplative knowing where wisdom resides.

**Chapter Two: Meditations on Merton  
Aesthetic Moment, Contemplation and Transcendence  
Towards the *Wisdom Image***

**Introduction**



Of the relation of wisdom, contemplation and art, Merton's writings reveal a contemplative whose views of such relation evolved broadly from a theologically framed understanding in his early writings, to one which became more ecumenical with its reflections on Zen in his later writings. From the abundance of his writings, the chapter endeavours to explore such evolution in three parts by focusing on selected texts; in particular *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* (1947) from his early monastic years and which forms the first part of the exploration. In the second part, the evolution of Merton's views are explored through later texts, notably, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) and his essay *Zen in Japanese Art* from *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968). In the final part Merton understands of paradisaal consciousness and paradisaal wisdom –one which is sculpted by an aesthetical presence in his writings is explored. With such exploration is introduced the notion of the *wisdom image*; an understanding of image which evolved during the process of my inquiry. Reflecting upon how images can be conveyors of wisdom bears kindred relation to traditional text based configurations of wisdom while departing from such understandings by being situated within the domain of the artist and not the tradition of wisdom literature.

The chapter is prefaced with a dialogical conversation with Merton. In his essay *Rain and the Rhinoceros* from *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) Merton speaks of the “festival of rain” – a moment of enveloping warmth, spiritual oneness and beauty in the experience of *being* with rain in nature (Merton, 1966, p. 11). The festival of rain is the

basis of a dialogical engaging with Merton which both begins the chapter and exploration of the intersection of wisdom, contemplation and art that follows. Reflections upon the story of the rain also forms part of a general reflection within this inquiry upon the notion that wisdom is nested within us and nurtured by moments of aesthetical presence.

The interpretation of Merton's aesthetical views and their relation to the notion of wisdom image is informed by the work of researchers in the fields of holistic studies in education in general and contemplative and transformative learning in particular. Amongst some of these researchers, Merton's ideas are acknowledged in their writings as is seen in the writings of Palmer (1993), Miller (2014), Zajonc (2009), Dencev and Collister (2010) and Hart (2004). Amongst other writers such as Burrows (2015), Byrnes (2012), Gunnlaugson (2007/ 2011) and Morgan (2014), there are echoes of Merton's spiritual ideas. Reading their work returns us to him and foregrounds the notion of how prescient and kindred Merton's thoughts from the 1960s were to later writing in the fields of transformative and contemplative studies in education.

While forming interpretative bridges with Merton's ideas, it is also hoped that reading Merton through the lens of these writers will also inform the fields of transformative and contemplative learning. Recently such bridges have been brought into focus with the centenary of Merton's birth in 2015 which has been accompanied by a renewed interest in his life and writings; and acknowledgement of his contemplative presence in American life by Pope Francis in his address to the United States Congress in September 2015.



## Seeking the “Festival of Rain”

*Brother Louis. When you began your life as a contemplative monk your writing was imbued with Christian theology. By the 60s you write of Zen and Asian mysticism. There are moments when you write mystically as in *The Geography of Lograire* (1969); and there are other moments too when, as a philosopher you write critically of Descartes, Foucault or Barthes.*

*I find solace in the journey of your philosophical and mystical biography. I too started in philosophy and studied Descartes. I too journeyed into French theory and pondered Foucault. I too am immersed in the space of theory; yet like you I intuit and am seeking other places.*

*Sometimes we need to reflect upon the narratives of others in order to penetrate our own. Brother Louis, for what reason and to what end have I pondered your life and teachings? What cosmological magic has brought us together to this present moment? Why am I drawn to them? What is it in your narrative that allows me to penetrate my own?*

*As a philosopher, your love of ideas and the pristine clarity with which you write draw me towards you. Yet, in the same instance, you seek other places where the philosopher does not journey and which I too am seeking. What map does the philosopher follow to this other place – the “Festival of Rain” you write of in *Raids*? (Merton, 1966, p.11).*

*Of those other places, the analytical philosopher declares to me “You are not a philosopher!” The other place demands questions from him, but the answers, if we name them as such, are incommensurable with the philosopher; and instead reside within a different domain of intuition, feeling, the aesthetical and transcendence.*

*In *Raids* you write,*

*The rain I am in is not like the rain of cities. It fills the woods with an immense and confused sound. It covers the flat roof of the cabin and its porch with insistent and controlled rhythms. And I listen, because it reminds me again and again that the whole world runs by rhythms I have not yet learned to recognize, rhythms that are not those of the engineer. (Merton, 1966, p. 9)*

*I too have not recognized those rhythms, but like you Brother Louis, intuit their transcendent possibilities. And like you Brother Louis the seeking of the rhythms also captures our reality - that we vibrate amongst two domains – one of the rational world of the philosopher and other of the artist who guides us towards the realm of spiritual transcendence within the “festival of rain” (Merton, 1966, p. 11).*

*Of those realms, how do we integrate them Brother Louis? Your student ponders your advice in Zen and the Birds of Appetite.*

*If one reaches the point where understanding fails, this is not a tragedy: it is simply a reminder to stop thinking and start looking. Perhaps there is nothing to figure out after all: perhaps we only need to wake up. (Merton, 1968, p.53)*

*Brother Louis. How do we reconcile the rhythms of the engineer with those of the rain? How do we reconcile the places that we have been to with the places we seek but which are unknown except through our intuition and not the analysis of the philosopher.*

*Some will say that the places we transit from are more real than the places we seek. Yet this does not dissuade us from seeking the unknown place – the void of Zen. Of that domain, we do not know. We do not have its map. We do not know where the journey to that place will take us. We do not know its ending. Yet we return intuitively to it and have comfort in its unknowability. We feel towards the journey.*

*Of that journey in Zen and the Birds of Appetite, you speak of “...a breakthrough into what is beyond system, beyond cultural and social structures, and beyond religious rite and belief...”(Merton, 1968, pp.4-5). The journey towards “...Zen enlightenment, the discovery of the ‘original face before you were born’ is the discovery not that one sees Buddha but that one is Buddha and that Buddha is not what the images in the temple had led one to expect: for there is no longer any image, and consequently nothing to see, no one to see it, and a Void in which no image is even conceivable. ‘The true seeing,’ said Shen Hui, “is when there is no seeing.” (Merton, 1968, p.5)*



*"Looking onto Others to See Myself, April 29, 2017"*

Bottega Degli Embriachi

*Specchio*

15<sup>th</sup> Century

Bargello, Florence

*Of the journey towards “true seeing” and “no seeing” your student wonders. What does this mean for the artist when there is no seeing? I recall your advice to stop thinking and become awake. Perhaps your student must become patient of the questions he asks.*

*Brother Louis. How do we not see yet see with truth? How do we wake up? And in the space of wakefulness, where does beauty lay? You esteem the artists’ vision but does that vision only “...help us approach Zen” (Merton, 1958, p.5) as you say in *Zen and The Birds of Appetite*, but bears no equality with Zen. Does the aesthetic not stand with the transcendent as I desire it would?*

*The artist’s vision transports us towards the transcendent. But of what relation is such vision to the transcendent? In *Raids*, you speak fondly of your writings as your children. But what remains of the aesthetic with the transcendent experience? What becomes of our children? Do our children remain apart; or does the aesthetic encounter become enmeshed with the transcendent experience?*

*I ponder these questions as I remember your advice as I do a mantra.*

*If one reaches the point where understanding fails, this is not a tragedy: it is simply a reminder to stop thinking and start looking. Perhaps there is nothing to figure out after all: perhaps we only need to wake up. (Merton, 1968, p.53)*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, May 2016)

### **Beginning to ponder Transformative Shifts and Merton’s Aesthetics**

Of the nature of wisdom and its relation to spiritual transcendence and artist’s vision study of Merton’s writings reveal how his thinking of such relation evolved from a theologically focused one in the late 1940s to a more expansive, nuanced and ecumenical one later in life. The evolution can be traced in his writings, amongst these essays *Poetry and the Contemplative Life in Figures for an Apocalypse* (Merton, 1947), *The Study of Zen* (Merton 1968) and *Zen in Japanese Art* (Merton, 1968). Study of the

evolution of Merton's aesthetical vision through these writings also provide insights into the phenomenon of *transformative shifts in consciousness*; one which follows the work of researchers in transformative learning studies such as Dencev and Collister (2010), Hart (2004), Burrows (2015), Byrnes (2012), and Gunnlaugson (2007/ 2011).

Merton's ideas on art reveal a life of writing that was a continuous unfolding; one in which the presence of the creative was essential and underscoring the thesis that transformation is an unending process (Dencev and Collister, 2010, p.180). Transformation aligned with the presence of the aesthetical; an alignment which embraces life in its entirety and one reflected in the transit of Merton's life and writings. Transformation, creativity and life intertwined. To be with the creative is to be with life.

It is through the lens of such writers as Dencev and Collister and others in the fields of holistic and transformative studies in education that the evolution of Merton's aesthetical ideas and their relation to wisdom are traced beginning with his early essay *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* (Merton, 1947). Of the relation of the artist's vision to spiritual transcendence we observe it corralled within hierarchical and restrictive theological understandings. Merton's later essays depart from such restrictions by being informed by the study of Zen – one which creates a more nuanced understanding of the artist's vision in spiritual transcendence; and which in addition invites us to meditate upon the relation of such ideas to the notion of a paradisaical consciousness aligned with the vision of the artist.

In beginning to reflect upon Merton's ideas I ponder,

*Brother Louis. In your early writings, the transcendent possibilities of art are corralled within Catholic theology. Yet within such constraints are seeded themes which would evolve in your later writings. That is, of the presence of the aesthetical*

*within us and contemplative nature of art. Of the power of intuition over reason; and of art to transform us.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)

For Merton, the encounter with art has not a singular character but one which ranges. While for many persons such encounter is simply an emotional experience (Merton, 1947, p.101) a genuine encounter with art is different in being transcendent and contemplative. In his early essay *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* (1947) he writes

But a genuine esthetic experience is something which transcends not only the sensible order (in which, however, it has its beginning) but also that of reason itself. It is a supra-rational intuition of the latent perfection of things. Its immediacy outruns the speed of reasoning and leaves all analysis far behind. (Merton, 1947, pp. 101-102)

For Merton the aesthetic encounter is a both a powerful transformative and epistemological moment wherein the being of the artist is resculpted. It is a moment of powerful knowing which is beyond reasoning – what he names the “supra-rational” (Merton, 1947, pp. 101-102). Within such moments artists have described them with words echoing Merton’s observations as “profound moments of grace” (Kelly, 2006, p.3); or as Emerson describes “deeper apprehension” (Miller, 2006, p. 10).

Of the transformative presence of the aesthetic encounter, such artists’ retellings are kindred with Merton’s reflections in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* where he likens such encounters to mystical experiences (Merton, 1947, pp. 101-102). For Merton, in such moments there is a melding of the artist with their work – a moment of unity or as he names that of “connaturality”- a “...mode of apprehension” wherein “... it reaches out to grasp the inner reality, the vital substance of its object, by a kind of affective identification of itself with it” (Merton, 1947, pp. 101-102). Such moments are ones of

connection – what writers in holistic studies have also viewed as moments of spiritual infusion (Kelly, 2006, p. 3) or of “nondual knowing” (Miller, 2006, p.10).

For Merton such moments are ones of an intuition infused with an aesthetical presence (Merton, 1947, p. 102) and which hold an elevated standing in spiritual experience. When such intuition occurs, Merton observes how the artist pierces reality and opens onto God (Merton, 1947, p. 102). While Merton is careful in distinguishing mystical from aesthetic experience and speaks of the aesthetic as an analogue to the mystical, his celebration of how the aesthetic can transport us towards the spiritual realm is a recurrent and powerful theme in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* (1947).

### **Of the Aesthetic and Contemplative: A Unity within the Light**

In his essay *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* (1947) Merton’s description of the aesthetic encounter evokes rich interpretations of *transformation*, *embodiment* and *intuitive knowing*. The language with which Merton ponders the contemplative and aesthetical in turn anticipates kindred language used by later writers in the field of transformative learning and spirituality studies (Dencev and Collister, 2010; Gunnlaugson, 2007/2011; Hart, 2004; Burrows, 2015; Byrnes, 2012; Miller, 2016; Palmer, 1993; Ergas, 2016).

Of the nature of transformation, that is of the “...permanent shift in consciousness” Dencev and Collister (2010), following Crowell observe that “ “...when things are engaged in process there is constant transformation and [...] transformative possibilities [are] built into every creative act, every creative event” [personal communication, January 7, 2007]” (Dencev and Collister, 2010, p. 179). Interpreting Merton follows Dencev and Collister; the moments of ““connaturality”” (Merton, 1947,

pp. 101-102) when the artist becomes aligned with their work are encounters of *becoming* wherein connection is made, transformation happens and as Gunnlaugson also observes one's perspective changes (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 135). In a similar spirit O'Sullivan describes transformative experience as a moving between learning horizons; one wherein old ways of knowing are reintegrated towards new " 'spiritual horizons' " [personal communication]", Dencev and Collister, 2010, p.180).

Merton's writing invites us to ponder how the transformative encounter – one which is configured with a *moving towards* as O'Sullivan alludes to - is also an encounter with embodiment and ways of knowing, such as the intuitive and mystical. While rational knowing moves towards the eroding of experience into order to understand it, the intuitive and mystical move in a different path away from dualistic knowing towards what Merton in his text *Hagia Sophia* views as the unseen fullness of creation (Merton, 1974, p.506) or as researchers in holistic studies in education view as a knowing which is beyond the binary (Miller, 2006, p. 11); or as the "...reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds" (Palmer, 1993, p. 8). In *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* we see such trajectory in Merton's meditations upon the nature of contemplation.

For Merton the aesthetic experience is an analogue to the mystical and one which he ponders within a discourse on the nature of Christian contemplation. Of the kinds of contemplative experience, Merton speaks of them being of "three degrees" (Merton, 1947, p.95). The first, which he names "natural contemplation of God", belongs to the artist, philosopher and pagan religions (Merton, 1947, p.95). The second form, which he names "active contemplation", refers to Roman Catholic religious practices - participation in prayer, Liturgy, Sacraments, etc - a form of contemplation which we may



view today as a guided form of contemplation. While for Merton active contemplation “...belongs to our own powers,” the third form, “infused contemplation,” is that which is bestowed upon us by God and as Merton observes is “...to live on the desire of God alone” (Merton, 1947, p. 95). Of infused contemplation Merton elaborates

Infused contemplation is an experimental knowledge of God’s goodness “tasted” and “possessed” by a vital contact in the depth of the soul. By infused loved, we are given an immediate grasp of God’s own substance, and rest in the obscure and profound sense of His presence and transcendent actions within our inmost selves, yielding ourselves altogether to the work of His transforming Spirit. (Merton, 1947, p. 97)

For Merton, contemplation in its purist form is a movement towards the being of God; a *yielding* wherein God’s presence enters into our own being. Within such domain boundaries are dissolved within a new terrain of connection. Of the movement towards a place of connection and unity, Merton’s description of contemplation evokes Burrows observations on the non-dualistic nature of mindfulness. Burrows observes that

Mindfulness involves consciousness of everything. When we are aware to this degree, we begin to see the entirety of life as a seamless garment. In a mindful state – or a nondualistic state – we are present to everything...” (Burrows, 2015, p. 133).

While Burrows speaks of non-dualism as a “seamless garment” Merton tells us more by describing what the seamless garment *feels* like; that is, what it feels like to be in connection.

The words Merton uses to describe infused contemplation are sensual and aesthetical. Of infused contemplation, Merton describes it with tactile language: In the encounter with God’s presence, we *taste*; we are *possessed*; we *grasp*; we *yield*; we allow ourselves to be formed by “*His transforming Spirit*.” To be within infused contemplation is for Merton to be within an embodied moment which is transcendent and

transformative. Far from being a moment of stasis, the moment of infused contemplation is sensual and one of movement. We extend our reach – we grasp and taste - and yet we yield; and within such quivering movement towards unity with God there is a both a recasting and dissolution of one’s self. While Merton’s distinguishes infused contemplation from the “natural contemplation of God” which the artist possesses, the language he uses to describe infused contemplation invites an aesthetical and sculptural interpretation.

The vision of Merton’s contemplation is a rich one; the feelings of movement, possessing, yielding, grasping evoke artist’s visions such as Bernini’s sculptural retelling of St. Teresa of Avila’s mystical episodes - *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome, 1647-1652). Within a transformative encounter sculpted within a domain of feeling, St. Teresa moves towards an embodied and non-dualistic knowing with God.

While Merton in *Hagia Sophia* writes of *Sophia* as the sunlight, Bernini in his retelling of Saint Teresa’s mystical experience sculpts rays of light which fall onto her. The juxtaposition of the poem and sculpture invite reflection upon how the poet and the sculptor interpret the light as a manifestation of transcendence. Bernini sculpts the light that Merton contemplates of wisdom in *Hagia Sophia*.



*Hagia Sophia*

*She [Sophia] is in all things like the air receiving the sunlight. In her they prosper. In her they glorify God. In her they rejoice to reflect Him. In her they are united with him. She is the union between them. She is the Love that unites them. She is life as communion, life as thanksgiving, life as praise, life as festival, life as glory.*

(Merton, 1974, p. 510)

### **Weaving into Consciousness: The Seamless Garment of Contemplation**

For Merton the “seamless garment” (Burrows, 2015, p. 133) which Burrows speaks of is sensual and embodied. While Merton distinguishes “natural contemplation” which the artist possesses from infused contemplation, the language he uses to describe the latter is infused with the language of embodiment and the artist. In Bernini’s interpretation of St. Teresa’s vision, the waves of the saint’s garment expresses the enraptured encounter with God and in so doing evoking the sensual language of Merton’s embodied contemplation – of *tasting, grasping and transforming*. Bernini depicts the seamless garment that Burrows speaks of with Merton’s contemplative language of sensuality and embodiment.

Within such moments of embodiment, Merton observes that they are accompanied by the “transforming Spirit” (Merton, 1947, p. 97); a notion which finds kindred voice in the field of spirituality in education. The aspect of non-dualistic knowing which is evoked by Merton’s description of contemplation evokes Palmer’s (1993) exploration of non-propositional knowing; Miller’s observations on non-judgemental knowing (Miller, 2016, p. 129); and Ergas’ metaphor of the “impregnated being” (Ergas, 2016, p.6). In addition, Merton’s notion of contemplation as an embodied phenomenon, which the latter scholars collectively explore, is prescient to recent work on the spirituality research paradigm advanced by Lin et al (2016) wherein research is embodied (Ergas, 2016; Miller, 2016) and the transformative promise of such research is central.

In their critique upon dualistic epistemology these writers ponder another way of knowing which aligns with Merton’s writing on transformation; that is, one wherein the

movement to knowing is a movement with the body. In her critique of schooling, Burrows explores such view.

There is a need to go beyond talking and writing *about* transformative learning to include more holistic and experiential ways of knowing that directly involve the body, feelings, and intuition as well as cognition (Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda, 2005). (Burrows, 2015, p.128)

Burrows writes of “tapping into inner wisdom” (Burrows, 2015, p. 132); one which is nurtured by tapping into modes of knowing which are sculpted by feeling and the intuitive. I meditate upon Burrows’ words and ponder:

*To tap is to touch;  
and to touch is to feel  
To feel is to move  
and to move is to know*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, January 26, 2017)

Burrows writes of the “seamless garment” (Burrows, 2015, p.133); a cloth of non-dualism in which we are present to the fabric of creation and have “consciousness of everything” (Burrows, 2015, p.133). I layer Merton’s *grasping* in contemplation onto Burrows’ garment and ponder how such cloth is imbued with feeling; and am reminded how the tactility of Merton’s contemplative grasp evokes aesthetical reflections upon the sculptor’s chisel or weaver’s art. The garment knitted with threads of feeling, touch, intuition and the aesthetical and forming a cloth which departs from the reductive weave of analytical knowing.



*Sculptor's Chisels, April 19, 2017*  
 Restoration Workshop of the Duomo  
 Florence

While analytical inquiry is about *unweaving* the phenomenon, Burrows invites us to ponder how the “seamless garment” of consciousness engages modes of knowing which stand apart from the rationalistic and analytical. While the rationalistic unweaves the phenomenon in order to understand it in fragments, the intuitive and sensorial engages its complexity and *weaves* the phenomenon in the fullness of its creation.

With the richness of the holistic weave, Burrows’ spiritual garment evokes Merton’s contemplative holism. For Merton, wisdom is nested within the veiled fullness of creation (Merton, 1974, p. 506) and described with language which is sensual and tactile. In similar spirit, Burrows speaks of drawing upon the wisdom that lies within

(Burrows, 2015, p. 132) through deeper awareness with modes of knowing which embrace the intuitive and sensorial. Of the feeling of connection to creation which is nurtured by such embrace and shared by Merton, Burrows observes

For Rosch (2007), mindfulness involves an opening up to and expansion of awareness, a letting go into deep states of not knowing, accessing intuitive wisdom, and feeling one with the world around us. (Burrows, 2015, p. 133)

By tapping the wisdom that is seeded deep within us within the encounter with the wholeness of creation (Merton, 1974, p. 506) we begin the journey onto *Sophia* – one wherein is nested the potential for transformative shifts onto the spiritual domain.

### **Merton and the Transformative Journey towards the Spiritual**

Of the inner journey Merton's ideas on contemplation evolve during his lifetime. In his early reflections in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* (1947), Merton presents a hierarchy of contemplative forms which feels corralled within catholic theology. Within such configuration the presence of the aesthetical feels conflicted. While Merton distinguishes the “natural contemplation” of the artist and philosopher from “infused contemplation” which is bestowed by God, (Merton, 1947, p. 95), the language of the latter form of contemplation is rich in aesthetical language.

Of the transformative journey writers in the field of holistic education observe how its trajectory is one which travels across horizons of learning, with each crossing one's learning horizon is resculpted and nurtured towards the spiritual in addition to the intellectual and emotional (Dencev and Collister, 2010, p. 180). The journey of transformation as a spiritual quest invites an analogous reading of the evolving nature of Merton's ideas on the relation of contemplation and the aesthetical. While in *Poetry and*

*the Contemplative Life* (1947) such relation is understood through a restricted theological lens, in his later writings, Merton's ideas on contemplation and the aesthetical evolve towards understandings which depart from the earlier rigidity.

While Merton's categorization of forms of contemplation demarcate the earlier phase of his writing, the presence of the aesthetical within his categories of "infused" and "natural" contemplation (Merton, 1947, pp. 95-111) invite nuanced interpretations of their meaning. Although Merton does not dwell on the idea of natural contemplation of God – the form of contemplation which artists possess and which is mentioned only once in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* - one cannot but sense the presence of such idea in deep relation to his concept of infused contemplation. When Merton observes "Christ on the Cross is the fount of all art because He is the Word, the fount of all grace and wisdom" (Merton, 1947, p. 98) we sense such presence intimately; one wherein Christ, manifested upon Christianity's most potent visual symbol of the Cross – a visualization which is also identified with God's gifts of grace and wisdom – presents us with an artist's vision of contemplation which is fundamentally aesthetical in spirit.

Of such vision Merton's essay sculpts a rich literary and visual understanding of contemplation. Of the liturgical domain, Merton speaks of the beauty of music and the pictorial arts; and extends his enthusiasm for the arts in contemplation to poetry, of which he is especially fond, and questions why we do not read the poetry of St. John of the Cross, whom he ranks amongst the greatest of Catholic contemplatives (Merton, 1947, p. 98).

The enthusiasm with which Merton explores the relation of the aesthetical to contemplation evokes observations on the nature of wisdom amongst researchers in



wisdom studies. Merton's entwining of poetry and contemplation evokes Baltas' observations on the relation of poetry to wisdom (Baltas, 2004, p. 148). In a similar spirit his embrace of the visual arts in relation to contemplation evoke the idea of the imaginal presence in wisdom; one which is alluded to in Curnow's historical overview of wisdom (Curnow, 2015, p. 10).

While Merton's observations on poetry guide us to reflect upon a relation of the aesthetical to contemplation, they are also nuanced perhaps anticipating the spirit of some of his later Zen infused writings. While he praises poetry's relation to contemplation and observes how some of the greatest Christian contemplatives have been poets, he follows his praise with questions. Merton ponders how "...contemplation has much to offer poetry. But can poetry offer anything, in return to contemplation? Can the poetic sense help us towards infused contemplation, and, if so, how far along the way?" (Merton, 1947, p. 101).

Such questions reveal how Merton raises the standing of the aesthetical in relation to the contemplative, but is uncertain of their equivalence.

*Brother Louis. I ponder your questions. You begin by praising contemplation's relation to poetry and how it offers much to poetry, yet then you ask what poetry can offer contemplation. Your question invites me to ponder the general question – what can the aesthetical offer contemplation?*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)

Merton's questions are ones I find nurturing to my inquiry by their invitation to ponder the relation of poetry in particular and the arts in general to contemplation. Of the relation of the aesthetic to contemplation, for Merton, it is not a foregone conclusion that engaging the aesthetic transports us towards a contemplative experience. While the aesthetic encounter may move us towards such experience we must be careful not to

confuse it with mystical experience of which it is not. While Merton confounds us by his questions, they also invite us to meditate upon the relation of art and contemplation.

Of such relation Merton's questions anticipate themes in the spirituality and transformative learning paradigms in education where the presence of the aesthetical in relation to contemplative knowing is a central thesis. In particular, evoking Hart's exploration of the place of the arts as a configuration of contemplative knowledge (Hart, 2004, p. 29); or Lin's view that the domain of spirituality research include forms of expression that are creative and metaphorical (Lin et al., 2016, pp. ix-x).

While Merton's views of the relation of art and contemplation are prescient to later themes in transformative learning and the spirituality research paradigm, they also present us with a conundrum. While recognizing "...the dignity of the esthetic intuition" (Merton, 1947, p. 102) and the close resemblance of the artist's contemplation to that of the mystic; Merton cautions that such resemblance may be confused and that an "abyss" stands between aesthetical and mystical contemplation. The difference between such contemplative modalities is subtle. As Labrie observes Merton's view evolved from an orthodox theological view to one which was less so later in life (Labrie, 2001, pp. 162-163) – one in which artistic and mystical experiences were viewed as "...analogous, since both involved an intuitive perception of reality through an "affective identification" with the object contemplated" (Labrie, 2001, p.162).

In *Poetry and the Contemplative Life*, while Merton views artistic contemplation as analogous to mystical experience (Merton, 1947, p. 102), such analogue feels ambivalent in his writing. On the one hand he speaks of how the artist conveys us onto the "interior sanctuary of the soul" (Merton, 1948, p. 104) and prepares us for infused

contemplation. Yet, Merton also cautions the artist observing that while gifted with aesthetic intuition, will fall short of union with God (Merton, 1947, p. 109). In strong language that departs from his later writings, Merton advises “In such an event, there is only one course for the poet to take, for his own individual sanctification: the ruthless and complete sacrifice of his art” (Merton, 1947, pp. 109-110).

In the transit towards spirituality the final act of the artist is to forgo his art. Merton’s observation is puzzling and I reflect,

*Brother Louis. Your language is strong and seems to diminish the artist. I do not want to give up my art. Must the artist abandon his art to complete the spiritual quest? I am confused Brother Louis. What if the artist feels “morally certain” (Merton, 1947, pp. 111) to do their art as you suggest?*

*You write,*

*“But we can console ourselves with Saint Thomas Aquinas that is it more meritorious to share the fruits of contemplation with others than it is merely to enjoy them ourselves. And certainly, when it comes to communicating some idea of the delights of contemplation, the poet is, of all men, the one who is least at a loss for a means to express what is essentially inexpressible” (Merton, 1947, p.111).*

*Brother Louis. Though you speak theologically, I find in your contradictions an early intuition of Zen. The presence of opposites.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)

Of the relation of artistic and mystical forms of contemplations Merton oscillates on the nature of their relation. He speaks of both *abyss* and *analogue*; they are similar and yet they are not. The language is dissonant and moves us to wonder by what path such contemplative forms could be possibly reconciled. Of such possibility, Merton provides a hint in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* where he observes “...the intuition

of the artist sets in motion the very same psychological processes which accompany infused contemplation” (Merton, 1947, p. 103).

Merton’s observation is provocative and I am struck by its powerful implication as a notion unifying artistic and mystical contemplative forms. That is, though Merton suggests that the end points of natural contemplation of the artist and infused contemplation are different, their origins are nurtured within shared psychological presences. The aesthetical is kindred with the contemplative experience. Though natural and infused contemplation are different for Merton, natural contemplation of the artist nurtures us towards infused contemplation the highest form of contemplation.

### **The Journey of the *Heart* towards the Spiritual**

Man himself has now become a soul in the form of art.  
(Merton, 1968, p. 91)

In the dialogical retelling “Seeking the ‘Festival of Rain’,” which begins this chapter, the question of the status of the aesthetical in relation to the transcendent is pondered. Merton refers to his writings as his children; yet he also invites us to ponder what becomes of them within contemplative experience. Is the aesthetical abandoned? Must we forsake our children? While the aesthetical carries us towards wisdom, does it ultimately fall short of such destination as is suggested by Merton in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life*?

Of the entangling of the aesthetical and contemplation Robert Inchausti reflects upon the conundrum of writing in relation to contemplation observing how “The writer must, for the sake of coherence, maintain his voice, and yet in contemplation, one must

overcome any separation between one's self and one's experience" (Inchausti, 1998, p. 32). The writer seeks to capture the Absolute, yet in so doing stands apart from it.

While this paradox troubled Merton, Inchausti observes how Merton was able to reconcile it by accepting that writing was a ceaseless activity intended to correct misunderstandings of experience (Inchausti, 1998, pp. 32-33). Thus the aesthetic is not dismissed but remains within an endless exploration of human experience; a view which is sympathetic with the spirit of the spirituality research paradigm in education; and in particular evoking Miller's notion of the journey of the researcher as one which is eternal (Miller, 2016, p. 138) and Hart's kindred notion of inquiry as one which travels the journey of questions (Hart, 2009, p. 12).

Inchausti's observation suggests a reconciliation within Merton's thought; one which is brought into focus in the context of the evolution of his views on contemplation and art. In *Poetry and the Contemplative Life*, Merton's writing on contemplation is sculpted theologically. The language is rigid and categorical – contemplation is understood within a hierarchical formation wherein the differences between aesthetic and contemplative experiences are delimited by the strong language of "abyss" and the less strong word of "analogy" (Merton, 1947, p.102).

The complexity of language with which Merton parses such difference stands in striking contrast to a simple observation about spirituality and art he makes in a correspondence with Boris Pasternak in 1958. Merton writes to Pasternak,

...I do not insist on this division between spirituality and art, for I think that even things that are not patently spiritual if they come from the heart of a spiritual person are spiritual. (Merton, 1993, p. 90)

The change in language reflects an evolving of Merton's writing on the relation of spirituality and art – one which is also seen in his reflections upon Toshimitsu Hasumi's aesthetical views in *Zen in Japanese Art* (1968). In his observations Merton erodes the categorical language used to explore such relation in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life*. Instead Merton, following Hasumi, reflects on how Japanese contemplative art, calligraphy and the tea ceremony are spiritual experiences and “impregnated with the spirit of Zen” (Merton, 1968, p. 89). Merton's associating of the contemplative with the aesthetical is strong; an identification which he reinforces with a second observation that such experiences could also be viewed as mystical (Merton, 1968, p.89). In his exploration of Hasumi's aesthetic the standing of the beautiful in relation to the contemplative is thus elevated.

In Hasumi's writing, Merton observes how Zen infuses art spiritually and transforms it “...into an essentially contemplative experience in which it awakens ‘the primal consciousness hidden within us and which makes possible any spiritual activity’ ” (Merton, 1968, p. 90). Departing from the categorical relation of art to spirituality in his earlier writings, Merton explores in *Zen and Japanese Art* a different relation in which art is central to contemplative experience. Within such centrality, Merton observes, echoing his comments to Pasternak, that there is no separation of spirituality from art and life; instead “under the unifying power of the Zen discipline and intuition, art, life and spiritual experience are all brought together and inseparably fused” (Merton, 1968, p. 90).

While the language Merton uses to ponder art, spirituality and Zen departs from that used in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life*, it also invites interpretations through the

spirituality and transformative learning paradigms. The intimacy with which Merton describes how Japanese contemplative art is embodied with Zen - one which is “impregnated with the spirit of Zen” (Merton, 1968, p. 89) - echoes Ergas’ notion of the “impregnated being” as a metaphor for the fullness of spiritual life (Ergas, 2016, p. 2). Of art that can nurture us towards the contemplative within holistic interpretations of knowing aligns with kindred sentiments in the writings of Palmer (1993), Zajonc (2009), Kabat-Zinn (2005) and Hart (2004).

The intimacy with which Merton speaks, in *Zen in Japanese Art* (1968) of the relation of spirituality and art stands in interesting juxtaposition to the exploration of such relation in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life*. From a theologically categorical exploration in the latter text Merton evolves into another language, which in *Zen and Japanese Art*, suggests another way to view the intimacy of art and contemplation. While he ponders the *abyss* which separates aesthetical and mystical contemplation in the earlier text, in the later one he presents us with a different language of such relation; one which is instead offered through the example of Japanese art. Instead of *abyss*, Japanese contemplative art is *pregnant* with Zen; one wherein the intimacy of one with the other culminates in one’s soul becoming “the form of art” (Merton, 1968, p. 91). Dispensing with the categorical relation of art and spirituality of his earlier writing, Merton in *Zen in Japanese Art* presents a simpler exploration of such relation where he forgoes the rigid separation of art from spirituality. Of such dissolution we are in turn invited to reflect upon how spiritual growth in general and the evolving character of Merton’s views, in particular, on the relation of spirituality, contemplation and art reveals how spiritual growth involves transformative shifts in one’s perspective (Morgan, 2012, p. 44).

**A Moment of Discovery:  
A Classroom Encounter with Merton**

*In a graduate seminar on holistic education our teacher presents us with different notions of holistic education for group discussion. The statements were diverse and made for interesting group conversation though we did not at first know who the authors were.*

*During our group's discussion I asked my colleagues why they did not choose the second notion on the handout. Of the six conceptions we had not discussed this one. I was intrigued by their silence.*

*Unlike them I had chosen it; this particular conception of education resonated with me. It was about the "spark" within us which marks the true self (Merton, 1979, pp.9-10). It was written by Thomas Merton in *Love and Living*.*

*My colleagues, while answering my question with the shared observation that they found the second notion too theoretical and less interesting, also reconfirmed something about myself.*

*That is, what moves me; is integral to my being; and intrinsic to how I observe the creation is through the lens of the aesthetical and theory.*

*This moment of coming into a knowing within an encounter with Merton and my colleagues became another ingredient in my present inquiry.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)



*The Astronomer*



### **Merton on Education: Towards the Unity of the Aesthetical, Spiritual and Paradisal**

Paradise is simply the person, the self, but the radical self in its uninhibited freedom. The self no longer clothed with an ego.

(Merton, 1979, p. 8)

Of the power of art to nurture us on our spiritual quest, Merton's writings suggest an evolving towards a paradisal consciousness and wisdom; an evolution which is nested within the relation of the aesthetical and spiritual within our selves; and which transits towards the unity of these within the paradisal. The exploration of such relation was triggered by Labrie's (2001) exploration of the paradisal idea in Merton's writings; and in this inquiry endeavours to expand such exploration through focus upon the unity of the paradisal with aesthetically informed understandings of wisdom. In *Zen and Japanese Art*, Merton offers the possibility of such unity; one which evolves from a more oscillating position of such prospect in his earlier writing in *Poetry and the Contemplative Life*. In *Love and Living*, Merton offers us another link in such evolution. That is, one marked by the evolving towards a paradisal consciousness which is sculpted within the intimacy of art with spirituality and Merton's view of the purpose of education.

Of such purpose Merton, in *Love and Learning* (1979) reflects,

The purpose of education is show a person how to define themselves authentically and spontaneously in relation to the world-not to impose a prefabricated definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of the individual himself.... (Merton, 1979, p.3)

Thus the fruit of true education, whether in the university (as for Eckhart) or in the monastery (as for Ruysbroeck) was the activation of that inmost center, that scintilla animae, that "apex" "apex" or "spark" which is freedom beyond freedom, an identity

beyond essence, a self beyond all ego, a being beyond the created realm, and a consciousness that transcends all vision, all separation. To activate this spark is not to be, like Plotinus, ‘alone with the Alone,’ but to recognize the Alone which is by itself in everything because there is nothing that can be apart from It and yet nothing that can be with It, and nothing that can realize It. It can only realize itself. The “spark” which is my true self is the flash of the Absolute recognizing itself in me.” (Merton, 1979, pp. 9-10)

In *Love and Learning*, Merton reflects upon the paradise idea within a discourse on the purpose of education - a linkage which evokes kindred notions in transformative and holistic studies in education, in particular, the relation of the child and paradisaal. Merton’s notion, for example, of “child mind” (Gardner, 2016, p. 3), which he explores within language of the paradisaal world of the child (Merton, 1977, p. 330), evokes comparisons to Hart’s view of children as contemplatives (Hart, 2004, p. 43) or Montessori’s notion of the “spiritual embryo” (Montessori, 1970, p. 18). The holistic spirit in which Merton ponders education with the paradisaal also evokes reflection upon how such spirit aligns with themes within spirituality and transformative studies in education; in particular, Zajonc’s and Palmer’s understanding of integrative learning and their kindred notion of a pedagogy of interconnection (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, pp. 6 & 81).

Zajonc and Palmer both acknowledge the presence of Merton in their writings. Merton’s observations on the unclothed self echoing Palmer’s views on transcendent education as one which “...prepares us to see beyond appearances into the hidden realities of life” (Palmer, 1993, p. 13). For Merton, though, seeking the self is a cautious seeking which places a demand upon us and poses risk (Merton, 1979, p.4). For Zajonc, such demand is echoed in his exploration of contemplative inquiry where, in the spirit of

Merton, observes how “We need to complement our outer work with a comparable commitment to inner work...” (Zajonc, 2009, p. 15). For Zajonc, as it is for Merton, integral to the inner work requires engaging with solitude and meditative practices (Zajonc, 2009, p. 20). Such work places a demand on us to extract ourselves from the noise of daily life which surrounds us; one which is also advocated by Merton in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Merton, 2014, p. 128). For Zajonc to seek solitude is to find a haven in meditation. But of such haven, Zajonc also observes, in the spirit of Merton that “...the work of meditation is, in the end, a solitary work. It is ours to do, and no amount of assistance can or should relieve us of it” (Zajonc, 2009, p. 22).

Removed from the clamour Merton observes the unclothed self; one beyond ego but one where paradise also resides within a configuration with education and the discovery of the authentic self. Of such configuration, Merton describes it within a potent and expansive aesthetical language rich in the presence of light, the image of the spark and visual movement. Within the vision of light, the star hurdles forth from its scintilla and explosive birth onto a transcendent plane; one wherein the movement towards the self is set within a vision of learning which cascades towards the paradisaal.

While Merton’s scintilla evokes the image of a powerful star rich in visuality, it also suggests that the transit to the self follows a silent light. Seeking Merton’s “radical self” (Merton, 1979, p. 8) is a silent journey which is, following Palmer, beyond the clamour of the “hall of mirrors” which distracts the transit towards transcendence (Palmer, 1993, p. 13). Like Fra Angelico’s Christ who is centered yet blindfolded to the clamour that surrounds him, the light of transcendence is a powerful but silent flicker. Yet also a light which illuminates Merton’s “radical self” within the paradisaal idea. To

read Merton through Palmer or Fra Angelico's vision invites us to ponder how the journey towards Merton's self is a transit towards the paradisa; a transcendent place bathed within the silent light where wisdom resides.

### **Seeking Paradisal Wisdom within Beauty**

Thus He shines not on them but from within them. Such is the loving-kindness of Wisdom...

The shadows fall. The stars appear. The birds begin to sleep. Night embraces the silent half of the earth. A vagrant, a destitute wanderer with dusty feet, finds his way down a new road. A homeless God, lost in the night, without papers, without identification, without even a number, a frail expendable exile lies down in desolation under the sweet stars of the world and entrust Himself to sleep. (Merton, 1974, pp. 508-511)

Merton's poetic sculpting of the vagrant and "homeless God" is a beautiful meditation upon the spirit of holistic vision; one in which wisdom shines from within. It is within such reflection in the poem *Hagia Sophia* that Merton offers a paradisa vision of spirituality; one which is rich in its visuality and nurturing of the idea of spirituality's kindred relation with the arts. In Merton's poem such visuality is expressed though the presence of light; a presence which also echoes the vision of Merton's spark which marks the radical self and the transit onto wisdom.

In his poem *Hagia Sophia*, Merton offers such visuality in his meditation on *sophia*; from the Greek idea of wisdom. He writes

There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom, the Mother of all, and Natura naturans. There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fount of action and joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being, welcoming me tenderly, saluting me with indescribable humility. This is at once my own being, my own nature, and the Gift of my Creator's Thought and Art within me, speaking as

Hagia Sophia, speaking as my sister, Wisdom. (Merton, 1974, p. 506)

In *Hagia Sophia* Merton sets the poem in four parts corresponding to the natural rhythm of the day: “Dawn,” “Early Morning,” High Morning,” and “Sunset (Merton, 1974, pp. 506-511). It is within the natural cycle of light, the rhythm of nature and not the analytical that wisdom is rooted. And within such cycle Merton speaks of wisdom with beauty: “wholeness,” “sweetness and purity,” and “gentleness and flows.” It welcomes, it salutes, it is both tender and a gift. Merton speaks of wisdom with love within an aesthetical discourse. From within a place of beauty formed of love and the cycle of light which sculpt our being we awaken from our darkness onto the paradise (Merton, 1974, p. 507).

*Brother Louis, how do I transit to the light; how do I receive the “Gift of my Creator’s Thought and Art within me?” You write “Wisdom cries out to all who will hear” (Merton, 1974, p. 507). But how do I both hear the cry of wisdom and solitude of silence, which you ponder and where wisdom also resides (Merton, 1974, p. 506)? Within the seeming contradiction of the silent cry you invite us to seek our wholeness; the paradisaal place within us where wisdom is seeded.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, March 2016)

In his exploration of Merton’s spiritual evolution, Higgins observes how for Merton wisdom is configured with the embrace of wholeness (Higgins, 1998, p. 240). For Merton, such embrace is nested within the presence of the aesthetical and, as his poem *Hagia Sophia* reveals, sculpted with love and beauty. Merton’s reflections on *Sophia* and beauty in turn evoking Zajonc’s thesis of knowledge formed by love (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1745) or Palmer’s advice that we see the world within the unity of heart and mind (Palmer, 1983, p. xxiii).

Pondering Zajonc and Palmer returns me to Merton's reflection that wisdom resides within the discovery of our true selves and with such discovery we transit into the paradisaal where the authentic self is seated. Of wisdom, in *Hagia Sophia* he meditates upon how it is configured by one's being with the cycle of nature and aesthetical. Merton speaks of wisdom as the presence not only of God's gift but of the art that resides within us (Merton, 1974, p. 507); a wisdom in which the creation and aesthetical becomes central to the flowering of one's self in the transit towards the paradisaal.

### **Seeking Paradisaal Wisdom within Solitude**

Like the cycle of light which envelopes us, so does wisdom for Merton. But for wisdom to flower there must be awareness. To be with wisdom and the paradisaal, we must be in tune with the rhythm of creation while drowning out that which impedes the light. While Merton writes about silence in *Hagia Sophia*, in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* he reflects upon its antithesis; that is of the clamour that blocks us from the paradise. Of such moments Merton reflects,

Here is an unspeakable secret: paradise is all around us and we do not understand. It is wide open. The sword is taken away, but we do not know it: we are off "one to his farm and another to his merchandise." Lights on. Clocks ticking. Thermostats working. Stoves cooking. Electric shavers filling radios with static. "Wisdom," cries the dawn deacon, but we do not attend. (Merton, 2014, p.128)

Merton cries for wisdom, but his plea is for silence; a plea which is prescient to and finds kindred reading amongst contemporary writers in spirituality and transformative studies in education such as Zajonc (2009), Zajonc and Palmer (2010) and Hart (2014).

Merton's observations on the clamour that envelopes our daily lives and impedes our awareness echo the spirit of Tobin Hart's observations in his text, *The Integrative Mind* (2014). Like Merton, Hart ponders the cultural distractions which disable our awareness. Commenting upon the din of electronic culture which envelopes our lives, in the spirit of Merton's reflections, he observes

Will clicking our way through fragments of information reduce our ability for sustained concentration and depth of comprehension? Will so much time on disembodied screens reduce our connections to our own bodies, the body of nature, and direct, embodied encounters with one another? ...will these invisible algorithms reduce our capacity to see broadly and choose wisely? There is evidence and argument that for all the advantages of massive computational power, these not-so-desirable changes are already shaping us. (Hart, 2014, pp. xii-xiii)

Like Hart other writers in spirituality and transformative learning studies have echoed Merton's prescient observations. In *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry* (2009) Zajonc begins his inquiry with the reflections upon solitude and its importance in contemplation (Zajonc, 2009, p. 19). With a spiritual declaration Zajonc foregrounds Merton's plea for silence in order to emphasize its importance in contemplative practice. Like Merton, who he acknowledges in his writing, Zajonc laments the clamour which surrounds us. While Merton pleads for silence, Zajonc in like spirit advises "becoming practiced in solitude" (Zajonc, 2009, p. 20). Engaging solitude does not mean separating oneself from the world for as Zajonc observes "we are already hermits" (Zajonc, 2009, p. 22) in the world. Amidst the din though Zajonc, in like spirit with Merton's cautions, pleads for the nurturing of "the silent self" – one which, following the example of Martin Luther King, is a self beyond ego (Zajonc, 2009, p. 20).

Though Zajonc speaks of our hermit lives, the silent self is not a place of disconnection, but a nurturing place, what he also describes, again following Merton, as a place of “creative silence” (Zajonc, 2009, p. 30). With such silence Zajonc, in the spirit of Merton, evokes the presence of the aesthetical within contemplative practice; and its centrality to nurturing of the authentic self. In a similar spirit Palmer ponders the pain of disconnected lives (Palmer, 1993, p. x) within contemporary culture and looks to Merton for guidance. Encouraging a return to the spiritual traditions Palmer, like Zajonc, references Merton and observes that, while our lives seem detached, they are also permeated with a wholeness that is unseen (Palmer, 1993, p. x).

### **The Paradisal, “Radical Self” and the Artist**

*Brother Louis. Of wisdom you speak of it configured by beauty and solitude; and within such configuration is seated the paradisal within our self. How does the artist carry us towards the paradisal, the “radical self” that you speak of and how is such transit towards the paradisal wisdom?*

While the question of the relation of the artist to the paradisal and wisdom gradually foregrounded itself in my inquiry through reflections upon Merton’s writings, it also seeded a second related question. That is, *does the paradisal idea have a place in holistic studies in education?*

Reading Miller’s retelling of Emerson’s interpretation of the non-dualistic nature of painting (Miller, 2006, p.5) nurtured initial reflections on the question of the relation of wisdom and art. Of the intertwining of the ideas of wisdom, art and the paradisal was one which evolved later in my inquiry with reading of the paradisal notion in the work of Merton (1979) Labrie (2001) and Higgins (1998). Reading Zajonc’s idea of the silence of creativity (Zajonc, 2009, p. 30) in tandem with the place of the artful within



transformative learning studies (Hart, 2004) nurtured reflections on how the paradisaal idea, which Merton and his interpreters explore, was sympathetic to Zajonc's idea in particular and holistic studies in education in general.

Merton explores the paradisaal within the realm of the artist; an idea which invites reflection upon Zajonc's notion of "creative silence" (Zajonc, 2009, p. 30). The artist turns us away from the din, nurturing us towards the solitude where Merton's "radical self" (Merton, 1979, p. 8) is nested within the paradisaal that both surrounds and is present within us.

In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Merton reflects upon how we are inattentive to the paradisaal presence although it encircles us (Merton, 2014, p. 128). Of such presence I am reminded of Miller's observation of how "the soul opens to us when we hear a piece of music, see a child at play, are deeply involved in our work, or are simply being present in nature" (Miller, 2008, p. 14). Such moments of mindful listening and looking - moments of *attending* – evoke the paradisaal presence which Merton ponders.

For Merton such moments are both incarnated and imaginal. In the poem *Hagia Sophia* he reflects on how wisdom and the paradisaal consciousness are embodied. Merton writes

When the helpless one awakens strong at the voice of mercy, it is as if Life his Sister, as if the Blessed Virgin, (his own flesh, his own sister), as if nature made wise by God's Art and Incarnation were to stand over him and invite him with unutterable sweetness to be awake and to live. This is what it means to recognize Hagia Sophia. (Merton, 1974, p. 507)

Merton identifies *Sophia* with art and embodiment. Within embodiment there is awakening and life; and within the presence of light that emanates from it there is the

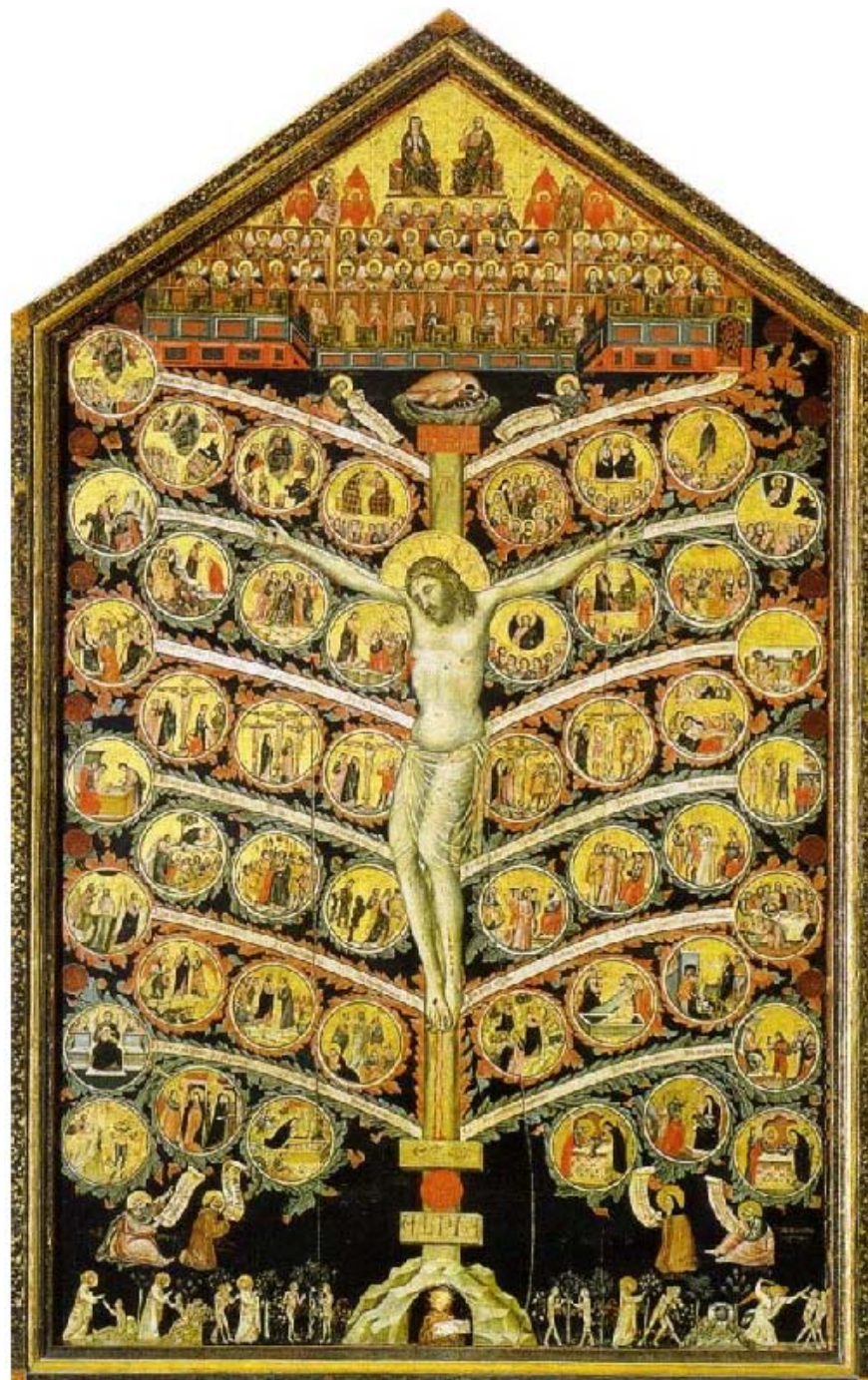
paradisal. Within the presence of the aesthetical – of the “gift of my Creator’s Thought and Art within me” (Merton, 1974, p. 506) there is nurtured wisdom or Sophia.

Exploration of Merton’s view of the paradisal and its relation to the aesthetical and wisdom was seeded by Labrie’s (2001 / 2014) examination of the paradisal in Merton’s writings. Of Merton’s paradisal idea Labrie observes

While in Merton’s early writings, paradise was often a biblical one, he later came to locate the seat of paradise in the psyche. Within the self, in Merton’s view, dwelt the most precious of paradisal gifts, a fundamental inner freedom, particularly freedom from the demands of the ego, a freedom that, once attained, Merton lyrically referred to in 1965 as a “paradise tree.” (Labrie, 2001, p. 120)

Pondering the paradise tree returns me to my trip to Florence when I encountered a painting called “Tree of Life” by the 14<sup>th</sup> century artist Bonaguida. While the image is rooted in a Christian narrative configured by stories of genesis and the passion of and salvation by Christ, the narrative is depicted as a holistic representation of the creation in its fullness.

Reflecting upon the image nurtures my reflections upon the presence of the imaginal and aesthetical in Merton’s paradisal; and how such presence nurtures wisdom. That is, while the paradisal is a rich concept central to the mythologies with which we have psychically evolved; the paradise story of the fall, the place we have come from and the place we seek to return has also a deeply aesthetical presence. As a foundational myth the paradisal story is rich in its visual and poetic sculpting. Reading Labrie on Merton’s paradisal consciousness (Labrie, 2001, p. 119) nurtured this other possibility in my inquiry; that is, how contemplating the paradisal evokes the *image* of the paradise narrative; one in which the presence of the artful and role of the artist is central.



*Tree of Life*

*They bear with them in the center of nowhere the  
unborn flower of nothing:  
This is the paradise tree. It must remain unseen until  
words end and arguments are silent.*

(Merton, 1977, p. 355)

Exploring the image of the paradisa also nurtured a kindred question of my inquiry; that is, how exploring images, which nurture spirituality, embody wisdom.

Reading Labrie's and Higgins' account of Merton's paradisa consciousness seeded reflection on such possibility; that is of the idea of the image as a transmitter of wisdom and one which is nested within the intersection of the centrality of the paradisa narrative in our mythological psyche with the image of the paradisa.

The story of art reveals such centrality; how the journey of paradisa is mapped by an aesthetical presence – one which is evoked through powerful and memorable artists' interpretations of such journey through history. Pondering the paradisa evokes the image of paradisa. Gilgamesh's story of the *Garden of the Gods* (c. 3500 BC) the Sumerian paradisa; the *Elysian fields* of the Greeks; or the Christian story of *Adam and Eve* amongst interpretations of the paradisa journey.

Of written stories, Dante's *Paradise* in the *Divine Comedy* (c. 1308-1320) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1658-1664) are poetic interpretations of the paradisa. Of visual representations, Masaccio's *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1425, Brancacci Chapel, Florence); Michelangelo's *The Fall and Expulsion from Paradise* in the Sistine Chapel (1477-1480, Rome); Jan Breughel the Elder's *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* (1617, The Hague); or Blake's depictions of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1658-1664) are notable examples of the paradisa image.

Within the domain of the aesthetic such works of poetry and painting share an elevated standing – one which in turn nurtures the notion of the centrality and preciousness of the paradisa in our cultural psyche; and one in which the role of the artist, as the channel for the paradisa, is key. The paradisa, the place we psychically

lament for its loss yet the end point that we seek for ourselves. The paradise story which we contemplate through artists' retelling of the paradisaal image. The paradise journey as a holistic transit; while cosmological in breath it is also a deeply personal one which touches our "radical self" (Merton, 1979, p. 8) – a holistic dialectic which the story of art reveals is central to its history and one in which the role of the artist is key.

**“Earth Connections:”  
Wisdom in the Landscape**

Of the spiritual path of Merton's core self pondering the contemplative writers nurtured the observation that the journey involves a dialogue between our interior lives and being present to the creation in which are lives are nested. Amongst spiritual writers, for example Merton (2014) and Miller (2008), such dialogue is nurtured in relation to nature.

In *The Holistic Curriculum* Miller (2008) observes how contemporary society has become removed from nature; a removal symptomatic of educational systems which value technical knowing over wisdom and knowing holistically (Miller, 2008, pp. 162-163). In the spirit of the Transcendentalist writers who also lamented their society's disconnect from nature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Miller similarly advocates for restoring our connection with it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of those connections, which he terms “Earth connections,” he observes,

Earth connections, then can reawaken us to the natural processes of life. The wind, the sun, the trees, and the grass can help us come alive and waken us from the treadmill we find ourselves (Miller, 2008, p. 163).

Miller's reflections upon the landscape evoke those of Thomas Merton. Miller's observation of the “treadmill we find ourselves” (Miller, 2008, p. 163) remind us of

Merton's lament in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* about soulless lives controlled by "Clocks ticking" (Merton, 2014, p. 128); of lives which are spiritually vacant to the paradise that surrounds them.

Other writers in the field of transformational learning echo such views. Amongst them Tobin Hart who in *The Integrative Mind* (2014) observes how contemporary culture is replete with distractions and disabling of our awareness; or Parker Palmer's observation about " 'the pain of disconnection' " (Palmer, 1993, p. x) that he sees in education and which is symptomatic of the "one-eyed lives" (Palmer, 1993, p. xxiii) that many live; or Arthur Zajonc (2009) who advocates responding to the din in which we are enveloped through the appeal for a renewed silence and solitude.

For Merton, as is echoed in Miller, the path to the core self is intertwined with the touch with nature. For Merton, by restoring our being with nature – to touch it and feel we are one with it and it one with us – sculpts a spiritual intertwining which is key to reaching the paradisaal. A journey towards the paradisaal which is imbued with love and beauty; one which echoes Zajonc's notion of an epistemology sculpted by love (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1745).

For Merton being with nature and the aesthetical are intertwined; and central to awareness of wisdom which is nested in the aesthetical encounter with nature. Of such intersections Merton, writing on his travels in the American southwest shortly before his death in 1968, offers poetic insights into such intersections – ones which evoke the spirit of American Transcendentalist writing. His writings stand in juxtaposition to the mechanistic and soulless culture of "Thermostats working. Stoves cooking" (Merton,

2014, p. 128) which he laments in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. In his later writings on the southwest landscape Merton observes,

Alone, amid red rocks, small pine and cedar, facing the high wall on the other side of the Chama canyon. But east, the view opens out on distant mountains beyond the wider valley where the monastery is.

Light and shadow on the wind erosion patterns of the rocks. Silence except for the gull-like, questioning cries of jays.

Distant sound of muddy rushing water in the Chama River below me. I could use up rolls of film on nothing but these rocks. The whole canyon replete with emptiness...

The sun on the vast water, the sound of the waves. Yet the sound of the wind in the piñon pines here is very much the same.

(Merton, 1998, pp. 104-105)

The passage is from a journal titled *Woods, Shore, Desert A Notebook, May 1968* which is found in *The Other Side of the Mountain*. In this journal Merton records observations of his travels through New Mexico and California. His haiku-like writing surveys the southwest landscape – its canyons and wildlife and “...the adobe walls of Georgia O’Keeffe’s house” (Merton, 1998, p. 106). His observation of the sound of the pines being the same as the sound of the waves is a sensual retelling of the interconnection of the creation. Merton’s connection with the landscape reveals a state of mindfulness – one which as Kabat-Zinn observes “ ‘...means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgementally’ [Kabat-Zinn, 1991, cited in Black, n.d.]’ ” (Burrows, 2015, p. 129). Kabat-Zinn’s notion of nonjudgemental mindfulness is echoed in kindred notions by others within the holistic and transformative learning paradigms; amongst these Zajonc’s notion of “a calm eros that animates our interest and keeps us attentive and engaged” (Zajonc 2006, p. 1748); Hart’s notion of a “knowledge by presence” (Hart, 2008, p. 236); or Byrnes’ exploration of “mindful awareness” (Byrnes, 2012, p. 34). Of the latter, Byrnes reflects upon teaching practice and observes “Mindful awareness in teaching requires openness to the present

moment with a perspective of equanimity that is driven by a sense of wonder” (Byrnes, 2012, p. 34).

Of the aspect of wonder that Byrnes ponders in relation to awareness and focus on wholeness (Byrnes, 2012, p. 22) is extended to interpretations of Merton’s retellings of his encounters with nature. While Merton’s desert journal engages the immediacy of the landscape it is also expansive and imbued with a sense of wholeness and connection. Merton intertwines his contemplations on the landscape with observations on philosophers, poets, artists and American society. His critical remarks on society, expressed in his observation “Computer Karma in American civilization” (Merton, 1998, p. 103), are mixed in with observations or quotations from Chaucer, Descartes, Zen and the Astavakra Gita. The encounter with nature is simultaneously for Merton, an aesthetic one.

In the midst of his poetic journal Merton quotes from Astavakra Gita and reflects,

“When the mind is stirred and perceives things before it as objects of thought, it will find in itself something lacking” (Astavakra Gita)

To find this “something lacking” is already a beginning of wisdom. Ignorance seeks to make good the “lacking” with better and more complete or more mysterious objects. The lack itself will be complete as void.

Not to deny subject and object but to realize them as void.  
(Merton, 1998, pp. 104-105)

Merton’s discourse on wisdom is nestled within artful contemplation – one sculpted by his poetic reflections on the landscape which are interspersed within other expansive and holistic meditations upon Zen and spirituality. In his meditations he references artists and poets; philosophers and mystics; and his own photographic art.



Within such writing he sculpts a meditation which is visually rich and in which the prospect of wisdom is nested. The writing evokes the spirit of Thoreau's Transcendentalism. In like manner as Thoreau who meditates upon the river bank in *Walden* (Thoreau, 1854, p. 327) Merton contemplates the "whole canyon replete with emptiness..." (Merton, 1998, pp. 105) – a spiritual and holistic emptiness which is also aligned with his artistic engaging of the landscape with his own film camera. Within the meditation upon the landscape is nestled an aesthetic emptiness; and within such emptiness wisdom is nested.

Of mystical writing, Curnow in *Wisdom, Intuition and Ethics* (1999) observes how such writing is often infused with "metaphors of ascent, height, of the mountain" (Curnow, 1999, p.280). With Merton, whose writing is also sculpted by such metaphors, being with the landscape infuses the mystical feeling of his writings – where the finding of " 'something lacking' " is also an opening onto wisdom (Merton, 1998, pp.104-105).

While writing was one strategy Merton used to contemplate the landscape, a second was his camera. Of his photographic practice, arts educator Charles Scott observes how for Merton, photography was a way of engaging with the " 'hidden wholeness' of a subject" in a manner which was focused and unhurried in spirit (Scott, 2014, p. 335). For Merton the camera, as with his poetry, nurtures the contemplative encounter with the landscape. The camera and poem are forms which intertwine the contemplative and aesthetic; an intertwining which in turn carries Merton towards the Zen where the presence of absence is also the beginning of wisdom.

Of the intertwining of the aesthetic with wisdom and contemplation, Merton's observations are prescient to kindred themes in the fields of holistic and transformative

learning in education. Amongst these Hart's embrace of contemplative reflection as a modality of knowing (Hart, 2004, p. 29) which supplements the sensorial and rational; but one which also stands apart from them by embracing the aesthetical. In a similar spirit, Zajonc's notion following Goethe of a " ' gentle empiricism' (*zarte Empirie*) [p. 307]' " (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1746) wherein the encounter with the phenomenon echoes Merton's relationship with the landscape – one which is configured by feelings of connection and not separation. In a similar spirit of connection, Burrows reflects how to be mindful is to be conscious of all things (Burrows, 2015. p. 133). For Burrows wisdom is seeded with the embrace of connection within the unbroken garment of creation (Burrows, 2015. p. 133).

### **Of the Pivot and Dome: Seeking the Divine by Visualizing Connection**

Curnow's observations on how mystical writing is often enriched with metaphors of the mountain is seen in Merton's *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1998) where the writing is replete with the presence of the mountain in particular and landscape in general. Merton's mountain poetry stirs the imaginal; and returns me to pondering the power of images to both stir and teach. Of the broader question of the relation of art to wisdom which is evoked by such observations, Merton's enmeshing of wisdom, aesthetical understanding and contemplation guides me towards pondering how the work of artists, and in particular, that of the Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky enriches reflection upon such question.

While the spirit of Merton's contemplative life was expressed through his writing, another vehicle for such expression was his own art. In tandem with his writings he sketched and later in life took up photography. In his meditation upon the landscape in

*Woods, Shore, Desert* (Merton, 1998, pp. 104-105), the rolls of film that he writes of form part of the imaginal richness of the depicted landscape. Examples of his sketches, which evoke a Zen-like quality, are included in *Raids on the Unspeakable*; a text in which he discusses them in the essay *Signatures: Notes on the Author's Drawings* (Merton, 1966, pp. 179-182).

As it is with Merton's writing and art the presence of the landscape is central in Burtynsky's photography. In some of his mountain images Burtynsky's photographs are in the spirit of Ansel Adams' landscape portraits. Like Adams' work Burtynsky's photographs invite reflections upon the American Transcendentalist writers – one which is also shared by Merton in his meditations upon the landscape.

While Merton dwells upon the landscape within a Transcendentalist spirit, the focus of Burtynsky's images has been to explore humanity's toll it. Over the past three decades Burtynsky has photographed quarries in Italy, oil fields of the U.S. southwest and scenes of ship breaking in Bangladesh. In 2013, he completed a five year project in which he explored how humanity's demand upon water threatens a vital resource. In the water series, Burtynsky offers images of dams in China, farmlands fed by pivot irrigation in the U.S. Southwest, step wells in India, and the demise of the Colorado River Delta. In his large format photographs and film *Watermark* (De Pancier, Burtynsky & Baichwal, 2014), Burtynsky invites us to become witnesses to humanity's toll on the environment. His images remind us of our troubled and complicated relation to our environment; they draw us softly, cause us to pause and meditate upon them.

Unlike other forms of aerial photographs Burtynsky's images, as the art writer Russell Lord observes "induces slower and longer looking" (Lord, 2013, p. 188). Lord adds,

While the story of water is certainly an ecological one, Burtynsky is more interested in presenting the facts on the ground than in declaring society's motives good or bad. In focusing all the facets of people's relationship with water, Burtynsky offers evidence, without an argument. And yet, we as viewers have to work to decipher this evidence or to even decode it as evidence. It is precisely this tension, the gap between our knowledge that there is something to be gleaned from these pictures and our inability to immediately recognize what that thing is that gives this project its immense weight. (Lord, 2013, pp. 188-189)

The nurturing of a slow looking, which Lord observes in Burtynsky's images, echoes a kindred observation by Scott who observed that for Merton photography required an engaging with the image which was slow and attentive (Scott, 2014, p.335).

Though writing from different fields of the art critic and holistic educator respectively, Russell Lord's and Charles Scott's kindred observations invite us to ponder how the encounter with Burtynsky's images is a contemplative one. While Roland Barthes spoke of the power of images to seize us (Barthes, 1981), with Burtynsky, such seizing is muted. While we are drawn to his images, their stories are not imposed upon us. They do not seize us as does Barthes' *punctum* (Barthes, 1981, p. 27); instead following Lord's observation Burtynsky's images, in particular, his abstract landscapes of agriculture, are sometimes "illegible;" (Lord, 2013, p. 188) clues are offered which the viewer must decipher on their own. The images require slow and careful looking. Rather than seize us, they draw us in slowly, following Zajonc with a "calm eros" (Zajonc 2006, p. 1748). As the National Geographic photographer Wade Davis also observes of Burtynsky's images,

The power of his photography lies not in polemics but in its neutrality. Edward makes no judgement. He simply bears witness, presenting a visual record of what he has seen. His work is an indelible record of the consequences of industrial folly, conceived, composed and presented in a manner that can only inspire. Compassion is the essence of his art. Harnessing the redemptive spirit of humanity to positive action and deed is the purpose of his passion. (Davis, 2016, p. 136)

While Davis and Lord do not use the language of spirituality, their observations evoke interpretations of a Zen-like silence and non-judgemental aspect of Burtynsky's images; ones which echoes the presence of Zen in Merton's writings.

Following Merton, Arthur Zajonc writes of a creativity which is configured in silence when one turns away from the " 'social self' ...toward a 'deeper, silent self' – the calm captain of the sailboat or the witness on the hillside" (Zajonc, 2009, p. 30). In a similar spirit Robert Inchausti speaks of "our silent selves" (Inchausti, 1998, p. 133) which is a self of listening (Inchausti, 1998, p. 133).

Reflecting on Burtynsky's images guides me towards pondering the domain of the quiet self that Zajonc and Inchausti speak of. While Burtynsky's images draw us, they do so, following Zajonc with a silent eros; we become "witness on the hillside[s]" to the images presence. Our attention is absorbed by Burtynsky's photographs but, following Inchausti, we listen to them as silent witnesses.

Of the intermingled themes of contemplation, the aesthetical, holistic connection and wisdom which is pondered in Burtynsky's photographs the pairing of two images in his book *Essential Elements* (Burtynsky, 2016, pp.48-49) is informative. One image, *Pivot Irrigation #39 (2012)* is an aerial view of a pivot irrigation installation in High Plains, Texas Panhandle. The pivot is an irrigation system which draws water from the aquifer below; once the water reaches the surface it is sprayed onto the field via a rotating

armature of pipes. The footprint of the pivot is a circular green field which dominates the image.

In Burtynsky's book, the image is paired with an interior view of the dome of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza (1642-1660); a church designed by the Italian Architect Francesco Borromini who is known for his use of complex geometries and the sense of drama and movement in his design of Sant Ivo (Wittkower, 1982, pp. 210-211). The image is titled *Borromini #21, 1999*. The *Sapienza*, which translates from Italian as *wisdom*, was a church I knew well. I had sketched it when I visited it as an architecture student in 1986. That it became present again and meaningful within a doctoral dissertation on wisdom and art decades later suggesting an interesting Jungian synchronicity.

SITE: S IVO ALLA SAPIENZA BORROMINI  
FOLLOWING ORATORIO 1660



G. Rossini  
Elevation Perspective Sketch  
Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza  
Rome



Edward Burtynsky  
Pivot Irrigation #39, 2012  
High Plains, Texas  
Chromogenic print



Edward Burtynsky  
Borromini #21, 1999  
Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza  
Rome  
Chromogenic print

Insights into the holism of Burtynsky's images were offered in a public lecture he presented jointly with William Ewing, the curator of his book *Essential Elements* (2016). During the question period which followed I asked Burtynsky (EB) and Ewing (WE) to comment on the presence of the spiritual in the visual pairing of the images of the pivot and dome, in particular, and Burtynsky's images in general. Our exchange went as follows:

**GR:** *While the landscape is an on-going presence in your work, in this image it seems to transcend that discourse. You mentioned earlier the formal aspects in some of your photographs. And in that pairing you see the presence of the circle.*

*But I can't help feeling in that pairing that there is something else going on that transcends the discourse of the landscape and the discourse of form.*

*I was wondering if you could comment on that.*

**WE:** *Its one of the pairings that means a lot to me. And I feel its essentially a spiritual thing. And I feel that the order and structure of the renaissance picture can be... theres something similar about the two. But its almost the difference between civilization and savagery. So that's what I am hoping with every one of these pairings that they will operate on several different levels. And stimulate the mind... if it was one pivot against the other I think you would say oh water pivots and that would be kind of it....It would be left at this level.*

*But when you have this gap of essentially five hundred years and you have a kind of magical and mysterious and deeply spiritual ordered structuring of the world as you have in the Borromini and then you have this relatively crude picture but still miraculous from our technocratic age. For me that they are two sides of the same coin. They are the world we have created and we can't get away from. And one of the things that Ed keeps saying over and over again is um there's some bad guys, there's some good guys, bad corporations, good corporations, bad nations, good nations but you know we are all in this together and we have in a sense created these things. The metal we have in this chair and the fabrics we wear and so on are all implicated and that's what that particular pairing was all about. It was meant to pull us in as human beings into a civilizational tapestry but Ed would you like to ....*



**EB:** *Well, I'll add to that ultimately ...I mean just came from Rome and Florence and have been looking at the Renaissance and the great things. And its interesting, I mean you can stand in front of Michelangelo's David today and still be just as taken as it was first unveiled 450 year ago. And Borromini is a similar thing. **It's the search for the divine. And divine in the sense that somehow you created something that transcends, a transcendent space. Something that is kind of universal and can live through across centuries, across culture, across generations.** And that is something that is enduring that kind of... our minds walk into something that touches us similarly. And we were....standing in front of Botticelli and they were just... we saw a lot of Renaissance paintings but you get in front of these and they just do something. There is something so profound and that's what I'm saying about the sacred. I think a lot of artists...you know the difference somebody whose in the artisan craft of making the greatest cup – can you make a cup that becomes divine? Maybe you can. But its much harder in the world of objects that are functional that we kind of yes, you know, a church is a functional space but you didn't have to make that ceiling. Borromini... **that's an attempt to take us to another place; to elevate us to think and to raise or lift our consciousness in our souls to a place of extraordinary**...you know, vision and just the perfect symmetry, the perfect realization of something. And I think by and large that's what I think artists in many ways have always searched for – **how do I take the ordinary and move it into the extraordinary.** How do I lift something, an idea into a new space? So I think that bringing in that architectural work it is that kind of pursuit of the human spirit to **find the divine in objects and in space...whether it is in a painting, or its in a drawing, or a piece of sculpture.***

**EW:** *But for me that was the sacred, profane. Its that simple. Yet both are perfectly symmetrical. But in the service of different ends. Both human.*

(Interview, October 1, 2016)

Following the lecture I speak to Burtynsky; he returns to the dialogue with Ewing and myself and in our brief exchange softly mentions the “sacred and profane” (Interview, October 1, 2016).

My question to Burtynsky and Ewing had been intermingled amongst questions by other attendees to the talk; for example, what had become of the places he had

photographed; the nuts and bolts of photographic technique; or future projects. My question stood apart from the others. It pondered the spirituality of images and artist's spirituality – themes which are not always foregrounded in discourses about Burtynsky's work.

Arthur Zajonc observes how contemplation resides in the silent self, one which is also a space of solitude and creativity (Zajonc, 2009, p. 2009). In tandem with my encounters with Burtynsky and his photographs, pondering Zajonc nurtures the observation that while the theme of spirituality is not foregrounded in discourses upon Burtynsky's work, his work is infused with a spiritual presence. While the public discourse may be muted the images reside within a contemplative space of "creative silence" (Zajonc, 2009, p.30). While powerful, the images remain silent and calm within Zen like moments of non-judgemental presence. They guide us towards contemplation; following Merton, they are "summonses to awareness" (Merton, 1966, p. 182).

In the photographic pairing of the pivot and the dome Merton's call is nurtured in Burtynsky's observation of how artists "search for the divine;" one which involves "tak[ing] the ordinary and mov[ing] it into the extraordinary" (Interview, October 1, 2016). By such movement the seemingly ordinary pivot, when juxtaposed with the dome, participates in an extraordinary story about spirituality and holistic connection. In such visual juxtaposition, Burtynsky softly brings into focus how humanity is configured within a realm of the sacred and profane. Of what happens when such juxtapositions are made, Ewing observes "...you have this gap of essentially five hundred years and you have a kind of magical and mysterious and deeply spiritual ordered structuring of the world" (Interview, October 1, 2016).

Burtynsky's pairing brings spirituality into vision. It reveals the presence of interconnection; the "civilizational tapestry" which Ewing speaks of wherein are mingled the sacred and the profane within the metaphor of the circle which the pivot and the dome share. Of such intermingling, Ewing is Zen-like in his observation; "For me that they are two sides of the same coin. They are the world we have created and we can't get away from" (Interview, October 1, 2016).

In *Hagia Sophia* Merton speaks of the unseen wholeness (Merton, 1974, p. 506) which configures the creation; one which Ewing also alludes to in his observation upon the "magical and mysterious" ordering of the world (Interview, October 1, 2016). In a kindred spirit Parker Palmer writes holistically of the need for reintegration of selves which are broken (Palmer, 1993, p. 8). Both Merton and Palmer aspire towards holistic knowing which is configured not within the eroding of phenomena but instead within the embrace of the creation within the spirit of connection.

With the pivot and the dome, Burtynsky offers a visual manifestation of the veiled wholeness that Merton ponders; and the spirit of reunification with the creation that Palmer speaks of. As Ewing observes an image standing on its own would have limited meaning, but when paired with another, as Burtynsky does with the pivot and the dome in *Essential Elements* (2016), we are invited to ponder the mystery of connectedness within creation. By embracing instead of reducing the complexity of phenomenon; by engaging with forms of inquiry which depart from the reductionism of rationalism and empiricism; and which are instead nested within exploration of the complexity of the aesthetical we are transported into a different domain of contemplative knowing. By bringing the pivot and dome together and viewing them as connected Burtynsky, from his aerial perch,

offers us holistic glimpses into the spiritual realm – one upon which we may begin to meditate upon the creation in the fullness of its connection, richness and complexity.

Of the presence of connection which is conveyed in his photographs Burtynsky's process is echoed in Merton writings. Writing of the work of the poet, in *The Geography of Lograire* (1969), Merton reflects

A poet spends his life in repeated projects, over and over again attempting to build or to dream the world in which he lives. But more and more he realizes that this world is at once his and everybody's. It cannot be purely private, anymore than it can be purely public. It cannot be fully communicated. It grows out of a common participation which is nevertheless recorded in authentically personal images.

In this wide-angle mosaic of poems and dreams I have without scruple mixed what is my own experience with what is almost everybody else's. (Merton, 1969, p. 1)

Merton's observation on how the poet's work is one of repetition invites us to reflect upon how the journey of inquiry is one of *return*; a closed loop in which the artist's work is one of incessant revisiting of self. In his landscape images, which he has created over the past thirty years, Burtynsky *returns* to pondering humanity's toll on the environment; a return sculpted within his artist's world, while in the same instance being one which, following Merton, extends beyond his world to everyone else's.

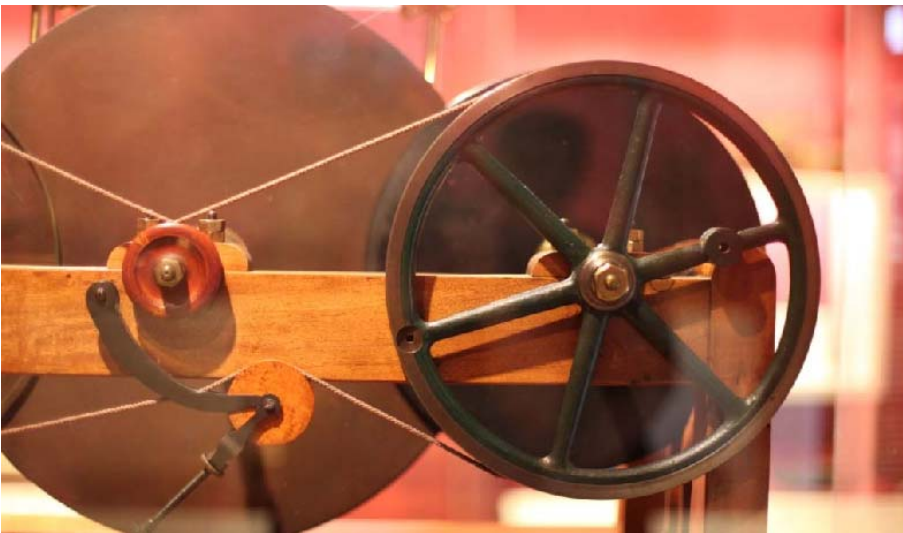
Of the loop of inquiry, I ponder its image.

While the rationalist journey to knowing is reductive and unidirectional evoking the metaphor of the straight line; the contemplative journey of holism and connection suggests a different metaphor of the circle. Of such metaphor Thomas Del Prete's study of Merton's views on education is illustrative. Evoking the trajectory of a closed circle,

Del Prete observes that the “...starting and ending points of a study of Merton and education are ultimately the same – ourselves” (Del Prete, 1990, p. 2).

In a study of the literary construction of Merton’s *The Geography of Lograire* Randall observes how the poem is configured within a mandala form (Randall, 1979, pp. 1-13) - one which echoes Del Prete’s observation on the closed loop onto the self which informs the study of Merton and Merton’s own observation on the aspect of return in the poet’s work. Of the presence of the circle in explorations upon the nature of self and inquiry Burtynsky’s pairing of the pivot and dome share a kindred symbolism; his depiction of the circle offering a metaphor for connection and inquiry which Merton, Del Prete and Randall allude to in their observations.

Of such metaphor, I am reminded of my journey to Florence where I encountered the electrostatic machine and a devotional painting done in the round; and create my own pairing of the sacred and the profane.



Anonymous  
Modified Carré Electrical Machine. c. 1890  
Museo Galileo  
Florence Italy



Ghirlandaio  
The Adoration of the Magi, 1487  
Uffizi Gallery  
Florence Italy

**Seeing Life from a Higher Perspective:  
Slow looking as Contemplation**

Lord's observation that Burtynsky's landscape images require slow looking (Lord, 2013, p. 188) and a kindred observation by Scott on how for Merton photography requires "...a slow, sustained and attentive engagement" (Scott, 2014, p. 335) invite us to reflect how slow looking is contemplative. Burtynsky's images draw us towards them, cause us to pause and survey the image, nurture our wonder and therein, co-opting Merton's observation about the aesthetical encounter with his own art, becoming "summonses to awareness" (Merton, 1966, p. 182). Slow looking becomes a contemplative moment and in this Burtynsky's photographs guide us to ponder how the eye is drawn into a visual contemplation.

Of contemplative knowing Tobin Hart observes how it is a way of knowing that does not supplant but stands with sensorial and rationalistic modes of knowing while embracing strategies of inquiry which include an array of forms such as poetry and meditation. To know with images informs Hart's list and nurtures the idea of how contemplative knowing includes the visual meditations that Burtynsky offers in his landscape photographs. His images allows us to see from on high providing a vision of connection and a place from which, as Ewing observes, we seek the divine (Interview, October 1, 2016). With such seeking the visual pairing of the pivot and the dome offers an example of slow looking; a way of looking which evokes Hart's observation of how contemplative knowing nurtures awareness which is deeper and focused (Hart, 2004, p. 29).

### **Seeing Whole as Visual Contemplation of “Paradoxes and Passions”**

Reflecting upon Burtynsky’s landscape images evoke Hart’s understanding of contemplative knowing. As contemplative images which reveal a holistic presence, they depart from the reductive strategy of rationalistic and empirical ways of knowing which delimit awareness (Hart, 2004, p. 37); instead embracing phenomenon in the fullness of its complexity and contradiction. Following Hart, Burtynsky’s contemplative images are instead nested within “shadowy symbols” and paradoxes (Hart, 2004, p. 37). While Burtynsky’s images embrace complexity they also transport us towards reflection upon connection; as Parker Palmer observes as seeing whole (Palmer, 1983, p. xxiii); or as Merton notes as the veiled wholeness of creation (Merton, 1974, p. 506).

Burtynsky’s pairing of the pivot and the dome enriches Hart’s and Palmer’s observations as does his image *Navajo Reservation / Suburb Phoenix, Arizona U.S.A. 2011* (Burtynsky, 2013, p. 53) which is offered as another example of a contemplative image. Like the pivot image, the image of the Phoenix suburb forms part of Burtynsky’s water series. Of that project Burtynsky observes “Water is the reason we can say its name” (Burtynsky, 2013, n.p.). While his observation comments upon a resource which is often underestimated but precious for life; Burtynsky’s comment is also holistic inviting us to ponder humanity’s relation to water. Water and humanity are not pondered separately; instead departing from a reductionist and rationalist view, they are viewed in intimate relation. By saying we are water Burtynsky invites us to engage a contemplative discourse about connection.

While the pivot and the dome are paired photographs, the image *Navajo Reservation / Suburb Phoenix* depicts two stories in one photographic print; one in which

the Navajo Reservation is juxtaposed with a suburb of Phoenix. On the left side of the image, we see the Navajo reservation which extends beyond the left frame. The reservation remains undeveloped marked only by the growth of desert shrubs. On the right, we see the suburb which extends beyond the right frame. The suburb is marked by groomed lawns, tract housing and private swimming pools. In the middle, such extension is absent; instead of extension into the other we see abrupt separation marked by the road which runs through the middle of the photograph.

The break between the two landscapes is severe and, at first view, the photograph seems a montage of two images. But the images are not montaged; Burtynsky's photograph is of a real yet complicated place. We are presented with a landscape photograph, yet within the image are two landscapes.

Following Ewing's observation about how we see Burtynsky's images, viewing each landscape separately from the other would have limited meaning, but once brought together, the juxtaposition of the different landscapes offers a story rich about holism and connection. Burtynsky's complex photograph of a desert and a suburb draws us towards it; we look, pause and try to make sense of it; we question whether it is real or not; it stirs our wonder. We try to understand landscapes which are viewed together but seem apart.

Tobin Hart observes how "rational empiricism trains us to pay attention to some things and not to others, discounting hunches or feelings, for example, in favour of certain appearances and utility – it focuses and limits our field of awareness" (Hart, 2004, p. 37). By depicting the contrasting landscapes, Burtynsky does not seek to limit our awareness as rationalism would have it; instead he expands it by embracing the





Edward Burtynsky  
Navajo Reservation / Suburb  
Phoenix, Arizona 2011  
Chromogenic print

landscape's seeming paradox. Following Hart, engaging with paradox as Burtynsky does nurtures the contemplative voice (Hart, 2004, p. 37).

Pondering Burtynsky's art seeds my inquiry. His image is deeply insightful and rich in layers of meaning. In depicting the story of the divide between two peoples - one manifested in their different relations to environment – Burtynsky invites us to ponder a global narrative about the relation of culture and environment which transcends the immediacy of place.

His insight focuses the questions of my inquiry onto his work. Can we speak of Burtynsky's art as having wisdom? Does his work raise our consciousness about our place within the creation and, as the psychologist and wisdom researcher Paul Baltes ponders, nurture reflection into the nature of humanity (Baltes, 2004, p.48)?

Of the nature of wisdom, the philosopher Michael McKinney observes how wisdom resides within the understanding of the commonplace from a higher perspective. He observes “When life is viewed from a higher perspective, above the self, we can see that wisdom is not in the details; its in the whole story, the overview, the universal” (McKinney, 2004, n.p.). In kindred spirit, the psychologist William James, who McKinney also acknowledges, observes how “the art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook” (James, 1891, p. 369).

McKinney's observation is prescient to artist's work such as Burtynsky's. In his overview of the landscape, Burtynsky offers a story which depends not on the details, but upon a vision which transcends them. From the bird's-eye perspective, he presents the seemingly ordinary, but from the same perch also offers us deep insights into culture and

environment. As Burtynsky himself observes the artist's search is to "take the ordinary and move it into the extraordinary" (Interview, October 1, 2016).

Burtynsky's image stirs me; and I am reminded of Emerson's observation of the power of the artist to arouse the soul (Miller, 2006, p. 10). By awakening us the artist guides us towards reflections upon our relation with environment; herein also foregrounding those existential questions we ask ourselves about the meaning of life, which as the arts-educator Peter London observes, are the core questions configuring our psyche (London, 2002, p. 5).

Of the holistic nature of contemplative knowing, Robert Inchausti makes a kindred observation in his examination of Merton's spirituality. To know the "real world," Inchausti observes "is not only to measure and observe what is outside us but to discover our own inner ground" (Inchausti, 2014, pp. 56-57). Referencing Merton, Inchausti adds,

That ground, that world, where we are mysteriously present at once to ourselves and to others, is not a visible, objective, and determined structure with fixed laws and demands. It is "a living and self creating mystery of which we ourselves are a part, to which we ourselves are our own unique doors." (Inchausti, 2014, pp. 56-57)

Similarly writers in the field of education for sustainability look to artists like Burtynsky to bring into focus humanity's relationship to environment. The environmental educator Gary Babiuk, observes how Burtynsky has "...made the invisible visible and shown us what is hidden from view in our over consumptive society" (Babiuk, 2014, p.41); also noting how the artist's images are useful pedagogical resources in the classroom to help students explore humanity's toll on the environment. Babiuk's

highlights the pedagogic richness of artists' work like Burtynsky's; herein also nurturing the idea of the potential of images as powerful messengers of wisdom.

Of the power of the artist to nurture wisdom Merton, in *Woods, Shore, Desert* (1998), seeds it within the contemplative encounter with the landscape; one which is infused with the aesthetical presence of the poet and painter. In his writing the aesthetical is enmeshed with the poetic meditation upon the landscape. In like manner, Burtynsky offers us a visual poetry in his landscape images, one which following Lord requires slow looking (Lord, 2013, p. 188); and like Merton nurtures contemplative knowing within the embrace of holism.

By making the "invisible visible" (Babiuk, 2014, p. 41) Burtynsky, in the pairing of the pivot and the dome or in his image of the Phoenix Suburb/Navajo Reservation, nurtures us towards reflection upon the mysterious wholeness of Merton's *Hagia Sophia*. By embracing a holistic visual perspective Burtynsky nurtures a contemplative encounter; one wherein feeling and paradox (Hart, 2004, p. 37) are not excluded from awareness, as rationalism would have it, but instead embraced within the fullness and mystery of creation.

Of the character of pondering, Hart views it as one focused upon what Tillich names the "ultimate concerns" (Hart, 2004, p. 37) of life; or as London observes, its core questions and the purpose of art (London, 2002, p. 5). With such images by Burtynsky, as the pivot and dome or the image of the split desert landscape, we are summoned to awareness (Merton, 1966, p. 182) onto the concerns and core questions which Tillich, London and Hart ponder.

### **The Contemplative and Aesthetical as Merton's "Summonses to Awareness"**

*Brother Louis. What brings me to awareness? Do I seek the landscape or does it call upon me? Or, is my question unnecessary? Is awareness simply being present to the other? I onto the landscape and the landscape onto me. I touch the landscape and the landscape touches me.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)

In the encounter with nature's art – the landscape of the American south west - Merton transits onto a place of Zen - a place of void yet a place of wisdom as well. His spiritual journey though invites us to ponder its geography.

Of the nature of the encounter is the spiritual journey which the encounter initiates a seeking or a calling? Do we seek wisdom or are we called onto it? Am I a vessel from which the spirit cascades; or a vessel into which it flows? Am I both?

In *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* (1948) Merton oscillates in his view of art's contemplative possibilities. He ponders how the artist nurtures us towards the soul while in the same instance speaking of the "abyss" that resides between aesthetical and mystical contemplation. Merton speaks within a paradigm of theological categories; of the role and power of art in contemplation, Merton is cautious.

Of such caution Labrie observes how Merton, in the early 1950s pondered relinquishing poetry as he viewed it as a distraction from "pure contemplation" of God. Later Merton departs from such position when he believes he will not achieve such contemplation; such departure though not diminishing Merton's belief in the spiritual significance of art (R. Labrie, personal communication, February 27, 2016); and as Labrie observes the "...importance of art as a source of truth" which for Merton was wisdom (Labrie, 2014, p. 163).

Of the nature of transformation, Gunnlaugson observes how it can be characterized as being either a slow progression; or sudden in configuration (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 135); a characterization which is echoed in Merton's evolving views on the relation of contemplation, art and spirituality. Of such evolution Merton's reflections in his later essay *Signatures: Notes on the Author's Drawings in Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) are illustrative. In this text, art is not corralled by theological categories as it was in his earlier writings. Instead he writes forcefully of the energy of the drawing within a discourse where categories have been dissolved including his own drawings which are not to be viewed as art (Merton, 1966, p. 179). From *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* to *Raids on the Unspeakable* Merton evolves from the bifurcating domain of categories to another beyond category.

While he views his drawings as standing apart from category, Merton seeks to strip the image of unintended and superfluous meanings; and instead desires for them a kind of essential presence. Instead of viewing an image with categorical understanding (Merton, 1966, p. 179); he speaks of them as "signs" and refers to them as "abstractions" (Merton, 1966, p. 179) rather than art. Merton's abstractions are paradoxical; while he does not consider them art, he cautions us to neither be judged or feel threatened by them (Merton, 1966, p. 180). In the spirit of Burtynsky's visual pairings I juxtapose Merton's drawing with a photograph I had taken of an art installation; the juxtaposition serving as a visual metaphor for the dissolution of category which Merton alludes to in his reflection upon his drawings.



*The Dissolution of Category*

*No need to categorize these marks. It is better if they remain unidentified vestiges, signatures of someone who is not around. If these drawings are able to persist in a certain autonomy and fidelity, they may continue to awaken possibilities, consonances; they may dimly help to alter one's perceptions. Or they may quietly and independently continue to invent themselves.....For the only dream a man seriously has when he takes a brush in his hand and dips it into ink is to reveal a new sign than can continue to stand by itself and to exist in its own right, transcending all logical interpretation.*

(Merton, 1966, p. 182)

*Brother Louis. You seem to erode the image towards an essential presence, but then you build it up and imbue it with a vital presence. You say the image is not to be understood as a concept, yet you speak of it having meaning. You caution us to not judge it and not to be judged by it. Yet you imply its presence. What is the being of the image? Or, is the power of the image beyond being – one having a presence which is transcendent?*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)

While denying the categorical nature of the image, Merton offers us a paradox in which the image stands in relation to the viewer and is imbued with a vital presence. We are present to the image and the image is present to us. We encounter the image and the image encounters and may judge us. That an image should judge or pose threat is curious language and causes us to pause in our interpretation and ponder whether such language is best viewed as metaphorical. Yet Merton, in his text dwells upon the vitality of the image. He speaks of them as “...ciphers of energy, acts or movements intended to be propitious” (Merton, 1966, p. 180).

Merton’s language is elusive and evocative. His words suggest a vital presence within his abstractions; but to describe such vitality Merton speaks tentatively and of possibilities. They come to life but cannot be described with nouns; instead Merton’s abstractions are ephemeral barely describable as events. Neither object nor event, Merton’s abstractions are present within a different and perhaps transcendent territory – one marked by energies and movements.

The dissolution of categories, which informs Merton’s reflections on his drawings, suggests a paradoxical understanding in which spirituality and art are intertwined. Merton’s enmeshing of these within paradox in turn echoing kindred themes



within the holistic learning and spirituality research paradigms. In *the Other Side of the Mountain* Merton describes the “impossible paradox” of Zen as one which stands beyond category in its embrace of opposites (Merton, 1968, p. 286) – a sentiment which is echoed in his Zen like reflections upon his drawings and Ergas’ kindred observation that spirituality research is configured within a paradoxical “nonparadigm” (Ergas, 2016, p. 15). In a similar spirit to Ergas, Burrows observes how the contemplative domain “thrives on paradox” (Byrnes, 2012, p. 24).

Merton’s paradox evokes the methodological observation that inquiry is configured with messiness as Gunnlaugson observes (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 139); or Palmer’s suggestion that integrative education is a field marked by fluidity and complexity (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 39). The criticism of categorical thinking which Gunnlaugson’s and Palmer’s observations suggests foreground a general critique of Cartesian thinking which Merton also shares in his kindred reflections on his drawings as ephemeral and beyond category. Tobin Hart echoes such thinking in his criticism of the “rational-empirical approach” (Hart, 2004, p. 28) dominating binary understandings of what counts as knowing; and his advocacy of a contemplative knowing which, in its holism, stands apart from reductive epistemologies.

The categorical critique shared by these writers echoes Merton’s reflections on the ephemeral nature of his images which he views at best as ciphers or inventions, “...but not in the sense of findings” (Merton, 1966, p. 182). For Merton, his abstractions are outside categorization. Instead, they are present within a different realm. With a life of their own their being is beyond object; and outside of moment and identity. They do not tell us what they are; instead their presence resides in their calling or summonses to

us (Merton, 1966, p. 182). Outside of ontological language, Merton's abstractions are contemplative presences whose call to awareness transport us into a transcendent realm where wisdom resides.

*Brother Louis. We struggle to understand the transcendent through art. We strip the drawing of meaning and category. We reduce it to an essentialism configured by signs and abstractions. The drawing is ephemeral and an illusion to the transcendent. It is left with "crude innocence" (Merton, 1966, p.179).*

*Your drawings devoid of category, are "signs and ciphers of energy" (Merton, 1966, p. 180) – an ephemeral presence of a transcendent moment.*

*In that moment we seek to feel beyond theory, beyond category, beyond analysis, beyond words, beyond drawing.*

*Before the moment of transcendence and after it what is left to know of the drawing except "afterthoughts"? (Merton, 1966, p. 179).*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)

Of the power of texts to move us, Tobin Hart observes how within the tradition of wisdom literature, texts were described as having a vital presence (Hart, 2008, p. 236). Texts possess a vital spirit which is shared with persons and events and captured in Hart's observation that together with the "...world as a whole are living words" (Hart, 2008, p. 236). In similar spirit, in his teaching, Parker Palmer encourages students to go "beyond 'looking' at the subject into personal dialogue with it" within a spirit of community. (Palmer, 1993, p. 99)

The presence of connection with which Hart ponders the world as words which are alive; or Palmer's dialogical relation to the subject echoes Merton's reflections on his drawings. Though stripped of category, Merton speaks of their vital presence - the

drawings are present to us (Merton, 1966, p. 180); while they touch us, we are in connection with them within a relation of hope.

Merton's drawings are abstract images evoking Japanese calligraphy which he does in tandem with his meditative writings on the southwest landscape. Burtynsky's aerial images are narrative depictions of complex and often troubled landscapes. While their art is thematically different they invite us to reflect upon shared themes of holism, connection and the power of art to move us spiritually.

For Merton, the abstract drawing was infused with a vitality which defied category; one in which he pondered connection within its non-categorical and paradoxical nature. For Burtynsky, the landscape image embraces opposites; while it depicts beauty, such beauty is complicated by the gravity of the environmental message. While embracing the paradox Merton and Burtynsky evoke Zen-like feelings of non-judgement in their work.

Of learning which is deeply rooted (Hart, 2008, p. 236) Tobin Hart reflects that it entails both a looking within ourselves and outwards at the data within "an emphasis on contact over categorization...and a willingness to really meet and, therefore, be changed by the object of inquiry" (Hart, 2008, p. 236). In his poetry and observations on art, Merton defies category while Burtynsky similarly seeks to transcend categorical vision by guiding us towards his visual paradoxes. By nurturing us to look outwards and meditate upon the desert landscape or complicated urban landscapes, Merton and Burtynsky respectively also, following Hart's observation, *return* us to ourselves. Within such return, following Merton, we are "summon[ed] to awareness" (Merton, 1966, p. 182) within an expansive vision which feels towards holism and connection.

## Chapter Three: Emerging Questions: Of the Relation of Wisdom and Art

### Introduction: The Journey of Questions



While the questions of an inquiry stand as points of embarkation for it, the journey of inquiry is not necessarily completed by the questions we ponder. Like the inquiry the questions travel – like passengers the questions join it at destinations, depart at others while some remain for the entire journey. The questions feel present within a ceaseless movement of embarking and disembarking. Always moving and never resting; getting closer to and seeing but not always reaching the destination. The unending movement of questions intimate with the journey of inquiry and in turn sustaining the life of the researcher as one of never-ending inquiry (Miller, 2016, p. 138).

The journey of questions is a metaphor for their presence in contemplative inquiry; one which accompanies wisdom along a path which defies the restrictive Cartesian demand for certainty by instead embracing inexactness within the complexity of creation. Of such journey Tobin Hart observes,

Instead of grasping for certainty wisdom rides the question, lives the question. As physicist David Bohm (1981) argues, “questioning is...not an end in itself, nor is its main purpose to give rise to answers” (p.25). Harmony with the “whole flowing movement of life” comes when there is ceaseless questioning (p.25). When the quest for certainty and control are pushed to the background, the possibility of wonder returns. (Hart, 2009, p. 12)

Not apart from but intimate with the journey of transformation questions are kindred with wisdom, as Hart observes “wisdom seeks and creates questions” (Hart, 2009, p. 116) - an observation which invites us to ponder how questions, instead of

posing obstacles, are vital to the journey of transformation towards wisdom. Wisdom embracing questions as vital reflectors; the questions we ponder reflecting aspects of self and how we view the creation.

It is within such journey that the questions of this inquiry, which are of two broad configurations, are offered. The first set is sculpted of intuitions and feelings about the relation of art and wisdom which formed the initial embarkation into inquiry. The second are those questions which joined the journey after its departure and were generated in response to reflections upon texts that I had discovered or revisited in the course of inquiry. The later questions revolve about the relation of Merton's aesthetical ideas to wisdom; and methodological observations about the paradox of doing spirituality research which is observed in spirituality studies in education and Merton's own writings.

In his text *From Information to Transformation*, Tobin Hart (2009) observes how information is data that "flattens the world into component parts" (Hart, 2009, p. 8) whereas stories reconfigure information into "patterned wholes" which give them meaning. In this inquiry, Hart's observations on the nature of data and stories are extended to include the questions we ponder within inquiry and underscored by the notion that questions are informed with stories. While they come into being within encounters with texts they are also entwined with our lives reflecting aspects of self; an entwining informed by the stories in which they are enmeshed and give meaning.

Of such entwining, the questions feel incarnated in our selves and therein enriching the life of inquiry as one which is also embodied by the researcher (Miller, 2016, p. 138). Departing from a Cartesian strategy to reduce the data for inquiry into its component parts; questions are instead embraced within connection to stories within the

complexity of experience. It is within Gunnlaugson's invitation to embrace the complexity and murkiness (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 139) of inquiry that my questions are explored.

### **Embarking on Inquiry: First Questions**

The first question of the inquiry - what is the relation between wisdom and art? – emerged during a synchronous reading of three texts: John P. Miller's *Transcendental Learning – The Educational Legacy of Alcott, Emerson, Fuller, Peabody and Thoreau*. (2011); Ferrari's & Potworowski's *Teaching for Wisdom* (2008); and Thomas Merton's *Love and Living* (1979).

Reading these texts nurtured my initial intuitions about exploring a relation of wisdom and art. But the question emerged after I had abandoned an earlier project and began inquiry anew by embracing a methodology which was informed by narrative. Writing my stories felt authentic and generative to the rebirth of my inquiry. Reflecting upon them became a form of listening; stories become alive calling onto me; and within such listening to feelings and intuitions about art, life and philosophy - such moments which were ever present but never nurtured - were now allowed to emerge within an initial question about the relation of wisdom and art.

Reading Miller's retelling of Emerson's story of painting as non-dualistic knowing (Miller, 2006, p. 10) in tandem with Ferrari's & Potworowski's (2008) anthology of wisdom sparked the first iteration of such question while pondering past understandings of wisdom. While notions of wisdom are historically nurtured within forms of writing such as the Bible, parables, proverbs, stories, and myths (Baltes, 2004; Curnow, 2015; Ferrari & Potworowski, 2008) can a new understanding of wisdom which

both acknowledges but also departs from such historical forms be sculpted – that is, one which seeks a new understanding of wisdom in relation to the arts? Contemplating the writings of the Catholic mystic Thomas Merton on the arts (Merton, 1972) in tandem with recent scholarship in the field of holistic and transformative studies in education (Miller, 2011; Palmer, 1993; Schiller, 2014; Gunnlaugson, 2011; Burrows, 2015; Hart, 2009) and arts based research in education (Diamond and Mullen, 2001; London, 2002) has seeded this question. Reading Curnow on the history of wisdom was also nurturing to the question of the relation of art and wisdom. While Curnow’s study of wisdom is focused upon the examination of texts he also observes how the history of wisdom is rich in the vocabulary of illumination and visuality (Curnow, 1999, p. 15). Such observations in turn both nurturing reflection on Merton’s aesthetical ideas on wisdom and informing the initial question of this inquiry about the relation of wisdom and art.

Wisdom is a revered modality of knowing: it is both the highest and deepest form of knowing; and a guide on how best to lead a contented and meaningful life (Baltes, 2004, p. 8). While such understanding of wisdom constitutes a starting point for my inquiry, the question of the relation of wisdom and the arts is nurtured by Merton’s ideas on wisdom. For Merton, the idea of wisdom is extended; while wisdom is the highest form of knowing, it is also intertwined with spirituality and the aesthetical where to have wisdom is to be with the creation - a *being with* which is nurtured by the artist who resides within us. Merton writes

...true spiritual life is a life neither of dionysian orgy nor of apollonian clarity: it transcends both. It is a life of wisdom, a life of sophianic love. In *Sophia*, the highest wisdom-principle, all the greatness and majesty of the unknown that is in God and all that is rich and maternal in His creation are united inseparably, as paternal and maternal principles... (Merton, 1972, p. 141)

The encounter with art guides us toward spirituality. Of the relation of art with wisdom Merton meditates,

...art is not an end in itself. It introduces the soul into a higher spiritual order, which it expresses and in some sense explains. Music and art and poetry attune the soul to God because they induce a kind of contact with the Creator and Ruler of the Universe. The genius of the artist finds its way by the affinity of creative sympathy, or conaturality, into the living law that rules the universe... Since all true art lays bare the action of this same law in the depths of our own nature, it makes us alive to the tremendous mystery of being... (Merton, 1983, p. 36)

Pondering Merton's ideas on wisdom, art and spirituality reveals how his writing is sympathetic to holistic and transformative learning and arts-based inquiry in curriculum studies. While thinking about wisdom has a history spanning pre-Christian philosophical texts, medieval and Renaissance literature, and contemporary discourses in literary studies and developmental psychology such thinking circles about the study of the text; and not within the encounter with art. Thus seeking to understand wisdom within the latter territory departs from traditional discourses by situating a new understanding within the context of Merton's writings and artists' work; and as viewed through the lens of transformative learning and arts-based inquiry. By transiting onto this new territory the initial question that had marked the emergent point of my inquiry now became informed by new ones as follows.

- Discourses upon wisdom have historically formed around texts. While acknowledging such discourses, can they also be enriched by another which seeks understandings of wisdom through art?



- Can the encounter with art guide us towards wisdom? Can we draw into relation wisdom and art and speak of the wisdom of artful inquiry? Can we speak of art that is wise in the same way that we speak, for example, of a proverb that is wise?
- The history of wisdom is sculpted of wisdom texts. Can interpretations of wisdom be informed by the idea of wisdom art in general and wisdom-image in particular?
- If wisdom can be nurtured by artful inquiry, then what is the nature of such inquiry?
- If artful inquiry can lead to wisdom, then does such outcome elevate the standing of the arts as a way of knowing?

The questions emerged in the context of pondering Merton's ideas on art. While they seek to understand the relation of wisdom and art, *the nature of the quest for understanding* is a related question of my inquiry— one which is motivated by Susan Schiller's observations on the nature of inquiry itself. While inquiry within arts based research is nested within the primacy of artistic process (McNiff, 2009, p. 29), it also resides for this writer within the amalgam of such process with, as Schiller observes, the holistic modality of the "whole learner" within the integration of the spiritual with the intellectual and physical (Schiller, 2014, p. 1).

The inclusive nature of inquiry which is suggested by Schiller foregrounds how seeking it is intimately connected to the form of inquiry that we choose to follow. Of such forms Diamond and Mullen invite us to explore ones which are emerging but marginalized within the academy (Diamond & Mullen, 2001, p. 10). Similarly Schiller advocates rethinking of writing as a form which is both meaningful and connected to the

world of the writer (Schiller, 2014, p. x). Against the expectation within colleges that students write with an academic voice, Schiller encourages a rebalance wherein "...equal attention [is] given to multiple ways of knowing, including spiritual and emotional intelligence" (Schiller, 2014, p. x) as well as academic. Within the same spirit as Schiller's observations, Tobin Hart explores how contemplative inquiry offers another way of knowing (Hart, 2004, p. 29); which supplements the sensorial and rationalistic while engaging with strategies of inquiry which are drawn from contemplation and the artist's toolbox (Hart, 2004, p. 29).

My inquiry into the relation of wisdom and artful inquiry follows Schiller's and Hart's observations; and Diamond's and Mullen's invitation by reflecting upon how the process of narrative writing is one such form which integrates the path of inquiry with the questions we ponder and seek answers to. Narrative writing becoming a form of meditation practice which is nested within contemplations upon questions which are dear to us; a notion which follows Hart's view and extends Schiller's observation about how "writing is a natural site of holism because writing is a way of knowing that connects and draws from our inner and outer worlds" (Schiller, 2014, p. ix).

Narrative writing offers a contemplative terrain which draws upon such worlds; Merton's writings, such as *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1998), offering a notable example. It is within the realm of narrative – one which is methodologically sympathetic to holistic and arts based inquiry - that Merton invites us to ponder his ideas on wisdom, art and spirituality. His positioning of the centrality of narrative in inquiry in turn nurtures my questions about the relation of art and wisdom – ones which have emerged from contemplations upon my own narrative.

Thus, while the first questions of this inquiry explore the relation of wisdom and arts, such questions are also supplemented with another which, in the spirit of Schiller's, Hart's and Diamond and Mullen's work, ponders the relation of the form of inquiry to the questions an inquiry seeks to explore. Pondering such relation delves into the territory of methodology – one which is underscored by the questions: what is the relation between the process of my inquiry and the questions I seek to understand? Instead of a bifurcated relation, is it possible to configure another which is integrative with and connected to my life as the inquirer?

Reading Schiller, Hart and Merton's writings brought into focus how my thinking was sympathetic to such an integrative approach to research within curriculum studies in general; and narrative writing as a contemplative form in particular. While contemplative writing is uncommon in contemporary academic discourse, it finds its antecedents in medieval contemplative literature; the writings of Counter Reformation contemplatives such as Loyola; 19<sup>th</sup> century Transcendentalist writers; and within the work of recent contemplatives like Thomas Merton. Of these writers, pondering Thomas Merton's story of his emergence into knowledge of his self and how such emergence is told within the unfolding narrative of the meditation form, in particular as revealed in *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1998), served as a spark for beginning to ponder the relation between methodology; and narrative as contemplative writing.

The emergence of such methodological reflections; one which was in addition enriched by the strategy of speaking to Merton within a dialogical discourse with his writings, evolved during the progress of my inquiry and formed its second questions.

## **Travelling Through Inquiry: Second Questions**

### **The Question of Dialogical Discourse**

During the voyage of inquiry encounters with new texts and ones that I had revisited invited new questions to join in the journey. With these new passengers there emerged questions about the relation of wisdom to Merton's ideas on art – ones which gradually evolved towards the notion of *wisdom-image*. The spiritual aspects of such relation in turn foregrounding methodological questions about the paradox of doing spirituality research – one which is observed amongst writers in spirituality in education research such as Ergas (2016) and Merton's own writings. With Merton the paradox is deepened when pondered in relation to themes of the paradisaical in his writings. The paradisaical is a powerful imaginal vision – one which in turn guided this inquiry towards the question of the *wisdom-image* and how such question is nested within notions of the paradisaical and paradoxical in spirituality research.

Less paradoxical is the form of dialogical speaking with Merton's writings which is sometimes used in this study to explore themes about the relation of art and wisdom; but whose coming into presence in inquiry foregrounded methodological questions about the tools we use in inquiry.

During the process of writing, there were moments when my writing switched to a first person dialogical encounter - one which was nurtured by Merton's use of a similar strategy in some of his writings. While such strategy has a home in transformative learning and arts-based approaches in education which embrace forms of doing research (Schiller, 2015; Gunnlaugson, 2011; Hart, 2009; Palmer, 1993; Eisner, 2008 / 1997) which depart from the restrictive lens of rationalistic inquiry, new questions arose about

the characteristics of such speaking as a form of discourse in inquiry. Can dialogical speaking constitute a species of discourse – one which builds upon Gunnlaugson’s thesis of “generative dialogue” (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138)? While Gunnlaugson’s notion is sculpted by the communicative relations we have with others, can such idea form the basis of a discourse which is centered upon one’s interior life - one which is also informed by Burrows’ metaphor of “interior alchemy” (Burrow, 2015, p. 127)?

Burrows’ focus on the aspect of interiority in transformative learning evokes Arthur Zajonc’s observations on the centrality of doing the interior work and role of solitude within that centrality. In the spirit of Burrows’ observations, Zajonc observes that doing the inner work is central to living a life which is balanced with “our outer work” (Zajonc, 2009, pp. 14-15). Of the role of solitude Zajonc observes that it is the beginning place of contemplative practice (Zajonc, 2009, p. 21). Of solitude Zajonc observes

This does not mean brooding or self-indulgent musing, but instead practicing a special form of recollection of the past, mindfulness for the present, and envisioning of the future in a manner that is enlivening, clean, and insightful. (Zajonc, 2009, p. 20)

Together with Burrows’ focus on interiority and Gunnlaugson’s thesis on the relational nature of dialogue (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138), Zajonc’s view of the centrality of solitude within contemplative inquiry nurtured intuitions and questions about the character of dialogical discourse in my study.

### **Hearing the Silent Self: The Voice of Solitude**

If solitude has a place in contemplative inquiry, can Zajonc’s thesis of solitude in contemplative practice be aligned with dialogical discourse; and if so can dialogical

discourse be viewed as a voice of solitude – one which *speaks our contemplation* within contemplative practice? Is dialogical discourse the voice which hears the silent self?

Dialogical discourse evokes the notion that it is a condition of solitude, a dialogue with self; but also one which does so by engaging with Merton's presence through his writings. It is a dialogue which stirs the inner alchemy (Burrows, 2015, p. 127) and co-opting Zajonc's observations about contemplation a place where my inquiry both begins and is guided.

Of that place of beginning I am reminded of the monastic courtyards of Florence. Centred within the building, the courtyard is inward looking – a space of calm within the clamour of the city. The courtyard offers a metaphor for interiority and the voice of solitude that we pause to hear.

The solitude of dialogical discourse suggests an intimacy between the inquirer and subject of inquiry wherein the inquirer and the subject become one; an intimacy which finds a kindred place in Zajonc's view of the role of solitude in contemplative inquiry.

Of the intimacy of the researcher with their subject in inquiry others have pondered such relation; in particular, Palmer who encourages that we enter into dialogue with our subject (Palmer, 1993, p. 99). The question of dialogical speaking evokes Palmer's observation and how such relation departs from one defined by rationalistic dualism and is instead nested within a holistic understanding which is kindred to Buber's concept of "*I-thou*" (Buber, n.d., p. 3); or Hart's notion of words as having a vital presence (Hart, 2008, p. 236) to describe the relations we have with texts and others. Of such relation Buber's thesis of the "*I-thou*" resists subject-object dualism; in so doing



*A Courtyard in the Convent of San Marco  
Florence, Italy*

underscoring a central thesis about how we do inquiry which is shared by Miller (2016), Zajonc (2009), Palmer (1993) and Hart (2008). With such writers the question of dialogical speaking is brought into focus – can we ponder a relation to a text which is not disencased from the life of the inquirer but one which is instead intimate with it within a relation of vitality and connection?

### **Evolving Questions towards the *Wisdom Image***

Together with reflections upon primary and secondary texts dialogical speaking with Merton's writings becomes a lens through which the *second questions* of this study came into focus during the journey of inquiry. Of such questions, pondering the evolution of Merton's aesthetical ideas through such texts as *Poetry and the Contemplative Life* (1947) followed by *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) and *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968) guided my initial intuitions about the relation of art and wisdom towards reflection upon the idea of paradisaal wisdom. The idea of the paradise is visually rich evoking some of the most profound and memorable images in cultural mythology. The powerful aesthetical presence of the paradisaal, with which wisdom is aligned in Merton's writings, also guided my inquiry towards reflection upon the question of the wisdom image.

For Merton, the idea of paradise is aligned with the knowing one discovers about one's inner self (Merton, 1979, p. 9). The spiritual journey towards such knowing traverses a terrain of beauty and love and is nested within aesthetical encounters such as the "festival of rain" (Merton, 1966, p.11) in *Rain and the Rhinoceros*. Merton's encounters with nature are visually rich aesthetical moments evoking the Transcendentalist writers and idea that spirituality and the aesthetical encounter are in



entwined relation. Within such relation the authentic self is nurtured and paradisaal idea is nested. Notions of the paradisaal and aesthetical are intertwined with the other; and within such enmeshing there began to emerge within this inquiry the idea of the aesthetical in relation to wisdom in general and wisdom image in particular.

The idea of the wisdom-image, which became foregrounded in my reflections upon Merton's meditations on the paradisaal, nurtured some of the second questions of this inquiry.

- What marks the wisdom image and distinguishes it from other images?
- How do we explore the relation of the wisdom-image to the paradisaal?
- Of the paradisaal, Merton speaks of the "impossible paradox" in the encounter with the beauty of the mountain – "it is and is not" (Merton, 1998, p. 286). How does the wisdom-image relate to such paradox?
- If the wisdom-image is crafted of paradox, then how are we to configure notions of paradisaal wisdom?
- Alternatively, does the wisdom-image elevate the epistemic standing of the aesthetical encounter? In so doing celebrating ways of knowing through the arts, through such paradigms, for example, as art-based and holistic learning in education, which depart from the narrower lens of rationalistic inquiry?

### **The Spirituality Research Paradigm and the Wisdom-Image: An Impossible Question?**

While questions about the wisdom image are informed by Merton's writings they are also complicated by his view of the paradoxical nature of spiritual transcendence (Merton, 1998, p. 286); one which is prescient to the current methodological initiative by researchers, such as Lin (2016), Ergas (2016) and Miller (2016) into configuring a spirituality research paradigm. While Merton ponders the "impossible paradox" Oren Ergas speaks in similar spirit of the "paradoxical creed" (Ergas, 2016, p. 15) which confronts the project of sculpting a spirituality research paradigm (SRP).

In this inquiry the paradox and paradigm of SRP is viewed as a fundamental philosophical problem – one to which I am drawn, but whose approach to understanding now departs from the analytical philosophy in which I was schooled. Instead of posing questions within the paradigm of a reductionist methodology, my questions are posed within a different realm – one which following Kuhn (1962) are incommensurable with reductionism by instead embracing the place of the arts in knowing within a different holistic domain of connection and spirit.

Merton writes that the mountain is seen when where is nothing more to say; a seeing which happens when we "consent to the impossible paradox (Merton, 1998, p. 286). Such paradox turns away from propositional knowing by instead evoking ways of knowing which are nested within themes of the non-propositional (Palmer, 1993; Zajonc, 2005; Merton, 1998).

How does the wisdom image relate to Merton's paradox (Merton, 1998, p. 286) or Ergas' "paradoxical creed" (Ergas, 2016, p. 15)? Does the wisdom image guide us towards a knowing which cannot be parsed by analytical thinking and transcends it?

Does meditating upon the aesthetical carry us into moments of non-propositional knowing – that is the space of the non-propositional where we are in presence and not opposition with the paradoxical creed? And once in that presence what becomes of the wisdom-image? What becomes of his literary children that Merton speaks of fondly in *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966)? Do they dissolve within the presence of the paradoxical? Such are some of the second questions that became foregrounded during the journey of my inquiry.

To ask what becomes of the wisdom image or Merton's texts in the presence of the spiritual paradox that Ergas and Merton speak of is to perhaps ponder a question which reveals the tug of ontological thinking. Merton, quoting Prakriti on the nature of the self, observes “ ‘the self is not known within nature’ ” (Prakriti, quoted in Merton, 1998, p. 174). In a similar spirit Merton writes of the limits of propositional knowing observing that nothing is needed to be said when the mountain is discovered (Merton, 1998, p. xiii). The silence Merton alludes to when the mountain is found invites us to ponder how for both Merton and Prakriti propositional thinking with which the ontological is aligned is limited once the spiritual terrain has been reached.

Reflecting upon Merton's paradox (Merton, 1998, p.286) and Ergas' “paradoxical creed” (Ergas, 2016, p.15) foregrounds the conundrum of pondering questions in spirituality research. While questions are complicated by the conundrum that Merton and Ergas speak of, they are also vital to the spiritual journey. As Tobin Hart observes, inquiry proceeds within never-ending questioning and wonder returns when wisdom is no longer corralled by certainty (Hart, 2009, pp. 11-12). Merton's paradox evokes such

sentiment and along with Ergas' observations on the spirituality research paradigm bring into focus the paradox of pondering the question of the wisdom image within the different realms of propositional and non-propositional knowing.

When we consent to the paradox we are invited to ponder how such consent remains as mystery from within the propositional world, but remains as presence within the non-propositional domain. When we consent to Merton's paradox (Merton, 1998, p. 286) or Ergas' "paradoxical creed" (Ergas, 2016, p. 15) the questions, pondered within the realm of propositional knowing, are ones we are impelled to ask but which are also configured as impossible questions enwrapped by paradox. And thus we are drawn to ponder, following Merton and Ergas, how the impossible question accompanies Merton's paradox (Merton, 1998, p. 286) in the journey of spiritual inquiry. But a journey which is also, following Hart, rich in wonder (Hart, 2009, pp. 11-12).

## Chapter Four: Literature Review

### Introduction: In Search of Our Friends

*During a meeting of the Holistic Educators group at OISE I was asked by colleagues how my inquiry was going and whether I had tired of the readings. I replied that I enjoyed the readings and was still friends with them. They found my answer amusing and we all had a good laugh. Afterwards I recalled the encounter and pondered how my improvised response also revealed something about the relation of texts to the inquirer. While texts bear a referential and contextual relation to an inquiry, they also transcend such relations. The texts we choose reflect something of our selves; and in this are not simply texts disencased from inquiry, but in intimate relation to the life of the inquirer. The texts that we move towards and feel kindred with perhaps aligning with aspects of our emotional selves. Following Merton, who speaks to his texts in *Raids on the Unspeakable*, they become his children (Merton, 1966, pp. 1-6); and with my colleagues I describe them as my friends.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, November 19, 2016)



My story is guided by the reflection that while a literature review is recognition of the texts forming part of an inquiry, it also invites us to ponder a deeper connection to the texts to which we are drawn. A serendipitous encounter with my colleagues nurtured the reflection that the texts we choose are not disencased from the psyche of the inquirer; herein suggesting a relation between the inquirer and their texts which extends beyond their referential presence within inquiry.

Of such extended relation the following questions are offered. What feelings are evoked within us when we ponder the texts that we choose? Do the texts nurture wonder, curiosity, and love? Do the words convey us into silence? Do they carry us into awareness and nurture us towards contemplative reflection? Do they move us? That we

should feel towards the texts enriches inquiry and follows Tobin Hart's observation that "...what we know is bound to how we know" (Hart, 2008, p. 236).



*A Cosmological Conversation between Aristotle, Ptolemy and Copernicus*

Of the nature of the *how* in knowing Parker Palmer, in a similar spirit, describes how, in his teaching he nurtures connections by encouraging his students, not simply to observe, but be in dialogue with the subject (Palmer, 1983, p. 99). With specific reference to the teaching of Merton's writings, Palmer describes how he would introduce him "...with the care I would take in introducing one good friend to some others" (Palmer, 1983, p. 99). The intimacy with which Palmer engages with texts suggests an enriched relation between reader and text; one which extends into the realm of feeling where the dualism of the researcher and subject of inquiry is eroded.

To know with feeling when we engage texts evokes Patricia Morgan's idea of "felt knowing" (Morgan, 2012, p. 50) which she describes as a "precognitive knowing and meaning that originates in the interior" (Morgan, 2012, p. 50). While Morgan's notion is configured within the psyche, her idea is co-opted in this inquiry and extended within a reflection upon the relation of the psyche to texts. Of such relation, we are invited to reflect on how the texts we are drawn too mirror our inner world; reflecting our deep intuitions and feelings; and the special knowing from within that Morgan ponders.

Of the power of texts or persons or the world to move us, Tobin Hart describes them as vital presences; one which extends beyond their status as objects by being instead intimate with our lives (Hart, 2008, p. 236). Words are not disencased from our being but join with us in the journey of inquiry. Within the "living words" (Hart, 2008, p. 236) that both touch us and we touch them wisdom is nested. With their touch words become incarnated in our journey of inquiry within an intimacy which evokes Morgan's idea of knowing enriched by feeling (Morgan, 2012, p. 50).

Heraclitus observed "I searched into myself" (Curnow, 1999, p. 30). In inquiry, to search onto oneself is guided in part by the texts which touch us. I layer my words onto Heraclitus and reflect *I searched onto myself through the texts to which I feel*.

Of those texts I was touched by many in this inquiry. A literature review into the subject of wisdom travels a rich terrain; one broadly marked by two configurations. The historical tradition of wisdom literature, one which as a body of literature traverses eastern and western cultural traditions and is represented by the tradition of *wisdom texts*; that is, of ancient myths, stories, legends, proverbs, and maxims is one such configuration. Of the second configuration, the study of wisdom is nested within

scholarly inquiry into the subject of wisdom, one which transits diverse fields of philosophy, developmental psychology, curriculum studies and history of literature.

In this inquiry, such configurations are in turn sculpted by the question of the relation of wisdom and the arts; one which by tradition has not been central to the study of wisdom, but is to the present inquiry. Seeking to explore wisdom within the latter understanding is the focus of my inquiry and informs the literature research which follows in five parts.

In the first part, the journey of my literature review is introduced through exploration of texts which were seminal to the genesis of this inquiry; in particular Miller's *Transcendental Learning* (2011) and a second text by him *Educating for Wisdom and Compassion* (2006); and Ferrari's and Potworowski's anthology *Teaching for Wisdom* (2008). While pondering such texts brought into focus the initial question of the relation of wisdom and art its exploration was nurtured by examination of texts by artists and holistic arts educators such as Kandinsky (1977), Kelly (2006), de Botton (2013) and Merton (1998). Exploration of texts by the latter writers is the intent of the second part of the literature review.

The literature review continues in the third part by acknowledging texts from the academic study of wisdom, in particular ones by Baltes (2004), Curnow (2015) and Ferrari and Potworowski (2008). Reading Thomas Merton is central to the present inquiry and in the fourth part the literature review surveys selected texts from Merton's immense body of writings; and in addition, interpreters of Merton's work, such as Labrie (2001), Higgins (1998) and Inchausti (1998). The literature review concludes with acknowledging texts from the fields of transformative and contemplative studies in



education (Miller, 2014; Hart, 2004; Morgan, 2012; Burrows, 2015; Byrnes, 2012; Dencev & Collister, 2010; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Zajonc, 2006); and others from recent research into the concept of a spirituality research paradigm (Lin, 2016; Miller, 2016; Ergas 2016). Together such texts inform the pedagogical and methodological configuration of the present inquiry.

The literature review unfolds as a narrative nested within this writer's encounters with primary and secondary texts. Such counters were often serendipitous and fortuitous and affirming of the notion that inquiry often departs from our initial expectations and preparations; and is instead marked by multiple entry points along its journey and ones which are often unexpected. Of the journey of texts I reflect,

*Most often it feels like inquiry is less a rational and preplanned process than a serendipitous and intuitive one. On the ocean of texts I journey towards a port not knowing where my transit from that place will take me next. Only when I depart from it and continue on does the next port begin to appear. During the journey we arrive at destinations and do not.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, August 25, 2016)



*The Journey*

### Seeking Wisdom from Artists and Holistic Writers

The question of the relation of wisdom and art was nurtured in part through reading Miller's *Educating for Wisdom and Compassion* (Miller, 2006); becoming initially crystallized around his observation of the nondualistic nature of *timeless learning*. Unlike a *transmission* model of learning *timeless learning* is not about acquiring knowledge; instead, authentic learning resides not in its temporality, but in the heightened immediacy of the present (Miller, 2006, p. 5). Miller observes how timeless learning has several characteristics; amongst these his observation on its *nondualistic* character was generative in the initial formation of my inquiry. Sparking my initial intuitions into the relation of art and wisdom was Miller's retelling of Emerson's story of the painter,

Timeless learning tends to be nondualistic in that the knower and known become one. Emerson wrote. "A painter told me that nobody could draw a tree without in some sort becoming a tree." He adds: "By deeper apprehension,...the artist attains the power of awakening other souls to a given activity" (p. 134). For Emerson, nondual knowing can awaken others. (Miller, 2006, p. 10)

The way of art can carry us into such moments of awakening when by heightened comprehension we become closer to what Miller observes as "...the grand Mystery of being and the cosmos" (Miller, 2006, p. 11). I ponder his retelling of Emerson's story of the painter and wonder if the profound apprehension that Emerson observes in the painter's craft can be named wisdom.

Such deeper knowing, suggests a special relationality between the artist and her art – one of intimacy, alignment, or *being one with* wherein as Emerson observes in the story of the painter, the painter becomes the tree. Others have alluded to such

relationality. In my literature review the spark that was initiated around my readings of Miller's texts was followed by meditations upon the reflections of artists upon their art practice and other writers in the field of holistic education.

The photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson observes that "To take a photograph is to align the head, the eye and the heart. It's a way of life" (Cartier-Bresson, 2017). The Canadian landscape photographer, Edward Burtynsky speaks of a similar alignment which for him is also meditative; one which is marked by a deep focus wherein the subject guides you onto it (Khatchadourian, 2016, p. 83). Burtynsky's and Cartier-Bresson's sentiments echoing my own engagement with photography when the moment of the camera's shutter release is accompanied by a sense of completeness when I *feel* that the composition and the lighting is optimal and nothing more needs to be done to the image. In a similar spirit, Vicki Kelly, a teacher-artist, likens the artist's act of seeing to "beholding...within our innermost being" (Kelly, 2006, p. 3) – a deep relationality in which "...one stretches towards and unites with the object, or the other." "By this act of indwelling" Kelly observes this "...leads to an apprehending or deeper understanding...the artist completes the intended wholeness of creation...Sometimes artists experience profound moments of grace when, with insight, they see into the heart of things" (Kelly, 2006, p. 3).

In his essay *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* the painter Kandinsky describes such relationality poetically - "...colour is a power which directly influences the soul. Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul" (Kandinsky, 1977, p. 25).

Kandinsky's musical metaphor of such aesthetic intimacy, when colour and the soul are aligned, is echoed by John Coltrane, the American Jazz musician, who in the spirit of the American Transcendentalist writers simply observes that "All a musician can do is to get closer to the sources of nature, and so feel that he is in communion with the natural laws" (Coltrane, n.d.). Such closeness to nature, which Coltrane speaks of, is mirrored in Jean-Michel Basquiat observation "I don't think about art when I'm working. I try to think about life" (Basquiat, n.d.).

Of the closeness with nature and life which Coltrane and Basquiat speak of respectively Arthur Zajonc writes of the transformative promise of the aesthetical encounter – one which is configured by moments of *reshaping, recentering and realignment* of self. Using the metaphor of the circle such moments are marked by the movement from eccentricity to concentricity. Engaging with art centers and transforms us. Of the transformative presence of art Zajonc in *The Heart of Higher Education* quotes the artist Paul Cezanne and adds

‘There is only nature, and the eye is trained through contact with her. It becomes concentric through looking and working.’ That is to say, we start eccentric, off-center. Through our constant attention to her we become concentric; we reshape ourselves with every stroke on the canvas to be in alignment with her. Only in this way does the artist learn to see the as-yet-unseen and so become capable of rendering it visible to others. (Palmer and Zajonc, 2010, pp. 107-108)

Zajonc's reflection on Cezanne's painting evokes the spirit of the centered self in Fra Angelico's *Mocking of Christ* (1440). For Zajonc, the encounter with the aesthetical is a one that reshapes us; a transformative event whose transit from the eccentric towards the concentric echoes the centering of self portrayed in Fra Angelico's painting.

Of the spirit of connection between artist and subject that Zajonc ponders in the aesthetic encounter is one which is not exclusive to the domain of the arts but reflected in other fields of inquiry. Amongst scientists are found echoes of kindred descriptions of their relational encounters with the subjects of their laboratory studies. Amongst these is the story, retold by Tobin Hart (2004), of how Barbara McClintock, a Nobel Prize winner, described her relation to the corn plants she researched. The scientist's attentiveness to her plants involved a soft empiricism (Hart, 2004, p. 32); " 'a feeling for the organism' and an 'openness to let it come to you' (Keller, 1983, p. 198)" (Hart, 2004, p. 33). The language McClintock uses to describe her relation to her plants evokes the intimacy and spirit of Coltrane's intent for the musician, in his work, to get closer to nature; or Burtynsky's strategy of letting the subject guide his photographic composition.

Amongst such artists, musicians and scientist there emerges a shared observation of a special alignment or oneness that is present between the artist and their creation. Such unity evokes the spirit of holism; and one from which, as Emerson observes leads to a deeper knowing; or as Kelly observes moments when grace is present (Kelly, 2006, p. 3).

While the question of how we know within such moments is not a central concern of such writers, they invite us to ponder whether such deep knowing is closer to one which is aesthetic, contemplative, intuitive and embodied in nature rather than simply described as rational and demonstrable. The special alignment which Emerson, Cartier-Bresson, Burtynsky, Kelly, Zajonc, and Kandinsky observe occurring between the artist and the soul evokes Curnow's observation on Pascal that "...intuition and experience are the domain of, or exercises of, the heart, and reason is helpless without them" (Curnow,

1999, p. 131). Without the pauses of rational demonstration, there is instead the suddenness with which direct perceiving happens; a moment of intuitive grasping, a moment of clarity, a leaping into understanding when the encounter with the imaginal touches us. Of the power of intuitive and embodied knowing, Coltrane observes

When you are playing with someone who really has something to say, even though they may be otherwise quite different in style, there's one thing that remains constant. And that is the tension of the experience, that electricity, that kind of feeling that is a lift sort of feeling. No matter where it happens, you know when that feeling comes upon you, and it makes you feel happy. (Coltrane, n.d.)

Of the intimacy of the intuitive touch others in the field of holistic arts education parallel such sentiments. Michael Grady explores the notion of “art as spiritual inquiry” – a holistic notion about the reintegrating of self through the arts which he examines in the context of the alienation of self in contemporary society (Grady, 2006, p. 84). Alain de Botton parses a similar notion, but through the idea of the art gallery as a space – what he also names the “...apothecary for our deeper selves” - which he views as a healing space for the psychic recovery of self (de Botton, 2013, p.1). The holistic art-educator Seymour Simmons observes how art making is a platform for existential inquiry and the artist serves to make public those ideas which are deeply held and private (Simmons, 2013, p. 48). In the same spirit arts educator Peter London observes how the purpose of art is to engage with the core questions of life: “Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Who are you? Who are we? ...” (London, 2002, p. 5).

Interestingly, such sentiments amongst holistic writers in the arts and transformative learning are synchronous with Merton's writings upon Zen. Of Zen, Merton observes that it is not about understanding enlightenment as a philosophical

system; rather it “...seeks an existential and empirical participation in that enlightenment experience” (Merton, 1968, p. 36). Of such participation, Merton writes of the essential nature of Zen. In *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968), in a passage which evokes similarities with London’s meditations upon the core questions of life or Basquiat’s desire not to think but to paint life, Merton observes

But the chief characteristic of Zen is that it rejects all these systematic elaborations in order to get back, as far as possible, to the pure and unarticulated and unexplained ground of direct experience. The direct experience of what? Life itself. What it means that I exist, that I live: who is this “I” that exists and lives? What is the difference between an authentic and an illusory awareness of the self that exists and lives? What are and are not the basic facts of existence? (Merton, 1968, p. 36)

While such questions have been the terrain of philosophers since antiquity, the answers they offered have not satisfied us. We continue to ponder them; and we turn to the artist for insights upon such answers. As the American writer James Baldwin observes “The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers” (Baldwin, n.d.).

For the artist, the answers to the life questions are not corralled by the rational-analytical domain of the philosopher but instead are configured within a different knowing – an intuitive one informed by the creative and aesthetical. Within the latter domain, of such questions, Merton’s observations on Zen echo those of Peter London on the arts. The questions are similar; and nurture the idea that engaging with the arts can guide us towards wisdom; a deep knowing upon the existential questions which both London and Merton pose.

## Seeking Wisdom from Current Research in Wisdom Studies

*Though my academic training was in philosophy the topic of wisdom, which the ancient philosophers had viewed in intimate relation to philosophy, had not figured within my studies. Being curious about this absence I revisit my first philosophy anthology, Edwards and Pap, A Modern Introduction to Philosophy (1973) and observe that there are no subject entries for wisdom. Neither are there entries for art. The absences are puzzling: to speak of philosophy without wisdom within a book about philosophy seems counter intuitive; while speaking of philosophy without art feels soulless.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, February 2014)

In my literature review my initial intuitions about the relation of art and wisdom which had formed about reflections upon artists' work and readings in the field of holistic education led to a general reading on the subject of wisdom beginning with Ferrari's and Potworowski's *Teaching for Wisdom* (2008). Pondering Ferrari's and Potworowski's text brought into focus how my undergraduate study of philosophy excluded the study of wisdom, one which many years later nurtured the retelling which introduces this chapter.

My reflection upon readings completed many years ago, while highlighting a gap in my philosophical studies, also foregrounded an insight about the activity of doing a literature review. The old philosophy text which now forms part of my literature review foregrounds itself within my narrative about the study of philosophy with which it is entwined. In this is evoked the idea that a literature review need not be disencased from but instead intimate with one's narrative – one which in my story is informed by the memory of absences in my philosophical readings that only now have been brought into meaning within a doctoral inquiry into the nature of wisdom and art.

Reading Ferrari's and Potworowski's *Teaching for Wisdom* (2008) stands in opposition to such absences in the philosophical anthology. Years later when I ponder an



inquiry into the relation of art and wisdom in the context of reading *Teaching for Wisdom* did I realize how my experience of academic philosophy had been marked by the absence of a pedagogy of wisdom.

With my academic experience brought into focus through reading *Teaching for Wisdom*, I ponder how the dearth of wisdom that I had experienced as a philosophy student was later replaced by an abundance of understandings of wisdoms. Ferrari's & Potworowski's anthology parse such understandings through the lens of pedagogy, histories of eastern and western philosophies and development psychology. Through their reading I learn that understandings of wisdom are not singular but manifold.

Underscoring their inquiry into wisdom is the question "Can wisdom be taught or at least fostered" (Ferrari & Potworowski, 2008)? Ferrari's & Potworowski's text reveals how responses to this question have diverse answers – ones which range from Curnow's historical overview (Curnow, 2008); Stange's and Kunzman's scientific approach to the understanding of wisdom as captured in the Berlin Paradigm (Stange & Kunzman, 2008); Sternberg's, Jarvin's and Reznitskaya's "Balance Theory of Wisdom" (Sternberg, Jarvin & Reznitskaya, 2008, p. 38); Reeve's, Messina's and Scardamalia's understanding of wisdom as a deep knowing nurtured within communities (Reeve, Messina & Scardamalia, 2008); Rosch's particular interest in Buddhism's notion of "beginner's mind" (Rosch, 2008, pp. 135) and general interest in what is common between wisdom traditions; to Bright's exploration of wisdom within the Christian context (Bright, 2008). While their foci are diverse, all recognize that understandings of wisdom are much more than knowledge of the world; instead such understandings are an amalgam of how we know and live in the world.

Following Ferrari and Potworowski I turned to the work of the development psychologist Paul Baltes, who like the former explores multiple understandings of wisdom. In *Wisdom as Orchestration of Mind and Virtue*, Baltes (2004) presents an encyclopaedic overview which, through its inquiry into the history and scholarship on wisdom, ponders whether a psychological theory of wisdom is possible. While Baltes observes that historical understandings of wisdoms share "...the core notion that wisdom constitutes deep knowledge about life, its conduct, and its interpretation" (Baltes, 2004, p. 41), he also observes that such understandings are marked by many configurations - to understand wisdom is to engage "...a collection of wisdoms rather than a singular wisdom (Assmann, 1991)" (Baltes, 2004, p. 8).

Baltes' view of the multiple configurations of wisdom is shared by others in the field of wisdom studies; notably Trevor Curnow whose writings on wisdom form another pillar of my literature review. While recognizing that wisdom has no single definition Curnow, in his text *Wisdom* (2015), overviews the history of wisdom to show how wisdom has been understood in different ways. Amongst these, wisdom understood as being identified with knowledge; or with a healthy soul; or alternatively, in the Christian context, with piety (Curnow, 2015, p. 8). That wisdom has multitudinous understandings is a theme Curnow explores in his other texts, *Wisdom in the Ancient World* (2010), and *Wisdom, Intuition and Ethics* (1999).

Reading Baltes', Curnow's and Ferrari's & Potworowski's writings in wisdom studies brought into focus how such studies have centered on the text as the primary expression of wisdom. Proverbs, maxims, the wisdom literature of the ancients (Buddha, Greek philosophers, early Christians), and writings of Renaissance thinkers such as

Cusanus (1998), for example, are witness to the form of the text as the primary modality of wisdom. In his overview of the history of wisdom, Curnow observes how its history parallels the evolution of language, writing, and literacy; and is often associated with the presence of the scribe in ancient historical accounts (Curnow, 2015, p. 14).

While such focus in wisdom studies became foregrounded in my literature review; such relationality between texts and wisdom was one I found both intriguing and generative in my inquiry. While wisdom stands in relation to the *word*; and text form as the formal conveyance of wisdom, the subject of wisdom in relation to a different modality of the arts is less apparent. Importantly, arriving at such observation was formative to the initial question of my inquiry; that is of the relation between wisdom and art.

### **Allusions to the Artful and Imaginal in Wisdom Studies**

In my literature review the question of the relation of art and wisdom became crystallized while reading Baltes' work. In his text there are few references to arts; except for allusions to poetry. Of wisdom in poetry Baltes observes how poetry became highly regarded because it revealed insights in the nature of humanity (Baltes, 2004, p. 148).

Reading Baltes' work foregrounded a conundrum I observed within wisdom studies; though much has been written on wisdom, less has been written on the intersection of the arts with wisdom. Though his comments on poetry are cursory, they hint at the possibility of such intersection. In pondering how the art of poetry embodies wisdom Baltes guided my inquiry towards a general meditation upon the relation of wisdom and art.

Such peripheral references to the insights offered by the arts onto the human condition are alluded to by Curnow in his writings on the history of wisdom. In *Wisdom* (2015) Curnow ponders, for example, the story of the cave from Plato's *Republic* where the inhabitants of the cave observe shadows; observations set within a philosophical story about the nature of reality and how it can only be understood when the inhabitants leave the cave and emerge into the light (Curnow, 2015, p. 10). Of the meaning of the cave story for understanding wisdom, Curnow writes,

Whether we take the connection between wisdom and perception in a metaphorical or a literal sense, it is a theme that is encountered at many different times in many different cultures. The wise are those who can see the bigger picture, whose horizons are broadest, whose vision is clearest, who live in the light. (Curnow, 2015, p. 10)

Though an aesthetical interpretation of the cave story is not Curnow's interest, the cave story is rich in its visuality and perception. The journey from the cave is an evocative visual narrative about seeing – one which in turn invites us to ponder how the transit into wisdom can be nurtured by an aesthetical and imaginal presence.

Of the possibility of such presence, reading Curnow's *Wisdom* (2015) nurtured kindred further interpretations in this inquiry. In his overview of Zoroastrianism, for example, Curnow describes how the idea of wisdom is aligned with “creative process” (Curnow, 2015, p. 22) in the creation story of the world. Of the aligning of wisdom with creativity, Curnow observes such affiliation is a common theme found in the ancient mythologies of the Greeks, Norse and Indian sub-continent (Curnow, 2015, p. 26). Within such affiliation though, the artist is absent from Curnow's account, except for the poet who he observes is often associated with wisdom (Curnow, 2015, p. 66).

In Curnow's account as it is for Baltes' the aesthetical relation to wisdom is largely missing but the route to understanding such relation is present in their writings. The rich history of wisdom literature and wisdom studies provides a scaffold for beginning to formulate the relation of the aesthetical with wisdom. That is, when Curnow observes, for example, that the proverb, had a "didactic" (Curnow, 2015, p. 179) purpose from which one would learn, such notion of didacticism is one that can be applied to the work of art; for example, the didactic character of the encounter with Burtynsky's images.

Of the aesthetic and imaginal aspect of the proverb, Curnow observes, "A proverb is something that is 'well express'd', there is an aesthetic dimension to it. In literary terms a proverb is like a tiny polished gem....the proverb is a triumph of economy and imagery" (Curnow, 2015, p. 180). Of the proverb's imaginal presence, Curnow quotes the medieval Hebrew philosopher Moses ibn Ezra who says " 'A proverb has three characteristics: few words, good sense, and a fine image' " (Curnow, 2015, p. 181). Curnow's description of the wisdom of the proverb and its didactic possibilities offers an entry point for a kindred understanding of wisdom's relation to the aesthetical.

Of such relation Curnow in *Wisdom, Intuition and Ethics* (1999) alludes to the imaginal presence of wisdom in his retelling of the story of Job from the Old Testament. Job encounters God and speaks to him of his dire life. Through his seeing of God, Job achieves enlightenment. Job says

I heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (Job, ch. 42, vv. 5-6). (Curnow, 1999, p. 15)

Of the visuality of wisdom that is suggested by Job's story, Curnow observes "The vocabulary of wisdom in a variety of cultures talks in terms of illumination and enlightenment, which are both explicitly visual notions. The primary meaning of intuition also links it to the faculty of sight" (Curnow, 1999, p. 15).

While the relation of art and wisdom was guided by the thesis of the imaginal in Curnow's interpretations of wisdom; such relation was also enriched by Curnow's reflections upon the relation of the divine to wisdom. Of the divine, Curnow (1999) observes how, within the wisdom traditions, it is nested following Heraclitus within one's search for self-knowledge (Curnow, 1999, p. 31).

Reading Curnow on the relation of the divine and wisdom returns my reflections in the literature review to Merton. With Merton, such relation of wisdom and the divine is enriched with the imaginal presence of the aesthetical; one which is echoed in Merton's visually rich meditations in *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1998) or the poem *Hagia Sophia* (1974) where Merton seeks his inner *Sophia* within the aesthetical encounter with nature. Reading Curnow nurtured the idea of the imaginal aspect of wisdom in Merton's writings; one which also seeded kindred reflections on the relation of the imaginal to the divine and wisdom.

### **Wisdom and Ethical Intuitionism**

Though the literature review is informed by Curnow's chronicle of wisdom it is also nurtured by a second intent in Curnow's writing. While Curnow explores the history of wisdom and as such follows in the tradition of other wisdom scholars such as Baltas (2004), he also departs from such tradition by supplementing his history with a discourse

upon the relation of wisdom and contemporary understandings of “ethical intuitionism” (Curnow, 1999, p. 152).

Curnow’s exploration of intuitionism is presented within a critical epistemological question about the nature of knowing. As Curnow observes in his analysis of Spinoza’s *Ethics* intuition involves a direct knowing without the intervention of the rational faculty (Curnow, 1999, p. 132). Ethical intuitionism extends such premise by observing how our moral judgements are also known without logical demonstration.

To know with intuition presents a critical departure from Cartesian rationalism. In tandem with such departure, the study of wisdom has also been mostly absent from contemporary philosophical inquiry which has been historically influenced by Cartesianism. While wisdom resides outside the rationalism of contemporary philosophical discourse, Curnow in *Wisdom, Intuition and Ethics* (1999) ponders a different philosophical possibility; that is of wisdom’s relation to intuition in general and ethical intuitionism in particular.

While Curnow nests the understanding of wisdom with a “new intuitionism” (Curnow, 1999, p. 248) which he identifies with “a moral elite”; and which is not outside rational reflection (Curnow, 1999, p. 297); his views depart from understandings of wisdom held by researchers in transformative learning (TL) such as Gunnlaugson (2011) or Burrows (2015) whose views about wisdom are inclusionist in spirit. Gunnlaugson’s notion of “collective wisdom” (Gunnlaugson, 2011, p. 3) – one which is configured by intersubjectivity and “second-person contemplative approach[es]” (Gunnlaugson, 2011, p. 3); or Burrows’ advocacy of nurturing one’s “own innate wisdom” (Burrows, 2015, p.

127) stand apart from interpretations of wisdom which are nested within exclusion and moral elitism as is suggested by Curnow.

Curnow's views are presented within a historical analysis of the history of wisdom and as such are presented within a scholarly paradigm whose lens is different from that of researchers within transformative learning studies. While Curnow's views of wisdom stand apart from TL, his inquiry into the nature of wisdom nonetheless offers possibilities for new understanding of the relation of wisdom and intuition.

Curnow's exploration of such possibilities reintroduces the study of wisdom into philosophical discourse. It is also generative to the life of this inquiry by informing its principal question of the relation of wisdom to the arts. That is, if we follow Curnow and ponder wisdom's relation to intuition, then can we also by extension ponder the relationality of wisdom and the aesthetical to intuition? Is knowing through the arts closer to an intuitive knowing than it is to rational knowing? In the literature review, Curnow's observation on the similarities between wisdom and ethical intuitionism (Curnow, 1999, pp. 5; 152) in *Wisdom, Intuition and Ethics* (1999) was nurturing to this latter possibility. Along with his chronicle of the history of wisdom, Curnow's philosophical exploration of such similarities informs both the literature review and the present inquiry.

While for Curnow and Baltes the aesthetical is not central to the academic study of wisdom their writings help us to begin to scaffold a relation of the arts with wisdom which, by contrast, for Merton is already present. When Merton speaks of Sophia "...the highest wisdom principle" (Merton, 1972, p. 141), he does so within a story about nurturing the artist that is present within us (Merton, 1972, p. 100); and contemplation which is coloured by acts of artful engaging (Merton, 1972, p. 216). When we create or



contemplate art Merton observes how “...the psychological conscience is able to attain some of its highest and most perfect fulfillments.” (Merton, 1983, p. 34). For Merton, contemplating the spiritual essence of a poem or painting or music transports us to a higher level of being (Merton, 1983, p. 34).

### **Seeking Wisdom from Brother Louis**

*Reading Merton returns me to another time when as a philosophy student I was inducted into a different paradigm of rationalist epistemology in which matters of art and heart were unwelcome. To seek knowledge through the arts was incommensurable with such paradigm. Years later, its incommensurable presence impelling me towards a different modality – one wherein I ponder how artistic inquiry can hold an elevated epistemic standing as wisdom. As I reflect upon Merton I am reminded of Emerson’s poem *The Poet* (1844) and layer their words onto mine. Of the relation of artistic inquiry to the creation Emerson and Merton speak forcefully. For Emerson, this is “true science” (Emerson, 1844, p. 7), while for Merton this is the “law” (Merton, 1983, p. 36). Such co-opting nurturing an ancillary question of my inquiry; that is, if artful inquiry can lead to wisdom, then does this elevate the arts as a way of knowing?*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)

While Curnow’s and Baltes’ writings offer historical interpretations of wisdom, the aesthetical is not fundamental to such interpretations. In Merton’s writings, the opposite is observed – the aesthetical is closely intertwined with wisdom and spirituality – an intertwining which in turn forms another pillar of my literature review and is central to my inquiry.

While Merton is best remembered for his autobiographical text *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1998), it was another text by him, first encountered in a graduate seminar on holistic education, *Love and Living* (1979) that provided a spark to my journey. In that text Merton contemplates how the purpose of education is not to enforce a view of the

world but to nurture one's authentic self from within (Merton, 1979, p. 3). Of the inner path to the self, Merton speaks of the spark which is vital to the birth of the authentic self (Merton, 1979, p. 3). Reading about Merton's *spark* resonated with my intuitions about the journey towards the authentic self; and is here also co-opted to describe the genesis of my inquiry.

Reading *Love and Living* (1979) along with Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1998) marked entry points in my inquiry into Merton's writings. Of those other writings, though, Merton's oeuvre is immense; and I pondered – which other writings of his should I explore? Merton was a prolific writer; his works spanning poetry, literary criticism, theology, Zen Buddhism, autobiography, correspondences, and mystical writing. An ocean of writing presented itself; how does one navigate such literary vastness?

The unscripted journey presents a metaphor for inquiry; its open-ended nature in turn suggesting that there are multiple entry points into a body of literature and one marked by the serendipitous interaction between primary and secondary sources. An encounter with Ross Labrie's text *Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination* (2001), while browsing the library shelf, marked such a critical and unanticipated entry point. Though the encounter was serendipitous, it was also fortuitous marking a key turn in my inquiry towards exploring the relation of art and wisdom in light of Merton's aesthetical evolution towards the paradisaical consciousness. Such turn follows Labrie's exploration of the paradisaical within the context of Merton's aesthetics; one which in turn was followed with exploration of Michael Higgins *Heretical Blood* (1998), a spiritual biography of Thomas Merton wherein the ideas of the paradisaical and the aesthetical are also explored;

and Robert Inchausti's exploration of Merton's ideas in American thought in *Thomas Merton's American Prophecy* (1998).

Reading Labrie, Higgins and Inchausti was generative to the life of this inquiry nurturing its evolution towards the idea of wisdom image in particular and wisdom art in general. That is, of an understanding of spiritual growth in which the place of art is central – one which in turn aligns well with the paradigms of holistic learning (Miller, 2008; Schiller, 2014) and arts based research (Eisner, 1988/2001/2002/2008; Eisner, Gardner, Cizek, Gough & Tillman, 1996; McNiff, 2009; Diamond and Mullen, 2001) in curriculum studies.

Of the paradisaal idea, pondering Labrie and Higgins shifted my inquiry to a rereading of Merton's *Love and Living* (1979) where Merton explores the paradisaal within contemplations upon the goal of education. For Merton, the idea of the paradise is not about a knowing which is held by teachers; rather it is centered on the student who discovers his inner self (Merton, 1979, p. 9).

Seeking to understand the *paradisaal* in Merton's thought followed my reading of *Love and Living* and led to the exploration of other texts by him; amongst these, Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (2014) and his poem *Hagia Sophia* in *A Thomas Merton Reader* (1974). *Conjectures* is a collection of poetic and literary meditations wherein Merton expands the meditation upon the paradisaal idea from the realm of education, as parsed in *Love and Living*, to life itself. Complaining of the noise and distraction that infests contemporary life, Merton laments that we do not see the paradise which surrounds us (Merton, 2014, p. 128). In *Hagia Sophia*, Merton writes of the paradisaal; but the language he uses departs from that in *Conjectures*. While in

*Conjectures* the paradise is contemplated within the clamour of contemporary culture, in *Hagia Sophia*, the paradise is rendered in love and beauty; and within an intimacy of one's self with the aesthetical and rhythm of nature.

Of such intimacy of the aesthetical with the paradisaal, Merton's writings offer other entry points – ones which read collectively reveal an evolution of his ideas on such intimacy. In an early essay, *Poetry and the Contemplative Life in Figures for an Apocalypse*, (1948) Merton ponders the aesthetical within a configuration framed by theological and categorical understandings of contemplation. By the 1960s, the categorical rigidity with which Merton understood such configuration is eroded with his explorations of Zen; one which is observed in his essay *Zen in Japanese Art* (1968) from *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968) wherein he meditates upon the intimacy of spirituality and art and how within the “unifying power of Zen” they are “inseparably fused” (Merton, 1968, p. 90). In *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966), categorical understandings of art and contemplation are not present. Instead Merton, writing within the spirit of Zen in his essay from *Raids* titled *Signatures, Notes on the Author's Drawings*, moves towards abstraction distilling the drawing to an energetic and transcendent power.

While Merton meditates upon the power of art within contemplations upon his own drawings within the interiority of his own spiritual journey, central to such journey and the intimacy of the aesthetical and contemplative is a *being* with nature. In his later journals, *Woods, Shore, Desert A Notebook, May 1968* from *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1998) Merton poetically records his experiences of being in the American southwest. In writings which are evocative of both Zen and the American

Transcendentalists, Merton meditates upon wisdom within an artful contemplation upon the landscape.

Collectively, the exploration of such texts mark entry points into understanding Merton's aesthetical ideas and their relation to wisdom and art. While such texts form part of the literature review, the review is also informed by other writings by Merton. Reading Merton's *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) in particular the *Prologue, The Author's Advice to His Book* and chapter *Letters to an Innocent Bystander* where Merton speaks directly to his reader or text sparked the strategy of dialogical speaking to Merton – one which was generative to the life of my inquiry and goal of making such inquiry an artful exploration. The presence of the autobiographical is close to such goal – one which was in turn nurtured by reading of *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1998) where the spiritual journey is nested within the life of Merton's narrative. Exploring such texts from Merton guided the transit of my inquiry and formed a component of its literature review.

### **Seeking Wisdom from the Transformative Learning and Spirituality Research Paradigms**

The literature review concludes with an overview of two bodies of academic literature which together inform the methodological configuration of the present inquiry. Parallel with reading Merton's writings were texts from researchers in the fields of transformative learning and contemplative studies in education (Miller, 2014; Hart, 2004; Morgan, 2012; Burrows, 2015; Byrnes, 2012; Dencev & Collister, 2010; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Zajonc, 2006); and recent scholarly work on the development of a spirituality research paradigm (Lin, 2016; Miller, 2016; Ergas 2016).

Reading the work of these researchers provided a contextual lens through which Merton's aesthetical ideas and their relation to the idea of *wisdom image* could be bridged to recent work in transformative and contemplative studies in education. Reading them also provided a methodological scaffolding for the narrative and dialogical strategies which are adopted in parts of this inquiry. While such texts enrich a reading of Merton, it is also hoped that the nurturing is reciprocal; and that interpretations of Merton's work return to enrich the fields of contemplative and transformative studies.

Informing my inquiry are retellings of memories from childhood and experiences of school; and other writings which seek to explore Merton's writings through the dialogical address to him. While such strategies broadly align with arts-based (Eisner, 2001 / 2008; Diamond & Mullen, 2001) and narrative (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) approaches within curriculum studies, they are also enriched by the field of transformative learning and contemplative studies in education (Miller, 2014; Hart, 2004; Morgan, 2012; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Zajonc, 2006). As with narrative and art-based approaches the field of transformation learning and contemplative studies seeks to expand the tools of inquiry beyond the narrower register of analytical and reductionistic methodologies. With such writers, as it is also with those in narrative and art-based approaches, the way of inquiry takes on an ecumenical formation wherein are engaged intuitive, emotional and artful modes of knowing in addition to the rational and analytic.

It is within such expansive spirit that Gunnlaugson's understanding of transformative learning (TL) is adopted as a lens through which my strategy of dialogical speaking and narrative retellings are, in part, interpreted. Acknowledging Gunnlaugson's thesis forms part of this literature review as is also his notion of "generative dialogue"

(Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138) in TL. It is within such methodological ecumenism that my retellings within this inquiry are nested; as is also the approach of using dialogical speaking as a tool for exploring Merton's writings.

Of the nature of *transformative shift* writers in transformative learning span an array of pedagogical interpretations ranging from Gunnlaugson's socially contextualized "second person contemplative approach" (Gunnlaugson, 2011, p. 3) to Burrow's notion of "interior alchemy" (Burrows, 2015, p. 127) and its focus on learning from within (Burrows, 2015, p. 128). Within such range of interpretations Byrnes' (2012) understanding of the nature of transformation, as one which straddles both the domains of interiority and externality informs the literature review.

Byrnes' observation that contemplative learning is centered upon oneself (Byrnes, 2012, pp. 36-37) is adopted in tandem with Burrow's focus on the interior life as lens through which the dialogical speaking with Merton is explored. Byrnes' writing forms a theoretical pedestal through which dialogical speaking is viewed as a reflective practice and one which aligns with the spirit of Merton's life and writings which were similarly centered on the life of contemplation.

In tandem with writings from Byrnes and Burrows the literature review was enriched with the work of Tobin Hart; in particular his view of contemplation as a way of knowing which supplements the traditional epistemological paradigms of the rational and empirical (Hart, 2004, p. 29). Reading Hart's views on contemplation informed the strategy of dialogical speaking and narrative reflections in this inquiry; strategies which are viewed as falling within the range of contemplative practices which Hart observes nurture deep reflection.



*Transformation, April 21, 2017*

*Atlas Slave*



Narrative retellings are like comets' tails, signatures of moments which have past but which remain present in their formative spirit. In the literature review pondering such presence draws upon Dencev's and Collister's (2010) observation, following Crowell, that transformation is characterized by constant creation (Dencev and Collister, 2010, p. 179); a view which evokes the presence of the aesthetical with the transformative. Of such movement within transformation Michelangelo's sculpture of the prisoner "Atlas Slave" (1525-1530) offers a visual metaphor. "Atlas Slave" resides in two entwined domains: one of the rock from which he struggles to transcend and the other of the emergent form. Within such transformation both domains are unique but also inseparable.

While the literature review is informed by texts which ponder how transformation is about shifts and movements, it is also enriched by understandings of *presence* in transformation, which are drawn from the work of Gunnlaugson (2011) and Hart (2008). Gunnlaugson explores presence as a knowing nested within an attentiveness to that which emerges (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 141) while Hart explores an "epistemology of presence" (Hart, 2008, p. 237) within contemplative practices. In this inquiry these notions are co-opted to ponder the question of whether dialogical speaking with Merton is a form of presencing, a strategy by which knowing emerges, following Hart, when we allow our selves to wonder and question (Hart, 2008, p. 236).

Hart's notion of wisdom texts as words possessing a vital nature (Hart, 2008, p. 236) – one which he uses to describe deep knowing – is also explored to ponder the topic of dialogical speaking. Of the transit into the realm of such knowing, Hart explores it by a second concept of flow which he adopts from the work of the psychologist Mihaly

Csikszentmihalyi (1990). In tandem with Hart's notion of the "epistemology of presence" (Hart, 2008, p. 237) such notions both provide a theoretical lens through which the dialogical address to Merton is pondered.

In my inquiry reflections upon the paradise idea in Merton's writings nurtured kindred reflections on the relation of the contemplative and child; one which in turn formed another component of my literature review. Montessori's view of children's spirituality (Montessori, 1970, p. 18) evokes Hart's suggestion that children are "natural contemplatives" (Hart, 2004, p. 43) and Merton's notion of the "child mind" (Gardner, 2016, p. 3).



*Child Mind*  
*Planets and Comets' Tails*

My Grade Four Workbook  
c. 1966

With my narrative retellings as a backdrop these notions are pondered in relation to Morgan's "ground of being experience" (Morgan, 2012, p. 43) as a way of exploring the thesis that the seeds of inquiry are planted early and synonymous with the nascent spirituality of one's childhood.

While writings from researchers within the field of transformational learning studies in education form the focus of the present section of the literature review, they were also read in tandem with Merton's writings which presciently echo the intertwining of the themes of presencing, transformation and spirituality which Hart (2004), Gunnlaugson (2011), Burrows (2015), Byrnes (2012), and Morgan (2012) collectively explore.

### **Paradox and Paradigm and the Spirituality Research Paradigm**

Informing the literature review is an exploration of research on the topic of the spirituality research paradigm (SRP) in education – one which until recently has lacked an autonomous methodological presence in curriculum studies. Lin (2016), Miller (2016), and Ergas (2016) are amongst researchers who have begun to address such absence.

While SRP provides a methodological lens through which Merton's aesthetical ideas are examined, such methodology is both informed and complicated by notions of paradox and paradigm. In this literature review, such notions are foregrounded in Ergas' (2016) observation that a spiritual research program embrace the paradoxical nature of its research (Ergas, 2016, p. 15); one which interestingly echoes Merton's own words on spirituality as the acceptance of paradox (Merton, 1998, p. 286).

Yet, in the same moment, within such paradox a paradigm for spirituality research

is sought. The literature review is guided by such complexity and Ergas' (2016) and Lin's (2016) kindred view that in order to engage such intricacy, the horizon of research strategies must be expanded. Ways of inquiry such as those nested in arts-based and narrative research fall within such expanded horizon and in so doing align with Ergas' (2016) and Lin's (2016) project for a spirituality research paradigm.

For Lin et al. the domain of spirituality research encompasses ways of collecting data which depart from positivist understandings of research data by engaging with ways of doing research which are creative in spirit and nested within the aesthetical (Lin, Oxford, Culham, 2016, p. xi). The strategy of dialogical speaking with Merton is sympathetic to such intent; and as such reading Lin et al. was nurturing to my engaging with inquiry with strategies which embraced the metaphorical and creative.

Such embrace foregrounds Ergas' observation of a "contemplative turn" in research practices (Ergas, 2016, p. 16) – one which nurtures the spiritual self and underscores his metaphor of the impregnated nature of spirituality research (Ergas, 2016, p. 6); and notions of non-propositional knowing as read through Palmer (1993), Kabat-Zinn (2005) and Merton (1998).

## Chapter Five: Seeking a Methodological Haven

### Introduction

In such perfect poverty, says Eckhart, one may still have ideas and experiences, yet one is free of them. (Merton, 1968, p.11)

I start in the middle of a sentence and move both directions at once. (Coltrane, n.d.)

*Brother Louis. How do we name the unnameable? How do we begin to describe the ineffable? How do we form the clay when it is too soft to be formed? How do we sculpt water when it flows through our hands?*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, April 2016)



The methodology of this inquiry, while informed by understandings of curriculum as “aesthetic text” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995; Eisner, 2008; Diamond and Mullen, 2001) and “autobiographical/biographical text” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995), is also informed by notions of curriculum as contemplative text – one which is nurtured by Merton’s writing while also drawing upon the fields of contemplative and transformative studies in education (Zajonc 2009, Palmer, 1993; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Dencev and Collister, 2010; Miller, 2014; Hart, 2004; Burrows, 2015; Gunnlaugson, Sarath, Scott & Bai, 2014). In this, the inquiry is nested within an methodology which seeks to be embracing and holistic in spirit – one which draws on rich understandings of inquiry as aesthetic, narrative and contemplative exploration while also aligning such understandings with the current project by Lin, Oxford and Culham (2016) to sculpt a formal paradigm for spirituality research; with contributions to that project by such researchers as Ergas (2016) and Miller (2016).

These writers to which I have found my self *returning to* in my inquiry sustain the intent of my project to create one which is both aesthetical and contemplative in spirit. Amongst them meditating upon Merton's autobiography *The Seven Story Mountain* (1998) and his other texts, such as *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) where he uses the strategy of dialogical speaking sparked and nurtured the intent of crafting an inquiry which drew on narrative while also being contemplative and artful in configuration. By using research tools informed by narrative and dialogical writing, inquiry departs from modes of academic research which are confined by empirical methodologies set within the third person, and are instead enriched by an expansive strategy which is configured within a first person approach in addition to the third person.

To introduce narrative and artful strategies into inquiry expands its domain; and in addition to Merton writings follows in the spirit of researchers in narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000); arts-based researchers such as Eisner (1988/1990/1993/1995), Eisner et al. (1996) and Diamond & Mullen (2001); and writers in the fields of holistic and transformative studies in education such as Palmer (1993), Zajonc (2009), Miller (2014), Gunnlaugson (2007) and Kabat-Zinn (2005). With such writers, the configuration of inquiry takes on an all embracing formation wherein are engaged intuitive, emotional and artful modes of knowing in addition to the rational and analytical.

While an inclusive methodology departs from the narrow register of a third person approach by instead engaging the first person in inquiry, it also foregrounds the question of the relation of methodology to holistic inquiry.

*Is the methodology of my inquiry intertwined with my life experiences; and if it is, then what is the nature of such intertwining?*

That is, while my study into the relation of wisdom and contemplative inquiry is informed by diverse understandings of curriculum, it is also nurtured by questions about the relation of methodology to my inquiry. Is such relation bifurcated from the life of the researcher; or is there another possibility guided by the notion that methodology need not be seen separately but in holistic relation to the lived experience of the researcher? Can methodology be understood holistically? That is, instead of being understood as something borrowed from curriculum studies, can methodology be viewed organically as one which also is seeded by and grows within the lived experience of the researcher? That is, one which follows in the spirit of Tobin Hart's focus on "on contact over categorization" (Hart, 2008, p. 236) in knowing; or Parker Palmer's advocacy of listening to the "voice of the subject" (Palmer, 1993, p. 98) in inquiry. Departing from the idea of methodology as a tool, which is necessary for inquiry but sometimes viewed as being separate from it, the idea of methodology in this inquiry follows in the spirit of Hart's and Palmer's holistic observations on a non-binary relation of the researcher to their subject.

While being inclusive in spirit the exploration of methodology in this inquiry is also a paradoxical discourse. While the field of transformative and contemplative learning studies encourages ways of knowing which are enriched by feeling and intuition and as Burrows observes allow us to source the wisdom that lies within (Burrows, 2015, p. 132), the paradigm of spirituality research with which these fields are aligned is as Ergas observes a paradoxical "nonparadigm" (Ergas, 2016, p. 15).

Ergas' project to begin to formulate a spirituality research paradigm marks an important contribution to an area of curriculum studies which until now was lacking an autonomous methodological presence (as is illustrated in its notable absence in Pinar's classic compendium on curriculum studies *Understanding Curriculum* [Pinar et al, 1995]). Yet it presents a methodological conundrum for research in holistic studies; one whose paradoxical presence is also observed in Merton's own writing on spirituality. Merton's meditations on Zen and how spirituality is enmeshed within contradiction (Merton, 1998, p. 286) echoing Ergas' view of spirituality research as one also configured in paradox. As such, while a methodology provides a framework for doing inquiry, pondering Merton's views on spirituality enmeshes him within discourses upon such framework. It is within such verdant yet paradoxical configuration that I explore the methodology of this inquiry in the following six parts.

In the first part the problem of spirituality research is introduced through Merton's observation that spirituality is nested within the embrace of paradox (Merton, 1998, p. 286). The problem of language which is associated with such embrace is acknowledged by Merton and explored in the address to Brother Louis. Reflections upon notions of non-duality as read through holistic researchers such as Palmer (1993), Burrows (2015), and Byrnes (2012) inform responses to such paradox as does Ergas' embrace of its complicated presence in research (Ergas, 2016, p. 15).

Reflections upon how to approach such presence in inquiry form the second part wherein is explored the idea that to engage the paradox is to engage complexity; an engaging which moves us to embrace multiple research strategies rather than one. Arts-based, narrative and holistic inquiry in curriculum studies sculpt such strategies. Upon



these, the work of this inquiry is founded; and aesthetical notions of the palimpsest and pentimento are introduced as metaphors for engaging complexity within inquiry.

The third part returns to the idea of the spiritual research paradigm and explores Lin's view that such paradigm views reality in the fullness of its complexity as "multidimensional, interconnected, and interdependent" (Lin et al., 2016, pp. ix-x); a view which embraces the inner life of the researcher by departing from positivist understandings of research data and expanding the domain of research to include creative strategies such as metaphor (Lin et al., 2016, pp. ix-x). Within such expansion of the terrain of data for inquiry is introduced the notion of dialogical speaking to Merton as a creative and holistic strategy which is sympathetic to Lin et al.'s spiritual research paradigm and the view shared by Palmer (1993) and Byrnes (2012) about the relational nature of learning. Such strategy follows Burrows (2015) in locating knowing within the eroding of the subject-object dualism; a view which is sympathetic to the intimate strategy of dialogical speaking with Merton. The strategy of the dialogical voice in inquiry, which was inspired by Merton's writings, also follows Labrie's observation of the presence of such voice in Merton's texts (Labrie, 2001, p. 46).

Reflections upon dialogical speaking as a tool in holistic inquiry is explored in greater detail in part four. Merton's strategy of speaking to his reader or text was the spark for utilizing a similar approach in this inquiry. Examples of Merton's writing where he writes dialogically are offered as a basis for exploring understanding of discourse as read through Gunnlaugson (2007), Byrnes (2012) and Burrows (2015). While such writing departs from traditional academic writing, it is explored in this

inquiry as a strategy which is welcomed within the spirituality research paradigm (Lin et al, 2016; Ergas, 2016).

In parts five and six the chapter concludes with reflections upon methodology as a return to contemplative practices; one which follows Ergas' (Ergas, 2016, p. 2) observation that the life of the inquirer is intertwined with the life of the subject – an intertwining which echoes Merton's kindred sentiment that contemplation is not separate from life but is life.

**The Paradox of Methodology in Spirituality Studies: Exploring Merton's "impossible paradox" and Ergas' "paradoxical creed"**

*Brother Louis. You are stuck in the same conundrum as I – the conundrum of language.*

*But your relationship to your conundrum is one I find complicated. You are well read and have written extensively on different subjects. Your writing can be of poetry; or in journals, letters and essays; sometimes you write mystically; at other times you seem a different person when you engage literary criticism. You write with love and beauty.*

*You write of the problem of language, yet you cannot give up on language can you? You speak of language with love as if a parent to a child as you do in Raids on the Unspeakable.*

*How do you and I seek the way, and live in the domain of language? Must we one day journey away from this domain? Must we one day relinquish the words of the poet or the chisel of the sculptor – those special maps the artist possesses which raise our consciousness and guide us along the pathway to wisdom?*

*Must we forsake them when we have reached consciousness? Must we one day forsake our love for the artist? How can we forsake our children Brother Louis?*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, March 2016)

The paradox of spirituality research which Ergas (2016) embraces provides a lens through which Merton's own reflections upon this question can be pondered. Of such paradox, Merton alludes to it in his writings. In *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968), Merton ponders Zen and the ideas of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart while meditating upon the mutability of knowing the spiritual. Of whether we can understand Zen, Merton says that "...the question can probably be answered by 'yes' and by 'no'...Zen is not understood by being set apart in its own category, separated from everything else: 'It is *this* and *not that*' " (Merton, 1968, pp. 1-3). Of the complexity to reconcile the irreconcilable, such Zen-like sentiment is captured in the words of the American documentary photographer Robert Frank.

I am always looking outside, trying to look inside. Trying to say something that is true. But maybe nothing is really true. Except what's out there. And what's out there is constantly changing.

(Robert Frank, n.d.)

For Merton, the difficulty of talking about Zen was symptomatic of a general unease he felt with the limitations of rationalist knowing – one which for him was attributable to the legacy of Cartesianism which had infected modern thinking. As Labrie also observes in *Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination*,

In Merton's view Cartesianism had infiltrated modern thought, especially scientific and technological culture, with such thoroughness that human beings had become alienated from the external world, including other human beings and nature, losing a sense of their affinity to their fellow creatures. (Labrie, 2001, p. 31)

Merton's observations on Zen and discomfort with Cartesian knowing serve as an interesting entry point into meditations upon the nature of methodology in holistic inquiry and brings into focus how its methodology, if it can be named as such, is nested within

paradox. Of such paradox Merton's views on Zen are informative. While reflecting that Zen is " 'beyond the world of opposites' ", he also observes, following D.T. Suzuki, that " '...The Absolute is in the world of opposites and not apart from it' " (Merton, 1968, pp. 3-4).

To speak of the unity of opposites is counter intuitive to the language of Cartesian knowing. Yet for Merton within the embrace of opposites is found spiritual awakening, hope and beauty. In his final journal *The Other Side of the Mountain* he writes,

The full beauty of the mountain is not seen until you too consent to the impossible paradox: it is and is not. When nothing more needs to be said, the smoke of ideas clears, the mountain is SEEN. (Merton, 1998, p. 286)

For Merton, the paradox of the mountain and self extends to wisdom. In his poem *Wisdom*, Merton reflects

I studied it and it taught me nothing.  
I learned it and soon forgot everything else.  
Having forgotten, I was burdened with knowledge –  
The insupportable knowledge of nothing.

How sweet my life would be, if I were wise!  
Wisdom is well known  
When it is no longer seen or thought of.  
Only then is understanding bearable.

(Merton, 1977, p. 279)

I ponder Merton's ideas on the limitations of rational knowing and meditate upon the paradox he offers us.

*Brother Louis. I ask of you the map to the mountain that you have seen. But you cannot provide it because there is no map.*

*I am reminded of Melville's book *Moby Dick*; or, *The Whale* where Ishmael says "It is not down in any map; true places never are." (Melville, 1922, p. 68)*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, June 2017)

For Merton, spiritual awakening resides within acceptance of paradox (Merton, 1998, p. 286). Of such paradox, though, how is it to be understood; how do we offer our consent?

The questions are put forth but cannot be answered; they are nested within a language which is incommensurable with the domain of spiritual awakening. Such incommensurability in turn brings into focus how holistic inquiry in part resides within a paradox formed about the problem of language in inquiry. Of the splendour of the mountain, that Merton writes of, we can acknowledge it but cannot write of it. It is ineffable. We can allude to it, speak of it tangentially, intuit and feel it; but never capture it with language.

Following Merton, the way of holistic inquiry is nested in paradox. Within it we seek the mountain which we cannot speak of; and were we to find, we remain within the paradox because, as Merton observes “nothing more needs to be said” (Merton, 1998, p. xiii).

With such reflection Merton brings into focus the problem of language and methodology in holistic inquiry. How are we to speak of methodology in holistic inquiry when we are present to the paradox of holism? For Merton to seek the spiritual self is nested within a domain where language will not suffice to guide us; a situation which is not unique to Merton but a recurrent theme amongst spiritual writers. *In Wisdom, Intuition and Ethics* (Curnow, 1999) Curnow, for example, observes the Indian mystic Ramana Maharshi who writes “ ‘In order to quieten the mind one only has to inquire within oneself what one’s Self is; how could this search be done in books?’ ” (Curnow, 1999, p. 165).

The aspect of reflexive interiority, with which the seeking of self knowledge is nested, remains in complicated alignment with language. Of such complication Curnow, in his chronicle of wisdom traditions, succinctly summarizes “Texts may be valuable to the extent to which they can indicate the path which is to be followed. However, their value is limited in that they cannot themselves constitute a substitute for the following of that path” (Curnow, 1999, p. 165).

Like the mystic Merton too is confronted by the problem of language and spirituality; one which I reflect upon in my introductory reflection to this chapter.

Pondering Merton along with Curnow’s observations upon the vision of the mystic foregrounds the idea that the problem of language and spirituality – one which is central to the discourse of the spirituality research paradigm – is also about the burden of rationalist thinking which pervades our lives. We impel towards a rationalist understanding of the spiritual path; yet the path is not demonstrable; and therein lies the paradox. We seek to demonstrate; find reasons; and tidy beginnings and endings with which to allay our angst about the unknown. We seek to create comforting compartments of certainty. Descartes’ presence is manifest.

Yet the spiritual is intimate with our being; to demonstrate is to objectify that from which we cannot stand apart; and as Parker Palmer observes speaks of the “myth of objectivity, which depends on a radical separation of the knower from the known” (Palmer, 1993, p. xv). The conundrum of spirituality lies within such division; one whose remediation for Palmer is to be found in the restraining of the rationalist impulse which underscores it. Instead, to be present with the spiritual involves a relationality which for Palmer is nested within the holistic and inclusive engaging with emotion,

intuition and empathy in addition to the rational (Palmer, 1993, p. 52). To embrace such modalities of knowing is to nurture the unseen wholeness where wisdom resides (Merton, 1974, p. 506); or as Palmer also describes as a return to seeing the world as whole (Palmer, 1993, p. xxiii).

In a similar spirit, Burrows speaks of “non-dual mindfulness” (Burrows, 2015, p. 134) with which Merton’s and Palmer’s meditations upon wholeness are kindred. In a study of mindfulness amongst teachers Burrows records the observations of one of her study participants who observes that when in the space of non-duality “ ‘There’s a sense of openness to the universe. I’m a vessel for sensing impressions – no thinking involved, no processing, just receiving – open to whatever comes’ ” (Burrows, 2015, p. 134). Within the space of wholeness Byrnes (2012) echoes Burrows’ sentiment and observes how contemplative teaching embraces wholeness and following Merton and Ergas is nested within paradox (Byrnes, 2012, p. 24).

Of the disintegrating of self within the clamour of contemporary culture Merton’s writings can be viewed as prescient to Palmer’s, Burrows’ and Byrnes’ observations. It is within such clamour that Merton embraces the paradox of spiritual transcendence (Merton, 1998, p. 286) – one which also serves as an entry point into the conundrum of doing spirituality research.

Of such conundrum, Oren Ergas (2016), like Merton, speaks of its paradoxical nature yet attempts to configure such paradox within a spirituality research paradigm (Ergas, 2016, pp. 1-23) with language borrowed from Kuhn’s paradigm theory and the sociology of science. Yet, in the same instance, while Ergas argues for a spiritual research paradigm, he cautions that such paradigm must remain a “nonparadigm if it is to

remain loyal to its paradoxical creed” (Ergas, 2016, p. 15). And hence the paradox of spiritual experience extends onto the paradox of its methodology. As Ergas observes in his exploration of a spirituality research paradigm, “Perhaps this kind of approach proposes to us that this new paradigm is more of a nonparadigm: A Zen koan that resists our efforts to grasp at our own nature through grasping at stable ways of doing research” (Ergas, 2016, p. 21).

Ergas’ paradoxical paradigm (Ergas, 2016, p. 15) evokes Merton’s paradox (Merton, 1998, p. 286) - both striving to name the path of spirituality which we intuit and collectively nod to; but which cannot be rationally parsed. Yet the conundrum is formidable and places a demand upon us. For Merton we must consent to it while for Ergas we must be loyal to it. Within such paradox we seek a spirituality research paradigm; or rather a “nonparadigm” which, following Ergas does not follow generally acknowledged ways of conducting research (Ergas, 2016, p. 21). Instead, inviting us to ponder whether the corralling of the paradox is nested within alternate ways of doing research which depart from reductive methodologies while being informed by fluid; yet creative and positively un-stable modes of inquiry.

With Merton, to embrace the paradox (Merton, 1998, p. 286) is to embrace it with love and poetry; with tools which depart from the strictures of rationalism but which begin to corral the paradox. While we speak of such tools as creatively un-stable; we are also invited to ponder how alternate research strategies, which following Palmer (1993) and Hart (2014) are nested within intuition, emotion, love, art and creativity, guide us towards an alignment with the spiritual. Within such alignment we are with the paradox and do not stand apart from it. Following Merton, we consent to it and within such



integrative aligning of one's self with the creation we are offered a lens into the possibility of a spirituality research paradigm which Lin (2016) and Ergas (2016) propose.

### **The Paradox of Spirituality Research: Palimpsest and Pentimento as Metaphors for Inquiry**

*It is within a conundrum that I seek to write of that which cannot be written. To grapple it, I use the tools I have at hand – meditations and meanderings; creativities and heresies; the opposites of the artful and analytical. Upon such moments that have both preceded and sculpted my narrative, I begin to create my own artful palimpsest of inquiry.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, September 2016)

For Merton, following in the Zen tradition, spirituality involves the embrace of opposites – an embrace which poses a conundrum when we twin the ideas of methodology and spirituality. What language do we speak and research tools do we adopt to probe spirituality? How do we journey the paradox of holism? What *unstable*, yet creative tools of inquiry do we use? Of such questions, to speak of a clear and defined methodological path to conduct holistic inquiry seems counter intuitive as Ergas suggests. In light of such complexity, inquiry into spirituality leads us to ponder whether the way of such inquiry is one which embraces a multiplicity of research practices rather than one which is singular in nature.

The latter possibility is pondered in this study. Of such methodological embrace, the inquiry is informed by understandings of curriculum as aesthetical and autobiographical (Eisner, 2008; Diamond and Mullen, 2001; London, 2003; Pinar et al., 1995); and in addition is rooted within the field of holistic and transformative learning in

education (Miller, 2011; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Dencev and Collister, 2010; Hart, 2004; Burrows, 2015; Byrnes, 2012).

Together such understandings of curriculum sculpt the methodological configuration of my inquiry; one which is underscored by the notion that research into spirituality studies in education embraces a multiplicity of research tools which transcend singular categorization. Instead of categorization, the complexity of spirituality research evokes the metaphor of the palimpsest; one, which by engaging with multiple research practices, is guided towards research outcomes which, like the figure of the palimpsest, are layered and complex.

While the palimpsest becomes an expression of my inquiry into the relation of art and wisdom, it is scaffolded by the philosophies of arts based and holistic learning and guided by the questions *who are the writers and artists that I am drawn to and what are the lenses through which they sculpt their work? Upon whom do I build my palimpsest and layer my inquiry?*

Much has been written on the subject of wisdom; to inquire upon wisdom is to engage a rich landscape of scholarship. While recognizing that the pathways of inquiry are manifold ranging from discourses scaffolded by post structuralism and critical social, feminist, or literary theories; my inquiry into wisdom is situated within a scholarly landscape sculpted by the intersection of holistic learning and arts-based research paradigms in the field of curriculum studies. In my study such intersection is marked by teachers whose writings are sympathetic to one another; in particular holistic educators like Miller (2013) and Schiller (2014) whose thinking upon the place of the arts within a holistic pedagogy echo that of arts based educators like Eisner (2001), McNiff (2009) and

Diamond and Mullen (2001) who view artistic process as integral to the understanding of human experience.

On holistic learning, Schiller observes

Holistic education is generally perceived as an alternative form of education that concerns the whole learner. Holistic educators believe that the learner's intellect, emotions, physical body, spirit, and social nature develop together rather than independently and that drawing from the whole person is necessary to initiate deep and permanent learning experiences...(Schiller, 2014, p. 1)

Of arts-based research McNiff defines it "...as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people they involve in their studies" (McNiff, 2009, p. 29). McNiff's observations are nested within a tradition of arts based research which is grounded within the work of foundational thinkers like Eisner (2001) and Barone (2001).

I return to such writers in my thinking; such return also marking the beginnings of a methodological home for my inquiry – one broadly framed by a qualitative research methodology in general (Cooper & White, 2011); and within curriculum studies, by the fields of arts based inquiry (Eisner, 2001; Knowles & Cole, 2008) and holistic and transformative learning in particular (Miller, 2011; Gunnlaugson, 2007; Dencev and Collister, 2010; Hart, 2004; Burrows, 2015; Byrnes, 2012).

My embrace of such writers also marked a significant personal journey; that is, moving from analytical philosophy to another territory wherein categorical rigidity is displaced by the embrace of alternate ways of knowing – ones which, following Barone and others, are instead configured within understandings of categorical ambiguity, uncertainty and eroding of disciplinary borders (Barone, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln,

2005; Eisner, 1991; Diamond & Mullin, 2001). Instead of reductionist knowing that was enforced in the analytical philosophy to which I had been accustomed, holistic and arts based learning offered another way. That is, instead of the compartmentalized ways of knowing marking industrial societies, holistic knowing is integrative and inclusive (Miller, 2007, p. 3); while arts based research embraces notions of creativity, community and discovery (Bagley and Castro-Salazar, 2011, p. 1.) While the work of such researchers informs my inquiry, it is in addition also guided by the work of narrativists, like Clandinin & Connelly (2000); their work being sympathetic to my sensibility that authentic inquiry is nested within the deep fonts of our stories.

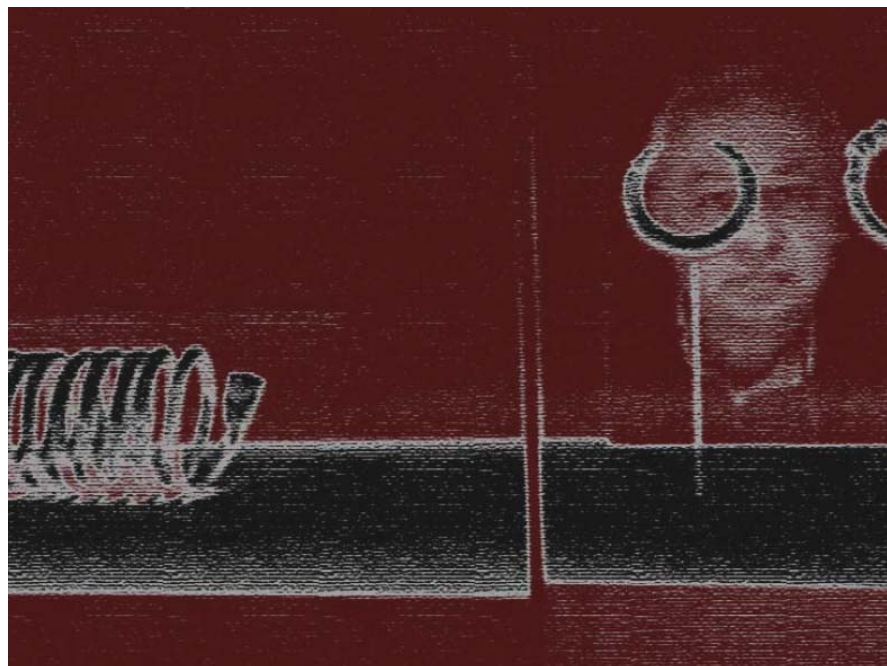
Together such writers form the methodological haven for my inquiry. They nurture a kindred sensibility about the encounter with art; one to which I am drawn and expressed in Eisner's reflections upon Maxine Greene's observation that which "awakens" us heightens our awareness (Eisner, 1995, p. 2).

Upon the work of such writers I layer and inscribe my inquiry and create my palimpsest.

*The palimpsest is a medieval manuscript which has been scrapped and then reinscribed with new text. In the visual arts, the reworking of an image on top of existing one on the canvas is called a pentimento. In both the palimpsest and the pentimento, what we see in the text and in the image is layered upon what came before.*

*The palimpsest and the pentimento are metaphors for the process of inquiry. Upon writers and artists that have preceded me, I layer my inquiry. And within such layering resides the space of awakening. The palimpsest and pentimento which precedes me, forms the possibility for the awakening which follows.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, September 2016)



*Pentimento, May 1, 2017*

Of the way of inquiry as an awakening of metaphors the palimpsest and pentimento show it as additive and layered; explorative and ephemeral. The metaphors suggest the transitory nature of inquiry – one which for Merton is intimate with spirituality and Zen-like. In his essay *First and Last Thoughts* Merton writes of inquiry in a way which evokes the spirit of the palimpsest and Miller’s kindred notion of the researcher’s journey as one which is unending (Miller, 2016, p. 138).

When a thought is done with, let go of it. When something has been written, publish it, and go on to something else. You may say the same thing again, some day, on a deeper level. No one need have a compulsion to be utterly and perfectly “original” in every word he writes. All that matters is that the old be recovered on a new plane and be, itself, a new reality. This, too, gets way from you. So let it get away. (Merton, 1974, p. 16)

### **From Kindred Methodologies to a Spiritual Research Paradigm**

While drawing on kindred research traditions within curriculum studies, does doing so allow us to locate a thesis on spirituality within its own research paradigm? Can the metaphor of the palimpsest and the pentimento – ever changing and evolving, fluid and limitless - sustain and nurture an autonomous paradigm for spirituality research in curriculum studies? Of the nature of truth and method in spirituality studies, Parker Palmer observes,

Authentic spirituality wants to open us to truth – whatever truth may be, wherever truth may take us. Such spirituality does not dictate where we must go, but trusts that any path walked with integrity will take us to a place of knowledge. (Palmer, 1993, p. xi)

Palmer invites us to ponder how getting to the truth is not so much contingent on following prescribed methods of research as it is upon the character of those methods. In this, Palmer expands the ways of inquiry beyond the prescriptive nature of positivist methods. In so doing inviting us to reflect upon the legitimacy of modes of knowing which depart from the restricted configuration of rationalist investigation and are instead nested within the personal, transformational and spiritual. Others in transformational contemplative learning studies echo Palmer's view such as Byrnes who explores how learning is relational and begins with inquiry into one's self (Byrnes, 2012, p. 36); Burrows who erodes the subject-object dualism of traditional research practices by exploring how the researcher is changed in the process of research (Burrows, 2015, p. 136); or Hart who views contemplation as a way of knowing (Hart, 2004, p. 29) which departs from the emphasis schools place on learning by the sensorial and rational.

While the thesis is informed by arts-based, narrative and holistic research traditions within curriculum studies recent research in spirituality studies both

acknowledges and formalizes Palmer's desire for integrity and Burrows', Byrnes' and Hart's observations on the intimacy of the research process by exploring the possibility of locating spirituality studies within its own autonomous research paradigm (Lin et. al., 2016). In this, my thesis straddles two methodological formations which are similar to one another in its constituent components but different in name. That is, one formation as synthesis of selected methodologies - that is, arts-based, narrative and holistic studies - in curriculum studies; the second a formation in which such methodological components are subsumed within a stronger and more recent label of a *spiritual research paradigm*.

Of such paradigm the text, *Toward a Spiritual Research Paradigm* (Lin et. al., 2016) guides us to ponder the possibility of a spiritual research paradigm – one which until the present publication has been largely absent in curriculum studies in particular and research practices into spiritual traditions in general. Of such paradigm, Lin et al. observe

A spiritual research paradigm requires an ontology that considers all reality to be multidimensional, interconnected, and interdependent. It requires an epistemology that integrates knowing from outer sources as well as inner contemplation, acknowledging our integration of soul and spirit with the body and mind. (Lin et. al., 2016, pp. ix-x)

In their research Lin et al. outline characteristics which define a spiritual research paradigm. Paramount amongst these is the recognition of one's interiority (Lin et. al., 2016, pp. xi) as central to such a paradigm – one which is configured about notions of interconnection, peace, and quietude (Lin et. al., 2016, pp. ix-x). Such intent evokes the spirit of researchers in contemplative and transformational learning studies such as Dencev and Collister who explore how transformation is configured within encounters

which are deep, sensual and touch the soul (Dencev and Collister, 2010, p. 180). With kindred language Hart ponders how contemplative knowing involves a turn towards interiority – one marked by silence and witnessing in consciousness (Hart, 2004, pp. 29-30).

The reverence with which Dencev and Collister and Hart explore the nature of learning evoke Lin et al.'s focus on interiority and how it is the place of the sacred, intuitive and revelatory. A spiritual research paradigm recognizes such attributes by being focused on the personal - a focusing which requires practices of inquiry which are contemplative, creative and transformative to the life of the researcher (Lin et. al., 2016, pp. ix-x). Of such focus, Lin et al. observe

Spiritual knowing is personal and internally focused. New and creative ways must be available in research to encompass this type of knowing. As spiritual experiences are personal and often originate in contemplative practices, researchers need to embody what they research. This means researchers' spiritual cultivation and growth are part of the research endeavour. Hence, an embodied approach in growing spiritual knowledge is essential. The acknowledgement of our subjective and intersubjective experiences, which often cannot be described in language, necessitates the use of metaphors and creative forms of expression that call for an expansion of the criteria for research data and validity. (Lin et. al., 2016, pp. ix-x)

While the thesis draws upon arts-based and narrative research traditions within curriculum studies it is within the spirit of a spiritual research paradigm as described by Lin et al. that this thesis is also nested. Within such paradigm, Thomas Merton is pondered, not as a historical literary figure, but as a spiritual presence – one whose presence is vital both to the life of the thesis and my *life* as the researcher. A melding of moments wherein, as Palmer observes the reality of Merton's writings become enmeshed in the reality of the student (Palmer, 1993, p. 99) and vice versa.



Thus within such intimacy meditating and writing upon my narrative becomes enmeshed with meditations upon Merton's writings; and one marked by a melding of presences. When speaking to Merton – that is, when questions are addressed or reflections made as in the sub chapter *Seeking the "Festival of Rain"* - when Merton's writing is overlain with my words, the inquiry is intimate wherein the words from his life are meshed with those from mine. The entwined text which follows becoming an artful palimpsest of Merton's and my words. Such approach acknowledges a spiritual research paradigm by embracing the personal and subjective in its fullness in inquiry; and by the use of creative and artful strategies, such as dialogical speaking to Merton which, following Lin et al., expand the territory of data for inquiry beyond positivist restrictions.

To engage the personal; to engage an embodied research project in which the personal is enmeshed with the life of the thesis follows in the spirit of a spiritual research methodology – one in which the methodological has not a bifurcated relation to the life of the thesis but one which, as Burrows observes, instead is intimate with and transformative to the life of the researcher; and where one's "innate wisdom" (Burrows 2015, p. 136) is to be found.

### **Acknowledging Merton's Call: Dialogue with Brother Louis as a Strategy for Inquiry**

...It is not as an author that I would speak to you, not as a storyteller, not as a philosopher, not as a friend only: I seek to speak to you, in one way, as your own self. Who can tell what this may mean? I myself do not know. But if you listen, things will be said that are perhaps not written in this book. And this will be due not to me, but to One who lives and speaks in both! (Merton, 1998, pp. xvii-xviii)

Of intimacy of the personal with the subject of research Parker Palmer in *To Know as We are Known* (1993) offers an example; one which is told through his retelling of his experiences teaching contemplation through Merton's writings. His approach is a personal one – instead of standing apart from his subject, he encourages his students to be in dialogue (Palmer, 1993, p. 99) with them. To encourage such strategy Palmer shares with his students images, biographical information, and audio tapes of Merton speaking. Palmer's intent is to introduce Merton as if he were a friend; by nurturing his students in communion with Merton's reality they may discover their own (Palmer, 1993, p. 99). As Palmer observes

...when we interview the subject instead of just viewing it, then we find the subject speaking back to us in ways surprisingly independent of our own preconceptions. (Palmer, 1993, p. 99)

The intimacy with which Palmer engages his subject within a spirit of dialogue invites us to ponder the intimacy with which Merton also speaks to both his *readers* and *texts* in his writings *A Thomas Merton Reader* (1974) and *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966). The community of discourse which Palmer and Merton nurture in their writings underpins the methodology of dialogical speaking in this inquiry; one which is also enriched by a broader exploration about the nature of discourse in transformative learning studies as examined in Gunnlaugson (2007); Burrows (2015); Byrnes (2012); and Hart (2004).

The impetus for dialogical speaking in this inquiry was sparked by Merton's *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) wherein he begins the text with a prologue which is addressed, not to the reader, but to the text. *The Prologue*, sub titled, *The Author's*

*Advice to His Book* (Merton, 1966, p. 1) begins with a caution to his text written in the spirit of a father to his child. Merton writes,

Well, Raids, you're grown up now. It is time for you to go out and meet people as the other books have done. They have usually managed pretty well on their own. They were, for the most part, good mannered. Some of them were even fairly devout. As for you, you may need special advice. It's your poetic temperament. (Merton, 1966, p.1)

Merton cautions his text about how it speaks about God (Merton, 1966, pp. 1-2).

The words with which Merton offers advice echoes the dialogue of a father speaking to a child. Merton advises

Will you be careful, please, not to overemphasize the titans, the creativity, and the microcosmic subject? And don't make Atlas look like a "world soul" or cosmic Adam. I have been called so many names lately that I don't want to be called a Gnostic anarchist on top of everything else. Please think of your old man, won't you? (Merton, 1966, p. 2)

But then Merton tempers his caution though with his love for his child for it has a message that he especially likes. For this reason, though he loves all his texts, he adds "But in some ways, *Raids*, I think I love you more than the rest" (Merton, 1966, p. 2).

In his writings, Merton works spanned the domains of spiritual writing, poetry and literary commentary. In *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966), while Merton explores subjects ranging from the poetry to the nature of solitude to reflections on images, in his *Prologue* he integrates the element of the personal into his writing. Instead of the text being disencased from the personal and the emotional, Merton speaks to it as a vital presence – one whose vitality is integrated into his discourse. In *Letters to an Innocent Bystander* (Raids, 1966, p.p. 53-62), a chapter in *Raids on the Unspeakable* wherein Merton meditates upon how we are witness to truth, he repeats this strategy except he

speaks directly to the reader. He begins by posing the question “If I dare, in these words, to ask you some direct and personal questions, it is because I address them as much to myself as to you” (Merton, 1966, p. 53). Merton invites us into his reality and in so doing returns us to Palmer’s observation about how he also invites his students to be with their subject within a spirit of communion (Palmer, 1993, p. 99).

Of the presence of internal dialogue in Merton’s writings, Labrie observes how Merton’s dialogical writing opened onto the reader and was prevalent in his writings (Labrie, 2001, p. 46). In a similar spirit Inchausti observes how in his texts Merton seeks to connect with his readers by revealing his own contemplative reality – a revelation which is ultimately about one’s self. Of the dissolution of the binary of writer and reader and the seeking of connection which accompanies such revealing is captured in Merton’s words which are used to begin this subchapter.

Pondering Merton in tandem with Palmer’s, Labrie’s and Inchausti’s observations informed a methodological configuration about how my inquiry could be sculpted. While the intent of this inquiry is to explore questions of wisdom and art, such intent is ecumenical in its desire to explore such questions with an artful voice, within a spirit of connection, in addition to an academic one. Merton’s writings in *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) provide an example of the artful voice – one which in turn resonated with my intuitions and desires about creating an inquiry whose intent is not only to explore questions with an academic voice, but to do so with an aesthetical presence. Merton’s writing offered a way of nurturing such presence; and one whose spirit was also kindred with the modes of inquiry within arts-based and transformative learning studies in curriculum.

## Speaking with Brother Louis

This book is dedicated to All My Friends  
 To the Old Ones and the New Ones  
 To Those Who Are Near and Those Who Are Far Away  
 To Those on Earth and Those in Heaven  
 To Those I know and Those I have Never Met  
 To Those Who Agree and Those Who Disagree  
 To Those I have Never Heard of  
 In the Hope That We May All Meet in the One Light  
 (Merton, 1974, n.p.)

*Brother Louis. We have never met but I heed your call within the light we share.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, November 16, 2017)

When Merton entered the Abbey of Gethsemani he took the name of *Brother Louis*. In this inquiry, the address to Brother Louis becomes an entry point to my writing where those initial questions, observations and intuitions about the nature of wisdom and art, which seed my reflections, are posed. Speaking to Merton has been generative and nurturing to the life of this inquiry. Such strategy is twofold in intent in its desire to sculpt an inquiry which is not only artful, but in addition spiritual in nature. By speaking directly to Thomas Merton, the intent is to engage him, not simply as a historical memory apart from us, but in a different mode; that is, as a vital and active presence in my inquiry as one with us. As such, my inquiry endeavours to speak to his texts directly and in turn allow the spirit of his texts to engage with us in the present moment; and herein to nurture a process which is integrative, artful and holistic in spirit. With this, the methodology follows Palmer's strategy about engaging a subject in community and friendship and in a manner wherein "we listen obediently to the voice of the other" (Palmer, 1993, p. 101).

While to sculpt an inquiry in such manner departs from traditional academic writing, such an approach finds precedent; methodologically, following in the spirit of

writers in the fields of holistic and arts-based inquiry in curriculum studies. Notably, holistic writers such as Susan Schiller who reflects upon how we need to rethink writing by situating it in the writer's emotional and spiritual world in order for it to be meaningful (Schiller, 2014, p. x).

Other writers, such as Parker Palmer within the domain of holistic pedagogy, echo such sentiments. Critical of the bifurcated nature of rational knowing Palmer instead advocates for the intimate relation of knower and known within a community of knowing and one born of love and compassion (Palmer, 1993, p. xv). For Palmer to know is to love; by such activity we engage with others within their reality (Palmer, 1993, p.8) and in so doing, knowing becomes a relational act about community and one which is nurtured, not simply by rationality and sensation, but in addition by other capabilities of the self such as emotion, intuition and empathy (Palmer, 1993, p. 52). Together, such capacities nurture what Palmer, in kindred spirit with Merton, allow us to see the world as whole within the unity of the heart and mind (Palmer, 1993, p. xxiii).

In the field of arts-based inquiry Elliot Eisner similarly departs from binary knowing by the embrace of non-propositional strategies of inquiry, as are associated with the arts (Eisner, 1991, pp. 10-19). Eisner's openness to alternate strategies extends to the ways we write in inquiry in general and the form of the novel in particular; herein aligning well with Schiller's ideas about nurturing ways of writing which may depart from common academic practices (Eisner et al, 1996, pp. 403-427).

In his poem *Hagia Sophia* Merton writes of the wholeness which is nameless and hidden but wherein wisdom resides (Merton, 1974, p. 506). It is within such spirit; that is, of engaging the creation in its fullness within a spirit of connection that Schiller

(2014), Miller (2006/2008) and others in the field of holistic education share in their vision of inquiry. Within such vision inquiry is viewed, not as reductive in the Cartesian sense and restricted in the tools it uses in research but, as one which instead embraces the learner in their aesthetic, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual complexity - a vision of inquiry which both sees with “wholesight” (Palmer, 1993, p. xxiii) and is nurturing of the “whole person.” (Schiller, 2014, p. 1)

It is within such spirit of seeing with whole eyes that my inquiry seeks to be *artful inquiry* – one which is sculpted, not in dualistic relation to an object of research, but instead in holistic relation to meditations upon art, wisdom and dialogical engagement with Brother Louis’ writing.

My reflections in this chapter are introduced with the dedication from his book *A Thomas Merton Reader* (1974). While they may not be yet known or near, in his dedication Brother Louis reaches out to friends who are spiritually present in the “One Light” (Merton, 1974, n.p.). His dedication is both expansive in spirit and artful in its desire to engage in discourse with those who transcend the temporal and spatial confines to which we are accustomed. Following in the spirit of Merton’s dedication, this inquiry endeavours to reciprocate his call and *re-turn* towards him in spiritual discourse through the address to Brother Louis. By speaking directly to him my inquiry seeks to sculpt a discourse which is holistic and aesthetical; and which following Schiller (2014), also is meaningful to the life of this writer.

### **From “Generative Dialogue” to Dialogical Speaking: Seeking Merton’s “Silent Self”**

While the strategy of dialogical writing is nested within reflections upon Merton (1966), Miller (2008), Palmer (1993) and Schiller (2015), it is also informed by kindred observations about the nature of discourse from other writers within the field of transformative learning (TL) studies such as Gunnlaugson (2007), Burrows (2015), Byrnes (2012) and Hart (2004).

In his exploration of TL Gunnlaugson observes how “generative dialogue” (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138) is central to the possibility of transformative learning. Also known as “spoken discourse” or what Mezirow describes as “‘communicative learning’ ” (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138) with generative dialogue “...learners can reflect on their actions and uncover insights from the meaning, experiences, and opinions expressed by others” (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138). Such process has also been named by Gunnlaugson as a contemplative strategy configured within a second person approach (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138). As with a first person strategy, the second person approach departs from the focus on learning in the third person which dominates education (Gunnlaugson, 2011, p. 4).

Instead, within a second person approach learning is social; within a community of discourse learners can examine their assumptions and herein begin to engage with the emotional and intuitive in addition to rational ways of knowing. With generative dialogue learners become attentive to those beliefs which form their perceptions of the world; as Gunnlaugson observes it allows learners to become witnesses to their own thoughts (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 144).

The strategy of dialogical speaking with Merton in this inquiry, while being



informed by, departs from Gunnlaugson's understanding of generative discourse as a social discourse involving others, and guides us to reflect upon how such speaking can enrich understandings of transformative learning. Can transformative learning be nested within a discourse which is centred about an *interior generative discourse* in addition to the social context? Can transformative learning happen outside of a concept of TL as a socially grounded configuration (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 139)? Instead can TL also align with a different process which is focused upon an interior dialogue; one which follows Palmer's suggestion to be in a dialogue with the subject which is personal (Palmer, 1993, p. 99)?

Arthur Zajonc (2009) and Leigh Burrows (2015) offer guidance on this other possibility. While observing that the clamour of life, which he identifies with our external world, needs to be balanced with a commitment to doing our inner work (Zajonc, 2009, p. 15), Zajonc adds that meditation, which is key to such balance, is a solitary endeavour (Zajonc, 2009, p. 12). The "silent self" which Zajonc identifies with doing the solitary work requires a turning inward located beyond the psyche space of ego (Zajonc, 2009, p. 31). Departing from Gunnlaugson's notion of the communicative and social aspects of transformation which is nurtured within the presence of others, Zajonc references Merton's early writings wherein the space of transformation is instead centred about the self extracted from the outer clamour that surrounds it. For Merton, self, creativity and silence are enmeshed with one another. Referencing Merton, Zajonc observes the importance for Merton of silence when one withdraws from the din of society and instead seeks the interior self of quietude where creativity lives (Zajonc, 2009, p. 30).

Thus in contrast to Gunnlaugson's view of the role of communicative

relationships in transformation, the communal self with which such notion may be allied, is in Zajonc's and Merton's writings diminished and instead stands as a "silenc[ing of ] the social self" and what he names as the "not-I" (Zajonc, 2009, p. 31). It is within the space of the silent self; a space which Zajonc also describes as one of solitude (Zajonc, 2009, p. 15) and where creativity is present in silence (Zajonc, 2009, p. 30) that the dialogical discourse with Merton is situated. Following Zajonc it is within my interior space of a silent and creative solitude that I speak with Merton.

In a similar spirit to Zajonc, Burrows' notion of "inner alchemy" (Burrows, 2015, p. 127) explores the centrality of interiority in transformation; one which departs from Gunnlaugson's understanding of the community of dialogue in TL while inviting us to ponder alternative forms of interior dialogue, such as dialogical speaking, as is explored in this inquiry. The aspect of interior discourse which describes dialogical speaking stands apart from Gunnlaugson's understanding of TL by focusing instead upon transformation nurtured by one's interior life. For Burrows the inward turn is a self reflective one wherein we arrive at self awareness "...through a process of 'learning from the inside out' (Osterhold et al., 2007)" (Burrows, 2015, p. 128) – one wherein are engaged paths to knowing which are holistic in spirit; and informed by intuition and feeling. Of the importance of interiority in Burrow's work is seen in the retelling of her own dreams with which she begins her meditation upon the transformative alchemy of one's interior life (Burrows, 2015, p. 127).

While it may be viewed as an artful literary strategy, dialogical speaking is also a strategy, which following Burrows, is about learning from within the transformative presence of reflection (Burrows, 2015, p. 128); or as Zajonc observes is focused on doing



*Monk's Cell,  
Convent of San Marco  
May 4, 2017*

the interior work (Zajonc, 2009, p. 15). In my journey dialogical speaking nurtures my inward reflective turn guiding me towards the promise of wisdom which Burrows observes is innate to our being (Burrows, 2015, p. 127). Within the crucible of my “inner alchemy” (Burrows, 2015, p. 127) its promise nurtured within the dialogical discourse with Brother Louis; one which both nurtured my journey of inquiry while feeling authentic to the life of the inquirer.

### **Seeking the “Inner Alchemy” through the Aesthetical**

Of the presence of the alchemical in transformation Burrows and Gunnlaugson guide us to ponder how understanding of transformative learning is sometimes aligned with the metaphor of the alchemical - one which is affiliated with ways of doing inquiry which depart from the domain of rationalistic methodology. While Burrows speaks of the “inner alchemy” within meditations upon the inner life Gunnlaugson, though focused upon a social understanding of TL, also speaks of the “alchemical vessel” (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 141) in which the community of discourse unfolds.

For Gunnlaugson the alchemical is aligned with creativity and the aesthetical; an alignment which is also suggested by Merton in his observations upon the artist’s place in society. In his essay *Answers on Art and Freedom* (1981), Merton stands the artist with the alchemist. Merton says,

For today, the artist has, whether he likes it or not, inherited the combined functions of hermit, pilgrim, prophet, priest, shaman, sorcerer, soothsayer, alchemist, and bonze. (Merton, 1981, p. 379)

For Merton, the artist’s role is not singular but is instead immersed within the complexity of creation; one which evokes the messiness of inquiry which Gunnlaugson ponders. Within such messiness the aesthetical is bound with the alchemical; inquiry is

informed by ways of knowing which transcend the parameters of rationalistic methodology; and transformation is nurtured. It is within such complexity; one wherein the artist stirs the alchemical, that the dialogical discourse with Merton is also configured.

### **Dialogical Speaking, Narrative and Contemplative Knowing: A Transformative Journey of Shadows and Paradoxes**

*Though I studied philosophical writing I was never comfortable with the way philosophers wrote. I could not write as a philosopher. It was stern and depending upon the topic often unintelligible. Something was missing.*

*I then tried historical writing but could not write as a historian. Historical writing is premised on chronicle and though I could not name it at the time, it just did not feel right for me. Something was missing.*

*I tried writing as a cultural theorist. The way the theorists wrote broke with the shackles of philosophical and historical writing and for a while felt liberating. But while the writing opened up I still felt unsettled. Something was missing.*

*I tried everyone else's writing and gradually came into my own knowing that the "something" that was missing was my voice.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, November 29, 2016)

Dialogical discourse and narrative retellings are viewed as strategies which are configured by Gunnlaugson's notion of generative discourse and Burrows' idea of our "interior alchemy" (Burrows, 2015, p. 127); while suggesting another understanding which is an amalgam of both notions and drawing upon Byrnes' (2012) understanding of contemplative teaching as embodying a relation of both the internal and external worlds. Following Palmer's (2004) observations on the metaphor of the Mobius strip, Byrnes observes how they are intimately related. While the integrity of a teacher, for example, is nested within interiority, it is also influenced by the world beyond (Byrnes, 2012, p. 23).

While Byrnes' understanding of holism straddles the internal and external worlds, neither Gunnlaugson's externalist notion of generative discourse nor Burrows' internal understanding of the "inner alchemy" exclude the other domain. While TL in Gunnlaugson's account, for example, is set within a social context he also observes that it is "not exclusively group mediated" (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138). Similarly, Burrows while observing that learning happens from the inside, does not discount the importance of one's relation to the external world. Following Krishnamurti Burrows observes that the transformation of self and society depends upon the nondualism of the observer and observed (Burrows, 2015, p. 129).

As such the differences between Byrnes' and Gunnlaugson's interpretations of transformative learning suggests one of emphasis, rather than of opposing differences. Meditating upon the strategy of dialogical speaking with Merton falls within the range of such emphases. That is, while constituting a discourse; dialogical speaking departs from Gunnlaugson's understanding of generative discourse by being one which is instead situated within the domain of inner reflection instead of a community of discourse. With this understanding, the idea of dialogical discourse also aligns with Burrows' focus on the central role of reflection in transformative learning.

Of contemplative education Byrnes observes how it is a relational journey enmeshed with the self; "...a journey that moves both outward into the world and inward into one's own mind, body, and heart. It is a journey of knowledge and self-knowledge towards transformation" (Byrnes, 2012, pp. 36-37). Inspired by Merton's writings, the strategies of narrative reflection and dialogical speaking are ones which are both meaningful to my inquiry; and nurturing of the journey of self reflection that Byrnes

ponders. Of that journey my opening reflection upon my experiences with different forms of writing is offered as an example of the transformative journey that Byrnes explores.

Being witness to the thoughts which inhabit our consciousness both travels the journey and offers a contemplative opening onto the world. As a contemplative moment, reflecting upon my story of writing nurtures, as Hart observes

...a distinct nonlinear consciousness that invites an inner opening of awareness. This opening within us in turn enables a corresponding opening toward the world before us. Through a fresh lens, our worldview, sense of self, and relationships may be powerfully transformed. (Hart, 2004, p. 29)

Following Hart, my story of writing becomes a pathway onto awareness. By meditating upon my relationship with forms of writing my retelling brought into focus aspects of *myself* which had not been nurtured but which are central to the richness of my life. By looking inward, as Byrnes' observes onto the relationship with myself, I am able to begin the journey of transformation (Byrnes, 2012, pp. 36-37).

Such story as mine about writing is one which traverses a terrain of lingering feelings, and recycled memories – ones which were ever present but never voiced as such stories did not meet the epistemological expectations of the rationalist epistemological paradigm in which I was schooled. In contrast to such knowing, Hart observes “Contemplation involves a softer focus and a lighter touch. The voice of the contemplative lives in these shadowy symbols, feelings, and images as well as in paradoxes and passions” (Hart, 2004, p. 37).

My story of writing dwells within such land of shadows, paradoxes, feelings and images as do my other stories. Only by journeying into this open terrain and away from

the rationalist encampment from which such shadows and paradoxes had been isolated could I begin the journey of transformation. Only by entering this new territory and stirring them within the crucible of one's "inner alchemy" (Burrows, 2015, p. 127) could the richness of human experience of which they are its ingredients be brought into meaning within the fullness of the creation.

Of the nature of transformation, Dencev and Collister write of how it is marked by a change in consciousness; one which is configured within ceaseless change and acts of creativity (Dencev and Collister, 2010, p. 179). Configured by a story of writing my retelling of my academic journey echoes Dencev's and Collister's understanding of transformation; one which in my retelling is nested within narrative encounters with forms of writing.

Transformation transcends stasis. Of such encounters narrative and dialogical writing signals a gradual departure from ways of writing in which I had been schooled in the university and which felt inauthentic. The journey towards a different writing that combined aspects of literary and narrative marked an evolution away from earlier modes; and one which aligns with Dencev's and Collister's (2010) observation "...that transformation does not happen instantly and is never finished. Transformation is iterative and continuous" (Dencev and Collister, 2010, p.180); and one which in turn invites us to ponder how the journey of inquiry, following Miller, is continually unfolding and unending (Miller, 2016, p. 138).



### **The Epistemology of Presence: Transformation as “Living Words”**

While the strategy of using narrative writing and dialogical discourse aligns with interpretations of Dencev and Collister (2010), Gunnlaugson (2007) and Burrows (2015) on the nature of transformative learning, such strategy is also informed by other aspects of their writings; and in particular Gunnlaugson’s notion of *presence*, and Hart’s kindred notions of the centrality of *presencing* and *interiority* in education.

Of the experience of presencing Gunnlaugson describes it as “...the practice, condition, or state of abiding in embodied present-moment-centered awareness – is the quality of attention that we embody in each moment” (Gunnlaugson, 2011, p. 6). Of such state of being, Merton’s writings are rich in evocations of presencing; amongst these, for example, his reflections upon the southwest desert landscape in his journal *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1998).

While Merton’s retellings of his encounters with nature evoke the notion of *presencing* which Gunnlaugson speaks of, we are also guided to ponder how his other writings, in particular his dialogical writings wherein he speaks to his reader, also embody such notion. Can we ponder dialogical speaking as a form of *presencing*?

The strategy of dialogical speaking with Merton in this inquiry was inspired by Merton’s writing, for example *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966), where he speaks directly to his readers. While being artful Merton’s strategy is also holistic as it connects with his readers in a manner which is intimate and dialogical. This inquiry follows Merton’ strategy by listening to his call and returning to him within a discourse which is nested within a first person instead of a third person relation. Adopting such strategy is explored as a way of both reflecting upon and learning from Merton’s ideas; one wherein

his ideas are engaged not as a historical presence, but instead within a different and more complex relation configured by a notion of a vital *presencing*.

The notion of *presencing* is adopted from Gunnlaugson's examination of generative dialogue and its definition where he observes "...presencing involves learning from attention to what is emerging – knowledge that is sensed but not yet embodied in our experience" (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 141). While Gunnlaugson explores the notion of presencing within the social configuration of dialogue and a second person perspective (Gunnlaugson, 2011, p. 3), his notion also invites a kindred affiliation with the idea of dialogical speaking or the life of interior discourse. When Gunnlaugson speaks of *presencing* as a moment of emergent knowing which is sensed, such notion can inform understandings of interior discourse where, in kindred manner, I become present to what is emerging in the dialogue with Merton.

Of the configuration of knowing that emerges within such moments, Tobin Hart writes of the "*epistemology of presence*" – one "...that moves past conditioned habits of mind to stay awake in the here and now" (Hart, 2008, p. 237). For Hart, such notion is nested within interiority and the idea of contemplation as a way of knowing which both departs from while supplementing rational and sensorial ways of knowing. To know with presence for Hart involves both a looking at the world beyond while "opening into our selves" (Hart, 2008, p. 236). By such opening (Hart, 2008, p. 236) and listening to that which emerges within the dialogical discourse with Merton, I become present to a knowing which seeds from within.

To speak of knowing within dialogical discourse; one which is configured by notions of *presence*, *emergence* and *openings* guides me to reflect upon how such

knowing is a vital knowing - a knowing configured, following Hart, in the *here and now* – an epistemology of presence which is vital in spirit. Within such vital knowing, words are not dead; instead following Hart within the epistemology of presence is nested the idea of *wisdom* as words which are alive (Hart, 2008, p. 236).

When Merton addresses his readers or I address Merton, the writing departs from modes of academic writing which are bounded by a third person configuration; and instead is sculpted within a relation of intimacy in which such boundaries are eroded. The objective distancing which marks third person inquiry is transcended by another relation that is vital and personal; words are exchanged within a relation that transcends the subject-object binary and are instead configured within an intimate discourse where Merton's words touch me and I, within my reflections, reach out to him, not as a text, but as a friend. Of the vital character of such words, Hart observes

They are in some mysterious way described as alive on the page. This is why in all of the traditions there is invitation to reconsider the words again and again to see what light might be revealed this time around. It is as if the words are encrypted and compressed. To gain access to the mysteries and to reveal the meaning we have to break the code. (Hart, 2008, p. 236)

Knowing is not impersonal and disencased from the subject; rather for Hart it becomes living and interconnected. It is knowing in presence. Together with Gunnlaugson's understanding of presence, Hart's interpretation of the epistemology of presence is co-opted to interpret the strategy of dialogical discourse with Merton. His words are engaged not as historical artefacts separate from the life of the inquirer. Instead, I seek to engage with Merton, following Hart, within a relationship which transcends category; and is configured within a domain of presence where I open onto consciousness within the transformative encounter with his words (Hart, 2008, p. 236).

### **Inquiry as the Epistemological Touch of Flow**

The examples of narrative writing which fuel this inquiry were configured within my experiences of school, growing up within an immigrant family in the 1960s, and encounters with art. Together with the discourse with Merton to write these stories became my “living words” (Hart, 2008, p. 236) and points of departure for my study. My inquiry, which in its initial iterations had struggled with a third person approach, was reinvigorated when I rebooted it with the retelling of my stories and conversations with Merton. To inquire within the first person was nurturing to the progress of my study and in the same instance intensely gratifying. To tell the stories and speak to Merton felt natural. The struggles I had experienced when I started the inquiry were replaced with a happy abandon; the writing becoming less arduous and sometimes effortless. I was often not aware of time as I wrote them. Reflecting on them I am in wonder as to how they emerged from my being. I re-read them and ponder rhetorically – *this writing came from me?*

Of such feelings one experiences when absorbed Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes as a state of flow; one characterized by wonder, focus and suspension of the sense of time. The sense of self is temporarily suspended as one’s awareness is immersed within the activity they are engaged with. In Tobin Hart’s exploration of the epistemology of presence the notion of flow has a kindred relation – one wherein he examines Csikszentmihalyi’s notion and invites us to ponder how such notion is related to an epistemology of flow. When Hart describes presencing as “... stay[ing] awake in the here and now” (Hart, 2008, p. 237) or as Gunnlaugson observes as “embodied present-moment-centered awareness” (Gunnlaugson, 2011, p. 6) such notions evoke

Csikszentmihalyi's notion of flow wherein, as Hart observes, awareness and action become fused (Hart, 2008, p.240).

To know in presence is to know in flow. And to know in flow is to be, following Hart, in communion with words as vital presences within a relation that transcends the bifurcation of researcher and research subject; and is instead configured within a different relation where one touches onto the other and the other reciprocates. Within the epistemology of flow where stories are sculpted and interior dialogue hears its voice; that is, within the touch that transforms, I seek to be present to what is emerging and from such emergence distil its wisdom.

**Voice of the Paradise Child:  
Emerging from “Vague Fragments” onto Inquiry**

O Paradise, O child's world!  
Where all grass lives  
And all the animals are aware!

(Merton, 1977, p. 331)

*I look at the planets that I had drawn in my Grade Four workbook and reflect upon the words I use to describe them. In the margins I had written “Look back for size etc” and ponder the metaphorical prescience of those words. Years later within the context of doing a doctoral dissertation I “Look back” onto my narrative in order to arc forward onto inquiry.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, June 2017)

Pondering Gunnlaugson's, Burrow's, Byrnes' and Hart's writings on transformational learning was synchronous with my explorations into the idea of interior dialogue as a contemplative strategy inspired by Merton's writings. With Merton's texts as a backdrop meditating upon their writings provided a scaffold for retelling transformative moments in my life - ones which following Gunnlaugson marked shifts

(Gunnlaugson, 2007); revelatory moments; moments when memories came into clarity and meaning; and others which brought into focus, as Gunnlaugson also observes, the unstudied presumptions that I held (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 138). Such moments marked the seeds of my inquiry.

One such seed is configured within the following story of a medical examination. Retelling it brought to the surface a childhood memory which I had carried for years but only now coming into meaning within a doctoral inquiry; and one whose retelling foregrounded the notion of the contemplative child in inquiry.

*I had consulted with a medical sleep specialist to help with my disruptive sleep condition. The diagnosis involved a sleep study where I was monitored over night in a sleep clinic. A harness of electrical wires and probes were attached to my brain and other parts of my body. With the probes, data was collected on heart rate, flow of air, brain activity, REM and non-REM sleep. While the study revealed problematic sleep it also revealed that my dream sleep was higher than the population average. I dream vividly – the dream images are powerful and memorable - and the observations by the sleep study reconfirmed this.*

*Later, in the context of doing a doctoral inquiry, this observation, which had remained latent but ever present in my psyche, grew into meaning. As an only child until the birth of my sister eight years later, my life was a solitary one. Except for my caregivers I had very little interaction with playmates until the first grade. In lieu of pre-school, day care or kindergarten, I lived within an imaginary world of my own making – the Lego buildings I built a metaphor for that world. Within it the memory of being myself alone in silence on the couch – with my small hands grappling for the dust particles that floated in front of the sunny window. Within such moments the inner alchemy of one’s core is fermented and though, as a child I could not name it, my inner life began to form. One wherein my solitary childhood nurtured my imaginary world.*

*Within such imaginations and isolated but vivid memories of my childhood, were seeded the beginnings of my inquiry.*

*In beginning to know our core selves it feels that we need to allow those memories – ones that are ever present but unspoken - to*

*ferment and then come into calm. It is within such alchemy that the dialogical speaking with Merton is blended. To speak to Merton returned me to a place I had known as a child. Such speaking aligned with my inner life whose presence was manifested in the richness of its dream world. A presence which I do not discount but one which I am now open to listening to and learning from. Within such presence is nested the speaking with Merton. And within such presence is the source of my own “innate wisdom” (Burrows, 2015, p. 129) which I seek to tap.*

*Seeking the core self though feels like a quest without end. The discourse with Merton nurtures more questions; and doubts sets in as they did with Descartes when he pondered his dreams. Is the discourse a fantastical one which merits no place within an academic inquiry? The analytical philosophers who taught me would assent to this question, but my intuition says no. To dismiss my fantastical story would be to grant Descartes’ desire to dismiss the epistemic power of ways of knowing and forms of inquiry – ones sculpted by dreams and stories; and intuitions and feelings – which complete the fullness of the creation, are meaningful to the life of my inquiry and cannot be dismissed as Descartes would have it.*

*I seek to protect my dreams as Merton protects his literary children (as he does in Raids from the Unspeakable [1966]). Thus what seems the fantastical also configures as a holistic understanding about the interconnectedness between others past and present as Merton himself alludes to in his writings. And so with this, in my discourses with Merton, I seek to engage him, not as a historical artefact, but rather as a vital presence in my inquiry.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, March 2017)

The relation of the contemplative child and wisdom is one that has been explored by researchers in both Merton studies and the field of transformative learning in education. In his advocacy of contemplative practices in the classroom Tobin Hart (2004) reflects upon the contemplative nature of children (Hart, 2004, p. 43). They have a spiritual self which is rich in interior awareness and wisdom, what Hart also names “the wise child” (Hart, 2009, pp. 129-130). Hart observes,

Children – young children especially – are natural contemplatives. They ponder big questions, they daydream, they fall in wonder with nature, they reflect on their own existence and find silence in their “special spot,” perhaps under the arms of an old tree. (Hart, 2004, p. 43)

In a similar spirit, the Merton scholar Fiona Gardner explores the theme of the “child mind” in Merton’s writings (Gardner, 2016, p. 3). Gardner observes how for Merton spiritual enlightenment was nurtured within “...the adult mind uncovering, discovering, recognizing, and then integrating the eternal child – the Christ child – who is present and within the psyche of everyone” (Gardner, 2016, p. 3). In the poem *Grace’s House* (1977) Merton echoes such sentiment in the idea of the paradisal (Merton, 1977, p. 330). By coming into consciousness we travel away from the false self towards the terrain of the core self; that is, of the configuration of the paradisal self, which for Merton, is also identified with the child mind.

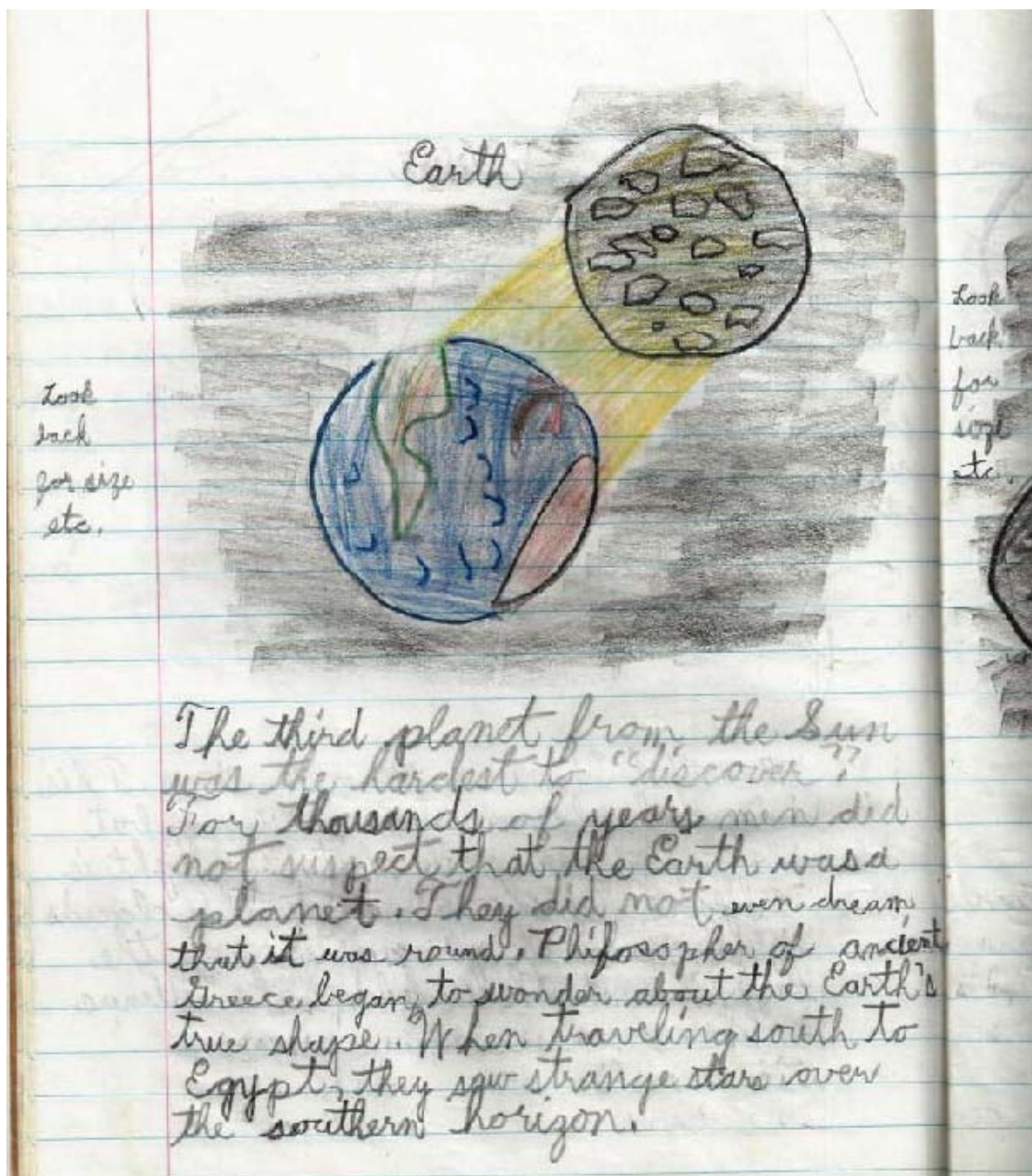
Of the child mind in Merton’s writings, other writers have explored such theme - in particular Del Prete’s exploration of the innocence of the “child’s voice” (Del Prete, 1990, p. 85); or Labrie’s study of the relation of “child’s vision” to paradisal consciousness (Labrie, 2001, pp. 119-150).

Tobin Hart’s observations of children as contemplatives and Gardner’s interpretation of Merton’s paradisal child evokes Montessori’s notion of the spiritual child (Montessori, 1970, p. 18) that lays within us – a spirituality which is present and seeks to grow. The wonder that children have for the great questions evoking Montessori’s kindred notion of cosmic education (Miller, 2010, p. 48); one which nurtures the child’s interest in the big picture and understanding of their purpose within it.



Reading Hart's idea on children as contemplatives (Hart, 2004, p. 43) together with kindred notions by Gardner (2016), Del Prete (1990), Labrie (2001), Montessori (Miller, 2010) brought clarity to my childhood memory which was ever present and persistent but whose meaning was never captured. I found silence under a window – a moment which became a vivid and recurring memory but which only now is coming into meaning in the context of writing a doctoral dissertation; one whose contemplative spirit had been seeded many years earlier in a solitary childhood of silence, dreams and imaginations and which collectively seeded my “spiritual embryo” (Montessori, 1970, p. 18).

Returning to this memory is also a return to my childhood when, I now reflect, this inquiry began. The seeds of inquiry synonymous with the nascent spirituality of my childhood. Of such generative moments in one's early growth, Thomas Merton, recalls how reading stories of the Greek heroes were formative to his later life. Of the bearing of those childhood experiences on his later life and work Merton writes in *The Seven Storey Mountain* “...I unconsciously built up the vague fragments of a religion and of a philosophy, which remained hidden and implicit in my acts, and which, in due time, were to assert themselves in a deep and all-embracing attachment to my own judgement and my own will...” (Merton, 1998, p.12). Like Merton, seemingly innocuous events in childhood were both prescient and formative to my later growth; and the beginnings of my inquiry. Spirituality and narrative intertwined; one echoed in Merton's memories of his early childhood and Clandinin's and Connelly's observation of narrative inquiry that it “...is a form of living, a way of life” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 78).



Merton's "Vague Fragments"  
 Building the Big Picture, 1966  
 My Grade 4 Work Book

In my story those “vague fragments” that Merton speaks of foreshadowed my later interests in philosophy and art; fascination with connections; and having a global perspective. Seeking the big picture began with my colourful drawings of the planets in my grade school workbook; subsequent study of philosophy and history of ideas; and my later transit through the territories of architecture and post-structuralist theory. As I journeyed away from those places the “vague fragments,” which were ever present and silently seeding, eventually came into bloom when I transited onto a new terrain of holistic education. During my transit the fragments were fleeting and elusive as when one looks through the window of the speeding train. But once I had journeyed onto and disembarked at this new land, those fragments, which had remained blurred, now came into focus and were embraced within a spirit of welcome.

In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton observes how every moment of one’s life is a moment of potentiality. Of such moments he speaks of them as “germs of spiritual vitality” (Merton, 1972, p. 14) which often die if they are not nurtured with freedom and love (Merton, 1972, p. 14). In this new place of holistic knowing that I had journeyed onto later in life; those intuitions, predispositions and feelings about connection and creation, that had their earliest manifestations in my childhood found fertile ground. They had found Merton’s “...good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love. (Merton, 1972, p. 14)

In my childhood, such intuitions were present but unnamed; later as a young university student, the same intuitions were present but unnurtured. Without a map I journeyed, often stumbling and sometimes failing, but in the same moment sustained by curiosity, moments of discovery and an intuitive feeling that the authentic path to reflecting upon connection and self could not but follow such a journey.

In *Raids on the Unspeakable* Merton, in a passage which evokes the spirit of Thoreau's Transcendentalist writings on his relation to nature, writes

But I am also going to sleep, because here in this wilderness I have learned how to sleep again. Here I am not alien. The trees I know, the night I know, the rain I know. I close my eyes and instantly sink into the whole rainy world of which I am a part, and the world goes on with me in it, for I am not alien to it. (Merton, 1966, p. 10)

Merton's story of his oneness with the rainy world speaks to my journey. Across terrains I travelled until I ventured into a holistic land where those intuitions about the interconnectedness of the creation and our place within it would be nurtured. Leaving the Cartesian territory behind where knowing is situated within the separation of the knower from nature, this new territory is nested within, as Parker Palmer observes, a space of community and connection – one in which, following the story of Merton's rainy world, recognizes the wholeness (Merton, 1974, p. 506) with which we imbue the world and the world onto us.

Of such interconnectedness, the physicist Fritjof Capra observes how we cannot talk about our world without talking about ourselves (Capra, 1991, p. 69). To Capra's observation I add that if we must talk about ourselves, then one aspect of such discourse is to embrace the presence of the child within us. Within such embrace – one which is nested within the configuration of the spiritual child (Montessori, 1970. p. 18) or Merton's paradisaal child - to know about the world is to honour such presence in our spiritual journey, one which in this inquiry gradually emerged from its vague fragments into meaning.

### **Transiting from the Ground of Being to Transcendence of Being: A Journey of the Spiritual Embryo**

To meditate upon the contemplative nature of childhood guided my inquiry towards the reflection upon how the contemplative child embodies aspects of self which are core; one which is interpreted in this inquiry using Morgan's (2012) notion of a "ground of being experience" (Morgan, 2012, p. 43). Of such experience Morgan views it as foundational to self; that is "...a benign, foundational ground that is conceived of here as a transconceptual, elemental substrate that founds reality" (Morgan, 2012, p. 43). In her research Morgan observes how such place was described by her study participants as a core psychic place which felt grounded and peaceful (Morgan, 2012, p. 43).

As a space of both anchorage and transcendence, the ground of being is key to the life of interiority; and aligns with the notion of the contemplative child from which my inquiry draws sustenance. To return to the spiritual seed of childhood feels both a passage towards and one away from the ground of being. That is, one which in my story of a medical examination transited through childhood memories, reflections on Merton and others on Cartesian rationalism. A connecting of stories, workbook images and philosophical reflections which were ever present within my interiority and from which meaning could be sculpted. Like an elevator ride the journey transits down through such stories and reflections towards the ground of being; and having reached it transiting away again towards another domain where being is sculpted within a transcendent configuration. For Morgan, such movement towards the ground of being is described as a passage through "layers of space" (Morgan, 2012, p. 49) – one where there is a sense that the journey penetrates through deeper layers of one's interior landscapes. Having transited through them, one arrives within a domain which is marked by what Morgan,

following Clark and Wilson (1991) describes as “ ‘perspective transformation’ ” (Morgan, 2012, p. 44); and which is nurtured by ways of cognition which extend beyond the rational domain (Morgan, 2012, p. 44).

The perspective shift that is associated with the ground of being evokes kindred sentiments amongst writers in transformational learning such as Burrows’ exploration of the alchemical configuration of interiority (Burrows, 2015, p. 128) or Hart’s observations on how the epistemology of presencing nurtures awareness (Hart, 2004, p. 29). In a similar vein Gunnlaugson’s exploration of meta-awareness (Gunnlaugson, 2007), which he develops in relation to generative discourse, suggests how consciousness is nurtured when Morgan’s ground of being has been touched.

Of meta-awareness, Gunnlaugson describes it as a tumbling through of thoughts and emotions when we become attentive to them within our consciousness (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p.145). Such movement through psychological states evokes the observation of how the journey towards the ground of being is one of passage - where assumptions which are unconsciously present transmute into awareness (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 145). In my retellings of my early childhood, such passage is witnessed within stories which were triggered by lingering memories and reflections upon images within my workbooks. To reflect upon them was to tumble through them; but one wherein such movement also opened onto the transcendent terrain of awakening.

## The Contemplative Turn

*In philosophy graduate school, the students were required to study a predetermined set of questions in preparation for the comprehensive examination. I recall studying the last question on the subject of Kant's Third Antimony on the nature of causality. In retrospect, the question exemplified the analytical paradigm – one which sought knowledge through the corroding of experience.*

*Years later I had cycled onto another orbit:*

*Not only observing, but participating  
within the alchemical stir of inquiry*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, June 2017)

Standing apart from the rationalist methodology in which I had been schooled, the idea of the paradoxical paradigm of spirituality research traverses a different methodological terrain; one which is instead mapped by a turn towards the contemplative. Of that turn, the map is marked by the inter weaving of ideas - *presencing*; of the *spiritual embryo* that configures our core selves; notions of *transcendence of being*; *alchemical* metaphors for transformation; reflections upon inquiry as *palimpsest*; the aspect of the *silent self*; the presence of feelings as tools which sculpt inquiry; and notions about how knowing is crafted within movement and *flow* instead of stasis. Together such ideas configure a paradigm for my inquiry which departs from the binary and reductionist thinking of rationalism by instead embracing one which is holistic, artful and contemplative; and which embraces the creation within the fullness of its complexity.

In the introduction to Merton's text, *The Inner Experience* (2004), William Shannon, observes how for Merton contemplation did not stand apart from one's life; rather it is life (Merton, 2004, p. viii). Following Merton, the contemplative spirit which

my inquiry seeks is entwined with my narrative - one in which the “summonses to awareness” (Merton, 1966, p. 182) discovers its earliest roots within a childhood narrative. The beginnings of inquiry are seeded within the nascent spirituality of my childhood.

Reading holistic writers such as Palmer (1993), Zajonc (2009), Montessori (1970) and Miller (2010) in tandem with Merton’s autobiographical and contemplative writings nurtured the latter reflection. Of the relation of contemplation to inquiry, I came to ponder how the relation of the contemplative life to inquiry is not simply to *inquiry* abstracted from the life of the inquirer; but rather to the *life of inquiry* in the same way that Merton speaks of the life of contemplation. That is, a life of inquiry which is not separate from how one engages life but is instead continuous with it in holistically, in the same way, that following Merton, contemplation is life (Merton, 2004, p.viii). Following Merton I reflect upon how the *life of inquiry* is the *life of contemplation*.

Thus, while understandings of curriculum in this inquiry are informed by notions of the aesthetical and autobiographical, its transit is also guided by a contemplative presence within it; one which is informed by Hart’s view of the nature of contemplation (Hart, 2004) and Lin et al.’s (2016) methodological proposal for doing research in spirituality studies. In kindred relation to such proposal Merton’s holism expressed though the richness of the contemplative’s inner life resonates well with Lin et al.’s observations of how spirituality research is focused upon the interior domain. Of the nature of the such research Lin et al. observes how it is embodied in spirit and one where the spiritual life of the researcher is intimate with the life of the research project (Lin et al., 2016, p. xi).



Of such nascent methodology Ergas observes an emerging “contemplative turn” (Ergas, 2016, p. 2) in academic research practices; one where contemplative practices are viewed as legitimate tools of inquiry. Standing apart from binary paradigms, Ergas observes how the such turn is critically an epistemic one; that is, one in which the idea of inquiry is reversed (Ergas, 2016, pp. 6-7) and moves from a position of disencased observation to another where to engage in inquiry is also transformative to the life of the inquirer. Of the transit onto this new orbit, my story of thinking about Kant in philosophy school, which begins my reflection, stands in opposition representing the analytical paradigm I had cycled away from.

Reflecting upon my story also returns me to Ergas’ own observation on how Kant has created a restricted narrative within the university and one which is at odds with a different paradigm centered upon spirituality research (Ergas, 2016, p. 7). Ergas’ observations in turn aligning with my own experience; the story of Kant’s third antimony being symptomatic of the narrow pedagogic lens that Ergas speaks of. Unlike my earlier experiences in philosophy school, Ergas invites to ponder a different research paradigm; one which departs from the dualism of subject and object by embracing holism in research. Of such paradigm Ergas observes,

A spiritual research paradigm is not about knowing spirit from without, as an object – that, as stated, or the potential to further advance such knowing, which is already present within current research paradigms. A spiritual research paradigm is rather about looking at the world from the vantage point of spirit itself. It implies accepting a knower who is not confined to reason and senses, but is rather an impregnated being who is also (or fundamentally) spiritual. (Ergas, 2016, p. 6)

Ergas’ metaphor of the pregnant being speaks to the fullness of the spiritual life; one which also resonates with Merton’s observation on how for the contemplative *life is*

*contemplation* (Merton, 2004, p. viii). In tandem with Ergas' observations reflecting upon Merton and writers in the spirituality research paradigm and transformative learning studies sculpted my journey to inquiry. Of that journey, its seed was nested within my spiritual embryo captured within the vision of a child's drawings upon the cosmos; one which in turn constituted a spark for the contemplative journey onto inquiry which followed.

**The Embodied Researcher:  
Pondering the Aesthetical Presence of the Wisdom Body**

*Brother Louis. I ponder subjects that you do not write of. In your writings you do not speak of curriculum, or paradigms or ways of conducting research.*

*Yet, you are present to my journey and I reflect upon these subjects through the lens of your writings.*

*I inquire using shifting languages vibrating between those of the academic and artist. Multiple voices speak the inquiry. What terrain must I cross to reach the place of the embodied researcher? The spectre of the analytical haunts my writings. But it is feeling and the voice of the aesthetic that nurtures them. The old paradigm collides with the new.*

*I intuit ways of knowing other than the analytical, but am unsure of the path. All I am assured of is that I travel an inquiry which feels eternal.*

*Of my doubts, I am reminded of your words which have become my mantra,*

*If one reaches the point where understanding fails, this is not a tragedy: it is simply a reminder to stop thinking and start looking. Perhaps there is nothing to figure out after all: perhaps we only need to wake up. (Merton, 1968, p.53)*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, August 2016)

With the contemplative interest in academic research, the Cartesian paradigm that narrowly associates knowing with the rational is juxtaposed by another where knowing is aligned with the body; one captured through such notions as Ergas' metaphor of impregnated nature of research (Ergas, 2016, p. 6) or Miller's notion of the "embodied researcher" (Miller, 2016, p. 138).

Of the nature of such knowing which is not local to the mind but incarnated with the body Miller, following the Jungian psychologist Robert Sardello, observes how wisdom is an intimate knowing nested within the body (Miller, 2016, p. 133). Within such intimacy the body becomes a seat of wisdom; in turn inviting reflection on the configuration of the *wisdom body* and how the presence of the aesthetical can inform understanding of such configuration.

To ponder the wisdom body expands the discourse of knowledge beyond the terrain of empiricist or rationalist understandings. Of the aspect of the non-propositional within such discourse, for example, researchers in the holistic paradigm such as Palmer (1993), Kabat-Zinn (2005), Miller (2008) and Merton (2004); and others such as Diamond & Mullen (2001) and Eisner (1993) in arts based learning acknowledge its presence.

Of the turn towards the non-propositional and its sometimes ineffable nature, which is reflected in Merton's writings, kindred sentiments are echoed amongst other writers. In the *Myth of Sisyphus* Camus observed "...deep feelings always mean more than they are conscious of saying" (Camus, 1955, n.p.). In a similar spirit, arts based researcher, Elliot Eisner observes,

As Michael Polanyi says, we know more than we can tell (Polanyi, 1966/1983). Thus, not only does knowledge come in different forms, the forms of its creation differ. The idea of ineffable knowledge is not an oxymoron. (Eisner, 2008, p. 5)

In Eisner's account, ineffable knowledge broadly constitutes complex knowledge – one which stands in raw juxtaposition to positivist accounts rooted within analysis, reduction and singularity. Such complexity is not a deterrent to the promise of knowledge. Rather, in Eisner's view, within the ineffable lies the possibility for “the liberation of the term knowledge from dominance by the propositional...” (Eisner, 2008, p. 5).

Eisner's observations have sympathetic resonances with Merton's contemplative prose and the discourses of holistic writers such as Parker Palmer and Kabat-Zinn. In *Raids on the Unspeakable* (1966) when Thomas Merton retells his encounter with the rain, he stands not apart of the rain; rather he is the rain (Merton, 1966, p. 10). To speak of the *world in me* – is to speak, not simply with a propositional voice, but with a voice that is deeply nested within a non-propositional realm in which the being of Merton's voice is the rain.

*Brother Louis. What does it mean to be the rain? Perhaps my question is unfair, because it assumes an answer which is not possible. My question is propositional but you teach us that to know the being of the rain is a knowing which is beyond such question. I transmute your words: To seek understanding one must become unstuck from the conundrum of the propositional.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, August 2016)

I turn to Merton's words in *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1998) where he advises me to be free of knowing; that is, “For the ‘Known’ – to know is not to know but to *be*” (Merton, 1998, p. 175). Elsewhere in his final journal Merton ponders how

knowing cannot be separated from the reality of one's physical being. With strong language he incarnates knowing in the body referencing the thought of the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno who, his text *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1912), argues how philosophy is incarnated in the flesh of the philosopher; and that when the philosopher reasons he does so with his will, body and soul (Merton, 1998, pp. 95-96).

While Merton's words echo the conundrum of the propositional which other writers like Camus, Eisner, and Polanyi ponder in their writings, it is also brings into focus kindred observations by Kabat-Zinn (2005) on proprioceptive knowing. Of embodied knowing which is felt rather than being cognized; of knowing which is outside the propositional, Kabat-Zinn, referencing the work of the neurologist Oliver Sachs, describes proprioception as “ “that vital sixth sense without which a body must remain unreal, unpossessed” ” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 389). For Kabat-Zinn the body is an anchor which is foundational to knowing and identity.

As I reflect upon Kabat-Zinn's notion of the centrality of the body within knowing I return to an encounter with a painting where the visual story is incarnated within the presence of the touch.

*In the painting *The Descent of Christ into Limbo* (1552), the painter Bronzino depicts Christ who journeys to Limbo to bring salvation to those who had died before his crucifixion.*

*The image came into view as I walked the gallery. It drew me towards it. The painting is replete with portraits of figures, which are witnesses to Christ's descent; but also whose eyes looked outside the canvas and gestured onto me. I accept their invitation and approach the painting.*



*"The Touch"*  
Florence, April 22, 2017

*Together with the figures I am present to Christ's journey; but I also notice another narrative in their witnessing which is about feeling. I am stuck by the artist's depiction of hands; and the sense of touch is strong. Hands that are pointing while other hands embrace; hands that pray while others caress; hands that are stretched while others are held close to the chest. The presence of hands in their various depictions infusing the scene with a tactile feeling and one of movement.*

*While the figures are present to Christ's journey, it is also a witnessing which feels embodied within the presence of touch and the spirit of the aesthetical. Christ's descent into Limbo is incarnated with the sense of touch.*

*Reflecting upon the painting returns me to pondering the presence of the non-propositional and feeling in knowing. While we are witness to its conundrum within the propositional world, as Merton's writing suggests, we are also witness to its touch within a different realm of feeling and beauty.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, November 2017)

Together with Palmer and Merton, Kabat-Zinn departs from the binary nature of the Cartesian methodological paradigm; instead guiding us towards another domain where our *being* stands with the way we proceed in inquiry and not apart from it. When we allow ourselves to know as Palmer also observes "...through our other capacities as well – empathy, intuition, compassion, faith" (Palmer, 1993, p. 54) then the way of inquiry becomes situated within our selves and moored by an organic anchor. Inquiry becomes witness to the touch.

Of the construction of such anchor, while it is framed within the capacities which Palmer speaks of, it is also reinforced by the presence of the aesthetical in my inquiry; one formed of encounters with images, reflections on stories and discourses with Merton. Of such encounters being present to Merton's call to his text in *Raids on the Unspeakable*

(1966) and readers in *A Thomas Merton Reader* (1974) became moments of connection within inquiry when Merton's call is heeded and returned. I co-opted his strategy and returned his call; and in turn the internal dialogue which followed became nurturing to the journey of my inquiry and one wherein Merton is engaged not simply as a historical presence but within a different configuration of spirit and holism. With the *return of his call* the binary of methodological inquiry is replaced by another where my inquiry is instead guided by a listening to the subject (Palmer, 1993, p. 98) within a discourse of connection.

Departing from the dualism of rationalist inquiry the spirit of connection travels the contemplative journey; one in which my life as a researcher seeks to integrate with the life of research and aspires towards the contemplative while being nested within the aesthetic.

Of the unity of the aesthetic with the contemplative within a spiritual research paradigm, Ergas observes

Good science representative of such qualitative research, and as I suggest of a spiritual research paradigm as well, will be measured by the extent to which it *inspires* the reader / listener; that is, by the extent to which it touches the individual's own spirit and compels him or her to commit to the further unfolding of spirit and life-meaning. Research thus becomes an *aesthetic experience* that touches a chord, as the spirit of the scientist resonates with the spirit of the reader, with both sharing a moment of meaning that will hopefully linger to the next. Truth in this case remains intersubjective as it is in quantitative research under the postpositivist paradigm. However, its assessment is not based on reason but rather on an attunement with heart and spirit while reading such research. If the research evokes sobs or laughter, touches life, or reflects meaning, then it can be assessed as valuable or good research. (Ergas, 2016, p. 17)



To sob, to laugh, to be touched in ways other than the delimited vision of reason; in ways which are both present to the fullness of being and meaningful and transformative to the life of the researcher underscore a spiritual research paradigm in general and the path of my inquiry in particular. Within such paradigm there evolves a more holistic understanding of the relation of methodology to inquiry; one which is nested within the notion that the life of the researcher is not bifurcated from the life of inquiry; and that the tools we use to cross the terrain of inquiry can be as meaningful to the researcher-artist as the terrain itself. Reading Lin et al. on the notion of the spiritual research paradigm in conjunction with Merton's vision of the life of the contemplative nurtured such understanding of methodology. Departing from the idea of methodology as a research tool, which is necessary to but sometimes viewed as being bifurcated from inquiry, a different understanding of methodology is pondered – one wherein it is engaged artfully in holistic relation to the life of the writer and life of inquiry.

**Chapter Six:           Wisdom in the Landscape:  
                              A Teaching Resource**

While my inquiry has focused in part upon theoretical explorations of Merton's ideas on art and contemplation, the presence of the landscape in his thought nurtured connections with the photographs of Edward Burtynsky. In my encounters with Merton and Burtynsky I was guided by the intuition that within the landscapes that they both pondered there was present wisdom; one which was also enriched by the spirit of the aesthetical which they share.

In Merton the landscape is celebrated as a contemplative space; a refuge from the clamour of contemporary society. In Burtynsky, the landscape is damaged by humanity's intervention upon it and often depicted within the clamour, yet his depictions of it are also contemplative in spirit. While his images depict difficult narratives they also cause us to pause and reflect. As we ponder them, the images draw us in; and invite us to ponder, not only upon our collective toll on the environment, but in addition the connection we have with others in the creation.

My encounters with colleagues at OISE, within seminars when Burtynsky's images were explored, were formative in this regard. While those seminars were opportunities for sharing with colleagues my interest in Burtynsky's images, they were also ones wherein we collectively explored the pedagogical possibilities of his images. Underscoring such exploring was the question: *How can such images support teacher's work?*

In beginning to explore this question I draw upon two seminars in which I was both a seminar leader and participant. The first was a graduate seminar in 2011 when

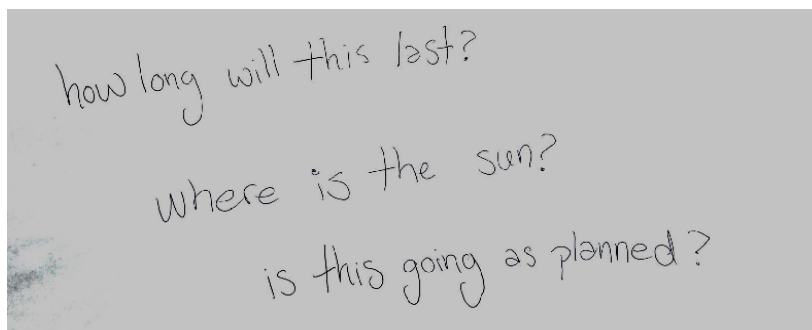
colleagues were invited to reflect upon selected Burtynsky photographs. The second seminar, which also took place in 2011, explored Burtynsky's images within the concept of a classroom gallery.

Reflections upon these events form the basis of my observations upon how Burtynsky's images can contribute to a teacher's toolbox in the field of education for sustainability in particular; while also fostering holistic perspectives in the classroom in general.



Edward Burtynsky  
Shipbreaking #11  
Chittagong,  
Bangladesh, 2000

**“How long will this last?” ..... “Where is the Sun?” ..... “Is this going as planned?”**



These questions were foregrounded by participants in an OISE seminar I led in 2011 on the subject of arts-based inquiry as a methodology in curriculum studies. The students were asked to reflect upon Burtynsky’s photographs of industrial landscapes and record their observations on 11’ x 17” sheets of paper which were then pinned to the classroom wall for shared viewing. With the images and observations acting as starting points a conversation ensued amongst my colleagues and the instructor which traversed a broad range of themes. Extracts of their observations are summarized as follows:

“Global Village”

Education tied to economic agenda

More Injustice. How much have we really progressed?

Loss of individual thought / creativity

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Implications of technology

Language of corporations

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Globalization making world smaller

Who is in control

Environmentalism

Corporatization of cultural, political, economical

Destruction of villages

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Stark Images

Hope?

Power in the art of the photographer

Need art

Question: Could John have found hopeful images on globalization?



Edward Burtynsky  
Manufacturing #18  
Cankun Factory,  
Zhangzhou,  
Fujian Province, 2005

The students' responses to Burtynsky's images invite us to reflect upon how encounters with art within the classroom nurture us to towards contemplations upon the core questions of life (London, 2002, p. 5); or upon our way of being in the world where wisdom resides (Hadot, 2002, p. 220). Of the pedagogical possibilities which are nurtured by such encounters the field of arts based research in curriculum (Eisner, 1991; 2002; McNiff, 2009; Inwood, 2013) acknowledges the role of art in the classroom as a way of probing and understanding experience; a view which is also shared by the holistic learning paradigm (Hart, 2004) in general and education for sustainability in particular (Babiuk, 2004).

While the exercise of sharing an image and reflecting upon it with others within the classroom is a straightforward one, it can also become a rich moment guiding us onto reflections and insights upon our selves and others within the creation we share. In transiting onto such contemplative moments, Burtynsky's images help us. His images are clear and colourful; and easily accessible. Their narratives are seemingly straightforward and engage us easily; but become complicated and nuanced in a gentle way once we begin to ponder them. They draw us in easily; in the image of the factory, the simple yellow line softly guiding us into its narrative. Following Merton, they visually call us onto awareness (Merton, 1966, p. 182).

The power of his photographs to cause us to pause and reflect was impressed upon me during serendipitous encounters with others outside the classroom; in particular in printing shops where I would make copies of Burtynsky's images for classroom seminars I was organizing. I observed that print workers would often pause upon seeing

the images; they were curious to know the story of such images and would engage me in conversation about them.

In the formal setting of the classroom seminar students responded to the Burtynsky's images with observations about globalization, environment, culture, creativity and the power of art. Looking at Burtynsky's images nurtured comments which were global and relational in spirit; and graphical in addition to being textual. Within some of their responses, the figure of the earth is central with observations which radiated about it; depictions revealing a holistic recognition of connection. Looking at Burtynsky's images also evoked feelings amongst the seminar participants with some finding the images too strong. Their feelings were accompanied with soft complaints that I could have "found hopeful images of globalization" ("Student Observations", 2011). Examples of students' responses are included in Appendix A.

Of the power of images in general and Burtynsky's images in particular both to move us and nurture awareness in the classroom, my encounters with teachers and Burtynsky's images have been insightful. Teachers are drawn to them seeing in Burtynsky's images, in particular, tools for nurturing reflection and conversation amongst their students. Following seminars in which Burtynsky's images were used teachers have often requested of me copies of his images.

Others have recognized the pedagogical possibilities of such images for student engagement and reflection in the classroom. Environmental educators, such as Gary Babiuk have recognized in Burtynsky's images a powerful pedagogical presence guiding students in their reflections upon humanity's relationship to the environment (Babiuk, 2014, p.41); one which has been complicated by issues of environmental damage, climate

change and social unrest. Such issues underscore for Babiuk an urgency which threatens our survival; and one which he addresses through his advocacy of an “education for sustainability” (Babiuk, 2014, p. 27). Informed by Miller’s notions of connection, inclusion and balance (Babiuk, 2014, p. 31) education for sustainability is understood holistically and enriched by notions of interdisciplinarity; critical engagement and participation in decision making; and a multitude of pedagogical tools including drama, art, and play (Babiuk, 2014, p. 32).

Reflecting upon Burtynsky’s images support such pedagogic intent. While Babiuk recognizes in Burtynsky’s images a rich resource which can be mined by teachers from Burtynsky’s own website ([www.edwardburtynsky.com](http://www.edwardburtynsky.com)); he also recommends other strategies and resources for teachers interested in education for sustainability. Amongst these, Babiuk recommends writing; such as contemplative journaling and creative, expository or editorial writing as ways for students to reflect upon sustainability (Babiuk, 2014, pp. 37-38). Helpful resources recommended by Babiuk include UNESCO *Education for Sustainable Development* (<http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>) and UNESCO *Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future* (<http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/>). Babiuk’s suggestions follow in the spirit of Susan Schiller’s encouragement of writing as a way of nurturing and “celebrating the connected self” (Schiller, 2014, p. 67). In her book *Sustaining the Writing Spirit* (2014), she offers several exercises for encouraging student writing ranging from reflective writing such as poetry and prose, biographical writing, epitaphs and screenplay writing.

Amongst art educators Babiuk’s recognition of Burtynsky’s work is echoed in the work of Hillary Inwood (2013) who advocates for the integration of art education and



education on the environment. While acknowledging, like Babiuk, the importance of Burtynkys's work, Inwood also views his work as part of a broader group of environmental artists who have much to contribute to the field of "eco-art education" (Inwood, 2013, p. 130); that is, one which draws upon the pedagogies of environmental and art education to foster awareness, creativity and environmental literacy (Inwood, 2013, p. 130). Suggestions for fostering such awareness are offered by Inwood in her examples of "Eco-Art Lessons" (Inwood, 2013, p. 134) which were based upon the experiences of teachers in Toronto District School Boards' (TDSB) Ecoschools program (Inwood, 2013, p. 133). On the basis of her findings, Inwood groups the lessons according to the intended pedagogical outcomes for students' learning of concepts in art education and environmental education. Inwood's website <http://www.hilaryinwood.ca/> includes information on eco-art learning in addition to being a rich teacher's resource on environmental education and art.

Another resource which links well with Inwood's investigation of eco-art lessons is the example of the TDSB's *Island Natural Science School*. Committed to fostering students' interactions with nature, its programs include eco art, investigations into biodiversity, energy conservation and gardening. A helpful teacher's resource can be found on the school's website <http://schoolweb.tdsb.on.ca/islandoutdoor/Programs/Eco-Art>. A school with a kindred spirit is the Equinox Holistic Alternative School; amongst its goals is the fostering of environmental awareness – "earth connections" (Miller, 2016, p. 11) - through outdoor activities. Information on the school can be obtained from <https://equinoxschool.ca/about/>.

The *Natural Curiosity* project, which is affiliated with the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study in the University of Toronto, is another initiative focused on environmental education and whose intent is fourfold; that is, learning which is inquiry based, integrated and experiential and committed to environmental stewardship ([http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/ics/Laboratory\\_School/Environmental\\_Education\\_Initiative\\_at\\_ICIS.html](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/ics/Laboratory_School/Environmental_Education_Initiative_at_ICIS.html)). The program, which is also supported by Edward Burtynsky and environmentalist David Suzuki, fosters environmental inquiry in children through the nurturing of children's curiosity while being enriched with an added focus on indigenous outlooks on environment. A helpful resource guide is the publication *Natural Curiosity 2nd Edition: A Resource for Educators* (<http://www.naturalcuriosity.ca/aboutus.php?m=b>).

The growing interest in education for sustainability has also been recognized by The National Film Board of Canada (NFB). Using the art form of film as a vehicle for nurturing environmental awareness its guide *Films for Change – a pedagogical template for sustainability education* offers teaching strategies, expectations for outcomes and classroom resources. The guide lists films on the environment, amongst them Jennifer Baichwal's documentary *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006). Filmed in China the film explores industry's toll on the environment and is based upon Burtynsky's photographs. *Films for Change* is a rich teacher's resource which can be accessed at <http://www3.onf.ca/sg/100559.pdf>.

While educators have recognized the pedagogical merits of Burtynsky's art for fostering environmental inquiry in particular; and as this thesis has also explored holistic inquiry in general, Burtynsky himself has contributed to educational discourse through his own initiatives. In addition to the *Natural Curiosity* project and his photographic art, Burtynsky has produced an educational guide for his film *Watermark* (2014) which he

made in collaboration with the Canadian filmmaker Jennifer Baichwal. The film explores humanity's relationship with water; one which has been complicated by the imbalance between our demand for water and environmental stewardship of such a vital resource. The teacher's resource offers lessons which are centered about the film and grouped according to pre-viewing, viewing and post viewing activities in the classroom. Activities are wide ranging and include explorations of the water cycle, glaciers, how dams work, farming, mapping, film making and beauty. The guide includes several links to online resources in education for sustainability. The guide can be accessed at [http://burtynsky-water.com/bw/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/WATERMARK\\_Edu\\_Pkg\\_REV\\_FINAL.pdf](http://burtynsky-water.com/bw/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/WATERMARK_Edu_Pkg_REV_FINAL.pdf).

While the exploration of water is central to Burtynsky's film, the activities listed in the teacher's resource suggest that such exploration extends beyond water revealing an expansive and holistic vision. Thinking about water also nurtures reflections upon holistic connection and our relation to others in addition to the environment.

The expansive vision of Burtynsky's photographs and films is echoed in his current work, the *Anthropocene* Project. The Anthropocene describes a new geological period, one that succeeds the Holocene period which began 12,000 years ago, and which is marked by the massive impact of humanity on the earth through such forces as global warming, urbanization and agriculture (<https://theanthropocene.org/experience-anthropocene/>).

The *Anthropocene* Project is multidisciplinary in spirit consisting of film, a book, museum exhibition and Burtynsky photographs. The film is the third film in the trilogy (with *Manufactured Landscapes* [2006] and *Watermark* [2014]) and along with the book and photographs are being developed at present. While the project will not be complete until 2018 Burtynsky has in the meantime created *The Hub*, a web based resource of links on environmental issues in general and the Anthropocene project in particular. *The Hub*

is a useful resource for teachers interesting in environmental education and education for sustainability and can be accessed at <https://theanthropocene.org/blog/>.

Supplementing the educational resources are general articles and videos on Burtynsky's work which offer a rich resource and are accessible online. A sample of some of these articles and videos are as follows.

Selected online articles:

- Adams, James (2013). With Watermark, Burtynsky and Baichwal finally go with the flow. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <https://beta.theglobeandmail.com/arts/awards-and-festivals/tiff/with-watermark-burtynsky-and-baichwal-again-go-against-the-flow/article14145342/?ref=http://www.theglobeandmail.com&>
- Baig, Shaad Ali. (2013). Paradise lost. *Glass*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglassmagazine.com/paradise-lost/>
- Baird, Daniel. (2013). Planet Water: Edward Burtynsky's new film partnership. *Canadian Art*. Retrieved from <http://canadianart.ca/features/ed-burtynsky-water/>
- Bethune, Brian. (2016). The unjudging eye of Ed Burtynsky's camera. *Macleans*. Retrieved from <http://www.macleans.ca/culture/arts/the-unjudging-eye-of-ed-burtynskys-camera/>
- Gambino, Megan. (2013). Aerial views of our water world. *Smithsonian Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/aerial-views-of-our-water-world-6364686/>
- Khachadourian, Raffi. (2016, Dec. 19 & 26). The long view: Photographing environmental destruction. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/19/edward-burtynskys-epic-landscapes>
- Solnit, Rebecca. (2003). Creative destruction. *The Nation*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/creative-destruction/>
- Sooke, Alastair. (2016). Edward Burtynsky: the photographer finding art in rivers of toxic waste. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/photography/what-to-see/edward-burtynsky-the-photographer-finding-art-in-rivers-of-toxic/>
- Wainwright, Oliver. (2016). Edward Burtynsky on his ravaged earth shots: 'We've reached peak everything'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/sep/15/edward-burtynsky-photography-interview>

## Selected online videos:

Burtynsky, E. (2008, April). *Edward Burtynsky: Manufactured landscapes* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2Dd4k63-zM>

Burtynsky, E. (2013, September). *Edward Burtynsky: On an epic scale* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EiuqDHDLXE>

Burtynsky, E. (2013, September). *Where I stand: A behind the scenes look at Edward Burtynsky's Photographic Essay, Water* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmwgqxc-7eY>

Burtynsky, E. & Ewing, W. (2016, February). *Meet Edward Burtynsky and William A. Ewing* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8h6ZI7GgW2Q&feature=youtu.be>

Burtynsky, E. & Ewing, W. (2016, March). *William A. Ewing & Edward Burtynsky on 'Essential Elements'* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABlItSGk2d0>



Edward Burtynsky  
Nickel Tailings #34  
Sudbury, Ontario  
1996

## A Classroom Gallery

With a variety of resources that are available to educators, what strategies can be implemented in the classroom that can be enriched by such abundance? How can we nurture learning using Burtynsky's art?

One strategy is the experience of a *classroom gallery*; one which was explored by colleagues and I in a graduate seminar on spirituality in the summer of 2011. Using Burtynsky's images we endeavoured to create a gallery experience that would nurture reflection; but also one which departed from the way we typically experience art within the gallery.

While gallery experiences are sometimes viewed as binary moments between a viewer who encounters an artwork and the artwork which stands apart from the viewer; we sought to break the binary relation. Departing from such relation was central to the project. We wanted to nurture encounters with art that transcended the binary experience; and instead nurtured some kind of reflective engagement within the viewer. Our group felt that doing so would nurture experiences which were richer and more meaningful. But how would we do that? As we began to ponder our initial question it became underscored by others:

- What strategies can be implemented in our classroom gallery which will foster reflective engagement in the students? What strategies can be implemented which will allow the images to touch us?



Setting up the Classroom Gallery  
2011

- What forms can such encounter with the image take; for example,
  - a student looking at images and then sharing their feelings with colleagues
  - viewing images together within a group followed by group discussion; and presentation of shared observations to the entire class
  - students or groups responding to what they have experienced with reflections which can take the form of written comments or drawings

Our questions led to experiments. With our tools consisting of tables and chairs, windows and walls we experimented with different room configurations. We experimented with how to display images.

As we did not have a strategy yet for putting on our gallery show we decided to think *outside the box*. We cleared the room moving furniture to the side and, at one point, experimented by piling chairs in the middle to see if it offered a strategy for display. Though we did not follow through on such approach; it felt that we had for a moment returned to our childhood as we made the classroom our play pen as we gleefully experimented within it.

Eventually we settled on putting the seminar tables on their sides to create mini walls upon which the images could be displayed. We then arranged the upended tables throughout the room so that visitors to our gallery could meander in front and between the displayed images.

Our arrangement, though did not encourage pausing. We wanted our gallery visitors to stop and reflect upon the images. To encourage this we put another table in





Classroom Gallery  
2011



front with blank sheets of paper resting on them so that our visitors could record their reflections. By doing so, we hoped to create an interactive gallery; visitors would look, pause, and record their reflections. The individual reflections upon Burtynsky's images would in turn be mounted on the blackboard for viewing within a community of shared reflection. Together with their recorded observations, participants in the classroom gallery reflected upon interconnected issues of society; the effects of industrialization; and humanity's toll on the environment.

Teaching resources for exploring art within the classroom or through gallery visits are plentiful and readily available online. In addition to providing visual resources organizations, such as the Art Gallery of Ontario and National Gallery of Canada, provide lesson plans which teachers can follow in their classrooms.

Summarized below is a sample of such resources.

- Art Gallery of Ontario. (n.d.). Activities and resources. Retrieved from <http://www.ago.net/teacher-resources>
- Art Gallery of Ontario. (n.d.). The Boxwood project. Retrieved from <http://boxwood.ago.ca/teachers-and-students>
- British Council and BBC. (n.d.). Art in the classroom. Retrieved from <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/art-classroom>
- Facing History and Ourselves. (n.d.). Resource library / teaching strategies. Retrieved from <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/gallery-walk>
- National Gallery of Art. (n.d.). Lessons and activities. Retrieved from <https://www.nga.gov/education/teachers/lessons-activities.html>
- National Gallery of Canada. (n.d.). Teachers lesson plans. Retrieved from [http://cybermuse.gallery.ca/cybermuse/teachers/plans/index\\_e.jsp](http://cybermuse.gallery.ca/cybermuse/teachers/plans/index_e.jsp)
- Perpetual Salish. (n.d.). Coast Salish in the classroom. Retrieved from <http://uvac.uvic.ca/gallery/salishcurriculum/>
- The J. Paul Getty Museum. (n.d.). Resources for the classroom. Retrieved from [http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/)
- The Met. Curriculum resources. Retrieved from <https://www.metmuseum.org/learn/educators/curriculum-resources>
- The Met. Lesson plans. Retrieved from <https://www.metmuseum.org/learn/educators/lesson-plans>

**Chapter Seven: Seeking the Road for My Journey:  
Concluding Reflections on the Presence of the Personal and  
Aesthetical in Inquiry**

*Nay, I see that God is in all creatures,  
Man and Beast, Fish and Fowle,  
And every green thing from the highest cedar to the  
Ivey on the wall;  
And that God is the life and being of them all...  
(Merton, 1969, p. 66)*

*The cosmologists have determined that the universe is 13.6 billion years old.*

*Every moment of being proceeds from that initial spark – what the scientists call the “big bang” when the light of creation first flickered. From that primal moment, galaxies have been sculpted, stars lit and planets formed.*

*Collectively, with the stars and earth, we have come into being within continuous moments of light. We have transited into creation together.*

*Every moment of being feels within such cosmological lineage and every moment within such lineage is a point of creation within the creation journey.*

*I look through the window surveying the city and forest and ponder how the present moment is nested within such lineage – one which connects us collectively to the creation and primal spark of 13.6 billion years ago.*

*Meditating upon such lineage, I reflect that what is fundamental to such presence are continuous moments of creation formed of light and nested within an aesthetical presence.*

G. Rossini (Personal Narrative, August 2016)

In *New Seeds of Contemplation* Thomas Merton reflects upon the character of the authentic self and asks us poetically how we can expect to arrive at our destination if we travel another person’s path (Merton, 1972, p. 100). While Merton’s question meditates upon the path of the integrated self, it is also a reflection upon the journey of inquiry.

In my reflections upon the relation of art and wisdom Merton's question both introduces my journey and informs its concluding reflections. Between these places of departure and destination the arc of my inquiry was seeded by a sometimes serendipitous but alchemical collection of narrative retellings, childhood memories, conversations with Merton and encounters with art which collectively summoned me onto inquiry.

While forming an arc for my study its transit was also epicyclical in character; one which, following the metaphor of Tycho's astronomy, was perpetually *re-cycling* between the guideposts of such experiences. Such recycling in turn painting an allegory for the seeking of the authentic self which Merton asks of us.

Of such seeking, encounters with art were generative bringing into focus the presence of the aesthetical in the nurturing of the authentic self and wisdom. Reflecting upon Merton's writings upon the aesthetic experience, in such texts as *No Man is an Island* (1983) or *Hagia Sophia* (1974) was central in this regard (Merton, 1983) as were also my own encounters.

Amongst the latter a surprising encounter with Fra Angelico's painting *Mocking of Christ* (Convent of San Marco, Florence, 1440) offered a visual metaphor for the centering of self beyond the clamour that sometimes envelopes us; a vision of the interior life which writers in the holistic paradigm, such as Merton (2014), Miller (2008), Palmer (1993), Zajonc (2009) and Hart (2014) also ponder. Accompanying such encounters were others; in particular, ones with Burtynsky's images of distressed landscapes. Reflecting upon them expanded the discourse of self onto its relation with others and the environment we collectively share. With Fra Angelico's painting, meditations upon

Burtynsky's images in turn reinforcing the intuition, with which I began my inquiry, that the aesthetical encounter offers us the gift of wisdom.

Of such gift the aesthetical experience not only returns us to reflecting upon the character of self, but in so doing also summons us to meditate upon the great questions of life which writers such as London (2002) and Hart (2004) in the holistic paradigm speak of. Carrying us towards wisdom the encounter with art is also a pedagogical one nurturing within the classroom dialogue upon such questions. My experience with classroom explorations of Burtynsky's images was reaffirming of such dialogue; one whose wisdom lessons was sparked by the vision of the artist.

Reflecting upon artist's work, such as Burtynsky's, informs the subject of wisdom as one, which, following Hadot in his text *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Hadot, 2002, p. 4), is both a discourse and one which becomes embodied within our "mode of being" in the world (Hadot, 2002, p. 220). Herein, in turn illuminating the questions of this inquiry about how the artist serves as a conduit guiding us towards Merton's *Sophia* (Merton, 1972, p. 141); and how the imaginal can be messengers of wisdom. The touch of art enriching deeper reflection upon our relation to the creation.

My journey of inquiry was one of epicyclical return to narrative reflections; the presence of the personal in inquiry prevailed and one which in turn reinforced my reflection that wisdom, following Merton, is nurtured from within when we become awake (Merton, 1968, p. 53). The promise of awakening extracted from the magical unity of the personal with the aesthetical. Together, creating an alchemical union from which the gift of wisdom flowers.

From such union, questions emerged onto the relation of art and wisdom; but ones which were also enriched by the return to wonder which was seeded by reflections upon the aesthetical presence within the creation. Of such return reading Miller's *Educating for Wisdom and Compassion* (2006) nurtured meditations upon artists' work and my own reflections upon the aesthetical character of the creation which introduces this chapter; and guided me to another way of knowing which had not been cultivated in my previous studies. His referencing of the thought of Abraham Heschel serving as a spark; in particular a passage from Heschel's text *God in Search of Man*:

A return to reverence is the first prerequisite for a revival of wisdom... Wisdom comes from awe rather than from shrewdness. It is evoked not in moments of calculation but in moments of being in rapport with the mystery of reality. The greatest insights happen to us in moments of awe. (Heschel, 1976, p. 78)

In the spirit of Heschel's reflection Merton, in *The Geography of Lograire* (1969), contemplates the creation and how all creatures within it are with the other within moments intertwined of reverence and rapport. An excerpt from Merton's poem begins this chapter. With Merton we ponder how such reverence is nurtured within the poet's vision. For Heschel the reverence for the "mystery of reality" (Heschel, 1976, p. 78) which he shares with Merton is also a return to wisdom.

For Heschel wisdom resides within the presence of mystery and reverence; an observation which reminds me of the spirit of Merton's writing. Merton extends Heschel's observation by enriching such presence with that of the aesthetical encounter; one which invites us to ponder how the way of the artist conveys us into such presence. Art transports us into the space of awe where wisdom seeds. Of the power of art to awaken us Robert Inchausti in his book *Thinking through Thomas Merton* makes a

kindred observation when he observes how Biblical scripture requires "...a way of reading that changes the person in the act of interpreting the text" (Inchausti, 2014, p. 39).

Inchausti's observation about the transformative character of reading in turn foregrounds the metaphor of the palimpsest in inquiry as a layering of formative presences. In my inquiry those presences were manifested within narrative retellings which collectively seeded the living palimpsest that forms my self; one whose presence within my reflections was enriched by the personal while being interpreted within an aesthetical vision.

In my study, within the alchemical union of narrative and aesthetical, the palimpsest was also layered by the presence of the child; one which gradually foregrounded itself into inquiry within reflections upon my school workbooks. Its "spiritual embryo" (Montessori, 1970, p. 18) informing the arc of my project and one whose presence within it reaffirmed Merton's observation that contemplation does not stand apart from life, but is life (Merton, 2004, p. viii). Its presence also sustaining the dialogical discourse with Merton; its first person strategy for inquiry nurturing reflection while returning me to a place I had known as a child and echoing Gardner's observation on Merton's spirituality about the recovery and integrating of the "Christ child" that is present within us (Gardner, 2016, p. 3).

Reflecting upon the notion of the spiritual child informs the thesis of how contemplative learning is centred about the relationship with one's self (Byrnes, 2012, pp. 36-37); one which in turn guided me towards the revelation that within the "vague fragments" (Merton, 1998, p. 12 ) of my childhood narrative were seeded the beginnings

of my inquiry. With those beginnings was also configured a methodology wherein inquiry, following Palmer, moves beyond a dualistic relationship to the subject of inquiry to another configured within a spirit of connection and dialogue (Palmer, 1993, p. 99). The dissolution of the binary within methodology extending onto the dialogical discourse when Merton calls onto us within his writings and reflection is nurtured within the dialogical return of his call.

A serendipitous but seminal conversation with colleagues at OISE about the relationship we maintain with texts during inquiry brought into focus the holistic character of such methodological dissolution. With Brother Louis the dialogical discourse became a way of penetrating the text; one wherein the binary of researcher and subject of research is replaced by another wherein, following Hart, words are viewed as possessing a vital character (Hart, 2008, p. 236). Of the vitality of words Merton, in *Raids on the Unspeakable* (Merton, 1966, pp. 1-6), spoke of them as his children and, I in my inquiry, as friends.

To speak of the friendship of texts in turn signalled a departure from the methodology in which I had been schooled; one viewed by Arthur Zajonc as the bifurcation of knowledge (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1744) which dominates higher education and echoed in Merton's critique of Cartesian thinking and in my own encounters with the university. To speak of the friendship of texts also marked a contemplative presence in inquiry; while reflecting Ergas' view of the direction of spirituality research in education (Ergas, 2016, p. 2), also acknowledging Hart's embrace of aesthetical approaches to inquiry (Hart, 2004, p. 29) within a spirit of inclusion and welcome.





*John 2017*  
*Looking onto Myself to See Others*

A poet spends his life in repeated projects, over and over again attempting to build or to dream the world in which he lives. But more and more he realizes that this world is at once his and everybody's....

In this wide-angle mosaic of poems and dreams I have without scruple mixed what is my own experience with what is almost everybody else's. (Merton, 1969, p. 1)

It is within such spirit that my inquiry is nested; one in which the turn onto narrative is a turn onto retellings, conversations and encounters with art which were central to reflection. One whose presence configured the palimpsest of my core self; its *SUM*, I Am (Merton, 1972, pp. 8-9) and the source of its “scintilla” (Merton, 1979, p. 9) for reflections upon the artist’s gift of wisdom. Of the touch of art to awaken and guide us towards wisdom, meditations upon Merton’s writings in tandem with the arc of narrative illuminated the road for my journey. Its map, sculpted of the unity of narrative and the aesthetical, serving as my “summonses to awareness” (Merton, 1966, p. 182) from whose call emerges the inner *Sophia*.

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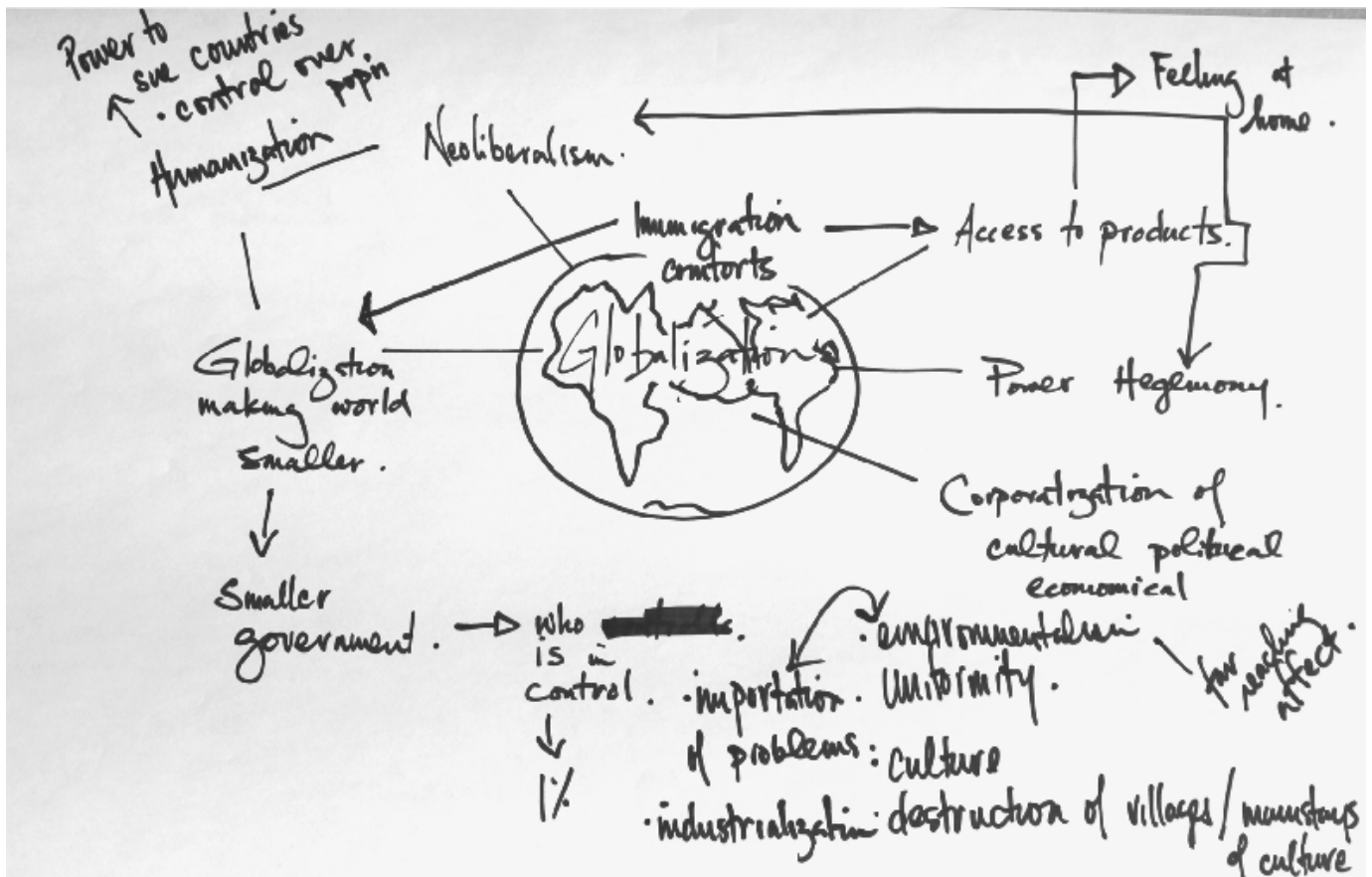
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## Appendix A: Examples of Student Responses to Burtynsky Images

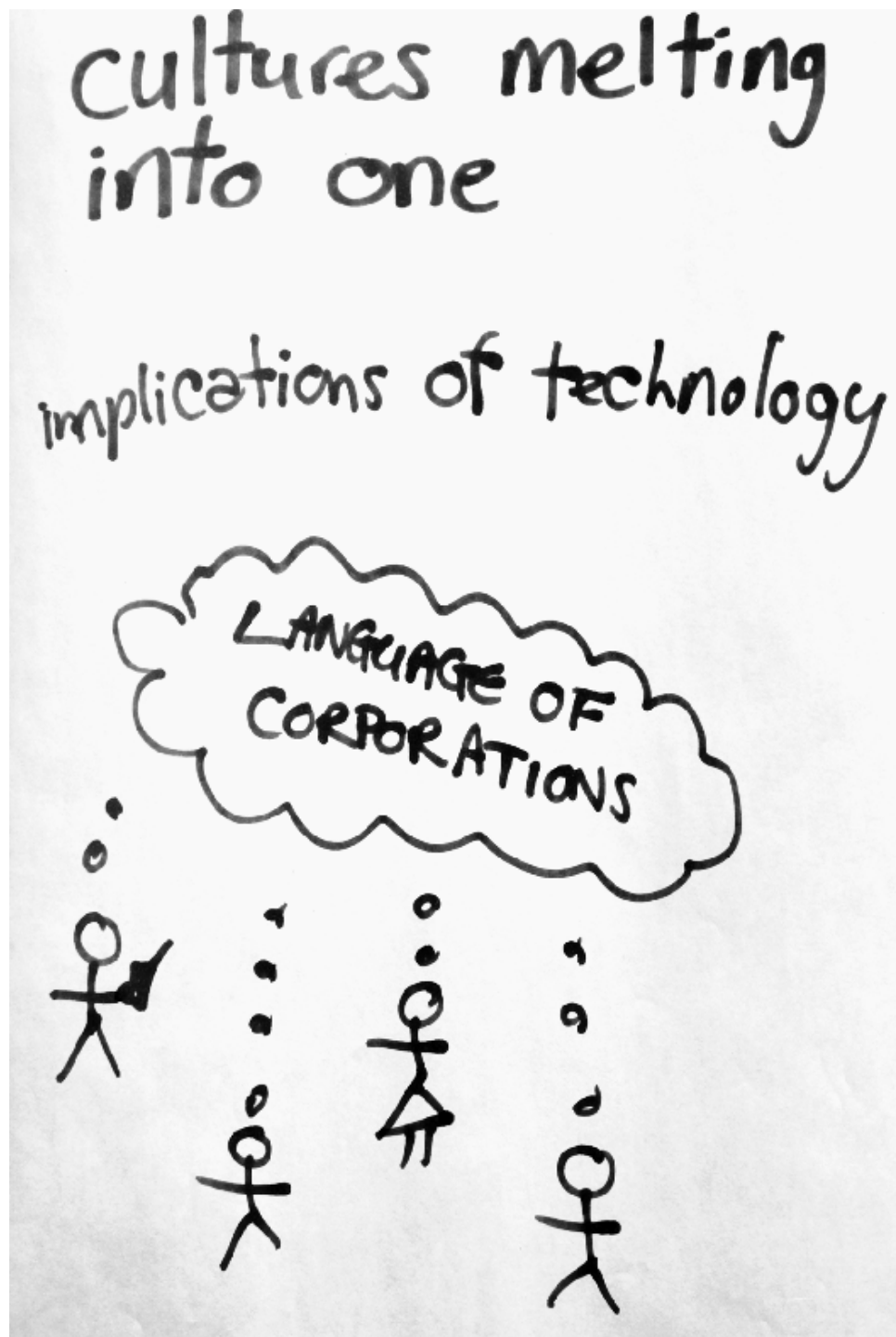
The appendix summarizes student responses to Burtynsky images within the context of a graduate seminar on arts-based inquiry in curriculum studies. The seminar was held at OISE in 2011.



Example of student reflections on a Burtynsky photograph  
December 2011



Example of student reflections on a Burtynsky's photograph  
December 2011



Example of student reflections on  
a Burtynsky's photograph  
December 2011





Example of student reflections on  
a Burtynsky's photograph  
December 2011

## Appendix B: List of Illustrations

The appendix cites artwork included in the thesis and consists of original images created by the author and images by other artists.



Pg. 14

*John 1962,*  
Central Avenue  
Photograph by Unknown.  
Digital editing by G. Rossini.



Pg. 15

Perugino, Pietro. (c. 1494). *Portrait of a Young Man*. Uffizi Gallery. Florence, Italy.  
Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 19

*Beginning Inquiry, My Grade Three Work Book*. Photograph of page from G. Rossini's Grade Three work book. c. 1966.  
Photograph by G. Rossini



Pg. 26

*Orphan Drawing, 1988.*  
Spray Paint on Mylar, G. Rossini.  
Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 30

*Clock Mechanism.* Museo Galileo. Florence, Italy. Photographic detail by G. Rossini.



Pg. 32

*The medieval mandalas of the Baptistery.* Florence, Italy. Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 35

*A Narrow Street in Venice known as a Calle, May 1, 2017.* Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 40

*The "Centered Self"*

Angelico, Fra. (1440). *Mocking of Christ.* Convent of San Marco. Florence, Italy. Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 44

Paolino, Fra'. (1525). *Sacra Famiglia con un angelo e Sant'Agnese*. Museo di San Marco. Florence, Italy. Photographic detail by G. Rossini.



Pg. 48

“*Looking onto Others to See Myself, April 29, 2017*”  
My image reflected in the *Specchio*. (15<sup>th</sup> c.)  
Bottega Degli Embriachi, Bargello Museum  
Florence, Italy. Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 56

Bernini, Gian Lorenzo (1647-52).  
*Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*  
Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome  
Retrieved from:

[http://www.artble.com/imgs/d/a/5/431705/the\\_ecstasy\\_of\\_saint\\_theresa.jpg](http://www.artble.com/imgs/d/a/5/431705/the_ecstasy_of_saint_theresa.jpg)



Pg. 59

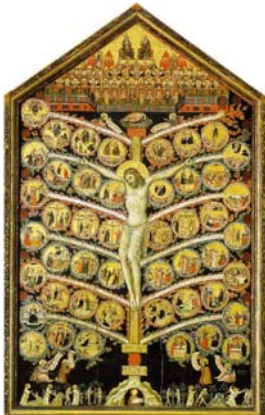
*Sculptor's Chisels, April 19, 2017*  
Restoration Workshop of the Duomo.  
Florence, Italy. Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 69

*The Astronomer*

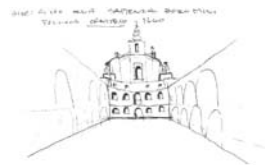
Pisano, Andrea & Assistant. (1341-48).  
*Gionitus, The beginning of astronomy*. The  
 Opera del Duomo Museum. Florence, Italy.  
 Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 80

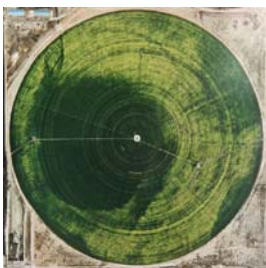
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Pg. 91

Rossini, G. (1986). *Elevation Perspective  
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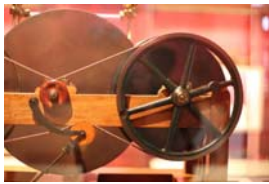


Pg. 92

Burtynsky, Edward. (2012). *Pivot Irrigation  
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*Edward Burtynsky: Essential elements*  
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Pg. 92 Burtynsky, Edward. (2012). *Borromini No.21, 1999* [chromogenic print]. In W. Ewing. *Edward Burtynsky: Edward Burtynsky: Essential elements* (p.49). London: Thomas & Hudson Ltd.



Pg. 98 *Electrostatic Machine*. Anonymous. (c. 1890). *Modified Carré machine*. Museo Galileo. Florence, Italy. Photographic detail by G. Rossini.



Pg. 98 Ghirlandaio, Domenico. (1487). *Adoration of the Magi*, Uffizi Gallery. Florence Italy. Photograph by G. Rossini



Pg. 102 Burtynsky, Edward. (2013). *Navajo Reservation / Suburb: Phoenix, Arizona, USA, 2011* [chromogenic print]. In E. Burtynsky. *Burtynsky water* (p. 53). Gottingen: Steidl; New Orleans Museum of Art.



Pg. 108 Merton, Thomas. (1966). *Drawing*. In *Thomas Merton. Raids on the unspeakable* (p. 177). New York, NY: New Directions.



Pg. 108

*The Dissolution of Category*

Image based upon:

Hirst, Damien. (2017). *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable*. Palazzo Grassi. Venice Italy. Photographic detail of exhibit by G. Rossini.



Pg.113

Vecellio, Tiziano. (1538). *Venus*. Uffizi Gallery. Florence, Italy. Photographic detail of painting by G. Rossini.



Pg. 124

*A Courtyard in the Convent of San Marco*. Florence, Italy. Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 130

Bronzino, Agnolo. (1551). *Portrait of Maria de' Medici*. Uffizi Gallery. Florence, Italy. Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 131

*A Cosmological Conversation between  
Copernicus, Aristotle and Ptolemy*

Galilei, Galileo. (1632). *Front piece.*  
*Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del*  
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*Chief World Systems [trans.]).* Biblioteca  
Medicea Laurenziana: Giovanni Battista  
Landini. Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 134

*The Journey*

di Bonaiuto, Andrea. (1365-1367). *The*  
*Christian Doctrine.* Spanish Chapel.  
Photographic detail by G. Rossini.



Pg. 157

*Transformation, April 21, 2017*

di Lodovico Buonarroti, Michelangelo.  
*Atlas Slave.* Galleria dell'Accademia,  
Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 159

*Child Mind, Planets and Comets' Tails*

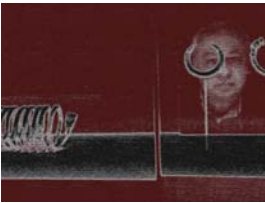
Photograph of page from G. Rossini's Grade  
Four Work book. C. 1966. Photograph by G.  
Rossini.





Pg. 162

Bronzino, Agnolo. (1552). *The Descent of Christ into Limbo*. The Basilica of Santa Croce. Florence, Italy. Photographic detail of painting by G. Rossini.



Pg. 178

*Pentimento, May 1, 2017*

Image based upon:

Hirst, Damien. (2017). *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable*. Palazzo Grassi. Venice, Italy. Photograph by G. Di Rezze. Digital editing by G. Rossini.



Pg. 192

*Monk's Cell, Convent of San Marco, May 4, 2017*. Photograph by G. Rossini.



Pg. 207

*Merton's "Vague Fragments"*  
*Building the Big Picture, 1966.*

Photograph of page from G. Rossini's Grade Four work book. c. 1966. Photograph by G. Rossini.

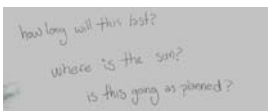


Pg. 219 “The Touch” – Florence, April 22, 2017

Imaged based upon:  
 Bronzino, Agnolo. (1552). *The Descent of Christ into Limbo*. The Basilica of Santa Croce. Florence, Italy. Photographic detail of painting by G. Rossini.



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Pg. 225 *Student reflections*. (2011, November 15) Graduate Seminar on Arts-Based Research– Introduction to Qualitative Inquiry in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, University of Toronto, ON.



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Pg. 246 *John 2017*  
*Looking onto Myself to See Others*. Guggenheim Museum. (2017). Venice, Italy. Photograph by G. Di Rezze.