Doing Animist Research in Academia: A Methodological Framework

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Abstract

Epistemologies, ontologies, and education based on colonial Eurocentric assumptions have made animism difficult to explicitly explore, acknowledge, and embody in environmental research. Boundaries between humans and the "natural world," including other animals, are continually reproduced through a culture that privileges rationality and the intellectual as primary ways of knowing, even though they have been repeatedly acknowledged as not enough *to address increasingly pressing environmental concerns. I use my own doctoral research journey to explore possible methods for working* with *nonhuman "persons" as co-participants in, rather than objects of, research. Through the identification and use of a dialogic methodology and methods, I show how animism, as an enacted epistemology, can be incorporated into an approach to research and its representation in multi-media hypertext. By engaging animism as a paradigmatic framework for research, environmental educators can respond to repeated calls for epistemological diversity, and more significantly, make use of research approaches that support the explicit acknowledgement of other-than-human contributors to knowledge-making.*

Résumé

Les épistémologies, les ontologies et l'éducation fondées sur les présomptions coloniales eurocentriques ont rendu difficiles l'étude, la reconnaissance et l'expression explicites de l'animisme dans la recherche environnementale. Les frontières entre les humains et le « monde naturel », y compris les autres animaux, sont constamment représentées à travers une culture privilégiant la rationalité et l'intellectualité en tant que principales façons du savoir, bien qu'elles aient souvent été désignées insuffisantes *pour cerner les questions environnementales de plus en plus complexes. Je me sers de mon propre cheminement de recherche doctorale pour examiner les méthodes de travail possibles* avec *les « êtres non humains » participants à ce titre à la recherche, plutôt qu'à titre d'objets de la recherche. Par l'identification et l'emploi d'une méthodologie et de méthodes dialogiques, je démontre comment l'animisme, en tant qu'épistémologie désignée, peut être intégré dans une approche de recherche et sa représentation dans un hypertexte multimédia. En recourrant à l'animisme à titre de paradigme de la recherche, les éducateurs en environnement peuvent satisfaire des exigences répétées de diversité épistémologique, et surtout, adopter des approches de recherche qui appuient la reconnaissance explicite de contributeurs autres que les humains à l'élaboration du savoir.*

Keywords: animism, nonhuman, epistemology, animal, environmental sustainability, research methodology, research methods, dialogic methodology

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Boundaries between humans and the "natural world," including other animals, are continually reproduced through cognitive imperialist culture (Battiste, 1998; Battiste & Henderson, 2000) that privileges rationality and human intellectual thought—even though it has been consistently recognized as not enough to address increasingly pressing environmental concerns (e.g., Capra, 1982; Stirling, 2007). In this context, the epistemological value of knowledge acquired through relational, sensuous, and embodied engagement with other-than-human "persons"[1]—those beings who are not human—remains under-represented in research. "Sensual participation with nature" is certainly not "'supernatural' or 'extra-ordinary'" (Cajete, 2000, p. 20), as some may claim.

Animism is central to this discussion. As a relational ontology, animism is particularly useful for disrupting the assumption that conscious communication among "persons" is restricted to humans, and scholars of animism have adopted the phrase "other-than-human person" in this endeavour. Animism situates nonhuman animals and other entities including plant, animal, earth, sky, and in some definitions, spirit "person" as volitional and communicating subjects (Harvey, 2006a; Stuckey, 2010). They are stakeholders in the world and co-participants in inevitably human knowledge-making and research processes. In recognizing human "persons," animal "persons," wind "persons," and so forth, the culturally inscribed hierarchy between the categories of human and nonhuman (see Bird-David, 1999; Hallowell, 1960) gets disrupted. Animism, then, involves the practice of relating to other-than-human beings, or "persons," as subjects. Like the use of "human" in Abram's (1996) oft-quoted expression "more-than-human world," I am still rather uncomfortable with the way in which the word "person" risks placing human qualities at the centre of conceptions of animism (see Fawcett, 2000). Yet given the limits and anthropocentric assumptions of the English language and Eurocentric thought upon which it is based, I am often pressed to use the phrase "other-than-human persons" to refer to those volitional beings who are not human. The phrase originally comes from the work of Hallowell (1960) who likewise acknowledged the limitations of the English language and used it to describe the relational ontology of the Ojibwa living in the Berens River area of Ontario. It has since been adopted by scholars in a number of fields (e.g., anthropology, religious studies, natural resource management) who acknowledge and write about animism as a way of relating to those who are not human. Engaging an animist epistemology and ontology does require disrupting many well-inscribed assumptions of Western science, and moving beyond research methodologies and the forms of representation that maintain and reflect them. It highlights the porous boundaries between human and more-than-human worlds and can support increased "understanding [of] animals, humans and the world we coinhabit" (Harvey, 2006b, p. 9).

Context

This paper is drawn from my multi-media doctoral study on engaging animism as a way of knowing in academic contexts (Barrett, 2009). Drawing on insights from feminist poststructuralism (e.g., Davies, 2000a; St. Pierre, 2000), religious studies (e.g., Harvey, 2006a), energy healing (Hufford, 2003; Yuen, 2007), Indigenous science (e.g., Cajete, 2000), anthropology (e.g., Bird-David, 1999), and a personal commitment to decolonizing relations with those who are more-than-human, I use my own research journey to explore issues related to working *with* nonhuman "Others" as co-participants in, rather than objects of, research. This has required both a disruption of many academic protocols (Harvey, 2006b) and an openness to an ontological understanding of the world quite different from that described by classical physics, but quite familiar to quantum physicists, Indigenous peoples, and many who work closely with plants, animals, and/or spirit. To do such work has required an energetic re-writing of many discourses continuously re-inscribed in my body. Like Bai (2009), I have been in recovery from many years living in a culture and educational system that is either silent about or explicitly denies animism as a legitimate epistemology and ontology.

Engaging one's animist sensibilities requires relational interaction with more- or other-than-human "persons." Such engagement, which involves a re-animation of one's embodied perception (Abram, 2010; Bai, 2009), shifts one's ability to perceive and enables more direct inclusion of the more-than-human in coming to knowing (Peat, 2005). By getting to a place where the chatter of the mind drops out of the way, one's consciousness can shift and communication can occur. Engaging what native science scholar Cajete (2000) describes as a "culturally conditioned 'tuning in' of the natural world" can open one to "feel[ing] the subtle forces of nature with a heightened sensitivity" (p. 20). There are many for whom such heightened sensitivity is a normal state of being; yet given that animism is a subjugated knowledge within Western academic contexts (Stuckey, Barrett, Hogan, & Pete, 2009), communications received are seldom talked about and often excluded from research studies (Fawcett, 2006). When they are included, they are not often acknowledged as insights coming from other-than-human "persons," and the human intellect is given sole credit for insight (for some exceptions, see Barrett, 2009; O'Riley & Cole, 2009). This pattern reinscribes those who are other-than-human as silent non-participants in knowledge-making processes.

The existence of such communications is not questioned in Indigenous societies, and habitually accessed through practices such as ceremony (e.g., fasting, sweats), prayer, and various forms of meditation, including shamanic journeying. While much debate still exists about the actual mechanism(s) of action that facilitate the reception of communication from other-than-human "persons," its existence is acknowledged and experienced by many, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous (e.g., Abram, 2010; Bai, 2009; Cajete, 2000; Heuer, 2007; Ingold, 2000;

Jensen, 2000). However, the kind of participatory consciousness represented by animistic, or "relational" ontologies, still makes many uncomfortable. It challenges the privileged place of the human (Fudge, 2002) and is not easily explained within the assumptions of Western frameworks of knowing (Stuckey, 2010) or Cartesian science (Hornborg, 2006). As a result, the possibility that plants, trees, and other nonhuman entities communicate in relational and meaningful interactions with humans has been downplayed, and experiences of animism are often either ignored, ridiculed, or explained away as unexceptional coincidence, projection, imagination, or some unresolved past emotions (Stuckey, 2010). More often, such informative insights are attributed to a brilliant human intellect. Consequently, communications from other-than-human "persons" are seldom explicitly acknowledged or cited in academic research (for some exceptions, see Barrett, 2009; Lipsett, 2001; O'Riley & Cole, 2009), and the nonhuman remains the object of research, with little possibility of being acknowledged as co-researcher with agency and volition. This is despite animism's central role in Indigenous communities, its contemporary expansion and resurgence in academic discourses (e.g., Bird-David, 1999; Harvey, in press; Stuckey, 2010), and the (albeit slowly) increasing interest in the role of nonhuman "nature" in research methodology, methods, and representation (e.g., Bell & Russell, 2000).

STORY:

As they embarked on a five-month journey following the Porcupine caribou herd, Gwich'in hunter Randall Tetlichi told Karsten Heuer, a park biologist, and his partner Leanne Allison, a filmmaker, that there was "a time when people could talk to caribou and caribou could talk to people. Then he told us to pay attention to our dreams." As a white Western-trained scientist, Heuer writes:

> I thanked him for his stories and advice but didn't believe them. I was a park scientist and park ranger. As far as I was concerned, they were just legends and myths. (p. 10)

By the time they finished their five-month journey, Heuer was not so sure.[2]

Although animism has a long history of subjugation (Bird-David, 1999) that continues to this day even in contexts where diverse knowledge systems are supposedly desired, supported, and explicitly sought out (e.g., calls for epistemological difference in research methodologies), this "culturally conditioned 'tuning in' of the natural world" (Cajete, 2000, p. 21) is certainly not primitive, childlike, delusionary, or at a lower level of cognitive development, as has been claimed by some anthropologists (e.g., Tylor, 1817/1958), psychologists (e.g., Berzonsky, 1974; Piaget, 1929/2007), and social critics (e.g., Widdowson & Howard, 2008). Neither is animism unique to Indigenous peoples. Even though its episto-ontological features are frequently excluded from discussions of Western epistemologies, one can be an animist without being fully immersed in an animist culture (Harvey, 2006a). For those who wish to engage animism, it is important to attend to discourses that constrain its access and take-up in colonized academic spaces (Barrett, in press). Until such attention is paid it will be difficult to deliberately take up insights available for use in addressing many current environmental problems. Similarly, many of the misunderstandings about what is often referred to as traditional ecological knowledge will be remain (see Houde, 2007; Nadasdy, 2007).

Application

Since receiving knowledge directly from "nature" requires a quieting of what Bai (2009) refers to as the discursive mind—in other words, not thinking in the normative sense of the word—it challenges the fundamental premises of much Eurocentric educational practice and is too often considered immature imaginings or just plain weird in Western contexts (Jensen, 2004; Plumwood, 2002). Consequently, animism has not been explicitly supported as a legitimate form of knowledge-making in academic research. This is not to say that its principals have not been euphemistically alluded to in various forms of qualitative inquiry, including much arts-based research (e.g., Lipsett, 2001), intuitive inquiry (e.g., Anderson, 2004, in press), Indigenous methodologies (e.g., Cole, 2002), or even scientific inquiry (e.g., Keller, 1983), yet specific acknowledgement of the role of other-than-human "persons" remains elusive in discussions of research methodologies (for exceptions, see Barrett, 2009, in press; Harvey, 2006a, 2006b; O'Riley & Cole, 2009).

Yet it is through a "practiced ability to enter into a heightened sense of awareness of the natural world" and participation with it that "gifts of information from nature" are received (Cajete, 2000, pp. 20-21). It is also in this state of awareness that communication with other-than-human "persons" most often occurs. While researching with and explicitly acknowledging the many more-than-human partners in the research process does not require one to be Indigenous, it does require disrupting many well-inscribed discourses, and extending episto-ontological boundaries kept intact by Western language, worldviews, and

lifestyles, including assumptions that those who are not human neither have consciousness nor interact with humans in dialogic relationship. It also requires extending the search for "protocols, processes, and etiquette by which dialogue is promoted to the encounter between human and other-than-human persons" (Harvey, 2006b, p. 15), while simultaneously addressing issues related to power, privilege, and cultural appropriation (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Smith, 1999). While it is critical to recognize past and current inequities, including the risk and reality of appropriation of Indigenous knowledges by researchers, as well as inappropriate interpretations of Indigenous cultural practices, it is also important to recognize the potential universality of animism as a way of knowing and experiencing relations with those who are not human. Being animist is not acting as an Aboriginal "wannabe" (O'Riley, 2003; see also, Stuckey et al., 2009; Stuckey, 2010); rather, it is being more whole and human in a wide circle of relations. Animism can be a particularly valuable part of a researcher's way of coming to knowing regardless of cultural context, and as such, is worth serious consideration in research methodology and methods.

Animism in Practice

Researching through an animist ontology and epistemology requires developing trust in hearing, making sense of, and interpreting insights, as well as clearing blocks to listening in the first place. Yet, once researching in relational interaction with the more-than-human, beyond the constraints of dominant discourses that suggest this is not possible, surprisingly innovative and effective resolutions to complex socio-ecological problems can be realized.

The main "results" of my doctoral study, *Beyond Human-Nature Boundaries: Researching* with *Animate EARTH*, include the development, use, and description of a dialogic method(ology) that can support a researcher to intentionally and respectfully engage with other-than-human "persons" as a key source of knowledge in academic research. Although some methodologies and forms of representation support a participatory consciousness in a less formal way (e.g., phenomenology, see Abram, 1996), or within a human-centred framework (e.g., organic and intuitive inquiry, see Anderson, 2004; Clements, 2004), they do not explicitly address the role of the more-than-human as active research partner (for some exceptions, see Harvey, 2006b; Lipsett, 2009; O'Riley & Cole, 2009). Developing an open receptivity to, as Berry and Tucker (2006) put it, the "thousandfold voices of the natural world which became inaudible to many humans" (p. 17) is crucial to this process. I refer to this openness as "porosity": a state of ultimate connectedness to all things, so as to be open and attuned to communication with an animate earth. This process involves quieting the part of oneself that often contains a tremendous amount of "mental static" and releasing what is often a vice-like hold of the rational mind. It is also premised on the other-than human "persons" choosing to engage (Harvey, 2006a, 2006b).

Coming to the research methodology and methods used in this study required listening for new (old) processes of making meaning, and of being, to emerge. The following four steps provide a brief summary of the methods that both emerged out of, and were used in, this study. They describe how one might open up to porosity and engage in research/representation through animist sensibilities. Although somewhat similar to organic (Clements, 2004), intuitive (Anderson, 2004) and contemplative inquiry, there are two significant differences: (1) a dialogic method(ology) foregrounds the role of the more-than-human in knowledge production and transfer; and (2) it engages energy work to support the researcher's openness to animist and other trans-rational ways of knowing.

While others may find different routes to opening up to knowledge from beyond Western frameworks of knowing, these are the steps used to research and write my doctoral dissertation. All are engaged in a context of deep respect for the wisdom of those who are other-than-human, which I have sometimes listed as a fifth step, but in reality, pervades the whole process.

1. Achieve openness to porosity;
2. Quiet the mind;
3. Identify and develop skill in using a range of methods;
4. Use forms of re-presentation that enable both researcher and reader to make meaning *through,* rather than just *about,* an animist ontology;
5. Maintain a deep sense of respect for the wisdom of the more-than-human world.

Opening to and engaging a dialogic methodology and methods requires an acceptance that like in all research, meanings are contextual, and possible meanings, and methods, are dependent upon locally available discourses and individual interpretations (Morgan, 2000). It is based on the premise that humans are not the only communicative beings, and humans would be well-served by finding ways to (re)learn, and practice, the many languages through which earth speaks (Abram, 1996; Berry & Tucker, 2006; Fawcett, 2000; Griffin, 2001; Harvey, 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Plumwood, 2002; Sheldrake, 1999; Sheldrake & Smart, 2000; Smith, 2004, 2006). Although I cannot (nor do I desire to) assume to be a neutral researcher, or to prove the methodologies and methods arrived at and knowledge produced through this study to be more true than any other, I re-present them as particularly useful, and often undervalued, ways of coming to know. As Scott (1988) makes very clear, meanings change, and given that meanings are socially constituted, "some meanings emerged as normative and others have been eclipsed or disappeared" based on "how power is constituted and operates" (p. 35). Meanings associated with animism have, for years, been marginalized and undervalued.

Methods

Although the steps listed below are not always linear, I will discuss each in turn.

Achieve Openness to Porosity

Porosity is a state of being open and attuned to communication with an animate earth. For some, this step of engaging porosity may be easy; for others, it may take significant effort. Together with the busy-ness of the Western mind, the privileging of rationality as the preferred way of knowing, and the many rules and assumptions about what counts as legitimate knowledge, it is often difficult to access, and perhaps even more so to trust, animist insights. In addition to quieting the mind, a central aspect of being open to porosity is to diminish the power of the many discourses that suggest either that there is no communicative agency in the energy of plants, animals, rocks, clouds, and so forth, or that all of one's insights are generated by the human mind alone, in the absence of input from the many animate entities with whom we share this universe.

Successfully engaging porosity requires using a variety of strategies to open one's channels and may require clearing stubborn, colonizing discourses that prevent effective use of the methods described in section three below. Practices such as Yuen Method™ Chinese Energetic Medicine can be particularly helpful. The Yuen method focuses on identifying energetic blocks in the body, including blocks to intuitive insight. These may include discourses that suggest that these ways of knowing are only accessible to particular cultural groups, or that they are only figments of a very active imagination. Once identified, blocks can be removed through application of focused intent and the shifting of energy in the body. To engage this process requires moving beyond conventional understandings of physical reality and associated limits ascribed to the human mind. Such a reality is embedded in the practices of many non-Western and Indigenous cultures and is gaining increasing attention in fields such as medicine (e.g., Goswami, 2004), contemplative inquiry (e.g. Zajonc, 2008), and human cognition (e.g. Stapp, 1995).

Quiet the Mind

Engaging porosity requires re-animating one's embodied perception (Bai, 2009) and quieting the thinking mind. If the mind is full of chatter, then it is much more difficult to engage the heightened perception required to tap into the often subtle "voices" of earth. As in a radio full of static, background noise gets in the way. There are many different ways to engage this step of quieting the mind. Some common ones include sitting or walking meditation, going for a run, painting, listening to music, carving, or even washing dishes. Simply engaging in a mindless task is enough for some; for others, a specific meditative practice may be more effective. Lipsett (2010), Bai (2009), Smith (2006) and others all

suggest that this is perhaps the most important step to tuning into those who are more-than-human. The more practiced one is at quieting mental chatter, the less cluttered the airwaves, and the more likely one is to receive any messages being conveyed.

Identify and Develop Skill in Using a Range of Methods

This step of the dialogic method(ology) is focused on methods, and overlaps extensively with the other two. Processes are seldom linear. Methods include (but are far from limited to) various forms of meditation (e.g., Bai, 2001), telepathic communication (e.g., Sheldrake, 2003; Smith, 2004, 2006), shamanic journeying (e.g., Walter & Fridman, 2004), dowsing (e.g., Conway, 2001; Graves, 1989), dreaming (e.g., Bernard, 2007; Castellano, 2002), visions, artistic practice (e.g., Bai, 2003; Lipsett, 2002, 2005), and simple, quiet attention. Many of these ways of knowing rely on the body as a source and conduit of knowledge. Abram (2010) talks of ways of knowing that go beyond the thinking mind. He states that there is:

> a language much older, and deeper, than words … a dimension of expressive meanings that were directly felt by the body, a realm wherein the body *itself* speaks … responding spontaneously to the gestures of these other animals with hardly any interpolation by my "interior" thinking mind. (p. 167)

Spontaneous painting, use of the pendulum, and dialogic reading are examples of this "spontaneous" response, and are methods within a dialogic method(ology). When held in the hand, both paintbrush and pendulum provide means to access usually inaccessible, unknowable knowledge, including that held within and beyond the human body. Attending to spontaneously occurring body movements and sensations can provide important access points to insights obtained from collaborations with an animate earth. Dialogic reading, which is an application of such embodied knowing, and human-animal telepathic communication are others.

The methods identified here provide some useful tools of engagement to accessing knowledge in dialogue with other-than-human "persons." It is likely that many of the practices are already implicitly in use by many researchers, particularly by those who have done arts-based research or other qualitative methodologies that foreground contemplative practice. By naming and describing the methods here, I make them and their underlying episto-ontological assumptions more explicit, and perhaps more available to researchers inclined to engage with and develop their skill in using them. Yet given that engagement with a dialogic method(ology) moves beyond intellectual knowing, it is often better experienced than explained. It requires an ontological shift, and should not be engaged lightly or without guidance.

Spontaneous painting. Lipsett (2001) describes spontaneous painting as akin to a moving meditation with earth. It is a way to "tap into" the "old languages."

Painting in spontaneous earth connection is a process of "stilling ourselves enough to give colour and form to earth energy" (p. 28). Spontaneous painting in connection with earth is a practiced skill that enables access to knowledge from both within and beyond the human body. As with the pendulum dowser (see below), it provides a set of physical tools (colour, paint, paper) and a capture system for knowledge received through porosity. Drawing on her doctoral research, Lipsett writes:

> By engaging in spontaneous art creation I am both entering into and transcending my body to attain a contemplative state. I am also co-creating my body to record the transcendence. My hand chooses the paint, the brush and my whole being moves the paint across the page. The result embraces both my body and the body of the earth in a cosmic dance. (p. 162)

This "cosmic dance" gives access to knowing that is both housed in and comes through our bodies as we swim in a soup of energy and knowledge. This interchange can be described as a "dialogue" with animate earth, influenced by the presence of particular plants, rocks, and spirit beings. Painting is a particularly useful way to gain access to the wisdom of these beings, and can also be helpful in apprehending and interpreting non-verbal or telepathic exchanges with nonhuman animals. By practicing spontaneous painting (see Lipsett, 2001, 2002), collage-making, music-listening, and intense de-schooling, I was able to get out of my head enough to receive earth's wisdom moving through my body and come to the knowledge represented in much of the dissertation. Months of practice letting the body rather than the mind direct knowledge access and expression were essential to develop skills for regularly accessing communications from other-than-human "persons," and ultimately, acquiring knowledge that was seldom accessible or expressible if I was to use my intellect alone. So was the use of energy clearing practices described above.

*Pendulum dowsing***.** Dowsing, which is sometimes referred to as rhabdomancy (Krautwurst, 1998), can be a very helpful entry point to porosity. The earliest records of its use are images of locating underground water with a forked stick, yet the exact cultural origins of dowsing is unclear (Hansen, 1982). Because dowsing often challenges material realist conceptualizations of the world, and there is not yet any clear consensus on a scientific explanation of how it works, dowsing is often dismissed by lay people and scientists alike (Graves, 1989). Despite this lack of explanatory consensus, dowsing is still used to locate water, minerals, and missing "persons" (e.g., French, 2007). Dowsing has also been used by the United States military, and was particularly useful in locating land mines in Vietnam (Hansen, 1982). I found it a useful tool to identify appropriate articles to read, or edit papers (such as this one). The dowser provides an important access point to a shift in understanding of how knowledge can be accessed once one engages an ontology, and epistemology, which conceives of

the universe as connected across time and space. When used skilfully and with care, it can also be useful as an entry point to access messages conveyed from other-than-human "persons."

I was introduced to pendulum dowsing in 2005 when I asked a friend for some advice on the herb seedlings I had started on my front porch. They weren't growing very well. Rather than drawing on her vast understanding of plant growth learned through reading, experience, and talking with other humans, instead (to my surprise), she pulled out a small wooden pendulum and replied: "Why don't we ask them?" Following the left and right swing of the wooden bob, we were able to determine that it was a different location, not more water, that the plants required. I became very curious about what would emerge if I foregrounded insights obtained through the use of a dowser, and eventually, other ancient ways of knowing. The pendulum provided an effective entry point to multiple kinds of cross-border dialogue and knowledge acquisition, much of which I foregrounded in my research/representation. I could not help but be intrigued by the accuracy (and helpfulness) of insights I received through its use as I became increasingly skilled at "conversations" mediated through the pendulum. And as I did so, the focus of my dissertation gradually shifted from my original research questions to an exploration of ways in which dominant Western ways of knowing, (re)inscribed through many academic structures and assumptions behind them,make it difficult to gain (and speak of) insight from conversation with animate Earth, and perhaps more significantly, to explicitly acknowledge that one can intentionally solicit these conversations as a central part of research processes.

Dialogic reading. Dialogic reading is an application of knowing that comes from both within and beyond the human body. It creates spaces to invite other-than-human "persons" to influence textual reading practices. For instance, if I listened to my body's knowing as I read the many articles and books that supported this research, and if, rather than reading an article through from beginning to end, I engaged my "felt sense" to intertwine a sentence here, a paragraph there, I would find the perfect passages to help me move ahead (or sideways) in my research. I realized that not only was the pre-defined order of conventional reading practices often not essential for comprehension, but in many cases they got in the way of both the content and process of what I was learning—how to read and research in co-creation with other-than-human "persons" with whom I was in ongoing dialogue. Further, if I followed the lead of my body to read the many small "bits" of textual insights tacked on to my wall, or followed my hand to move titled bits of paper around on the desk, I could see the structure and theoretical framework of the dissertation emerge. Letting go of thought, and letting the body lead, is an important part of using a dialogic methodology and methods. This body knowing is influenced not only by unconscious internal intuitions, but by subtle communications with other-

than-human "persons." It is one aspect of an animist epistemology applied to textual processing, and the reason for the dissertation's final format, which I discuss below.

Human-animal communication. Human-animal communication is the final aspects of porosity that I wish to discuss here. It is not unusual for animals to telepathically pick up on human thoughts (Braud & Schlitz, 1991; Sheldrake, 1999, 2003), and although less commonly admitted, humans frequently pick up on telepathic communications from nonhuman animals (Sheldrake, 2003). One of the most common examples is a farmer's ability to pick up on an animal's call for assistance when out of range of the physical senses (Sheldrake, 2003). Although some individuals may be more inherently attuned to these ways of knowing than others, skills in telepathy can be developed and refined over time. It is unfortunate that this form of knowledge acquisition is seldom the subject of academic discussion (Smith, 2006). Like in most forms of meditative practice, skill can be developed with time and practice. First steps to telepathic human-animal communication include being fully present, removing doubt about the validity of the method, and practicing sending and receiving messages (Smith, 2006). Messages received can take the form of visual images, a felt sense, or words that appear spontaneously. It is also particularly useful to eliminate discursive blocks to the process and the practice. Telepathic and other forms of animal communication can be particularly useful complements to other forms of knowledge acquisition when tackling complex environmental problems. Using these methods effectively requires skill in not only the processes of accessing such knowledge, but also the interpretation of the knowledge.

Use Forms of Re-Presentation That Enable Both Researcher and Reader to Make Meaning Through *Rather Than Just* About *an Animist Ontology*

Butler-Kisber (2002) notes that "form mediates understanding … [and] non-traditional form helps disrupt the hegemony inherent in traditional texts and evoke emotional [and other] responses that bring the reader/viewer closer to the work, permitting otherwise silenced voices to be heard" (p. 232, cited in Nolan, in press). Engaging animism is not exclusive of, but necessitates moving beyond, intellectual knowing. It entails disrupting the privileged place of linear thought and creating meditative spaces where the "voices" of other-than-human "persons" (in their many forms) can be heard. While it is often suggested that a participatory consciousness emerges from direct contact with the natural world (Bai, 2009), my experiences suggest this is not necessarily always the case: communications from other-than-human "persons" can, and often do, transcend time and space in ways that can influence both the designer and reader of the hypertext. The combination of intuitively placed links, music, "thought-bits" and image, together with the multi-linear hypertextual form (Morgan, 2000) reflects many of the ways of coming to know that were used in the development of this

research and a dialogic method(ology). Supported by the longer theoretical sections, they encourage reading through porosity, a trans-rational form of knowing that supports understandings of multiple knowledge systems. In other words, the reader's experience of travelling through the hypertext, and integrating multiple knowledge forms during his or her wanderings through it, provide an experiential medium designed to mirror, as best as possible, many of the methods used to complete the research. In the process of selecting the links, the hand and eye are drawn to the places of resonance between the individual's meaning-making process and the content.

This research is not exclusive of intellectual knowing, but stretches the reader to move beyond it. In doing so, the representation creates multiple opportunities for other-than-human persons to interrupt human thinking and knowing. It is up to the reader to be a reciprocating partner in this engagement. The interruptive nature of the format unsettles reliance on extended explanations, which can risk reinscribing "clichéd and explanatory language" (Davies, 2000b, p. 252) and logic as privileged. In its place, I foreground opportunities to engage a re-animated perception (Bai, 2009) and support readers in an experience of meaning-making through an animist ontology. The format for the dissertation was ultimately determined as I "unconsciously" walked patterns in the snow, and ran the cul-de-sacs in my neighbourhood. My footprints mapped out the loops, dead-ends, and constant webbing a hypertext would allow. As a techno-neophyte, I have to admit that I was rather distraught when I realized that my body's mapping seemed to be indicating that a web-based format was most appropriate for the dissertation. Yet despite its reliance on technology, the hypertext, somewhat ironically, offers a medium through which the dominant role humans have afforded themselves as the sole agents in research and its many processes can be disrupted.

Artist Lipsett (2010) speaks of the importance of letting go of fear and trusting one's creative processes as a means of establishing "deep and lasting even transformative Nature connections" (p. 7). Bai (2009) refers to the significance of overcoming "humanity's inability to perceive and feel the intrinsic worth of the other—in this case, nonhuman beings" (p. 135). Abram (1996) talks about limitations of the alphabet and phonetic language, and the ways in which it has disconnected us from an animate earth. Attending to dreams, visions, serendipity, embodied knowing, and spontaneous intuitions are also important ways to move beyond what Berry (1988) refers to as human autism to the many voices of the natural world (Berry, 1988). These are all involved in a dialogic method(ology).

A dialogic method(ology) has many parallels with intuitive (Anderson, 2004; in press) and organic inquiry (Clements, 2004), which, as of 2004, has "been used, in some form, in at least 86 dissertations in at least 17 graduate schools" (Braud, 2004, p. 18). Rather than focusing on any specific methods, organic inquiry is described instead as "an approach" that is premised on a pre-existing

"psychological and spiritual preparation and adequateness … of the researcher, and the importance of the active use of transpersonally-relevant resources" (Braud, 2004, p. 18). It draws heavily on "transpersonal and spiritual resources" the researcher brings to the process. Intuitive inquiry has been developed to the level of specific methods in its most recent iteration, and although Anderson recognizes "nature" as having a potentially significant role in a researcher's process, it is not foregrounded in her published work. A dialogic method(ology) is more explicit in its recognition and description of methods for engaging other-than-human "persons" in the transfer of knowledge, as well as providing a method for clearing obstructing discourses the researcher may encounter as he or she works to engage the methods (see Zajonc, 2009 for a somewhat different approach that places earth at the centre of inquiry). A dialogic method(ology) is also unique in some of its forms of representation, which deliberately create spaces for readers' intuitive engagement with other-than-human "persons" as contributors to research, and thus, to knowledge creation.

Closure

This special theme issue of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* is dedicated to moving "toward more thoughtful human-animal relations." Engaging animism as an epistemological possibility in research does just that. It acknowledges the role of not only animals, but of plant, rock, river, and other bodies as subjects and stakeholders in the research process, thus redefining conventional role of animal (and other nonhuman "persons") as research *participant,* rather than subject. Given the power and prevalence of the many discourses, which (re)produce and maintain a separation between humans and the more-than-human world, together with marginalization of Indigenous knowledges (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) and in some cases actual outlawing of the practices such as pendulum dowsing (Barrett, 2009),[3] it is not surprising that other-than-human "persons" have seldom been recognized as research partners in manuscripts explicating research methods.

As Bowers (1997) notes, particular ways of knowing are accorded higher or lower status than others. Discourses that place human language as superior (e.g., Abram, 1996, 2010), animals as lesser beings (Fudge, 2002; Plumwood, 2002), and other nonhuman entities as inanimate ensure that it is almost impossible to develop a methodology based on communication between humans and the more-than-human world. Yet courses such as ENVS 811: Multiple Ways of Knowing in Environmental Decision-Making,[4] as well as volumes such as this, which acknowledge the agency of nonhuman animals, go a long way toward making space for discussions of the potential of animist research. If, as Fawcett (2000) notes, "the choices we make and the actions we take on any environmental problem depend on the quality and reflexivity of our knowledge

making" (pp. 136-137), it may be time to (re)learn how to listen to those who are not human. Engaging in dialogue with other-than-human "persons" can make a significant difference in increased "understanding [of] animals, humans and the world we coinhabit" (Harvey, 2006b, p. 9) and enabling their many, and varied voices to contribute to decision-making processes in a very positive way.

Notes

1 Based on this centring of the human, I put the word "persons" in scare quotations. Similarly, given the complexity of varying definitions of nature, I also put it in quotation marks. See Harvey (2006a, 2006b) for further description.

2 This quotation comes from the children's picture book version of Heuer's and Allison's story (see Heuer, 2007; see also Heuer (2006) for an extended narrative).

3 Over time, dowsing (whether with a pendulum or often, with metal rods) has been both celebrated and outlawed. It has also been used by the United States military. See < http://www.porosity.ca/pages/bits/dowsersvalued.html >

4 Taught in the School of Environment and Sustainability, University of Saskatchewan.

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