

# Ethical Imagining: Ecofeminist Possibilities and Environmental Learning

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## Abstract

In this essay I explore some of the ways in which nature is known through stories and imagination, with particular attention to the role of ecofeminist narrative for environmental learning and teaching. I wonder how we tell stories that acknowledge other beings as subjects of lives that we share, lives that intersect and are interdependent in profound ways? How do we ensure that these “other” voices are audible and that we co-author environmental stories to live, teach, and learn by? I take up feminist questions of responsibility and accountability for knowledge claims, in order to explore ethical and political issues of agency, vision, and narrative imagination. My contention is that the intertwining of ecofeminist narrative ethics with purposeful attention to developing human imaginative capacities has precious possibilities to offer environmental learning and teaching.

## Résumé

L’auteure explore certaines des façons d’appréhender la nature par le récit et l’imagination, en portant une attention particulière au rôle de la narration écoféministe dans l’éducation et l’apprentissage relatifs à l’environnement. Elle s’interroge sur la manière dont nous racontons des récits qui reconnaissent la présence des autres comme des sujets de vies que nous partageons, de vies qui s’interpénètrent et qui sont profondément interdépendantes. Comment s’assurer de rendre audibles ces « autres » voix et de rédiger en commun des récits environnementaux qui peuvent inspirer notre vécu, notre enseignement et notre apprentissage? L’auteure soulève des questions féministes de responsabilité et de responsabilisation envers le savoir, pour aborder des enjeux éthiques et politiques d’agence, de vision et d’imagination narrative. Elle postule que l’entrelacement de l’éthique du récit écoféministe avec une attention délibérée au développement des capacités

### The Creature

I was wandering outside in my untidy garden this past summer, when the unbelievable blue of a delphinium flower stopped me. At the same moment a very constant thrumming zoomed into my hearing range, and I looked around for the familiar form and flight of a hummingbird. Instead I saw a very furry, tropically coloured, over-sized elongated bee-like creature with hummingbird-like behaviour. Can't be a bee. Flies like a hummingbird, looks like a very furry bee. It proceeded to zoom into the delphinium and sip nectar. Clearly, this was a curious creature, one that defied neat categories and boundaries.

I felt the "ontological thrill of an animal" (Hernstein-Smith, 1999) when I saw that furry bee/hummingbird/moth hybrid. The joy of knowing that this creature exists. The mystery of meeting another expanded my world. Filled with awe at the sphinx moth's proximity to my daily life, with the knowledge that our lives intersected, even if only momentarily there was symmetry between our worlds. Erazim Kohák (1984) has eloquently argued that there is a "sense in which the actual presence at a moment can be the metaphor of the sense of a life" (p. 233). Perhaps arrogantly, I did feel like I had a sense of that moth's life in that one moment between us. I did not constitute that life, but I did meet it. The sensory intimacy, the particularity, the direct embodied experience, and the ontological thrill of that meeting mixed together significantly for me. What, if anything, was reciprocal? The moth may have cared less about my presence.

Later, I felt delight learning from other researchers about what glimpses they had of the lives of clear-winged sphinx moths. As cognizant as I am about the incredible benefits of natural history knowledge for environmental education (Bell, 1997), and of the reciprocity implicit in regarding humans as environmental "fields of care" (Evernden, 1985, p. 47), evoking these conceptions in my students and myself is not enough for me anymore. Desiring to go beyond my own individual wonder, I am also wary. I do not want to get caught vacillating between the poles of modernity's "possessive individualism" and postmodernity's "aesthetic individualism" (McCarthy, 1991 quoted in Payne, 1999). I do not want to abandon individualism all together, I just want to drag it kicking and screaming into the realm of cultural and political relations in environmental education. Just as I have to

coax many of my most ardent students to expand their thinking beyond their own experiences, and to ask ethical, political and epistemological questions of those experiences and desires. dian marino (1997) wisely noted that: “Changing our relationships with each other and our environments is intimately linked to a habit of exploring and revealing assumptions in our everyday acts” (p. 128e). In order to explore these assumptions we need to talk to one another, to be in democratic, reciprocal conversations, and to be unafraid to make mistakes and admit them out loud.

In Tom King’s (1993) wonderful story, *The One about Coyote Going West*, the trickster Coyote makes mistakes while trying to fix the world. In the story, Grandmother tells Coyote about how the first one in the world was Coyote and that she started to make things, to fix the world. Only the first thing Coyote made was a mistake.

Big one, too I says. Coyote is going west thinking of things to make. That one is trying to think of everything to make at once. So she don’t see that hole. So she falls in that hole. Then those thoughts all bump around. They run into each other. Those ones fall out of Coyote’s ears. In that hole.

Ho, that Coyote cries. I have fallen into a hole, I must have made a mistake. And she did.

So there is that hole. And there is that Coyote in that hole. And there is that big mistake in that hole with Coyote. Ho, says that mistake. You must be Coyote.

That mistake is real big and that hole is small. Not much room. I don’t want to tell you what that mistake looks like. First mistake in the world. Pretty scary. Boy, I can’t look, I got to close my eyes. (p. 70)

Coyote is busy thinking about how to get out of the hole and how to get that big mistake back into her head but the mistake escapes (after flattening Coyote) and “wanders around looking for things to do” (p. 71).

The animate mistake and the wise twists and turns to King’s story teach me about humility, humour, the perils of not attending to the world justly, and the potential globalization of havoc. Donna Haraway (1991) has talked ironically about the “world’s independent sense of humour” (p. 199). She suggests that in Western philosophy, ecofeminists have been perhaps the most committed to an idea of a world that is composed of active subjects. I would argue that Neil Evernden (1985) and David Abram (1996), both loosely considered (among other moveable identities) as environmental phenomenologists, have also contributed immensely to conversations about the subjectivity of nature.

So thinking about that moth raises questions for me about agency (the moth’s and mine) and about reciprocal knowledge making. The choices we make and the actions we take on any environmental problem depend

on the quality and reflexivity of our knowledge making in that area. There has been a growing critique of dominant behaviourist, technocratic environmental education practices (Robottom, 1991; Robottom & Hart, 1995) complemented by Noel Gough's (1993) persuasive use of narrative theory in science and environmental education. Gough (1999) has shown the critical importance of questioning the privileging of positivistic scientific knowledge and narrow conceptions of human agency and subjectivity that are embedded in environmental education research. This is particularly evident in his example of adult researchers' (mis)readings of children's imaginative productions of garbage monsters as confused misconceptions. The compelling work of Annette Gough (1997, 1999), especially her perspective on feminist postcolonial discourses, alerts us to the silencing of women's voices and to the paucity of (eco)feminist research in environmental education.<sup>1</sup> In the spirit of wandering mistakes, and trying to fix the world, my contention is that the intertwining of ecofeminist narrative ethics with purposeful attention to developing human imaginative capacities has precious possibilities to offer environmental learning and teaching.

### Dilemmas and Responsibilities

As environmental educators we help produce, distill, critique, and interact with knowledge claims about the environment and we do these practices in various communities. I assume that collective questions about how we choose to know "nature" and what we choose to do with that knowledge are passionately intertwined with environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is very new and only now are we attempting to see beyond anthropocentrism, as Weston (1995) so thoughtfully discusses, and we do not know where we are going.

Kate Soper (1997) points out that one of the key ethical dilemmas the project of ecological justice encounters, concerns our human responsibilities to the non-human. Like Weston (1995) I think that this type of question is still framed linguistically as a problem between humans and non-humans and only serves to reproduce very culturally specific "us" and "them" thinking. David Abram (1996) addresses this problem by differentiating humans from the vast more-than-human world, but still leaves us on comparative ground, (humans as the measure), only the emphasis is inverted. Today, I prefer the term humans and "others" because it reminds me of the linked histories of oppressions shared by some humans and most of nature. For example, those who have been historically "othered," and not considered citizens by elite powerful groups, such as ethno-culturally

diverse peoples, women, people with disabilities, children, plants, and animals. For instance and finally thankfully, indigenous environmental philosophies that have been systematically denied and destroyed are now beginning to be audible in Western conversations (Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force, 1999). I imagine they were always audible but it takes time to remember how to listen. Time to learn how to listen through the silences.

In Western thought no doubt because of big mistakes, Soper (1997) asks: "To what extent, and with what effect, should other creatures be included within the 'moral universe' with whom our dealing should be 'just'?" (p. 60).<sup>2</sup> She believes that being awe-struck by nature will not protect nature, but she then goes on to say that attachment and human identity are key to nature protection. I agree that being awe-struck is not enough but it is a powerful beginning. As Soper points out, when we transform our attitudes we can rethink our role in transforming modes of production and consumption. In her book entitled, *What is Nature?* Soper (1995) discusses how the market economy inequitably distributes the conflicts that occur between humanity and nature. In a telling narrative she describes the employment/habitat conflict between some Oregon loggers and some spotted owls. The loggers are required by state laws to leave a number of trees standing for the spotted owls. In some cases, the loggers have come to the end of their logging permits and they face unemployment. What transpires when the loggers face unemployment? Do they hate the spotted owl? The ironic and empathic responses of some of the loggers are intriguing. As Soper reports, some of them question, rather dryly, whether or not they too should learn to live on a diet of mice, while others perfect their spotted owl hoots, perhaps, in the hopes of having a small conversation or two between species (p. 265).

### **Conversations: "Situated Knowing" and Ecofeminist Utopias**

If we are in conversation with nature and some of those conversations are diverse and wild, (as in alive and unpredictable), how will we avoid the trap of moral relativism in our knowledge making and subsequent actions? Haraway (1991), in her landmark feminist essay "Situated Knowledges," argues for particular, embodied perspectives and against totalizing knowledge that cannot be located, and hence is irresponsible. She writes:

The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology. Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. (p. 191)

Haraway (1991) discusses the importance of the “situated knowledges” of the less powerful, the subjugated, those on the peripheries whose perspectives can offer more adequate and promising accounts, often because they are not as blinded by disappearing tricks of denial and repression practiced by dominant people. At the same time she is careful to point out that subjugated knowledges are neither innocent nor exempt from critical examination. What matters, she suggests for feminist scientists in particular, is to live “in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others’ practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions” (p. 187). Thus, acts of conscious critical positioning and taking responsibility for one’s partial perspectives can ground struggles over what gets to count as knowledge, in particular places, and with particular beings. Partial, situated knowledges can connect in surprising and imaginative ways to show other possible avenues, and to open up solidarity in unexpected places.

Environmental activists McGuire and McGuire (1998) illustrate how ecofeminism can offer a form of utopian consciousness because it “brings the imaginative possibilities of what is not into the concrete realm of what could be” (p. 10, Bartoski qtd. in McGuire & McGuire). Like them, in my teaching and learning I have turned to the spiritual ecofeminist politics of Starhawk’s (1993) utopian novel, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, which offers some useful visions of co-authoring environmental stories. For example, Starhawk writes about a fictional democratic council (like an extended council of all beings) that represents the interests of all participants in a bioregion—e.g. human, plant, animal, earth, air, fire, and water. She details how the council meets and struggles, however laboriously, to reach consensus on key issues.<sup>3</sup>

To ground environmental struggles, Haraway (1991) insists on reclaiming an embodied sense of vision<sup>4</sup> to help feminist discourse avoid binary oppositions. How our bodies are taught and learn how to sense nature certainly makes a difference to how we know nature. For example, how did my eyes see that moth? Marilyn Frye (1983), in her essay entitled “In and Out of Harm’s Way,” differentiates between the arrogant eye which “creates . . . a sort of vacuum mold into which the other is sucked and held” (p. 69) and the loving eye which seems:

generous to its object, though it means neither to give nor to take, for not-being-invaded, not-being-coerced, not-being-annexed must be felt in a world such as ours as a great gift. . . . The loving eye does not make the object of perception into something edible, does not try to assimilate it, does not reduce it to the size of the seer’s desire, fear, imagination, and hence does not have to simplify. It knows the complexity of the other as something which will forever present new things to be known. (p. 76)

So, I believe that I came to know the sphinx moth through loving and curious eyes. Did it even sense me? Despite, not knowing about the moth's perception I am compelled to wonder about my ethical responsibility. A starting point for me is what feminist philosopher Lorraine Code (1987) refers to as "epistemic responsibility"—human responsibility and accountability for the choices we make about how to know the world and its inhabitants. Code argues that "people are epistemically interdependent, and that narratives (i.e., stories), historical, political, personal, fictional, are among the principal vehicles of self-understanding and self-critique" (1995, p. 183).

Now, I ask myself how do we tell stories that acknowledge other animals/beings as subjects of lives we share, lives that parallel and are interdependent in profound ways? How do we ensure that their voices are audible and that we can co-author environmental stories to live, teach, and learn with? As a marine biologist in Newfoundland in the 1980s, I was involved in an environmental dilemma between endangered humpback whales, inshore fishing folk, and cod. The whales were coming inshore and becoming entangled in the cod traps, sometimes destroying the nets, the fishing folk's livelihood, and themselves in the process. All the participants seemed endangered to me at the time, as we worked to free the whales and save the nets. Then in July 1992 the Canadian government declared the North Atlantic cod "commercially" extinct, and along with it went a very old way of life.<sup>5</sup>

### **Narrative Ethics and Imagination**

When I tell a story what am I telling? Speech smells, writing does not according to Roland Barthes (1977, p. 204), largely because writing can be erased and redone but speech cannot without the traces of the odours (inferences and mistakes) lingering. Barthes goes on to say that speech is neither neutral nor innocent, no matter what it pretends to be, consciously or unconsciously. Lacan quoted in Barthes (1977), asks: "Is the subject I speak of when I speak the same as the subject who speaks?" (p. 112). This is the crux of the matter for me—in trying to realize an environmentally just "situated knowing" that is epistemically responsible will I be able to encounter the "other" in its complexity? I need to nurture my imagination and the imaginations of my students, so that we don't reduce the unknown subjectivity of an "other" being to the limited range of our own experiences. I must be able to listen to my students and encourage listening by others, and looking with loving eyes. Will I be able to help enliven the traces and the "smells" of the subjectivity of the "other" to waft across us?

Gaston Bachelard offers me answers because he believed in a human as a “de-centred subject nourished by a poetic power which transcended its control” (in Kearney, 1998, p. 97). Bachelard’s subject is different because it is in constant interaction with the world and is conscious of the “others” of the world, unlike existential phenomenology, which saw human imagination as the lone focal point looking outward.

Narrative theories of identity and intersubjectivity have contributed vastly to the disruption of the rational story of the unattached, objective knower. Seyla Benhabib (1987) made a key differentiation between the abstract “generalized” other and the “concrete” other that is engaged in webs of narration. Humans are social and political animals and we grow up in a storied world, listening, telling, and re-telling. We are story-telling animals. Bachelard said that “reverie” (dreaming) is a constant re-creation of reality intimately linked to human practices of freedom:

The imagination as reverie is the guardian of the emergence of being. It is the purest expression of human freedom—residing at that place where being takes leave of itself and launches into becoming. (in Kearney, 1998, p. 101)

Bachelard also claimed that the imaginative sources of science and poetry give humans the ability to imagine “possibilities that emerge into existence at the intersection between self and world” (Kearney, 1998, p. 97). This combination of scientific and poetic possibilities is crucial to an environmental education that enlivens, rather than deadens nature.

I am interested, then, in an ethics that prioritizes the perception, emotions, and moral judgements of particular people and places in particular relationships with nature, over abstract rules of pure anthropocentric morality. Ricoeur parallels the skill of narrative imagination with “the practical wisdom of moral judgement” (in Kearney, 1998, p. 242). Metaphors become a central guide in an ethics that understands its roots in narrative rather than in rules. Metaphoric expressions often enrich the imaginative and communicative landscapes of poetic and scientific narratives. Ricoeur (1981) argues convincingly for a “structural analogy” between the emotional, the imaginative, and the cognitive aspects of a complete metaphorical act. He believes that the power of the metaphorical process arises from the complementary functioning of feelings, thoughts and imagination. Ricoeur (1981) writes:

To *feel* in the emotional sense of the word, is to make *ours* what has been put at a distance by thought in its objectifying phase. Feelings, therefore, have a very complex kind of intentionality. They are not merely inner states but interiorized thoughts . . . . Feeling is not contrary to thought. It is thought made ours. (p. 154)



The dualistic tendencies of Western thought, separating the emotional and cognitive, function to limit and control human experience, particularly knowledge of the “other.” An experience between two animals (say a human and a moth) includes thoughts, feelings and sensory perceptions all combined together from very different worlds. As a trained biologist, I had a certain amount of “deprogramming” to overcome in order to reflexively “story” a spontaneous experience (read unscientific) between myself and a moth. Arne Næss (1986) believes the privileging of certain biological knowledge undermines the kind of environmental ethics and educational possibilities I hope for:

When biologists refrain from using the rich and flavorful language of their own spontaneous experience of all life forms—not only of the spectacularly beautiful but of the mundane and bizarre as well—they support the value nihilism which is implicit in outrageous environmental policies. (p. 512)

Biologists, like environmental educators have a degree of “epistemic responsibility” and accountability. Not just any story or the act of telling a story will do. But the intentional quest for ethical imaginings through lived experiences retold in narratives—this offers environmental educators myriad possibilities. Narrative ethics is a way to unfold the diverse and silenced narratives of other peoples and very importantly to “consider ethics in terms of human *desire* rather than exclusively in terms of norms” (Kearney, 1998, p. 244). Narrative calls forth my desires, human desires that can transgress the barriers between species. I desire that that clear-winged sphinx moth should thrive. How does my partial perspective meet that of another’s? These desires need nourishment, space to breathe and grow. They can come forth as whispers, mutters, chit-chat, shouts, bellows, songs. Narratives can bring qualities of agency, “situated knowledges” and reciprocity to life, and feminist ethics can walk with them.

Kearney (1998) summarizes his interest in renewing the conversations between ethics, poetics and narrative imagining under three main headings. He sees the ethical potential of narrative imagination in its:

1) *testimonial capacity* to bear witness to a forgotten past; 2) the *empathic capacity* to identify with those different to us (victims and exemplars alike); and 3) the *critical-utopian capacity* to challenge official stories with unofficial or dissenting ones which open up alternative ways of being. (p. 255)

Kearney, like so many other philosophers, is not talking about human relationships with nature, but the capacities he articulates hold promise for environmental educators to expand the philosophical vision and moral

possibilities in our teaching and learning practices. How many students tell testimonial, empathic and/or critical utopian stories; what do these stories mean and who benefits from them?

To focus on environmental philosophies, ecofeminist Linda Vance (1995), with the help of historian William Cronon, lays out three grand narratives that she thinks reflect the prevailing ethical theories and ideological positions about animals in Western culture. She discusses:

- the progress narrative, “the taming of wild nature and the triumph of humans” (p. 168),
- the “Dominate wisely!” (p. 174) narrative, and
- the nondominance narratives (exemplified by ecocentric [deep ecology], biocentric [land ethic], zoocentric [animal liberation] or antianthropocentric [ecofeminist] positions).

Vance is quick to deconstruct the domination and anthropocentric utilitarian narratives, and then goes on to illuminate the contradictions and complexities of the non-anthropocentric tales. Nothing is sacred. Insightfully, she says we must learn to be discriminating about narrative and look for good narrative about animals, “if we are to propose the creation of intentional narratives, myths to live by, we must establish criteria by which to judge them” (p. 178). For Vance, good narratives should:

- be ecologically appropriate to a given time and place,<sup>6</sup> recognizing ecological limits for example,
- be ethically appropriate in that time and place,
- give voice to those whose stories are being told, and
- make us care (p. 178-185).

To be ethically appropriate, Vance (1995) reminds us that rather than the doom and gloom pronouncements often made by other non-anthropocentric groups, ecofeminist narratives should:

emphasize the pleasure we take in relationships and in identification with nature and animals, and the importance of caring, attention, kindness, playfulness, trust, empathy, and connection. They should demonstrate that ethical behaviour toward the nonhuman world is a kind of joyfulness, an embracing of possibility, a self-respecting and respectful humility. (p. 181)

If our stories are to make us care, they need to help us see with keen loving attention, not naïvely, but with senses that smell, hear, taste, and touch environmental narratives in all their imagination, pain and grace. Val

Plumwood's (1996) true account of being preyed upon by a salt-water crocodile is a superb example of such a complex narrative. She vividly describes how she survived the crocodile's death roll only to return and face a cultural masculine myth of the "crocodile as monster." The media sensationally reproduced this view, although she herself never thought of the crocodile as a monster and was actually concerned about the potential for a massive crocodile slaughter, (given that this had happened following previous crocodile attacks in Northern Queensland). She "felt not victorious, but responsible for putting the crocodiles at risk" (p. 40), clearly an example of epistemic responsibility in a broad sense. Plumwood writes:

To the extent that the story is crucial, by the same token the narrative self is threatened with invasion and loss of integrity when the story of the self is taken over by others and given an alien meaning. This is what the mass media tend to do in stereotyping and sensationalizing stories like mine, and this is what is done all the time to subordinated groups, such as indigenous peoples, when their voices and stories are digested and repackaged in assimilated form. As a story that evoked the monster myth, mine was especially subject to masculinist appropriation . . . The events seemed to provide irresistible material for the pornographic imagination, which encouraged male identification with the crocodile and interpretation of the attack as sadistic rape. (p. 40)

When we don't listen to the narrator of a story we miss the meaning. They talk, weave images, pause, stop and start in an organic way, and how they do this matters. At the same time, the importance of silence in narratives has yet to be fully explored. Between all words, breath, sentences, is silence. Our talking communication is held between silences. Silences can be mysterious gesturing towards the unknown, they can symbolize emptiness and they can be oppressive. Merleau-Ponty (1968) called for a return to the importance of silence: "There would be needed a silence that envelops the speech anew, . . . this silence will *not be the contrary* of language" (p. 179). I think that the power of narrative ethics should include an acknowledgement of silence, the tacit knowing we have in silence. Understanding this kind of knowing is crucial to an epistemically responsible relationship to other beings. There is no frontier between language and the world, for as Valery said, language is "the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests" (in Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 155).

### **What can be done in the practice of environmental education?**

Why do ethical stories matter at all to environmental education? Stories make certain relationships possible, probable, and "real." They actively

make knowledge in our bodies, and out there in the world tangible. And they protect us from alienation. Rachel Carson (1956) wrote that if she could give each child a gift it would be:

... a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength. (p. 43)

If we think of environmental education as a social movement, then it is important to ask ourselves two simple but tough questions. What are the sources of our collective strengths? And how can we make sure that they are good enough? June Jordan (1989) in a quote of Bertolt Brecht says, "It takes courage to say that the good were defeated not because they were good, but because they were weak" (p. 124). Narrative ethics offers environmental educators the chance to remember what it is they are struggling for, what the messy contradictory places feel like, and how they are dealt with on a day to day basis. We too need to protect ourselves from alienation. Perhaps we will narrate our way into our collective strengths.

We can tell each other stories, question, write, "listen" to one another, hold the contradictions a while. We can encourage stories from childhood through adulthood, all the while reminding ourselves that stories are neither innocent nor neutral. We can turn them over and over, look for ethics of care and justice in who tells which stories, and notice whose stories get to count? We can focus on "situated knowledges" and we can highlight interdependence, imagination, mystery, and the co-authorship possible in our relationships to other beings.<sup>7</sup> Critical-utopian narratives can disrupt the dominant story of human omnipotence, challenge the notion that humans are in the story all by themselves.

Besides story telling, some of us have found certain other practices to be conducive to supporting ethical imagining. The reflective nature of "environmental autobiographies" offers a good starting point.<sup>8</sup> I have learned greatly from students' environmental autobiographies that range from remembering the experience of killing other animals, to beloved and feared landscapes in cities, backyards, and "wilderness" areas. As a teacher, I believe it is important to try to move around between the particular and personal and the social and cultural. Stories shape us, and as we re-write them they might also re-shape us. In environmental education research, Chawla (1998) has warned us against making any direct links between significant life experiences and responsible environmental citizenship. The wondrous environmental experiences of an individual are not always

clear predictors of environmentally and socially just behaviours. Perhaps the significant life experiences research could be expanded to make more visible the individual ethical imaginings embedded therein and their social and political implications for action.

The fostering and teaching of natural history can be a vital component of a narrative ethics approach in environmental learning as “naturalists try to understand from within a society in which every participant is a subject by birthright” (Livingston, 1997). One way to encourage a kind of narrative intimacy in our teaching and learning is to have students pick a common, local organism of their choice (e.g. plant, spider, mouse, ant, bird, or dog) to observe daily, and to create a journal about their relationship. I believe that by enlarging our direct experiences of other lives and other worlds we deepen our collective ethical imaginations. To observe, to give attention to another life is no small task in these days of hectic, frantic activity. It is in the fullness of such attention that possible new ethical relationships lie.

The hyperreality of today, (which according to Borgmann [1992] is made up of information processing, disconnected glamour and cheaper, more pliable, brilliant consumer items), competes with “reality” for our attention and loyalty. Borgmann says that, “While the real world holds misery and grace, the hyperreal universe contains only news, challenges that demand one’s reaction” (p. 99). He goes on to say that if hyperreality is the game then hyperactivity is the addiction to that game (p. 99). As David Jardine (1996) has observed about our hyperactive culture:

Clearly, healing the flittering of attention that underwrites much of our lives cannot be had quickly or painlessly or finally. Remaining alert, remaining open to new experiences, is always a task to be taken up again, from here, with these children, this year, with these wisdoms of the world. (p. 54)

Ultimately, I want to slowly begin to mend the fractures in our relationships with different “others” and to learn from them. Narrative imagination and ethical reflection may show us some unknown strengths; some stories may inspire us, and at the very least they may breathe life in and out.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although, there are the beginnings of ecofeminist conversations with environmental education in Canada and Australia. See for instance, the writings of Di Chiro, 1987; Fawcett, Marino, & Raglon, 1991; Russell & Bell, 1996; Fry, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> In many traditional ecological knowledges and languages a separation between humans and other beings does not exist. For example, traditional Anishinaabe teachings are based on the inter-relatedness of all life (Rheault Ishpeming Enzaabid, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Most utopian novels have explicit political messages and this one written by a long-time peace activist and witch is no exception. I agree with McGuire & McGuire's (1998) critique that what *The Fifth Sacred Thing* lacks in literary merit it makes up for in its introduction to ecofeminist politics.

<sup>4</sup> I do not mean to privilege sight but to invoke all of our bodily senses. I am thinking here of blind people, and other animals like most bats, whales, and some shrews who can echolocate in the dark and "see" deeply in a different sense.

<sup>5</sup> There are innumerable stories from the work of the Whale Research Group (led by Dr. Jon Lien), for example, of whales proffering their entangled limbs to assist scientists in freeing them, of eye to eye contact, etc. Space does not permit their elaboration here, although my colleague Sue Staniforth and I have been working on these "stories."

<sup>6</sup> For me, this does not necessarily mean the narratives would not be appropriate in another time and space but it acts as a warning to avoid universal statements and colonizing tendencies.

<sup>7</sup> Co-authorship does not necessarily imply a benign or compassionate relationship.

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to my friend and colleague Susan Staniforth. We have been using and discussing the use of environmental autobiographies in our teaching, together and separately for a long time.

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