

# Without Words

## Breathing Within the Echoes of Circular (Un)Certainty

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Volume 7, Number 2, 2022

Poetic Inquiry for Synchrony & Love: A New Order of Gravity

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1094864ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29665>

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Publisher(s)

University of Alberta

ISSN

2371-3771 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

MacKenzie-Dawson, S. (2022). Without Words: Breathing Within the Echoes of Circular (Un)Certainty. *Art/Research International*, 7(2), 415–438.  
<https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29665>

### Article abstract

Our ways of seeing, of being, of knowing in the world are shaped by relationship. These relationships reflect the complex dynamic that exists as we navigate between the living layers of human nature, desire, loss, connection and disconnection, certainty and uncertainty. Across the space of this piece, I seek to breathe, to move with observant awareness through emotion and cognition. I want to acknowledge the deep sense of absence that reverberates across my consciousness, an absence that is both spiritual and etymological. This absence reflects the complexity of my subjectivity as a mother, an educator, one who navigates within the narrative of colonization, and a synchronicity of spirit that transcends self. It is through the breath that I find myself in rhythm, connected to the land—spirit, (be)longing with/in (un)certainly. Poetry, prose, and photographs intermingle upon the pages, offering an assemblage of being, of (un)knowing, of breathing amidst (im)permanence. This work creates space for me to better know myself as scholar, teacher, mother—as one who lives upon a stolen, sacred landscape, while creating openings for dialogue, disruption, and praxis.

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## WITHOUT WORDS: BREATHING WITHIN THE ECHOES OF CIRCULAR (UN)CERTAINTY

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**Sarah MacKenzie-Dawson** is Associate Professor of Education at Bucknell University, which sits along the Susquehanna River. She spends her days negotiating between her identities as a mother, artist, poet, partner, teacher, scholar, and introvert. It is the navigation within these liminal and often conflicting spaces that shapes her (re)search.

**Abstract:** Our ways of seeing, of being, of knowing in the world are shaped by relationship. These relationships reflect the complex dynamic that exists as we navigate between the living layers of human nature, desire, loss, connection and disconnection, certainty and uncertainty. Across the space of this piece, I seek to breathe, to move with observant awareness through emotion and cognition. I want to acknowledge the deep sense of absence that reverberates across my consciousness, an absence that is both spiritual and etymological. This absence reflects the complexity of my subjectivity as a mother, an educator, one who navigates within the narrative of colonization, and a synchronicity of spirit that transcends self. It is through the breath that I find myself in rhythm, connected to the land—spirit, (be)longing with/in (un)certainty. Poetry, prose, and photographs intermingle upon the pages, offering an assemblage of being, of (un)knowing, of breathing amidst (im)permanence. This work creates space for me to better know myself as scholar, teacher, mother—as one who lives upon a stolen, sacred landscape, while creating openings for dialogue, disruption, and praxis.

**Keywords:** spirituality; landscape; circles; breath; poetic inquiry

We speak within the echoes of longing, across the cavernous landscapes of “this human-made world of things and structures [that] stands as a facade between nature and us and provides a sense of permanence and objectivity” (Meyer, 2010, p. 85-86). The spirit withers in such a space; life cannot exist within certainty.

I live with/in echoes  
 of time's breath  
 where knowing sits upon  
 truth(s)  
 precipice  
 riddled  
     absence  
 rustling the leaves  
 of my intention  
 Muddled brokenness  
 forgotten amidst, among  
 resonance,  
     reverberations across consciousness  
     knowing and (un)knowing  
     body, heart, spirit, breath  
 I am  
 here  
 breathing,  
     breathing  
         and walking  
         upon land,  
     landscape  
 My feet  
 grounded upon  
 earth  
 My body, my heart  
     waiting,  
         wanting,  
     wondering,  
     wandering

I have spent most of my life living beside the water, along the Hudson and Susquehanna Rivers. I have watched their motions with wonder, feeling myself a part of the water, the landscape, the rhythms of time. When I was away from the water, I often found myself feeling disconnected, overwhelmed by a feeling I could not name. Perhaps my connection to the water, to the land beside the water, reflected a spiritual longing for

some way of knowing—being outside the daily isolation and personal disconnection I felt in my life. I remember as a young child spending hours talking to the girl in the mirror, desperate to be seen, to be heard. When I stepped outside the house, regardless of where my family was living at the time, I always knew I could return to the water, to the land beside the water, and that yearning for acknowledgement would dissipate as I became a part of something greater than myself, greater than the moment. I felt connected, across space and time, and I wanted to know what it was/who it was that I was connecting with. I yearned to know more about the Iroquois, Susquehannock, and Lenni Lenape Peoples who had lived beside these waters. My favorite place to visit, when I was younger, was the New York State Museum, in particular the Iroquois exhibit, where I could spend hours, just watching and looking, listening to the sounds, and wondering what life was really like for the people who had known this land long before I had been there. I was navigating, trying to make sense through a settler's lens—the lens of the colonizer—and while the narratives they offered provided me with terms and translations, I wanted to know more, to know outside definition and translation. My body-mind-spirit was overwhelmed by an ecological longing that I felt, but could not articulate.

Marrow wakes  
     deep hearted breath  
 that stirs  
     the spirits  
 of what  
 I am  
 not

In my early years of teaching, I would often invite my students to ditch their history textbooks, to seek stories outside the traditional narratives of what was, narratives bound within the neoliberal spell of logic, where truth exists outside of context (Latremouille, 2020). I wanted more for my students, for the world, for people, and time and space. As a mother, this desire continues but with a greater sense of urgency as well as purpose. It also continues sometimes buried beneath a shroud of disappointment in myself, for what I have failed to do as a mother. As my young daughters tell me they are bored, are busy playing on their tablets, or are enjoying the recent toy I have bought them, I worry about the messages I may be sending to my children, and I know they deserve more.

May your breath dance  
 between whispers  
     where wind, water, landscape  
 eloquently intertwine

with spirit  
 with/in and beyond  
 universal knowing

The ecological longing I felt has grown as I become more aware of my desire to connect to something greater than myself, and I imagine a future for my children where they know wholeness and love, where they become part of a greater intelligence, “knowing that the beginning is still *here*...knowing that it never left...know[ing] the refuge, safety, and sanity of returning to forever. Of forever returning. And of returning forever” (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 374) a part of a living circle of creation and spirit, nature, body, and breath. In being a part of, I want them to also know who has been lost, what has been lost, to be conscious of how they sit within the narratives of colonization, narratives that silence the deepest kind of knowing— a knowing that breathes “...in a language without words” (Sheridan, 2001, p. 204). I struggle with this yearning—the desire I have for my children, conscious of my own positionality as a white woman, living upon a landscape of erasure, where my understandings live ambiguously between the lines written in the language of colonization, lines that tell me I must find the words.

As a mother, teacher, scholar, partner—as a person living in this world, I often struggle to find my place, a sense of belonging or connectedness amidst the contradictions that exist between linearity and logic, love, ambiguity, and justice. hooks (2000) suggests that “the heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be” (p.33). The way it is, is not certain, instead, it is a reflection of a shared, imperfect humanity. We love, by becoming present to this humanity; mindful amidst, in tune with our breath and one another, in tune with the Earth-Creation that speaks to us. This is a way of being, of spirit, of truth; not a truth of definitions but a truth of liminality and reflection—a sacred truth. Poetry as a way of knowing disrupts certainty, bringing us into relationship with the present, the subtle resonances of understanding that speak to us across time, in time, and beyond time. Poetry creates space for an encounter, knowledge becoming what Thomas (2004) embraces “as a sequence of transitional movements that are dynamic and fluid [part of a] language that speaks of permanency and impermanency, that resides within a realm of appearances and disappearances—that lurks behind the shadow of meaning” (p. 14). Breath exists within these motions of cognition and feeling, where understanding means moving with/in the (un)known landscape. Leggo (2019a) so thoughtfully reminds us that “to engage with poetry is to live in the heart’s way, to acknowledge the truthfulness of emotion and experience ... we read and write poetry because poetry weaves language in texts that speak to us and move us and tantalize us” (p. 34), animating the spirit, breathing life in/to intellect. We make sense through poetry, not of truth(s) but of being. The poetic story is a shared story of selves reverberating—breathing across space and

time. It is within poetry that I (re)discover myself, “an individual, in the human condition of plurality” (Meyer, 2010, p. 95). It is through poetry that I learn to love, to become present. Even when I have no words, poetry becomes breath, image, heart—it speaks through and with me—a motion of spirit.

It is my intention across the space of this piece to breathe with/in and between the layers that shape our relationship with knowing self and landscape, spirit and time, moving with observant awareness, through the sensual—the visual and textual experience of making sense amidst the conflicting narratives of being and knowing that shape my/our understandings. I engage from multiple positions, as a scholar, mother, teacher, and as one who yearns for connection and deeper (un)knowing, amidst a culture of learning—of being, that situates itself within separation, possession, and anthropocentrism (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006). The purpose of this is to create openings for dialogue, space for being with/in (un)knowing as well as thinking through, and with Creation as a way of praxis. Poetry, prose, and photographs intermingle upon the pages, an assemblage of being, of (un)knowing, of breathing—seeking amidst (im)permanence. The photographs perhaps suggest a reality of sort, yet Sontag (1999) notes, “it is not reality that photos make immediately accessible, but images” (p. 86). Images are not reality, they are reflections of the incomplete, reverberations of stories that exist beyond the comprehension of truth—beyond words, toward the motions of spirit and the movement of time. These motions and movements are not linear, instead they reflect a movement of spirit in relationship—a relationship of be(com)ing where humans and nature enter into a dance of kindredness, what Salmon (2000) refers to as “kincentric ecology,” where “one’s breath is shared by all surrounding life” (p. 1331). It is through our breath—circular, timeless, and present—where we may enter into the synchronous rhythm of being with/out.

### **Amidst (In)consequential Narratives**

My eight-year-old daughter came home the other day with a study guide, providing all the information she should know about the Indigenous Peoples, the school’s curriculum claimed, who once engaged upon this landscape making their life together, a space once open, where our home now sits. Together we reviewed the guide, and it was clear that she had acquired the knowledge that was expected. After the review, she nonchalantly tossed the paper aside, confident in her ability to pass the test. But I wondered, as her mother, as an educator, what it was that she was really learning/losing in those definitions. My body pulsing, with a sense of longing, I looked at the guide, silently caught between grief, shame, and anger. There is violence that exists in claiming truth, of failing to acknowledge the depth of absence, of failing to acknowledge what we do not know. In education, we are too often disassociated from

the complex realities of the past but also the spacious possibilities of being present with/ in the world, of (un)knowing in relationship to the landscape, in relationship to the vastness of Creation. I grieve within a space of linearity where time cannot breathe between the suffocating lines of definition. Sheridan (2001) reminds that “the spirits need our help so that they can return to places they belong to. And so these healthy places can sing the stories of themselves again, stories that are as much their own as our own birthright to hear and learn to sing again” (p. 198).

The Iroquois Indian Study Guide  
upon my kitchen table  
tells someone’s story  
defined  
words reflected  
logically  
they were  
hunters, fisherman, farmers  
they lived  
in the Eastern Woodland region  
where summers were hot and winters mild  
they grew  
crops—beans, pumpkins, corn, squash  
they called  
the corn maize  
they wore  
animal fur and deer skins  
the woman,  
moccasins, braids in their hair, long wrap-around skirts, blouses, and fur robes  
the men,  
feathered hats and mohawks, shirts and breechcloths,  
You will need to list three for the test  
they sheltered  
    in long houses,  
survived  
by relying on the resources of nature  
timber and wood, water and soil  
This is what  
you need to know  
My heart screams  
no  
    Knowing situated  
caught in the tight grasp

of “another dehumanized narrative,  
 where the destruction ... is justified and explained  
 by ... unacceptable behavior” (Beisaw, 2012, p. 367)  
 merely another  
 language of accuracy  
 silencing breath,  
 spirit, body, and landscape  
 connected

The study guide speaks to definition, to certainty, to claiming what we cannot—what we should not know. I am overcome by emotion and yearning for what I cannot name, layers of spirit, of self, of truths; longing for relationship—for myself, my children, to know something beyond the language of explanation. As Leggo (2019b) understands, “we are part of vast network of connections and interconnections, all ecologically sustained in rhythms and memories and hopes” (p. 60), that breathe in synchronicity through time and space, bodies and land, water and spirit. I live upon a landscape where beauty and loss echo (in)consequentially amidst a grief etched with the markings of aporia and desire, presence and shame; beside a river whose name reflects a people—spirits gathering, sharing, loving, living, belonging until they were/they are forgotten—defeated, extinct, absorbed into the Iroquoian people (Eshleman, 2000). Our mind-body-spirit yearns to know, to connect to a greater consciousness, to “return fully to being what we actually are, members of the forest and its spirits” (Sheridan, 2001, p. 198).

I do not have the words for my daughter,  
 they were,  
     they are  
 this landscape we live upon

“As human beings we belong to the world long before birth. That is, each of us is born into the course of a larger human story and existing timeline, place, culture, and family” (Meyer, 2010, p. 85).

Our breath resonates  
     across space and time  
 amidst longing and loss  
 Love does not define  
 Truth does not exist      with/in definition  
                                 nor the names given to us  
     by another

The loss is palpable, it is important, it is breath, humanity, it is a loss of sel(f)es, but also a reminder of our connection, to time and space, body and landscape. Good



Feather (2021) offers, “all life is but a fractal of ever-expanding and multidimensional concentric circles within circles, collapsing and replicating in a never-ending story of birth and rebirth” (p.17). I am reminded by Leggo and Good Feather, that it is not certainty but connection—love—that opens the space for learning to be with/in the (un)known.

We begin with the land. We emerge from the earth our mother, and our bodies will be returned to earth. We are the land. We cannot own it, no matter any proclamation by paper state. We literally are the land, a plant. Our spirits inhabit this place. We are not the only ones. We are creators of this place with each other. We mark our existence with our creations. (Harjo et al., 2020, p. 1)

I do not have the words—my heart/spirit muddled, my thoughts entangled with absence and (un)knowing, yearning for a place of belonging—for myself and my children, for the stories and spirits lost or ignored.

### Figure 1

#### *Diluted Echoes*

My eyes linger,  
     branches circle  
         consciousness  
 Patterns  
     become pieces  
 that make  
     no sense  
 upon the moment  
 I hear  
 the water,  
 my breath  
     shallow in the stillness  
 of a broken beckoning,



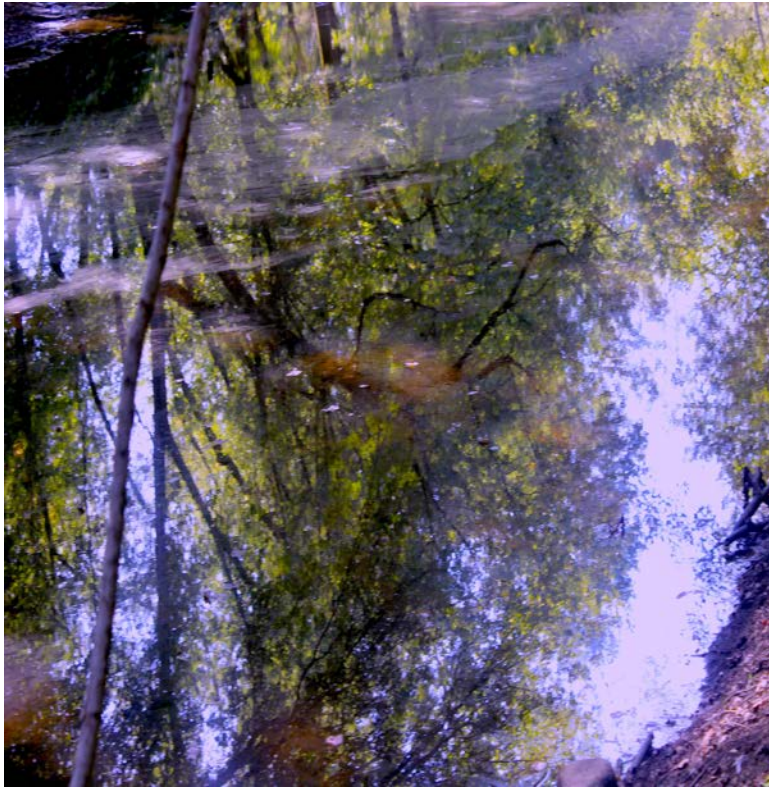
Our people were canoe people. Until they made us walk. Until our lakeshore lodges were signed away for shanties and dust. Our people were circle, until we were dispersed. Our people shared a language with which to thank the day, until they made us forget. But we didn't forget. Not quite. (Kimmerer, 2015, p. 33)

with/out  
     my heart reaches  
 toward the murmurs of time  
 where spirits linger  
     not forgotten

Even within the brokenness, the beckoning, the yearning of spirit, I am reminded “longing and belonging are fused within a circle” (O’Donohue, 2009, p. 12). It is here, within the circle, where our brokenness may open revealing that “the dust holds your body, but upon the earth your name will not end” (Eleazar, 2020, p. 19). We breathe the air upon the landscape, a reverberation of spirit that never ends, love that never ceases—even amidst the absence of words or memory. As Meyer (2010) reminds, “we belong to the world long before birth,” (p. 85) “we all share otherness with everyone and everything there is” (p. 88). I wonder what might happen, if, instead of asking my daughter to memorize the terms, definitions, the facts about a Peoples lost, instead of testing what she knows or remembers, the school invited her to become present upon the landscape, beside the water. I wonder what she might find, might feel, might come to (un)know.

### Echoes Upon the Landscape

As I think about the study guide, about the messages it communicates, I struggle to create openings for (un)knowing, to disrupt the narrative. I do not have the words to help my daughter know the truths of the Peoples whose breath echoed across the landscape, whose feet wandered upon the earth, along the water. I cannot know the stories of the people of the landscape, they are stories both absent and fragmented—stories without words that reverberate, a confluence of ambiguity, humanity, emotion, survival, earth, and water. I return to the land, the water, to listen, to feel time and nature’s breath upon my body-spirit-mind, to (re)discover. “Creation’s authentic qualities embodies *what is* and *was* and *what can be* in a cycle that is always returning to sacred time’s *forever*” (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 368). Like Latremouille (2020), “I recognize that every possible reaction arises from *somewhere*, welling up from deeply entrenched myths, fears, insecurities, and disconnections from deeper ways of knowing and living in the world” (p.1544). I am bound by both the dysfunction of language and the lens of anthropocentrism, yet, at the same time, the landscape calls my spirit into relationship.

**Figure 2***Survival's Long Yearning*

I have not forgotten  
     you  
         who echo  
         across  
         memory  
 mind, body, heart,  
         spirit  
 I imagine you,  
 you I do not know,  
 myself,  
         one I may never  
 know,  
 sharing this space  
 breath  
 landscape  
         waiting,  
         living, breathing  
         beside the water

Hirschfield (2008) offers, “something unknowable is always present in a life, just beyond what can be perceived and comprehended—yet that something is as much a part of the real as any other stone amid the raked gravel” (p. 10). It is breath that returns us to the present, the (un)knowable, echoes of time and space, experience and people; breath that returns us to sacred connection. Good Feather (2021) reminds, “Each of us is a sacred space through which every part of the universe flows to offer itself for reflection and to offer answers, perspectives, and meaning to our lives” (p. 17). We are land and water, living reverberations of time (un)known, situated with/in the (im)possibility of (dis)connection.



### Figure 3

#### *Breathing through Fragments*



Grief washes over me,  
 dirty with waters of my own yearning,  
 shame  
 within absence  
 Absence of story,  
 stories,  
 storied people,  
 nomads negotiating upon  
 a landscape  
 where my  
     tears  
     echo survival's longing,  
 within the deep grooves and root beds  
 where bodies move along water,  
 ghosts

seeking  
 themselves,  
 myself  
 waiting,  
 watching,  
 Voices echo  
     even in  
         absence  
 the heart grasps,  
     spirit gasps  
         for breath  
 within violent current of truth  
 Willowing, watering words  
 intangible  
 breath, life, being  
 Fissures of self  
 held in a chasm of faint fictions  
 Selves diluted,  
     treading through the waters  
 of delusion  
 Runny and worn,  
     faint  
     to the world,  
 to one another  
 Breathing alone,  
 we are (dis)connected,  
     held together  
 in subtleties of language  
     fragmented  
     our being, our breath, our words,  
 lost and lingering

**Figure 4**  
*Whispers of the Ambiguous*



We exist within the broken spaces of ambiguity and aporia, vibrating upon a circle of breath. When we learn to breathe, becoming mindful in our actions and present in our being, we may become aware of the echoes that exist within our ruptured being, echoes that reverberate across space and time, upon the historical landscape within and between ourselves. Krishnamurti (1953) suggests, “life is pain, joy, beauty, ugliness, love and when we understand it as a whole, at every level, that understanding creates its own technique” (p. 18). It is here where we may learn to love self, other, landscape, and story, and it is here where we may begin to recognize how deeply connected we



are within (un)certainty, within the (im)perfectness of our being. “The choice to love is a choice to connect—to find ourselves in others” hooks, asserts (2000, p. 93); however, as Leggo (2009) so eloquently reminds:

The story of love is always a tangled story because desire knows no boundaries, has forgotten the beginning of the story, and can never find the end. The story of love is a story that we can never get right because every right turn remembers every left turn, all the turns left, traced indelibly in desire and memory and hope. (p. 147)

Perhaps that is all  
                   we have  
       uncertainty of story  
 Lingering iterations of  
 ego  
 tripping  
       over (im)possible  
 longing,  
 living  
       upon landscape  
 Living  
 with and in and as  
 a part  
 of earth  
                   mother

**Figure 5**  
*Patterns of Stillness*



Our bodies know that they belong; it is our minds that make our lives so homeless. Guided by longing, belonging is the wisdom of rhythm. (O'Donohue, 2009, p. 3).

A shadow  
 strikes water  
 Circled etches of reflection  
 take flight  
 and in light  
 for a moment,  
 brief,

fleeting,  
slow  
like the eagle perched  
upon the dead tree branch  
above  
    waiting  
I see myself  
wrapped  
in the gentle cloak  
of earth,  
where words  
become tangled within  
the violently tender breeze  
of being  
light and shadow,  
memory and moment  
body and landscape  
connected

I find myself caught within an ontological chasm, lost without words. Yet I am reminded by Salmon (2000) that while “words shape thought...thought is an expression of spirit” (p. 1331), spirit breathes through the body, the landscape—circling our knowing and being. The words I seek do not exist within colonial definition, instead they breathe across time and space, fluidly upon the landscape, “sentient entities that directly participate in the world...not the exclusive property of people [but] a common language of the Earth...once spoken by all beings” (Sheridan, 2001, p. 199).

Language

like water

ebbs across creaking

consciousness

of truth

where patterns are etched upon

mud,

dried into land

or washed away

Nature of flow,

of being,

of truth

We are of

earth

water,

wind

It lives in us

as we create etchings across

landscape

Brokenness,

and breath

situated in echoes

silent,

silence yearning

toward feeling,

connection,

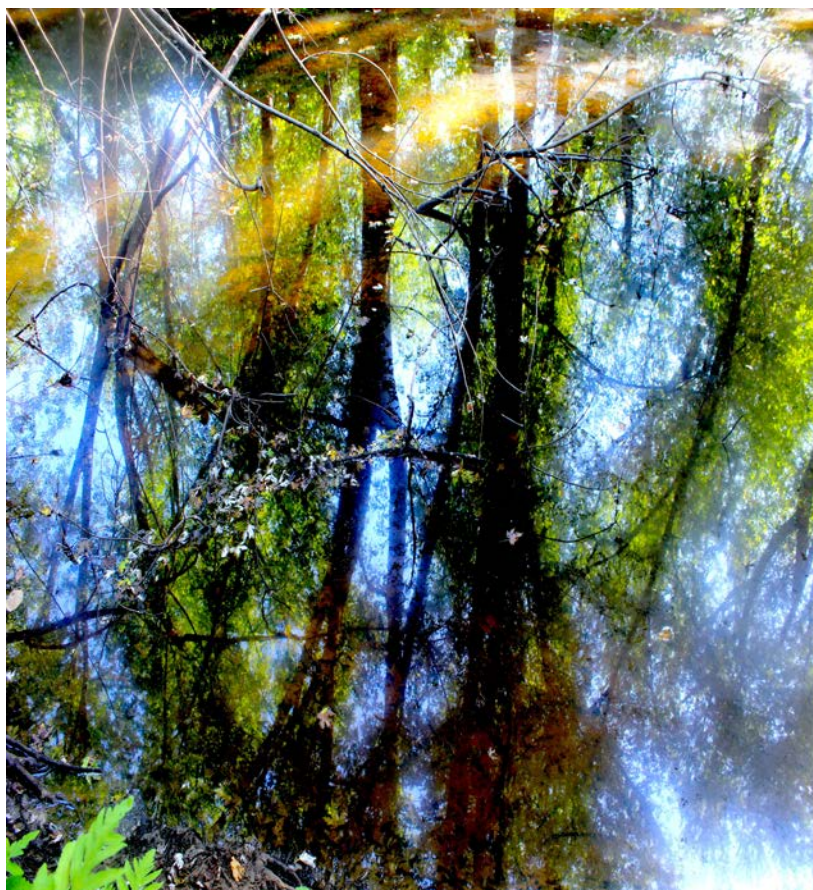
being,

breath and body

open

**Figure 6**

*Color of Absence*



The words I seek are not bound by language, rather they live in synchronous rhythm, in tune with time, connected—bodies and landscape living together in spiritual community, spiritual continuity. Like water, connections and truths flow in response to the elements, existing in temporality and lively fluidity. Irigaray (2002) intimates “that humans have lost the capacity that birds have of singing in harmony with the state of the universe, of celebrating nature such as it is in the moment” (p. 57). We have lost our connection with spirit, “with the ancient knowing that each of us is already perfect, whole, and complete, just the way we are” (Good Feather, 2021, p. 22). We have lost our connection to breath, to the rhythm of the landscape that whispers our truths.



Cluttering of time  
 where whispers  
 of past  
 sit like shadows,  
     light  
     beyond grasp  
 In their presence  
 truth is not  
     "a priori timeless  
 and fixed" (Irigaray,  
 2002, p. 45)  
 It moves  
     a pendulum  
 Self  
 and nature  
     shift in tune  
 with the rhythm  
 of breathing  
 Self  
 and nature,  
     shift in tune  
 with the rhythm  
 of breathing seasons  
 universe,  
 connected in living  
     stillness,

**Figure 7**  
*Beyond Grasp*



Words bombard my consciousness. I hold my breath seeking certainty. It is not without good intention, to seek the known, but it is born out of fear. I cannot hear amidst the cacophony of certainty's desire. Yet I am reminded by the words of O'Tuama, "sometimes the story we tell about the place we are...is a story we try desperately to believe because the truth feels too hard to face" (2015, p. 22). I cling to the words, even as I breathe upon the landscape, seeking truth I evade vulnerability. Flesh and bone and spirit, I am "kindred with ocean and tree and sky" (Tippet, 2016, p. 57), yet I am afraid to come home, to enter into relationship within the silence, to hold my space outside language. I am afraid to (un)know, to move into that embodied way of knowing that, as Thomas (2004) suggests,

involves a complex interaction between outer world experience and inner personal knowledge. It requires a multilayering of perception derived from shifting between insideness to outsideness, from an inner glance to outer participation, from exterior engagement with the world to interior reflection. (p. 236)

**Figure 8**  
*Earth Gathering*

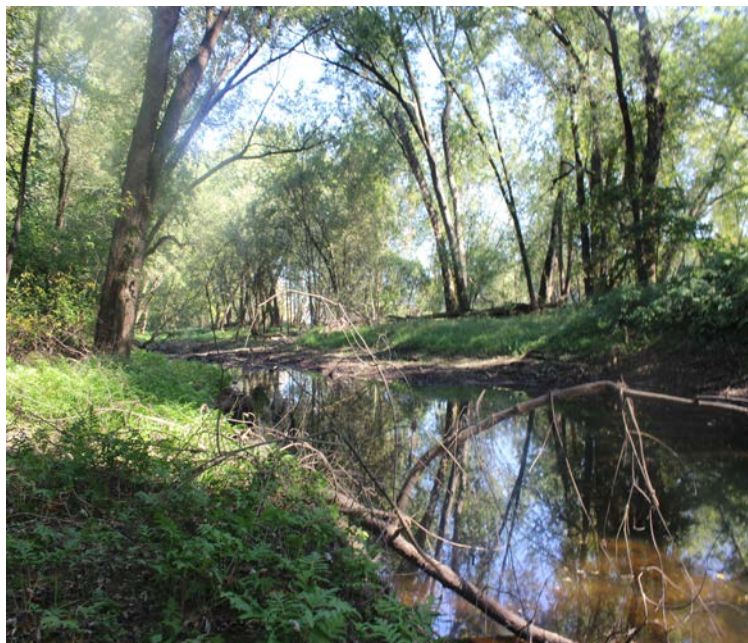
The ground is still  
                   where leaves have  
 scattered  
 Lonely within the soft  
 lullaby of the cicadas  
 call  
 Cycles  
 of living  
 Living and dying  
 Dying and living  
 Human  
               body, mother  
                           Earth



gathers us in her arms,  
 breathing  
 love

I cannot know  
           Without love  
 I cannot live,  
 without breath

My body exhausted, I walk carefully between the fallen limbs, afraid to fall. I cling to the words I do not have, breathing within their absence. I want to listen to the music of the space, to feel its ragged softness beneath my feet, the pungent aroma of seasons shifting. I want to breathe, to experience the wonder of becoming present with/in the living stillness.

**Figure 9***Wading Light*

Her beauty inundates my  
consciousness  
Etchings of anticipation  
burden and wonder  
Her once vivid colors  
muddled  
I can no longer  
see,  
breathe  
amidst  
the weary negotiations  
of spirit-self  
wandering

I am struck by the intensity of my own loneliness. Each breath opens me to something larger than what I thought I was seeking. “Life is fluid, evanescent, evolving in every cell, in every breath. Never perfect. To be alive is by definition, messy, always leaning toward disorder and surprise” (Tippet, 2016, p. 67). Past and present merge, and I wonder whose truth it was/it is that I have been seeking. I am reminded of the words of Irigaray (2002) who offers:

It is not, therefore, a questioning of uttering a truth valid once and for all but of trying to make a gesture, faithful to the reality of yesterday and to that of today, that indicates a path toward more continuity, less tearing apart, more interiority, concentration, harmony—in me, between me and the living universe, between me and the other(s), if that is or becomes possible, as I hope it is, given respect for the living universe and its temporality. (p. 22)

This, I believe, is where love exists: in those spaces of being present upon the land, vulnerable through sense and breath. We are body-mind-spirit-breath, living upon a landscape of temporality—waiting. This waiting is an act of vulnerability that calls on us to be mindful, open to our own (im)perfection and (un)knowing, to our brokenness across space and time, with/in and as a part of nature.

Creation speaks

sacred spirit  
in communion

Language fails me, yet spirit holds me softly upon the landscape, where water and time, earth and body are one.

### **(Re)Turning Toward Stillness**

When I was a little girl, I awoke to a circle of angels surrounding my bed. They reached out to me, and I was horrified. I remember the colors, the gentleness of their caresses, and my intense fear of being taken away from what I knew. I felt my body rise, myself disconnected, and I wanted desperately to return to my home. As I reach the (in)conclusion of this piece, I wonder—what does it mean to be home? As a child, in that moment, I yearned for comfort, for the embrace of my mother and father, the feeling of the blanket, but I also remember the dark sky outside my window, branches moving softly in the late evening breeze and a feeling that, even in my fear, I was a part of something more, a something that lived outside language, beyond words.

As I think about my daughter, about the study guide of truths and definitions that reflects an educational “system that divorces us from our hearts and bodies and neighbours, from humanity and animality and embeddedness in the world we inhabit” (Jenson, 2004, p. 42), I wonder how I might protect her from the violence of explanation/definition that lives, both insidious and innocent, within curriculum. The landscape brings me back to my breath, into my body-mind-spirit, connected and aware of the vastness of nature and humanity, and, for a moment, I realize we live with/in definition, but that is not all there is. I find solace in the words of Foerster (2021), “I find you nowhere that is here or there” (p. 38). This place of nowhere is the place where breath moves between and across time, a sacred space, where we might become present beyond the words and into the rhythm that speaks of shared and separate and circular knowing.



What whispers  
reciprocity  
between self and time  
Spirit breathes through  
the body—earth  
myself  
mother

    This place  
old soul; here  
circular, synchronous, subtleties  
meet and mingle  
where  
landscape speaks,  
black walnut  
beech  
chestnut—  
dusted spirits of  
    momentary memory  
like vespers through the limbs  
beside the water, upon the land

    This etched landscape of living and  
dying  
present and past,  
body and earth  
here  
where time and space  
may break  
and peach becomes our breath

**Figure 10**  
*Synchronous Vespers*



Sheridan (2001) reminds us that “ecology is a dialogue without words and to recover the ability to return sacred meaning to its rightful place in nature we must understand equally well that the ‘outside’ we call nature and the ‘inside’ we call spirit are ... like ice and water” (p. 195), a part of one another, connected. There are implications embedded across our relationship to the land, the water. How we choose to be in relationship matters, it matters to time, to spirit, to hope. My daughter came home this afternoon, completed test in her hand, 24 out of 24 correct. She passed the test, she knew the definitions, can tell the story. I am happy for her success, but wonder what is lost when all there is, is the language of explanation. Yet I hear the whispers of wind dancing through the trees in our front yard and know that there is more to this story, more to her story. Tonight, I will invite her to step outside the structure of certainty, to

walk with me upon the land beside the water, where she might feel the magical vibrations that live upon the storied landscape, the gentle caress of the air on her skin. Together we will learn to breathe in tune with the rhythm of spirit and time, becoming present to the circles that echo between the stillness that exists in the absence of words.

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