

Chapter Six

Rejoining the Planet

An Earthbody Ethics of Achieving Presence and Co-presence

The old sense of ethics often called for a faith that transcended experience. The ethical person had to believe there was a higher being, a higher law, an inner self, or a reward elsewhere; correlatively in the opposite direction there was a threatening demonic dimension, or a punishment below. One had to believe in an essence of goodness and/or evil beyond time in eternity. This kind of belief must be adhered to in spite of doubts and contrary feelings or experiences, because it is faith in what can never be grasped or comprehended by mere mortal beings. Because we have no direct experience of these “higher” grounds, we must believe or have faith in them—both in their existence and their transcending value.

Earthbody ethics also calls for a faith, but it is one of a far different kind. Our culture, both in its common sense and intellectual tradition, has assumed that belief is not necessary to what we actually experience in an ongoing everyday way, because our ongoing bodily, perceptual, active, and interactive experience is obvious in its accessibility and value. Although this seems logical, it is wrong. The hardest thing for most contemporary Americans and for those of most modern cultures to believe in is the ongoing actual experience of each person. Of course, we all believe that the events of each day actually happened. However, this does not mean that we fully assent to them.

We tend to discount experience as merely “my impressions,” but as we have seen if we give into the beckoning depths of experience, it is not “just mine.” The experience is contributed to by birds, waterfalls, Native Americans centuries ago, settlers on the Plains, Siddhartha under the Bodhi-tree, the clouds overhead, etc. We see facts and figures—the abstracted fragments of experience—on the one hand, and supersensible causes, on the other, as more real. So, for example, as we discussed early in the book, we discount the different speeds of time, its different rhythms, its being empty or full, or its being disconnected or expansive as being merely our impression of it and that it is really this abstract entity “beyond us.”

This belief in what is real of events in turn might mean that we do not in some sense “experience” them either. So then we come full circle to the point at which this disbelief has become correct, because in some sense, many people in our current cultures have no experience of phenomena such as a plurality of time senses. As things stand with most of us, experiences are not worthy of full belief.

Belief is not a mere cognitive function. Belief is an assent, a saying yes to something, a movement to affirm whatever it is that one believes in as having weight as existing—of being significant in some way, and perhaps, even of having some value. However, there is yet another dimension to belief that hasn’t been properly appreciated: *belief makes certain levels of experience possible. Then having experienced certain dimensions of “timing oneself” with aspects of reality, a belief in the reality of those dimensions becomes possible.* In other words, we are dealing with a feedback loop, or what philosophers would call a “dialectical relationship”—where each term emerges as a function of the other term. The opposite is true: if we don’t believe in certain dimensions of our experience, or don’t trust in it as a whole, then these dimensions aren’t available to us or our experience becomes thinner as a whole, therefore less worthy of our belief in its meaning and power.

Many books and movies of the twentieth century were about the hollowness of our experience, from high culture icons, such as Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, to pop culture’s mega-hits like *E.T.* Eliot’s Madame Sosostris tells us of the doom of so many who continue to walk the death shuffle across London each with his eyes fixed on his feet. Spielberg’s extraterrestrial showed us we don’t know what life and death are about; we fail to supply the “heart life” that ET needs in order to revive from its coma and that only children in our culture seem to retain. The century was filled with a constant barrage of messages that, as Heidegger most tellingly puts it, the holocaust may have occurred.

How Heidegger can claim the ultimate holocaust might have occurred without our noticing it can be understood by seeing that life can be destroyed even though everything seems to stand and continue in a physically undamaged sort of way: “The devastation of the earth can easily go hand in hand with a guaranteed supreme standard of living for all men. Devastation can be the same as both, and can haunt us everywhere in the most unearthly way—by keeping itself hidden.” Heidegger states that this holocaust is about the high-speed expulsion from being rooted in a deeper sense of memory or becoming re-membered. We might say “becoming remembered” is about rejoining the body of earthbody existence and is about experiencing the emotional, sensual, embodied, and thought-provoking currents of meaning always present in the sensual depth of the earth’s presence. Yet, if we don’t understand this, then “wee, to him, who hides wastelands within”—the wasteland being our disconnection from these currents. In our own wasteland, we are not really experiencing our experience and all has been lost. This book is full of these images: Philip K. Dick’s prophecy of a people who will be like their androids; Sillko’s warning about the “destroyers”; our description of the ghouls, vampires, and aesthetes; and the danger of pseudo-cyber-community. All these are images of a holocaust. The dance of life on the planet continues, but all we see is empty motion.

These images are about those who have lost faith in themselves as earthbodies, in the depth, cogency, and spirituality of earthly experience. They have lost faith in the sense that experience can be what we called “ceremonial” in chapter one. Then, without this belief, experience gets constricted to what we believe is real, largely as it has been shaped by the dominant teachings of culture, (a sense of “brute physicality” or mere “objective stuff” what the scientific and rationalist revolutions called “mere matter in motion” or the quantifiable). This belief is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those who adhere to it can’t feel the life of the environment, of things, of animals, and in some sense, even of other humans. Nor certainly can they feel the power of dreams, of imaginary stories and images, of collective memories, and a host of other experiences that bring out other layers of meaning and reality in our shared dance with all the world. They enter a vicious cycle of impoverished experience that leads to some of the excesses we’ve examined (the vampire, the ghoul, the cyberspace abuser, and the violator of animals), but also to the mechanical type of existence Lawrence has articulated as “full of danger to the gentle passengers of this life.”

Belief in one’s experience,—that what I feel, what I sense, what I dream, what haunts me and calls out to my intuitions or stirs within my body viscerally is a gift to which I must hearken and open myself—is an ethical action, a virtuous action. Achieving this state of being comes from a deeper sense of ethical action as “ethos”—“way of life”—rather than any particular deed that emanates from it. It also doesn’t follow, as the moralizing rationalist traditions of ethics have preached, that to open to earthbodies and these voices is to *abandon* the rational in their either/or formulations. Rather, to really be open as human is to allow our distinct ability to be rational to become added to these energies: that is the fully realized or healthy human response, and also the ethical one. Reason and emotion, human and animal, mind and matter, and morality and vitality are not at odds with each other or with goodness, as the either/or tradition of ethics dictates in an oppositional stance of the walled-in ego versus the larger world.

By pointing to famous modern Western cultural icons, we could mistakenly think this is a white male self-involved problem.² However, to consider *Ulysses*, *Babcock*, *Ceremony*, and *Surfacing*—novels of this century that have touched many deeply—is to think about tales that have had a great impact on Western culture, yet were told from four varying perspectives. All document a similar trajectory, and only one is about a white male. Whether it is Leopold in Dublin, Seth in the Midwest after the Civil War, Tayo after World War II in the Laguna Pueblo, or the narrator of *Surfacing* in post-Vietnam Canada, all these protagonists face a painful journey. They must move from some kind of living death or way of living in which their experience has become emptied of meaning and is dislocated in time, space, and place, to a way of life in which they can again truly believe in experience and thus become fully open to it.

All four of these novels show an the individual recovering the ability to be good and to become creative in their lives as the result of a psychic journey and a re-education about the reality of the world and the power of believing in experience.

Each learns this through listening to the body's deeper sense of energies and meanings present in their experience, in which they must encounter other humans and other voices in a larger swirl of historical, cultural, and natural forces and voices. After ten years of living in shock at the death of their child, Leopold and Molly in *Ulysses* have not really felt their feelings; they pass through the days, lying head to toe, not having intercourse, lost in a limbo life. The funeral of his friend and her taking a lover on this fateful day have suddenly awakened the pair to the possibility that they might re-enter their experience and find new meanings, and, perhaps, even love for each other. Joyce says of Leopold—that, at the end of this day of revelations and wrenching events, “he traveled,” and so does Molly, to a new point where she can say repeatedly, “yes,” as the book ends. They’ve suffered excruciating pain with the death of their son, Rudy, in a socially oppressive context in which Leopold is devalued in his talents and seen as a Jew, and of Molly, is seen as a fading beauty and talent. The resulting withdrawal of their faith in the richness and meaning of experience, has led them to a paralysis where they no longer rejoin the rhythms and propulsive, unfolding sense of experience, until perhaps tomorrow, June, 17, 1904, when they have resolved to awaken more fully.

Seth and many of the characters in *Beloved* have been abused by being bought and sold, beaten, raped, and degraded. The smiles on their faces are masks, their hearts are like Paul D’s—“locked in a tin”—and even the natural world is too painful in its vitality to experience, since to feel one emotion deeply brings all the others, interlaced in a rhythm, to the forefront. Here is another sense of the vicious cycle that we can enter ethically, if we ignore earthbody ethics: those who no longer experience the reality of their experience, who no longer let the waves of empathy, emotional apprehension, sensitivity move through them from others, can do horrible things to other humans beings, especially if the society’s laws and current ethics condone this abuse, as did the institutions of slavery. This lack of connection, however, not only allows the ethical victimizers to become ethical monsters who rape, pillage, and destroy others with no sense of the other’s torment, but it also *dehumanizes* those who suffer from such treatment. They suffer not only from the immediate impact of violation, but also suffer from the long-term reverberations.

In some sense, we can all see ourselves in this latter role, since most have suffered some sort of injustice or cruelty from others, whether in personal incidents of child or spouse abuse, as the object of violence, or from less personal trauma of wartime violence, industrial exploitation, or inhumane treatment by so many of the institutional forms of oppression in modern society. The greater the hurt suffered, the more likely that the person will have to withdraw further from fully “being there,” from fully living their experience, or from fully giving themselves over to the earthbody currents which flow through the environment into us in the depths of our senses. This dilemma is expressed eloquently in *Beloved* as Paul D struggles with his feelings during his five unsuccessful attempts to escape from slavery, the longest of which lasts for three years:

And in all those escapes he could not help being astonished by the beauty of this land that was not his. He hid in its breast, fingered its earth for food, clung to its

banks to lap water and tried not to love it. On nights when the sky was personal, weak with the weight of its own stars, he made himself not love it. Its graveyards and low-lying rivers. Or just a house—solitary under a chinaberry tree; maybe a mule tethered and the light hitting its hide just so. Anything could stir him and he tried hard not to love it.¹

Paul D, like other victims of extreme cruelty and oppression, has to block out the flow of energies as an earthbody, even though these are the energies that would bring him back into contact with vitality, feeling, and a responsiveness that would heal him. However, he would become transformed into a new being with new connections to the things, creatures, and people of the earth. He would be restored to vulnerability, which would be used against him by his tormentors. The plight for those who are objects of ongoing violence is that in order to survive, they cannot allow themselves to feel the pull of the open planet.

For someone in Paul D’s circumstances, to feel the flow of these admittedly positive energies is to bring back *all* feelings, including the horrendous ones of being violating, of being hurt, and of being degraded. Instead of continually re-experiencing this pain, these people are forced to hide within the body as if it were an empty shell, or “tin box,” as Paul D puts it. Secondly, there can be no question of opening oneself up to the flow of feeling and transformation when the same hostile environment still exists: the sensitivity and openness will be only become a weapon in the oppressor’s hand for the victim to feel more intensely further annihilating emotions. The worst part of being a victim is the aftermath of living death. This is part of how we get a population of ghouls, vampires, aesthetes, cyber-escapes, and people out of time and place.

Tayo, in *Ceremony*, physically survives much: he is part of the Bataan Death March, made more excruciating by having to carry his mortally wounded brother, Rocky, and he endures a lifetime of degradation and scorn by both whites and Native Americans for being a “half-breed.” Tayo has come to feel that “for a long time he had been white smoke.” Tayo explains that this white smoke doesn’t really have sense of itself and experiences the world as outlines, even “outlines of the food they pushed into his mouth, which was only an outline too. Like all the outlines he saw” (C, 14-15). He is amazed that others can’t see beyond his outline, “but they did not realize it was hollow inside.” Tayo is not here and the world is not here with him. This state is more obvious with Tayo, given his sensitivity, but it also true of all his friends, who hide from their own sense of unreality behind their drunkenness and anger.

Unlike most victims of violation, Tayo undertakes a long, painstaking search for healing, for a way to make his life ceremonial. He finds guidance from others, especially the non-traditional medicine man, Betonico. He listens to the myths and stories that inspire a different connection with the landscape, with others of the earth, where each people and each aspect of nature intertwine in emotional and imaginative significance that, if hearkened to, allows a “tuning” in which we meet up with the energy flows conveying purpose and meaning:

Dragonflies came and hovered over the pool. They were colors of blue—powdery sky blue, dark night blue, shimmering with almost black iridescent light, and mountain blue. There were stories about the dragonflies too. He turned. Everywhere he looked, he saw a world made of stories, the long ago, time immemorial stories, as old Grandama called them. It was a world alive, always changing and moving, and if you knew where to look, you could see it, sometimes almost imperceptible, like the motion of the stars against the sky. (C, 95)

The stories that move us back into resonance with the world are moving through the world and are spoken by voices throughout the planet. The language of these stories and others like them does not “scientifically” or “objectively” describe the world, but rather is the repository of images, feelings, and intuitions shared among people and evoked in response to the earthly powers around them. Language is used here to return one to experience, to break one free from distance and to help one become open to the pulsing of the world. For Tayo, it is as though he had somehow re-entered time and space after a long absence, an absence of years. His re-entry is about feeling that always alive and changing world moving through his body, feelings, and mind. He is there now in a different way, part of the circle of dancers again.

Tayo’s journey back to a moving space and time, experienced through a ceremonial life, is not just a psychological breakthrough: both he and his people recognize it as an ethical matter—a matter of the highest obligation. The elders have met to discuss his condition and the condition of his friends many times, and they feel that the fate of the people, the fate of the world or the goodness of the world, the “rightness” of the people, is at stake. There are different ways to see that this is an ethical dimension, not a psychological one, or rather that such a distinction is both wrong and itself unethical. On the most straightforward level, the victims of violence who don’t realize they’ve retreated from their experience, who have lost their faith in life, in being open to feeling and the flow of meaning as earthbodies, often become further perpetrators of violence against themselves and others. After Tayo’s friends return from the war and are again treated as second-class riffraff instead of conquering heroes, they turn their pain into an ongoing drunken haze and life of denial: “So, they tried to sink the loss in booze, and silence their grief with war stories about their courage, defending the land they had already lost” (C, 169). By the end of the novel they try to destroy Tayo, rather than have him wake up and make them see the truth and respond to it creatively. Finally, they destroy each other through violence, torture, and drunken self-destructiveness. There is where ethics should enter, at the root cause of destructive and self-destructive behavior: for a society that has already “lost the land,” and that is most of us at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have to re-find ourselves in the power of being fully present in space and time as fluid and moving through our bodies, or fail our obligations to each other and the planet.

The other way in which this is an ethical matter is that Tayo and the village elders realize this is the only way to defeat “the destroyers” we spoke of at the beginning of chapter three—those who “see no life / When they look / they see only

objects. / The world is a dead thing for them” (C, 135). The only way to fight those who fear the world as something antagonistic to them is to become fully present and part of the flow of energy on the planet. To be fully present and energized through the flow of the world’s energies is infectious and powerful, although it can be denied:

The dreams had been terror at loss, at something lost forever; but nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself. . . . They logged the trees, they killed the deer, the bear, the mountain lions, they built their fences high; but the mountain was far greater than any or all of these things. The mountain outdistanced their destruction, just as love had outdistanced death. The mountain could not be lost to them, because it was in their bones. . . . This feeling was their life, vitality locked deep in blood memory. (C, 219–20)

No matter how much literal destruction and violence is wrought, to have a human body means to have this ability to be attuned to a deeper revitalizing energy that makes one sensitive to everything and everyone around. The only way to try to combat those who perpetrate acts of violation, in the long term, is not to combat them, but to help them rejoin the earth in a sensitive relationship by awakening them to the sensitivity granted to them by being earthbodies: “As far as he could see, in all directions, the world was alive. He could feel the motion pushing out of the damp earth into the sunshine—the yellow spotted snake the first to emerge, carrying this message on his back to the people.” This is the heart of an ethos we share with all living creatures and all objects on the planet—not a human-centered “standard.” It is a way of life that gradually times out a relatedness to others and all living things.

Finally, the protagonist of Margaret Atwood’s novel *Surfacing* is the character who has to travel the furthest distance to rejoin her experience and find a way to believe in it, because she is unaware of how far she is from the reality of her life and the planet. Leopold, Molly, Seth, Paul D, Tayo, and the other Laguna men know something is wrong with their lives, even though they are lost. To Atwood’s narrator, life makes sense and she thinks she is present and doing tolerably well as a modern woman with a career as an illustrator, even though she is actually, in ways unknown to her, utterly displaced in space, time, body, feeling, and thought. This is a frightening condition, because when we don’t know something is lost, we don’t look for it. If what is lost is our experience, our reality, then we see how the holocaust can occur when we feel like everything is all right. This is what Socrates recognized: ignorance is dangerous, but not nearly so dangerous as being ignorant that one is ignorant. Knowing this, Socrates tried to reveal this to the Athenians, so they could start to know they had to search for themselves.

The narrator of *Surfacing* doesn’t realize that her past has been experienced as so violating to her especially her abortion and the fact that she was discarded by her lover. She has remembered a past according to more acceptable societal images that have reconstructed her life according to more acceptable feelings and ideas. It has left her without a life with which she is really connected:

It was all real enough, it was enough reality for ever, I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin that I'd made, I needed another version. I pieced it together the best way I could, flattening it, scrapbook, collage, pasting over all the wrong parts. A faked album, the memories as fraudulent as passports, but a paper house was better than none and I could almost live in it, I'd lived in it until now. (S, 168–169)

This slide towards reconfiguring experience according to society's dictates of what is acceptable and to minimize both our personal pain and the need to go through being shattered and coming out the other side happens more easily and gradually than we realize. The shift in memories, the elision of feelings, and the comfort with a constructed identity that goes through days like a drill passing through wood, without being caught up in the currents, the eddies, the depths of ongoing experience, builds imperceptibly, reinforced by society's proliferating images of career, consumption, and common sense. Traditional ethics does not disturb this condition and feeds into the holocaust, where people may decide by standards, but really have no deeply felt sense of who is deciding or about what. *The prime effort of ethics should be to awaken us.* To be fully awake every day is an achievement, an ethical achievement of attaining an ethos as a *way of life*, of being alive! This is why the Buddha, which means "the awakened one," claimed that to be jolted into full awareness, to become fully engaged in the ongoing reality of everyday life, and not to be at a distance of ego worries, societal diversions, and general categories of existence that substitute for actually experiencing the unique presence of life at every second would bring each person to an immediate sense of compassion.

In *Surfacing*, the protagonist has returned to her childhood backwoods home to search for her father, who is missing. What she discovers is that the reality of her life has been far more complex and compelling than she had allowed herself to experience, for in some way she had always been learning to distance and to not believe what she felt, or not to dive into its depths. In searching for her father, she discovers her parents were present to her in ways she had never allowed herself to take in and even this backwoods was not what she had allowed it to be. Her mother and father had both strengths and weaknesses she had not fathomed, as also this countryside had treasures and horrors beyond her memories. Instead of the backward hospitalities and cruelties she had paid attention to, she realizes there are deeper sinister societal forces, like the developers in this landscape who are violent and destructive or the hunters who "mainline power." In the landscape, in the lake, are also other dimensions, like the sacred spots marked by the painted figures of an older native people with presences and mysteries of which she had not dreamed.

She realizes that her father was both more evil and more weak, as someone who helped the developers; he also had deeper insight, daring, and feeling than she had known, as she discovers when she finds all the evidence of his explorations of the mysterious spirit sites of the lake. The scorned backward country of her youth, in its lack of sophistication, also holds answers and powers that grab hold of her, as she continues to explore the spirit spots her father had been trying to fathom. She is forced to dive into the depths of the lake searching for her father's body, and

the depths of her past in seeing the repressed vision of a fetus at lake bottom, and her old identity drowns. She loses her wits and society's clothing, and lives naked and wild for days, becoming in tune with the currents of meaning and energy embedded here. She feels as though, "after the failure of logic" leads her to follow the hints of the native peoples to experience the spirituality of the landscape, it is like "stepping through a usual door and finding yourself in a different galaxy, purple trees and red moons and a green sun (S, 171)." However, it is just really experiencing the reality, the earthsense, of her world for the first time. This is how far we've distanced ourselves from our earthbodies and the energies around us.

Vowing to herself that the hurts she has suffered will no longer keep her at odds with experience, ("This above all, to refuse to be a victim,"), she decides to trust and let go. Now that she understands in a deeply felt way, in a visceral fashion, the complexity of her parents' sensibilities and feelings for her and their world, she also vows, "to prefer life, I also owe them that" (S, 220). Feeling her body in a new way, as if "a creature neither animal nor human," unearthing its openness and vitality from under layers of cosmetics, clothing, and societal niceties, she feels her world in a new way:

The forest leaps upward, enormous, the way it was before they cut it, columns of sunlight frozen; the boulders float, melt, everything is made of water, even the rocks. In one of the languages there are nouns, only verbs held for a longer moment. The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word. I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning. (S, 212)

No longer distrusting the depth of experience and keeping a distance from her body, she feels her environment's presence in and through her in a new way and feels her belonging to that interplay of energies. The supposedly insubstantial parts of the world, like light and space, have substance and the supposedly solid world is fluid, moving through everything. What is most overpowering is that everything is meaning-laden, as if a word, and not that words and meaning come only from humans and their rationality. We are "reversible" with things, as Merleau-Ponty put it, intertwined within each other, tree and person leaning, seeing and speaking, for example, rather than confronting "dead matter" across an unbridgeable gap.

To enter our full presence with the world, to take up our earthbodies, is the prime ethical obligation and directive aimed at us by the rest of the planet and the cosmos. Atwood shows us what that means in a sense much different from its traditional interpretation. "Presence" is a word that has come to be denigrated within academic circles and within the larger postmodern culture in the past decades. The critique of the traditional sense of "presence" was well warranted. Traditionally, presence has been about something being utterly here, completely manifest, and impossible to deny, or in other words, something "absolute." To this absolute we owed reverence and duty, and we were somehow to become one with it. Whether the presence was the Absolute Spirit, the materialization of some purely rational idea, some Supersensible Spirit (like the New Age's "white light"), or some brutally physical monolith, it was a way of avoiding this world of ambiguity, of changing

identity and of being interdependent and mixed up with everything else. The kind of presence that flows through earthbodies is just the opposite: fleeting, richly ambiguous, and moving among boundaries in motion and rhythm, in which each being is incomplete in itself, yet taken up in an interplay among all. Throughout this book, we symbolized this swirling, changing, being caught up with all other beings on the planet, with the image of the circle of dancers.

No blinding light, no utter transparency, no absolute revelation, and no escape from the shifting cultural, historical, and natural energies in interchange and ongoing evolution awaits us as fully open to earthly experience. Rather, we can find ourselves shaping but caught up in energies beyond us by participating in an embodied, moving, linking, rhythmic gathering of depths of meaning. This brings us to a presence much more like that Shakespeare described in his declaration at the end of *The Tempest*: we “are but the stuff that dreams are made on.” Like a dream, however, there is drama, meaning, and magic, if we are able to enter its play wholeheartedly. As *Surfacing’s* narrator says in one of her final insights, “I am not an animal or a tree, I am a thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place” (S, 213). Humans cannot just blot out their insecurities and limitations by melding with something behind the world as an absolute. Yet the world beckons us as it moves through us. So, neither can we distance ourselves from this circuit of meaning and pulsation that moves through earthbodies without rupturing a communion both needed and offered as a rich gift by the linked planetary energies of humans, creatures, and things. We are more and less than mere physical entry or mechanism, less solid, but more open to a special magic because we are less solid. Instead, we are a place, a space, or a special opening in which humans can trace out the meanings flowing through and given to us by the world. It was this “in-between” state, when one becomes fully a body that communes with all parts of the world through its senses and feelings, that terrified Lester. However, as human beings and not vampires, this is our special human ethos. It is the ethical call addressed to us as a special kind of dancer whom the planet invites to participate in its dance and to witness in our human way of thought, speech, and expression of all kinds.

What Leopold, Seth, Paul D, Tayo, and *Surfacing’s* narrator all discover is a secret that the Buddhists have known for two and a half millennia: that to return to the quiet presence of the body which then buzzes with all the voices of the planet is to feel compassion for all beings, living and non-living. To cease clouding the channels of our earthbodies’ abilities to carry through us all the sensibilities of all other beings on this planet—their energies, their meanings, and their worth—by silencing the ultimatums of the separate sense of “I” that wants to control opens a sensitivity that is awesome. The kinship of all beings, how we are woven together, that swells up as a compassion allows us to see our reality in new ways and suddenly experience our actions as having a different significance in the need to serve the whole of the planet. Such openness doesn’t give us rules or absolutes of a different kind, but rather brings us into a sensitivity that is responsive to the rest of the planet. From there is not a sure way, but it is an interactive

way that seeks to find together long-term rhythms of mutual fulfillment that are also a beautiful and glorious sort of dance together.

Patterns of Perversity in Flight from Pain

Why have we, in the European-centered cultures persisted for thousands of years in thinking of ourselves, creatures, and the stuff of the world as substances, as hardened chunks of reality, as reducible to atoms or particles or pure spirit—or whatever else would simply be there, unchangeable—when life is so palpably about transformation, deep movement, and interfusion of objects and people and creatures? Why cut ourselves off from this unfolding process of vitality and meaning as a separate block of reality? The most obvious answer would be to repeat one of our cultural psychological truisms that to be so open to the input of other energies (as we would be by embracing our sense of being earthbodies) is to be open to the unknown and thus prey to insecurities. This is an obvious answer: we’re scared. Although this is true, I don’t think it is the most compelling reason. We humans are not as straightforward as we seem.

Another obvious and more current cultural response to this question would be the warning to avoid a “poor investment” in terms of time, energy, and emotion in causes that don’t immediately “pay off.” To “maximize investments” seems the new global commandment of free enterprise. To feel oneself caught up compassionately with the plight of others, whether starving children or caged chickens or acid rain damaged trees, is to lose the control over the self as having its own destiny, desires, and agenda, causing one to get sidetracked from productive self-filling pursuits. Even love, as a truly open embrace of all the ambiguities of the depths and transformations of the other person, is becoming to be seen as a sentimental project that can be superseded by a more rational program of exchanging mates—get a newer, more compatible model. If this is more efficient in terms of time, energy, and financial resources, then why not pursue this program? If life is about materiality, considered to be just a collection of inert objects that can be possessed and manipulated, then it makes sense to keep trading at any moment for greater satisfaction. If we live facing a distant, solid, and menacing world, we should control it in order to secure for ourselves greater pleasure. Then the meaning that comes from pain and suffering in allowing ourselves to feel fully related to all other beings is one that can and should be avoided, at least to a manageable degree. To feel openly with others is just a personal preference or an idiosyncrasy, and one that is often counterproductive to the true “bottom line.”

Although this reasoning seems eminently sensible, given the dominant world view, we may live the way we do for far less rational reasons. Edgar Allan Poe, who had a sensitivity to bizarre happenings in the world and those that we imagined might threaten us through the supernatural, also had a keen eye for the bizarre turns of our psyche. He described the power of what he called “the imp of the perverse” within all our psyches; he called our psyches a “radical, primitive impulse—elementary.” He described how, dreading to make an error, we also feel

drawn irresistibly to make a mistake; afraid of offending someone, we also desire to enrage them; and, at the last extreme, facing even death from falling from a precipice, thinking of the crushing and breaking of our bones; “. . . this fall—this rushing annihilation—for the very reason that it involves that one most ghastly and loathsome of all the most loathsome and ghastly images of death and suffering which have ever presented themselves to our imagination—for this very cause do we now most vividly desire it.”²⁴ This desire to plunge into the worst suffering is part of us as beings who are called to the dance of life. There is an intensity here that is compelling, even more so as we construct existences which are flat and lifeless or don't ever touch us deeply. Nietzsche, too, pointed out this will to destruction, this revenge against ourselves, as a powerful force behind Western culture once it has denied the passion of the body and the senses, and is therefore starving for vitality. Nietzsche diagnosed dominant Western culture as having been in thrall to this desperate attempt to feel life by going against its very sources of life, of wanting to feel the pain of going counter to life rather than languish in the throes of a feeling of lifelessness we've endured for the past few thousand years, (especially since Platonic and Christian philosophy had gained ascendancy, then followed by science), in a denial of living openly the body and its passions. Freud, too, was more and more impressed, as he aged and fled to London in response to the threat of the Nazis, that Western culture as overly repressed was driven more by Thanatos, the desire for destruction and self-destruction than by the erotic desire to join with the world.

It is hard to acknowledge the self-destructive irrational pulls that have an even more fundamental purchase on our psyches. It is the worn wound around the core of the way we have constructed our sense of self. Given the distance we have put between ourselves and the energy flow of the planet, we feel empty and hopeless. We persist insanely, denying our earthbodies as interwoven, dynamic, and ever-changing flows of energy and meaning with the world. We create another loop in a vicious cycle. *We deny our larger, renewing selves as energy patterns, because we feel deep in our bodies that this way of life that cuts us off from life hurts. We are addicted to this self-hurting style.* Part of the payoff is the pain itself. It is vitality, a rush of energy in the face of nothingness, a hurt that tells us we are still alive. Paradoxically, a culture that flees pain of all sorts, from headaches to mourning, continually condemns itself to a deeper, more pervasive, pain as its addictive need.

This addictive need for pain is perhaps also what is most distinctive and dangerous about human beings. James Hillman once said in a lecture that each animal has a distinctive display that its life exhibits to the cosmos. The display is each creature's way of turning the overflow of life, of vitality, into something that is amazing and is shown to the rest of the world. So, in Hillman's example, the soaring, looping, and graceful flight of birds shines down on other creatures and infiltrates their being with its awesomeness. Hillman couldn't discern what the human display might be, but it immediately occurred to me that it was our ability to deny parts of ourselves. Only humans can turn against their very nature and destroy parts of the meaning of their own existence. The Greek chorus realized that, in witnessing the

mythic Greek houses indulge in cycles of self-destructiveness, there was something uniquely human and awe-inspiring at work. We can create mighty, and even beautiful, things from this turning against ourselves, but sometimes the price is just too high, either for the individual, the culture, or the planet. The often portrayed artist who squeezes out creation from their life at the cost of great self-destruction is testimony to this addictive drive. Yet it is one that can be tempered.

There is a necessary pain to a full life. The unavoidable pains that we encounter in our interpersonal relationships, in our engagements with the world, and even within our flesh come as a direct result of being dynamically part of an interaction. Pain is a vital sensitivity to other energy forces in the larger pattern. One way to understand the traditional view of the body as a physical container divorced from the world, as well as the contemporary strategies of being vampires, ghouls, aesthetes, cyber-escapes, etc., is to see that it is a desperate attempt to save ourselves from the hurt of becoming openly part of these larger patterns. The roots of the word "hurt" mean literally "to be impacted upon." This is what hurt is about. Since our bodies are energy flows caught up with others, they are impacted upon and altered in this collision of forces. This hurts, it makes us feel the spots where we are enmeshed with other forces, whether it is something physical like a rock that slides down on us as we ascend a mountain, or it is our desire to have a person do something we would like while their desires bring them in some opposing direction.

Hurt can be appreciated as bringing ourselves back to this point of contact with others, registered in our flesh and emotion as this being torn apart. Hurt, if paid attention to and then embraced by letting it take us to the point in our psyches at which we have met this other opposing force, can usually bring transformation. The encounter of forces, if catalyzed in their potential interaction, will alter each force. Even hurts to the materiality of our bodies (let alone all the emotional hurts), as they register in our earthbodies with visceral feelings, are lined with emotions, images, memories, etc., into whose force flow we can enter.

As the Buddhists realized, the *worst pain* of even trauma like disease, or accidental damage to the organic body, is the pain in the psyche about the pain. Faced with a broken leg or cancer, it hurts in *tormenting ways* when we are racked with emotions and thoughts, often resentments, such as, why me? In other words, the initial pain of the impact upon psychological or fleshly boundaries within or without does not hurt with the same corrosive force as the anguish we *create* by attempting to fight the existence of the pain and by believing it is evil, rather than a way of discovering wrenching interrelations. A culture that is phobic about hurt and pain finds strategies to avoid these moments of contact. However, the avoidance is itself another sort of hurt that takes its toll on us and also deprives us of these moments of potential transformation. Pain is a map that directs our earthbody's energy flows to meeting with other forces that offers spiritual growth and changing, enriched identities through interaction.

The roots of the word "pain" come from the Greek work for "penalty," which originally meant "to be indebted." The hurt of pain shows us how who we are and what we may become is a debt to the other forces with whom we are interacting,

perhaps even colliding. There is the hurt and the pain of losing the accustomed trajectory of the way we have been unfolding as forces and patterns. There is no way not to register in the body this wrenching, but this dimension of pain is bearable and enlightening. It is a gift from the other beings of the world, allowing us to see where our trajectories and theirs are in opposition and further movement and transformation is needed. This is the type of pain to which Oedipus refers, as portrayed by Sophocles in *Oedipus at Colonus*. After twenty years of wandering as a blind beggar, the former king seems different, more at peace, and a better man, and remarks: "Suffering and time have been instructors in contentment."²⁵ Each torment taught Oedipus about old relationships, values, and ways of being that had run counter to the lives of others. He could then emotionally "see," despite his literal blindness. He could find more intrinsically rewarding alternatives to his old behavior patterns, such as facing difficulties instead of running from them, or being more humble instead of imperious and arrogant. The pain gave blind Oedipus more vision and insight than he had had previously as "far-seeing" hero and king, who avoided emotional challenge and pain in particular, always escaping through his wits. Pain is a key path of openness to interconnectedness of the world as earthbodies.

The pain of denying the necessary pains earthbodies bring with them causes the specific pain of *cutting all these threads* which weave us into the world, or at least cutting as many as we can without making ourselves into an utter zombie. It is the ripping apart of the lines of meaning and energy that bind us with the world. It hurts terribly, deep within our suppressed feelings, as the wrenching away, the ripping out from the midst of our larger bodies as energy patterns, the heart of vitality. Yet this deep searing pain at the root of our culture has become some sort of last gasp feeling of something. It resembles the gesture of the Nazi scientist in the last scene of Bergman's *The Serpent's Egg*; so frustrated at no longer feeling anything, not even when he tortures his victims, he watches himself slit his own throat in the mirror in the last ditch attempt to feel something. To take the body as a thing or live it as a ghoul or vampire is to feel the same pain as while having the physical heart ripped out from the physical body. Here, we rip out the heart of energy, movement, and meaning from a radiant, dynamic, and deep flow phenomenon. We do this to avoid so many other pains that would make us grow, yet we mainline this underlying self-destructive pain as our last gasp perverse proof that we are still alive.

However, it is obviously a self-defeating gesture: by attacking our spirits as a last ditch effort to feel alive, we make ourselves feel disgusted with life. On some level, we want this disappointment, this feeling like we can't win and that life is merely a gradual expenditure of energies and passions that will never be fully recompensed and will erode gradually into nothingness. As Sartre put it in the famous final sentence of *Being and Nothingness*, experiencing ourselves as seeking to get from an adversarial world some sense of having "made it," we end by feeling that "life is a vain passion." With this sense of desperation, that we are locked in a battle with a distant and threatening world and with competing fellow creatures for a small piece of the pie of satisfaction, we stay hungry, driven, and able to be manipulated to keep buying, striving, and having to be entertained to forget it all. It is

our motivation. We seek to engage in the hopeless battle as a noble gesture. To be told that life itself, without buying anything, without achieving anything, and without having to conquer, offers itself as an infinite gift of energy, wonder, and meaning is ridiculed. It is ridiculed, because we feel that it is unthinkable, unimaginable. If we were to see the obvious, that this planet, this existence as earthbodies is magical and wondrous, then we would lose our way of life and our world as we know it. This life and this world answers a deep need in us, or else we wouldn't expend so much energy, so much belief, and work so hard to keep it as it is. The notion that fulfillment comes just by being, by letting go and becoming aware of ourselves as part of rich and deeply meaningful dancing energies, threatens us with a loss of everything we use to orient ourselves in this uphill struggle of life.

It is a scary thought that we are lost doing things as our stated goals that we know on a deeper level cut us away from the heart of life. We fear facing pain, so frantically pursue goals that insure a deeper pain. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Tolstoy captured this fear and abhorrence with incredible power and purity in the character of Ivan, in his novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Ivan had followed society's pathways of success and desire unquestioningly. He had used his contacts and manipulated the bureaucracy to rise to a secure and profitable job, which he performed with no real love, but as a diversion, so that he did not have to really deal with the complexities of his relationship to his wife, children, and friends. This way he could keep them at a comfortable distance. He avoided pain whenever possible, including his wife's depression after childbirth and then, later, the death of some of their children, because he thought life was about finding ways to have pleasure. There is much more that could be said about Ivan's life and its patterns in their similarities to those described in this book, but what is relevant here is that after his health fails at the height of his life, from an absurd, trivial accident, he goes through stages of despair and rage. At first he is furious about dying, but then he realizes his rage is really about how he has lived. The lack of real connection with others, their collective inability to deal honestly with their deeper feelings and with the emptiness of their lives as a series of diversions suddenly slaps him in the face. How could playing cards have been the central pleasure and focus of his life!

After passing through anger with society for providing him with a life pattern so superficial and disconnected, and with others for still being caught in these patterns, Ivan finally turns to his own disgust with himself. Before he dies, he realizes that in his world, in the relationships of people with each other, and in the entire way they experience, there is nothing that is real. It is all a way to distract themselves from the fact they are living, sentient, feeling, and potentially expressive human beings. As Ivan realizes that his life has been a lie, he begins to howl in rage. He howls for the next three days, "three days of incessant screaming, screaming so terrible that even two rooms away one could not hear it without trembling."²⁶ Ivan's first response is to feel terror in realizing he spent his life avoiding the feeling, open, and spontaneous life of the body as interwoven with others that Gerassim, his servant, is able to demonstrate in his nights of holding

Ivan. Gerasim's emotional spontaneity and compassion shows Ivan that he has been caught in a horror film, to anachronistically use an earlier image of this book, and that he and his friends and family are the monsters, the ghouls. Then, fury fuels his days of rage as he realizes the planet is in the possession of the ghouls and that he knows no other way to be.

To let go of the lie, the diversion, and the distance of this life is no less overwhelming for him than it was for Lestat to give up his invulnerable vampire body for a body that felt the pain of others. This is the terror: of being drawn out of the non-life, which is empty, in which one is always driven by an underlying craving for something that would satisfy, but never does, after a brief respite with each new conquest. However, at a deeper level, there is the rage at giving up the familiar pain and at abandoning the inner sense of going down to ultimate defeat that we feel we all deserve as mere mortals, and with it, the accustomed round of self-loathing and loathing of others that lies behind this distanced world of interactions. Let us starve ourselves, for that is all we get and all we deserve. We are addicted to this heroic role in face of defeat, as if we were all in a tear-jerking film. This gives us the rush—that surge of desperate energy it takes to fight impossible odds—and the poignancy of being not quite able to be up to the task, the tragic halo around our image of self surrounded by overwhelming forces. We are addicted to this underlying pain and will howl if some force threatens to take it away.

Nietzsche tried to point out that the cheerful industriousness and round of pleasures with which European culture had busied itself was a disguise for a disgust with life and a self-hatred. He has the townspeople of the town of Mordley Cow (called this, because they patch together their diversions into a life of chewing their cud) say to Zarathustra: "One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasures for the night: but one has a regard for health. / 'We have invented happiness,' say the last men and they blink" (*TSZ*, 130). They have a regard for health in the sense that they never tax themselves or challenge themselves. They have invented happiness in the sense that it's a state of mind they've created for themselves that keeps them untouched by life's deeper problems and engagements, or, as they put it, "a fool whoever still stumbles over stones or human beings." They don't slow down or stumble, they speed ahead with life's tasks, like the jester who drives the tightrope walker to death by being behind him shouting, "forward lamefoot!" They blink, so as to avoid seeing the possibilities for new creation and openness that Nietzsche located in the figure of the "child" who is "a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred 'Yes.' " To reach this final stage of transformation, as Nietzsche articulated coming to affirm life in its imperfection, earthly sensuality, and creativity through a series of "metamorphoses" culminating in a final childlike stage requires "a sacred 'Yes.' " to our fate that we are interconnected with others as part of an "interplay of forces" and energies.

To be part of an "interplay of forces" in which "every atom of being affects all the rest," and is in turn affected by them, means we will hurt and we will fail at times, since we encounter many energies and forces that have their own trajectories. It means that ultimately we are powerless before the grasp of death. For each

failure to achieve our goal, for each time we are shown the emptiness of what we thought was our answer, and certainly by death, Nietzsche says we "go under," but for him this is a gift and an opportunity to be thrown into the game of self-creation with all these forces. It is the satisfaction of entering this creative process for which we must be grateful and which is the meaning of life of "this world," the world of the body, emotions, and constant transformation that Plato sought to leave behind, the world many religions have sought to abandon for a more "perfect place," and that in some sense our American culture drives us to try to conquer. However, for Nietzsche, this sense of pain, struggle, and necessity could be used as an appreciative sense that we are impacted upon by every atom in the universe as interconnected, and so included in the game of existence and potential creativity in response to this interplay. We could see that we are lucky to be earthbodies who are fragile enough in our flow patterns to be so affected by the world and thus invited to play within its game. Suffering pain is the price of openness to creative transformation.

To achieve this childlike openness means to be willing to affirm that we are changeable. If we take ourselves as mere substances, whether biochemical machines or pure spirits of a definite unchanging nature, then we remove ourselves from the interplay of forces with the world. Psychologically, we take our toys, go home, and shut the door. We have already seen that belief has the power to change our possibilities. We need to believe in the power of our experiences for them to gain their full potency. We can deny what we are and so reality appears to conform to this disbelief. We have the magical power to make life seem isolated and cut ourselves off from the planet's embracing energies in an open interactive way. To believe that we can be transformed is not to believe that we can just change ourselves. It is to see that learning, growth, and change are indirect paths. *We can't will ourselves to become anything, at least not directly.* Our will is potentially very powerful, when cleared out from being entangled within the images and desires that lock us further into ourselves. When our will moves us out into the world to find resonances, it can become empowered. As this book has hopefully shown, as "inner psyches" we are nothing. It is in allowing larger energies from other people, other kinds of people, natural phenomena, culturally diverse events, from animals, from differing historical understandings, etc., to flow through us that we gain meaning and energies. We can always allow change to happen, by opening ourselves to influences that have promise for us to become transformed in creative ways. It takes a steadfastness to remain open to new meanings and energies. However, it is not as if we can just change ourselves, like removing parts from a machine and putting in new ones. Rather, as humans we have to let ourselves go into new patterns that will return us to ourselves in new dimensions we couldn't merely open for ourselves.

Rhythm's Power, Changing Destructive Patterns, and Finding Place

Given our traditional prejudices, we think of our identities in terms of substances and their characteristics. However, we are both less and more changeable than a substance. A rock or a machine or a chemical compound has to be taken apart by

direct, forceful, and invasive impact to be altered. It may be destroyed in the process. These alterations are brought about by frontal assault according to a plan, and take on an established and palpable nature. There are parts of us that can be reduced to or altered as such a biological substance. When a surgeon invades our bodies, removes organs or puts in organic or mechanical parts, we have agreed to be treated as a mere substance and functioning mechanism for this purpose. However, in our fuller reality, humans are more diffuse and multifaceted, given that their identities flow into and through them from all to which they are related. As Oliver Sacks' book, *A Leg to Stand On*, demonstrates, even while trying to reduce ourselves to biological machines and substance for medical purposes, if the other dimensions of our meaning and energies are totally suppressed, the "repair" to even the mechanical level of our body won't be successful. Sacks had suffered a serious compound fracture of his leg, and bone, muscle, and nerve tissue had been disconnected. Much intricate surgery was required for his leg's reconstruction. However, after his surgeries and recuperation, he still couldn't walk or move properly, because he didn't have the sense of this being his leg. His doctors became puzzled and frustrated, because mechanically, all was back in order. This feeling of it no longer being his leg was so extreme, that one night, Sacks became alarmed and tried to throw his leg out of bed. Of course, he was right. A biologically perfectly constructed leg was not Oliver Sacks' leg. His leg was part of the energy flow and context of significance that made up the life of Oliver Sacks. Sacks, an ardent music lover, discovered that when he began to listen to music, his leg began to twitch with some spark of vitality and interconnectedness. Sacks listened to increasingly more music, and gradually he "danced" his leg back into the flow of his body as an integrated part of the circulation of energy and meaning. As Sacks talked with other patients, he discovered that most of them reported being aware of some phase in their recovery where they had to find a way to take their bodies, as substances that felt alien to them as mere parts, and find a way to re-integrate them into the energy and meaning flow of their bodies as earthbodies.

Earthbodies are a field of forces that interact with all other forces in patterns. Patterns in dynamic phenomena are both very fragile, in the sense that well-timed and artfully applied small changes may alter them dramatically, but also amazingly durable, if the forces that feed into them stay in the same relation and rhythm. A vortex in the river flow may remain in the same spot for hours or days, weaving its dynamic way in the same area and with the same contour, or there may be some slight shift in some part of the river that upsets the forces of flow entering that stretch of the river which then alters the relationships and disperses the vortex. As earthbodies, we are vortices.

People are surprised that changes in their behavior, changes in their physical states, or changes in their feelings are so difficult to achieve; it is a long struggle against the re-emergence of patterns. It is this stubbornness of the past that fuels explanations of our makeup as substances and tempts us to disown responsibility for who we can be, rather than engage in the long and laborious process of transformation. If we are not substances, then why can't we just will away our insecurities or stop eating too much or stop responding to our spouses

in a way that undermines our communication? Yet, patterns of flow as constellations of many forces involve a multiplicity of relations. It is not a matter of just changing "me." There is no simple "me." Who I am is this dynamic network of relations in unfolding events of all sorts. Each time I change the world is changed, and each change in the world of which I am part, if I allow it to be taken to heart, allows new selves to emerge in me.

Even the most simple behavior or understanding or way of coping may be a constellation of many, many forces in multiple relations. For example, when, in *Ceremony*, Tayo wants to halt his sense of helplessness and depression, he can't will them away. They are intertwined with Rocky's death, his long history with Rocky, his devaluation by his aunt, his relationship with his uncle, the lost horses, his degradation by the whites, the despoiling of the land, the toxicity of the uranium mine, his mother's upbringing of him in bars, his half-breed status with both the whites and the Pueblo people, his family traditions, his drinking in the service, his relationship with Night Swan, the rustling of the herd by the rich white rancher, the call of the mountain, the sense of the dragonflies, the power of the tribal myths of Bear and Trickster and others, the way in which he drove his stomach to nausea, the way in which he, too, found relief in drinking, the way in which he retreated to sleep, the way in which his body is now out of shape, the ways in which even he doesn't experience his senses as finely attuned to the land as he always did, and on and on. Beronnie, the unorthodox medicine man, realizes that the complex ritual that Tayo will have to follow will take months or maybe years, or maybe the rest of Tayo's life. Tayo will have to address many of these personal events, cultural displacements, physiological upheavals, natural presences, other people, and myriad aspects within his environment, his cultural context, and history.

To change ourselves is to enter into new relationships with so many of the forces that flow through us. Multiple forces make us become who we are in how we greet and shape them. It is an exhaustive process of locating for each person what these specific interweavings are about and how to find the paths to meet up with them in resonant rhythms. In a society that wants a quick fix and no responsibility, this does not play well. We'd rather have it be a problem with a "thing" out there that can be replaced. If it is our problem, then we'd prefer it to be a matter of replacing some "thing" within us, as if it were a faulty part—like altering chemicals or some genes or something we can manipulate without entering into relation. Relation takes energy, sensitivity, exhaustive exploration, and ongoing attuning emotionally, behaviorally, intellectually, and expressively. In a society that promotes ever-more passive consumption, instead of individual exploration and expressivity, this search for ourselves in transformation not only seems undesirable, but even impossible to many.

To change patterns takes the patience and the painstaking effort to find all these myriad interconnection points and to find new ways of entering into them. This takes a level of introspection, analysis of situation and relations, and attention to the smallest details of how these relations are forged that most of us are not taught, and that is not promoted by the pace and focus of our present consumer culture. It

also means this task, though partly reflective and intellectual in its process of careful self-discovery, is even more one that calls for bodily trust. We have to be able to give ourselves over to the viscosity of the body in order both to discover and to find indirect ways of modulating these patterned relations. This is the power of Gestalt therapy's attention to each part of the body, its energy, and its feeling tone, as reflecting a unique relationship, or set of relationships, to parts of the client's situation.

The body as unfolding dynamic patterns of interchange with the world flowing around and through it can be read viscerally, emotionally, and imaginatively to yield an understanding of these vectors. In Gestalt therapy, for example, the therapist might ask the client to become the knot in his or her stomach or the fluttering in his or her arms and give voice to how those visceral energies are the embodiment of feelings in connection with parts of the world. In a therapy session while I was in graduate school, the therapist helped guide my attention to the ball of tension at the pit of my stomach. In giving myself over to the energies that seemed to be congealed in my abdomen, by trying to feel what these visceral feelings meant in an emotional and emblematic way about my life situation, I discovered they contained the emotions swirling around my inability to write freely at the time. The energies, as I explored what they felt like and what they seemed to be suggesting or to what they seemed connected, felt like they were the heavy stone weight of Yale University Graduate School pressing down on me. The centuries of Yale's austere and intimidating expectations seemed crushing to my excitement as a writer.

My felt relationship with that reputation and what it meant for me had become something I had to painfully digest in the writing process. After identifying that relationship as it flowed through my body at that moment, I was then able to find a more dancing energy in my feet and shoulders that flowed into me, once I had faced the fear and pain in my stomach. This more lively and playful energy led into a playful sense of space that betokened a dancing, fun relationship with other parts of the world that could then be linked to the work I was trying to write at the time. As I experienced this new playful energy as another part of the writing process that I had not noticed before (with my being riveted on the tension in my stomach), I was then able even to invite the old stiffness of Yale to enter a jig with me. I danced around the floor with my imaginary thesis as my partner, opening up a flood of other emotions, memories, fantasies, and ideas. This helped me to start to find a way to enjoy writing my thesis and to think about it as my own particular dance, something that would reflect my own rhythm and not Yale's. In the depths of the energies that run through our earthbodies viscerally, the imagined, remembered, felt, thought, and intuited interweave in their flow, and by letting go into their sense within the body, we can enter into their shared current.

Patterns continue with force because they come to embody a certain rhythm, a rhythm that has been set up among many events, people, and places. Each facet woven into the network of relations adds more strength to the pattern and more energy to the rhythm. The relations are also reinforced, since we have entered them in a bodily way that is immediate and visceral, becoming vital to our own rhythmic

way of relating to the rest of the world and our lives. Once we have unfolded in our relations with the world by continually moving in certain patterns, it seems unthinkable to really imagine other patterns, for reality itself in many of its facets would change its identity. For example, in *Ceremony*, Tayo's nausea is not a simple feeling. It has a certain rhythm of frenetically fleeing and rifling through his past and present, but never getting anywhere, like a tire spinning with no traction in the sand. This is the visceral sense of all the events and relationships with the world that his stomach experiences as upsetting and nauseating. His part of the pattern and rhythm is a frenzied seeking, but not finding a proper place, and the world's part is that of being cold and solid in its exclusion of him. Tayo's drinking embodies this sense of dizziness combined with a despairing letting it all go, sliding towards a black hole of oblivion, added to an angry jerking away from possible creative relations. This is part of the sense of increasing velocity as his life slips away. The rhythms are indefinite in their number and nuance given each person we confront and each relation we enter, but take on a similar energy as part of our unique way of directing and shaping energies. It takes a considerable trusting of the body just to begin to detect them and then even more trust to start to work with them in transformation.

Rhythm comes about from the synchronous movement and harmonizing or interweaving with other forces in the environment and within ourselves. Rhythm gives patterns an added dimension of coherence or felt belonging among its constituents. They are no longer just related by circumstances or by cause and effect, but instead parts come to echo each other, to resonate to each other, to enter into a vitalizing energy that is passed back and forth, and augmented. Rather than mere repetition, there is a stressing and moving that has a musical sense of progression, and with it an inclusive electricity, drawing other beings into its spell or field, like shavings drawn to a magnet. In his book, *Wild Hunger: The Primal Roots of Modern Addiction*, Bruce Wilshire describes the most basic level of the person's relationship to the world as rhythmic. Wilshire comes to this conclusion after exploring how the self is a "body-self," comprising a circulation of energies with the world, similar to the description in this book of earthbodies. As he struggles to understand what we crave in addiction, Wilshire sees that Emerson's idea of the Earth's "circular power returning into itself" through our body-selves is a circuit that can be broken. Once this circuit is broken, we crave some other sort of sense of power and connection in its stead, or we can find ways to enter this flow of energy and meaning more completely.

Rhythm, explains Wilshire, gives us access to the melodic aspect of the unfolding of energies and meaning that are at the heart of the way things, people, and creatures come to enter the dance of manifestation together. Wilshire notes how Emerson saw that there is a musical sense of things, the way each thing, person, and creature is distinct is as a melody. Rhythm is the way those melodies join into each other or, as Wilshire explains, how a person and a stream can come together rhythmically: "Each coils into and instantly confirms the other within the resounding world that feeds back into itself." Rhythm is a centripetal force that

joins us to things and others by a fleshly synchronizing with the musical quality of their flowing forth. This is not an intellectual identification, but rather is the way as earthbodies, as material beings in our concrete sensual connection to specific things, we hold together in our moving through them energetically. As Welshire phrases this insight: "For stretching through time, the underlying rhythmic reciprocity of body and world, essentially musical orders, arrays, and re-collects all things sensuously—meaningfully." We are drawn into the world through this matching and responsive moving in time in our bodies. This is the way we have the ongoing continuity that we attribute in our culture's philosophical misunderstanding to some underlying substance or thing-like aspect of ourselves.

In order to read this sentence well, for example, the reader must enter a certain rhythm. Similarly, in order to function like a team in any sport, a group of people must find a rhythm in their movements and actions. Even in order to perceive meaningfully an object, there must be a felt rhythm among the sensations we take in through whatever sensory modality. For a discussion to become responsive and to take on meaning, a rhythm must spring up between its participants. In order for two people to communicate erotically and sexually, a rhythm is born between them that carries them like a tide. Rhythm is vital to all happenings in which a person generates meaning, works toward a purpose, or augments sensitivity. The opposite is also true: sometimes a discussion just can't proceed, if mired in dissonances, or suddenly the basketball team and all its members lose their rhythm and each shot clanks away from the basket, a task which was building upon itself, whether writing or painting a fence, loses its beat and synchronicity. Immediately, miscues start erupting. Rhythm allows us to interplay with other aspects of our world and within ourselves. Rhythm gives us a continuity and a momentum.

Our rhythms, embodying our basic sense of directedness through the world, are not easy to alter. The body moves within rhythm's power as if being surrounded with a field of energy and attraction that helps focus and propel its unfolding relations with things. A rhythm has a momentum and draws upon the combined force of its constituents, so that it tends to keep going, even though it is fragile in requiring the coordinated input of all its members to remain in existence. To alter a rhythm that governs significant relations with the world would require a prolonged effort to find a new series of what is noticed, what is emphasized, and what is valued in different ways of moving with accustomed things, or in finding new sets of things with which to move. We would be forging a whole new kind of relation in movement with the things that matter to us. This doesn't mean it can't be done, but it does mean finding out all the ways we have attuned ourselves to the world in a certain rhythm in order to modulate ourselves into a new one. It is a complex task to undo deliberately what rhythm achieves automatically in drawing upon multiple influxes.

A recent novel that demonstrates through the stirring struggle of one of its two main characters, Ada, the dynamics and power of shifting the rhythms of one's life in forging new relations with the world around us is Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*. Ada had moved to the rural setting of the Blue Ridge Mountains from the comfort of Charleston with her father, Monroe, a preacher, in the hopes his consumption

would improve. They find themselves at odds with the people, their ways, and the world in which they now are. Instead of the mountain air helping him, after six years Monroe dies. It is during the Civil War, and Ada is alone, without hired men available to help her, facing making a life in a setting to which she has never attuned herself. It was not only that she had been pampered by her father to never worry about work, nor that she knew nothing about farming nor living alone, but her psyche was forced to emerge from a kind of trance to find itself dislocated in time and space. In our own culture, many might find themselves in the same state, were they to suddenly awaken from their disconnection as ghoul, vampire, aesthete, hardied clock-driven workers, etc. Ada realizes that she not only knows nothing of the flowers, plants, trees, hills, and creatures around her, nor does she know what her own body can do, but also that she had been just as adrift previously in Charleston, and did not really know who she was or if there were any real purpose to her life. In Charleston, she had drifted with the rhythms of its life. Now, she had to find a rhythm within her that rang true and could make sense of her world.

With the help of a tough, self-sufficient country girl, Ruby, who has fended for herself since early childhood, Ada begins to learn how to apply herself to tasks, to discover how strong her body can be, the animals, plants, weather conditions, social customs, etc., are in her environs. However, each day Ada must stop her old rhythms of lying down in what she had assumed was tiredness, or giving in to supposedly feeling sad, or paying no attention to the changing plants on her acreage. Each day seems impossible to Ada. Ruby seems to bring to her attention detail after detail of farm life and of the exigencies of subsistence, and demand new movements from Ada's body and psyche that continually feel unavailable to her. Yet, gradually and painfully, with dogged attention and persistence, the whole rhythm of Ada's life gradually changes. Looking at the same fields she has looked at for years, she eventually can see plants or animals or implements she couldn't see before or she can see them in different aspects with a whole new set of values and appreciation in a relation that engages her deeply versus just moving by her and her walking by them.

At a key turning point in the novel, Ada has learned each night to watch with interest exactly where on the ridge the sun disappears behind the horizon. She muses:

Were she to decide fully to live here in Black Cove unto death, she believed she would erect towers on the south and north points of the sun's annual swing. She owned the entire span or ridge where the sun set through the year, that was a thing to savor. One then just had to mark the points in December and June when the sun wrenched itself from its course and doubled back for another set of seasons. Though upon reflection, she decided a tower was not entirely needed. Only clear some trees to notch the ridge at the turning point. It would be a great pleasure year after year to watch with anticipation as the sun drew nigh to the notch and then on a specified day fell into it and then rose out of it and retraced its path. Over time, watching that happen again and again might make the years seem not such an awful linear progress but instead a looping and a return. Keeping track of

such a thing would place a person, would be a way of saying, You are here, in this one station, now. It would be an answer to the question: Where am I?⁸

Through days of “shucking walnuts out of their stinking pulpy husks” (*CM*, 326) (as she puts it in her letter to her Charleston cousin, Lucy), or swinging the scythe for hour after hour, or burning the brush pile, Ada has come to pay attention to the way the land moves and can move her, its details and messages to her, and has taken its rhythm into hers, although she too shapes it in her unique way. Now, she can even see the deeper, slower rhythms of the land around her that take years, season after season, to infiltrate the body and which could encompass her. To take up these rhythms, Ada realizes, is to come to “have” a “place” or, we might say, to become *emplaced*: to feel in the body and heart as if one were located in a space because one has felt its connectedness and connection to oneself. Ada also realizes that to belong to a space in relation, to *be somewhere* in a fully human or earthbody sense as aware and savoring of these interconnections, is also to have a sense of who we are in being somewhere on this earth. Having an identity, Ada discovers, is about this sense of directed, located, belonging to the environs, having found an ability to respond and shape oneself in order to enter larger rhythms that can resonate with a creative sense of self.

Rhythm doesn't just happen instantly. It takes time to unfold in its extended identity, to infiltrate our bodies, and for us to become sensitive to the emanations from the things with whom we meet in this connection. A rhythm builds and then suddenly “catches” among its participants. There is that awkward forced stretch of time while synchronization and catchy new beats are established. At first, connections seem awkward, tenuous, and unstable. There is some clashing and disequilibrium. Flow isn't immediate. Only gradually do we move, resonate, and join in melodically after working with resistances and dissonances. Like the pain of tearing away from connectedness, which is a measure of the way we seek to avoid changing our established ways of flowing in response to the changing world about us, the world, too, resists a smooth and harmonizing yielding to relationship. The things of the world “hold back” into themselves, as Heidegger puts it: “They are self-enclosing; at least in the short stretch of time. Of course, it isn't a deliberate response on the part of the world, especially in its inanimate parts. Only other people and living creatures resist more knowingly such opening to others. However, whether people, creatures, or inert objects, all reality resists the immediate loss of boundaries afforded by the momentum of keeping its established rhythm of flowing back into itself. Only as we talk more will people melt somewhat and find a cadence of listening and speaking, of starting to understand and empathize, that starts to open possibilities for new rhythms together. However, even the most inert object, like a mountain or a rock, also has its own rhythm, and only gradually will it be taken up into the hand of the sculptor or by the legs of the hiker or by the eye of the painter. Cézanne painted Mount Saint Victoire for a decade, as Steiglitz shot photographs of the tree behind his house for decades. This resistance of rhythm is its reality: its depth, multiplicity of facets, and further levels to be explored.

A Dynamic Sense of the Depths of Surfaces

The goal of achieving depth, in our lives in works of art, or in other endeavors, had been assumed to be a worthy aim culturally until recent years. This goal, has come into disrepute in light of the current postmodern preference for surfaces. This reaction is a quite understandable and overdue response to the traditional emphasis on depth as more noteworthy and significant than what is present on the surface. The surface was merely “superficial,” not just in the literal sense of that phrase, but as an assessment of meaning. The true meaning was seen to lie at a depth, rather than “on the surface” of things or people,—as if the two were opposed to each other. Depth was often presented as something “hidden,” which only the expert, such as the scientist or psychoanalyst or intellectual, could locate. Others, lacking their training or talent just couldn't see into this dimension. This was part of the same Greek-through-modern-Europe cultural prejudice that we have critiqued throughout this work: against the senses, the emotions, and that which was experientially available to all as somehow not true knowledge. The truth was buried within things at their depths and had to be uncovered so its nature could be released, reflecting the power of the upper ethereal and eternal realm. One had to dig for this insight. All the commonly available experiences of the bodily emotional realm were condemned to being the “mere surface of life.”

However understandable the current obsession with surfaces and the accompanying ridicule of depth, it is also unfortunate in its reinforcement of the same dichotomy between surface and depth. A recent popular television ad for Canon cameras asserts, “image is everything.” It is meant to echo part of the current cultural wisdom, and if it is taken seriously as a sensibility or guide to significance in life, it is self-defeating in blocking access to other levels of meanings that have to be balanced with the sensual and emotional impacts of the surfaces of phenomena. Both dimensions, surface and depth, and the meanings they have to offer, are real, interdependent, and mutually enriching. However, to see this relationship and to derive the most meaning from both, it is necessary to have another model of meaning and depth based on another sense of the body.

Besides being oppositional (and thus excluding the devalued term), the traditional notions of surface and depth assume a *clarity of meaning* that needs to be questioned. In the most obvious reference, this distinction refers to things as if they were merely quantities of inert matter, and surface and depth were merely determined by their respective physical locations, though as the Mobius-like constructions of Escher make us aware, even this comparison is not so simple or clear-cut. However, all the other meanings of this dyad, whether referring to our superficial feelings versus deeper ones, or the superficial causes of a political event versus the deeper ones, etc., refer to a broader horizon of significance. Whether the surface meaning is assumed to be obvious, for all to see, or the meaning lying at the depths is hidden, and to be discovered only by the expert or through a journey of exploration, both references as commonly made assume a closure and univocality of discovery that belies the structure of earthbodies.

From the earliest tales of the “hero’s quest,” so insightfully brought to the public’s attention by Joseph Campbell, going all the way to back to the tale of Gilgamesh and his labors, it has been the presumption that there is some answer, some transcendent meaning, or some special talisman to be gained to restore to us the proper sense of life’s meaning. So, for example, in the myths surrounding Gilgamesh (the oldest recorded hero’s tales), he seeks the secret of immortality when faced with the horror of death after his best friend has died. In one attempt to secure this secret, he ties rocks to his feet to weigh down his body and plunges down into the depths of the waters to secure a magical spiny plant that insures immortality. (It perhaps symbolizes a “growth” fraught with pain, a lesson he resists in trying to get a quick simple solution to aging and death.) Although he cuts his hands, he does get the plant, but that night a serpent seizes the plant and dives back into the depths of the waters with it. The secret of living life forever is indeed one that lies in the depths, but it is not to be gained by merely plunging down to a spot and returning with a quick, simple solution. Gilgamesh laments that the secret of everlasting life has eluded him on his quest: “For myself I have gained nothing; not I, but the beast of the earth has joy of it now.”⁹ That is right: the serpent, the longstanding symbol of the cycles of the earth, has the secret of everlasting life. It is enmeshed in the history and proliferation of intertwined lives within these earthy cycles of birth, death, and rebirth.

In the heroic mentality to which our culture often subscribes, the depths are to be found at the conclusion of a quest as a prize, or a solution to a vexing problem. The depths have kept hidden some definite formula. Our shared Western presumption, since Plato on, is that a question has an answer and success is achieved by seizing that answer. Capturing the prize constitutes knowledge and sometimes wisdom. However, as Roland Barthes expressed in a protesting counter to this notion, it may be more the case at many times for many issues of significance, that “the key to the treasure is the treasure itself”¹⁰ (as he writes in *Chinera*.) There is no key, either lying self-evidently in front of our noses, nor hidden away to be discovered, but rather to keep asking questions is itself the answer, to stay open to searching, to be involved in the matter at hand such that there is a *flow of partial answers*, giving rise to new stories. As we have seen, humans and the planet might be better described as flow phenomena—dynamic, multi-leveled, and ever-changing. Barthes’ tale is a tale about tales, about where this book began, in the power of story and ceremony to keep life alive and moving, if it stays responsive to the larger whole and can keep evolving.

A better notion of depth, one that fits our experience as earthbodies and can encompass the end of the story of this book and its search for meaning, is the one proposed by Merleau-Ponty. Rather than being the “third dimension,” as depth has been traditionally conceived in its literal representation as coming after point and length, Merleau-Ponty suggests that depth is the “dimension of dimensions”¹² out of which all the others emerge, as does meaning itself. In other words, in our immediate experience and its particular logic, wholes precede parts. Even in its basic perceptual meaning, Merleau-Ponty asserts that depth does not come “after”

establishing points in space, then connecting them into lengths, and then projecting these lengths into planes, giving rise to a sense of depth. Rather, Merleau-Ponty shows that human bodies are not located at particular discrete points in space, as if we were mere objects, like coffee cups or rocks. We are “inside space” in myriad locations as being in relation with all the parts of the world.

Instead of starting from an isolated point and building up points to form our space, and then from within this space proceeding to forge relations with things, people, creatures, events, institutions, etc., Merleau-Ponty shows where our consciousness as bodies-within-a-world, as relational bodies or earthbodies, *emerges from a web of interconnections of implicit meaning*. Humans are *immediately* “at the depths” by being related to the world as a whole through flows of energy and meaning. To be a human body is to be immersed within this web of relationships that gives the so-called physical world its orientation and sense. We can be rational creatures when we take a distance from things and consider them reflectively. Equally unique, when we are caught up with things there is an immediate kind of bodily understanding in which the echoes of that rationality have melded with the new perceptual, emotional, memorial, imaginative, and other presences in this immediately felt (although implicitly so) web of relationships. Furthermore, the kind of relatedness to things, people, events is not just within this lived sense of space but also within a web of temporal relations. The space-time relational field of earthbodies to the world is inextricable.

Depth comes first, because it is the sense of being enmeshed at many distances in many situations, even when that seems predominately to be there “just perceptually.” When I look up at the blue sky, I don’t have to project out towards this expanse as if I had to build out from where I am struck towards the measurable physical distance located within a depth. Rather my vision is a kind of sensing in which I “come back” to myself from my interconnection with the sky, a kind of visceral “flowing back” into myself from being at one with the sky’s movement and energy on this brilliant summer day. Vision and the other senses enter the other being’s rhythm in perceiving something meaningfully and fully. In really looking at the sky, I am “skied” in some sense (we don’t have words for these aspects of experience) that adds its sense to my sense of being on the ground. The being “grounded” is in relation and interconnection with the expanse of sky, something a mere mechanical registering device wouldn’t feel in its limbs and stomach. Such a device couldn’t be “under” the sky in the same sense, as we earthbodies who have the implicit feeling and relational understanding of it as a “scarable space” that permeates our bodies. Similarly, to add more emotion and imagination to the nuance of a similar perception, as there is also usually present, when a bird flying overhead does capture our explicit attention and we watch its flight with some thrill, there is a visceral, emotional, imaginative, etc., sense of what that flight is like because there is an echo of flight in my body that flows back into me while watching the bird.

Given we are these earthbodies, whose *bodies* are as different and unique (although allied in kind with animals and even objects in this circulation of energy and sense) as we have traditionally thought of our minds, our sense of depth (which

infuses our more complex experiences, such as those that are the subject of “depth psychology,” for example), is unique as resulting from human perception and embodiment. We find ourselves being a creature of our personal and collective histories embedded in everything around us. As we walk down the street, for example, we are not only partially caught up in the store towards which the walk is to terminate and which gives the intervening steps their direction and purpose, but we are also caught up back at the house feeling emotions about our loved ones, are partially caught up at work with tasks unfinished yesterday, are pulled towards the locale hundreds of years ago where the event occurred that is celebrated in today’s holiday, or may even be caught up in the energy and meaning of the moon or space station where our country’s astronauts are performing an important mission. This sketch of how we walk through the world already contained in various depths, both spatial and temporal is consistent with reality as painted throughout this book, taking our experience as earthbodies as, circulation of energies and meaning as our guide.

If we look, listen, and feel to observe how we actually experience the world, we would see that at any given instant we are pulled in many directions at once. These pulls and tugs have to do with how we have forged and intensified previous relationships, but are also about the new things that call out to us for involvement. Also, they are about the many different contexts in which we live and find meaning, many of which are quite different from each other. So, the garden to be pruned, the car to be waxed, or the mountain to be climbed may beckon to a worker at the desk and be part of the consciousness and felt sense of the body at any instant. He or she is not entirely confined to the chair at the desk, but somehow is still located within the contexts of family life at home with the kids or with the group of buddies at the pool table or with the sick relative in the hospital. All the energy and meaning flows which pass through our earthbodies gives each of us a distinctive way of being anywhere, which is not strictly locatable on a geometric grid. What is most significant is that these sorts of spatialized and temporalized currents of meaning also indicate something important about the identity we can have as earthbodies. We feel, we think, we dream, we strive, we suffer, we mourn for and believe in things, persons, creatures, and dimensions that take us on paths of meaning which are widely divergent and sometimes even contradictory. For a purely mental being that had to live in its head in a logical realm, this would be a problem, an impossible one. However for a being which is a constantly transforming energy and meaning flow, which is in relation to all parts of its world through its bodily rhythms and extensions of circulating presence, it is a multidimensionality that makes us unique as earthbodies.

We often notice that a person who is called to many dimensions has a richness of involvement, personality, and meaning to their lives we might label as a “depth” versus someone else we might find “shallow.” This accords with Merleau-Ponty’s notion of depth as “the going together of what is impossible” (PP 264–5). In other words, what seems unrelated, or even contradictory or logically at odds, does co-exist, does cohere, for us in our experience and it is precisely this coming together within difference that makes up the more embracing sense of depth. Without a context, these feelings or ideas or senses would be exclusive of each other, but

our bodies’ relationship to these varying factors draws them into the context of our experience, within our distinctive rhythms. *The context becomes richer, not logically defined*, through these oppositions or tensions or different vectors.

Our experience as perceiving bodies allows us entrance to a world that is temporally dynamic in its jostling structures. Our experience of time as we listen to a sentence or walk down the block may swing back and forth from moments of the past, future, and present, which intermingle and give each a different sense. At one point, the land around Ada’s house may have been a forbidding, sterile landscape, home to ignorant people, yet simultaneously it was God’s beautiful creation and a place to relax while her father composed his sermons, or a reading spot, etc. It still has all these meanings within its depths as she walks through it. Later it also becomes the place to trap turkeys, to shuck corn, or to grind flour. When Ada walks across her fields at the end, the intense labors with Ruby flow through her steps and make the field something different in the present with different possible futures like the one we examined, where the conning rhythmic swing of the sun’s orbit will give her a sense of belonging to this land—which wouldn’t have been possible without that recent past that has transformed the present. She has taken on depths explored at different times that are present to her as she has worked with the world around her.

Similarly, we experience spatiality with this same jostling sense that is dynamic, both immediately and also in what spaces come to mean in a more enduring way. This jostling, ever-changing sense is clearly highlighted in an experience shared by Ada and Ruby. In a dangerous wintry attempt to help Ruby’s father, Ada and Ruby round the corners of a steep path. The path isn’t laid out before them in that orderly fashion of clear and distinct perspectives, but rather things emerge with shifting meanings and appearances. Things appear first to be ice or water or just cold air, or a cave or a drop in the path or deep shadows of the trees as they try to move through the treacherous conditions. The path’s identity as they actually experience it envelops them and infiltrates them with deeply felt ambiguities that get resolved for the moment only to give way to new ones. Their immediate experience is indicative of the dynamic perceptual sense space has for our earthbodies, which becomes more evident in these heightened moments of danger, emotional intensity, and accelerated flux.

However, these immediate environmental perceptions of dynamic time and space are the basis for the way more enduring, complex, and abstract identities also form as a jostle of different meanings. For example, the man they are out to save, Ruby’s father, is: a scoundrel; an abusive, derelict father; a ruthless schemer; an utterly transfixing, inspired violin player; a self-sacrificing creator of beauty; a source of good cheer; a cruel person, selfish thief, and manipulative user; a friend, and comrade; and an embodiment of many other contradictory dimensions. Ruby and Ada have the commitment, artistry, and patience to allow the different dimensions of his depth to emerge and can embrace the ambiguities of their relationship with him.

As we really live through our experiences, time “enjambs” or piles into itself, as does space, both of which are present all around us “in” the world and its beings, and not just “in” our heads. Rather, neither of these oppositions are true: meaning

emerges from the dialogue of us *with* things, others, and creatures. In these ongoing meetings in which the impossibles come together to give depth to our lives, the past, present, and future are all “now,” at different layers of a “thickness” of time, space, and experience that does not fall into the neatly linear order into which rationality tries to force this richer and more wild sense of our experience. We find this depth of time not just in “our heads” and with our memories, but by being open to the way objects and their spaces encroach upon each other in the same wave of meaning and “hold” within themselves networks of events and experiences spanning different times and places. We can recover different depths in different places with different objects, because we are all part of a circulation of energy and meaning. The porch is the place where Ada read a momentous letter or sat with her late father, just as it is also the place of shucking corn with Ruby at this moment, a place which evokes in her different senses of loss and security, and has layers of different times held within its floorboards.

In the paintings of Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty found a better representation of the primary experience of depth in perception than in the traditional “vanishing point” perspective of Renaissance-Albertian inspired painting. Cézanne abandoned the progressive, rational sense of depth “building up” through planes used within traditional European painting. Instead, he depicted depth through a jostling of different outlines, different planes, different positions, and overlappings of objects. Merleau-Ponty found it represented how we actually experience perception and perceived objects, before we take rational distance from them. It is not logically possible that the table has five different edges or three different angles, yet as we walk by that table that well may be our experienced sense of it. This is the source of depth in perception as actually experienced: there is an openness to multiplicity that later gets more resolved and crystallized, only to become fluid again at the next moment.

As earthbodies, our loves, our ideals, our goals, and even our values and beliefs are always shifting, dynamic, and ambiguous—like the outlines of Cézanne’s tabletop—if we listen to our bodies. We can feel a vitality and richness of meaning in our identities, values, and beliefs, if we keep ourselves open to the influx of energies and meaning from the world with which they are interrelated. If we were to see we are earthbodies and affirm this dimension of ourselves, we would dictate a cultural shift away from the social demand that our identities, values, and beliefs stay static and unchanging. The demand to remain constant and clearly identifiable fits the old Platonic sense that the true reality lies outside the embodied, material realm in the ether of pure, unchanging mental or spiritual ideals. *A spirituality or an ethics or a psychology that is earth-centered is one that stresses an openness to being enmeshed or compelled (having to act in concert with other forces, in response to them) by the dynamically changing world of which we are part, naturally and culturally (a blurred, evolving, and fluid boundary).*

This pregnant, given ambiguity means there is always a working out of what becomes possible on the basis of what has emerged from a past which keeps changing itself. Human freedom is not the freedom to soar above and just remake the

earth or humans or the rest of creation, but rather is the ability to work with what the maximal sense of the situation has presented to us as a challenge. Unlike a god, we do not choose our choices, but rather they are given to us by history, culture, matter, and all sorts of factual givens that confront us in the faces of objects, landscapes, institutions, situations, etc., that make up the texture of our lives. This gives us the responsibility to enter that dialogue with these things, with people, with events to find out the depths of meaning they hold for us. Our cultural heritage from Plato onwards has looked for the factual, the mathematically precise, as being our way into the world, by mastering its tendencies and manipulating them for our declared purposes. Meaning has been seen to be a creation of humans opposed to such a factual dimension. We are the ones who think and speak. This book has suggested that both—fact and meaning—are sides of each other, interdependent when maximally expressive of both the world and ourselves. The world speaks and dreams and feels through our becoming rooted in it. The imagination disconnected from the factual reality around it is entertaining, but not liberating in the same way as the dreams that grow out of matter, the passions that respond to the uniqueness of our situation, the memories that resonate to specific qualities of the environment that need to be kept open for future articulation, etc. These are the challenges that confront us not just personally, but globally, in how we can listen to the environment to represent and articulate the voices of creatures, or rocks and waterways, as they surround us as interlocutors. This sense of depth invites us to take in what unique properties and possibilities lie in new technological realms like cyberspace or wireless communication that can resonate with and celebrate the interplay of all forces at a depth of meaning in order to extend human creativity and depth. Depth in this sense is not the inaccessible. It is not what lies hidden beneath the surface. It is an enveloping, dynamic complexity which both plays across the surface of things, spans their temporal and spatial interconnectedness, and also does lie within. The voyage is not exclusively to far-off realms, but often takes only a return to where one already is with an openness to the tensions which simultaneously clash and compel.

Responsibility, Reverberating Resonance, and Joy

Decades ago, Gestalt therapists, existentialists, and others in various human potential movements began to point out that the word and idea of “responsibility” contains the notion that our obligations are always really about our “ability to respond.” The ideas, the values, the goals, and the identities of our lives come not from above, but from all around us in the way everything touches everything as an interplay of energies and forces. It is up to us to allow the particular meanings of our lives and its particularly challenging ambiguities to emerge from the world; we must register their significance by entering into a dialogue, as we are uniquely able to do as earthbodies. If meaning is in the world around us, it requires a level of increasing awareness resulting from an ongoing attempt to become sensitive to detail, to rhythm, to overall moods, and to the shifting interplay of all beings. This

takes a lot of work—there is no ready-made answer or quickly consumed sound-bite wisdom. A counter-cultural cry of the sixties and seventies was “be here now.” However, that phrase, without an understanding of earthbodies, is utterly misleading. There is no simple way to “be” a human self, no given “here” that is simply there, no simple “now” that is disconnected from the interplay of temporal vectors in a depth dimension.

Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, likened the development of a human self with character to the creation of an artwork, except humans were both the artist and the artwork, and so had the task of continually creating or shaping themselves. In such passages, he is specifically taking to task his teacher Plato and his teaching that there are universal goods, eternal truths, and that our task is to rise above the earth. Instead, Aristotle, in this particular moment, is hearkening back to ideas that predate the Greek rationalists and returns to a sensibility that everything is dynamic and interlocking in trajectory and requires our sensitive care-taking to mesh fruitfully. In his non-moralistic sense of ethics, he espouses a full use of all our human excellences to achieve human “goodness,” but says this is achieved by nurturing feelings neither insensitive nor exaggerated and “to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way”²⁴ which will be intuited within each unique situation. Aristotle’s vision is one that calls for the whole person responding to all of the factors within their concrete situation and doing so emotionally, as well as rationally, imaginatively, etc., and staying with this project during a lifetime of evolutionary transformations of both the person and the world. This kind of tolerance for ambiguity, an attempt to be committed to a long process for the sake of the inherent worth of the process itself, and to the purpose of bringing forth the maximal actualization of self, community, and world—where the latter includes other creatures and nature—is very much an earthbody ethic and sensibility. This can only happen when we understand responsibility to encompass our emotional being, the imaginative, intuitive, rational, expressive, and other dimensions of who we are. This means part of responsibility is to focus continually on our awareness, responsiveness, openness to ambiguity, pain, and difficulty. This goes counter to a culture dedicated to self-gratification and “quick fixes.”

Rather than seeking the simple sound-bite answer, we would have to become committed to complex answers that keep us exploring the nuances and diversity of our myriad relations with the world and others. Language can make possible other ways of understanding and openness to realms of experience. However, language can also keep us sealed off from such journeys of self-actualization. Rather than promoting speech that is easily consumed, thoughtlessly, we need to speak continually in a more exploratory use of language that keeps letting us know there is not a closure to taking in more meaning and evolving significance. At a time when this courage to break out of the everyday categories of language is needed to combat our mass consumer and entertainment culture, we retreat further and further linguistically into the conventional, the stylized, and the neatly packaged. Our children need to be taught to be imaginative, feelingful, bold, and

expressive with words, not made into “slick communicators.” Yet, real imagination is the last thing we devote time to in our schools’ curricula. Poetry, the medium that most promotes this wondering and wandering through language, is seen as a marginal activity. Adults need even more to wander with their words to avenues of discovery, not stay in the distanced, prepackaged ways of expression.

Our advances in biotechnology offer the same danger as the advances in communication technology. Their stunning success in dealing with certain aspects of the body and physiology can easily lead us into an addictive reliance upon *them* to fashion our lives at times when we have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in our development. Rather than looking for pills or machines or other devices to do it for us, we should relish the ways in which we can shape and transform in meaning anything that our biology, our environment, and our culture confronts us with as a challenge. Rather than constantly trying to manipulate the world seen as mere objects, including our own bodies as mere physiological objects, we should respond to what is given to us in our situation as potential interlocutors, partners in a dialogue with whom we can enter into relation and shape our connection. This means having the painstaking commitment to slowly work with ourselves, others, and things, the way the artist stays with repainting, rewriting, and never just finally finishing the witnessing and expression. For example, our emotional expressions and responses can be altered quickly by medications that screen out our sensitivities to parts of the world whose meaning we find too daunting. In taking this route, we have lost some of the depth of our lives and the chance to be transformed through the dialogue with those challenging aspects of our experience. We may have succeeded in “controlling” unwanted anger or sadness or whatever feeling we found troublesome, yet this gain also masks a lost opportunity. Sometimes this may be necessary if we have wandered too far out of balance with our ways of relating to the world or in our biochemistry. (each of which is a cause and an effect in cyclic ways as part of the same process, and eventually translate into each other as body/mind).

However, to rely solely on medications or on similar manipulations by exterior forces is to forfeit possibilities of meaning and self-transformation that come from working through the dialogue. One can easily imagine that if Ada had lived a century and a half later, she may have been given Prozac or another psychotropic medication to deal with the loss of her father and the sudden despair at having to make a living and find her way in this foreign backwoods setting. She would probably have been both medicated and shipped back to Charleston to her more familiar “support network.” She never would have embarked on her long and at times heartbreaking path of discovering the myriad aspects of farming and surviving in the wild. Those different selves within her own psyche that she had no idea were there would never have been given a voice. As earthbodies and artists of our lives, we can also alter emotions very slowly and gradually, as part of a faithful and concentrated effort to work through and with a myriad of relations with different aspects of ourselves and the world. There is no traditional moral reason to prefer this latter course, but there is a practical one. The way we

get to this new sense of balance leaves us with a different relationship to the world and self. We are enriched with the residue of different sorts of depths opened up for us and the world has been witnessed in its details, which does maximize an earthbody ethic of opening more potential fruitful relationships.

The key to this kind of work with oneself in relation to the world is in Ada's story, to which we should return one more time. Her decision to find out who she could become, given what she has been in her past, and what historical, cultural, and natural conditions she's found around her, follows Aristotle's or Nietzsche's sense of the artist of life slowly developing sensitivity to the senses, emotions, imagination, the depths of memory, intuition, and a thought which keeps coming back to these sources to shape and be furthered shaped by working with them. A large part of this task lies in developing an ever more focused awareness as part of the ability to become fully present. Much of this book, whether about our lack of ceremony, of myth, of meaningful story, of being vampires, ghouls, aesthetes, consumers, cyberspace escapees, or alienation from the animal dimension of human being, is about strategies that we use habitually in our current cultural milieu to achieve not really being here and becoming distracted. This book is largely about a pervasive sense of disconnection and absence that haunt the world at the beginning of this new millennium, the philosophies that helped cause this state, and a lack of day-to-day awareness about ourselves in relation to myriad beings around us. After Ada has gone through much of her hard labor and transformation, she thinks to herself:

North, south, east, west. It would go a way toward ordering her mind congruent with where she was. Ruby always seemed to know the compass points and to find them significant, not just when she was giving directions but even in telling a story and indicating where an event had happened. West bank of the Little East Fork, east bank of the Little West Fork, that sort of thing. What was required to speak that language was a picture held in the mind of the land one occupied. Ada knew the ridges and covers and drainages were the frame of it, the skeleton. You learned them and where they stood in relation to each other, and then you filled in the details working from those known marks. General to particular. Everything had a name. To live fully in a place all your life, you kept aiming smaller and smaller in attention to detail. (CM, 388)

The responsibility to the world and working on shaping oneself to be more creatively open comes through this painstaking process of delving more and more finely into the landscape around one, where that landscape is understood as not just land, but also people, institutions, events, relationships of all sorts and even the sense of the physical materials around one. However, Ada is wrong in phrasing this to herself as primarily a mental task. It does require working to be mentally keen, striving to stay alert and probing, but it requires equally developing the bodily sense of what is around us kinaesthetically, sensually, emotionally, imaginatively, etc. This gives us an underlying connection and direction in our situation to be plumbed in its rich but ambiguous depths. As Edward Casey writes in *Getting Back into Place*: "It is felt: felt bodily first of all. For we feel the presence of places by and in our

bodies even more than we see or think or recollect them. Places are not so much the direct objects of sight or thought or recollection as what we feel *with* and *around, under and above, before and behind* our lived bodies."¹³ The attunement to place is an attunement to the dynamic body informed by its surroundings in its inexhaustible detail.

This is where a notion like "self" enters. Throughout this work, there has been a critique of the sense of eternal, ethereal self, or enduring internal, substantial self, or against other models of self as an entity or state "given" to us. Rather we have tried to detail, from the Native American tales opening the book through the intervening descriptions to ending with the tale of *Cold Mountain*, how the most vital, richly meaningful, and ethically responsible sense of self emerges from a process of discovery of ourselves through entering relationships with the world around us and by allowing the self to be an ambiguous, ever-transforming "How phenomena." This doesn't mean we are passive. To let things, forces, and events work through us, to impact us, and then respond to their sense is an active process of what Heidegger called "letting be" (*Gelassenheit*).

To shape, witness, and to articulate the meanings we encounter in our particular rhythm, according to our distinctive ideas, feelings, history, and values, is how a sense of self emerges within this ongoing and transforming process. We are both contributor and recipient, as the dancers who symbolize the idea of this book are swept up in a dance that they create, but are carried beyond themselves in finding new dimensions of who they can become. Merely being carried off in different directions would not add depth to our lives, just disruption and dislocation. However, taking to heart the various beckonings of the world that mean something to us, meeting them with responsiveness and engagement, and then allowing them to carry us in new directions in summoning up the creativity to work through their challenge, enlarges and deepens this flowing sense of self.

The ethics of authenticity have been misunderstood as a "being true" to an "inner self" in the face of social pressure to conform. The original sense of authenticity as used by Heidegger, Sartre, and others, was a verb form of a process. It was about "making oneself be one's own" as an ongoing task of responsive self-creation. Not creation from nothing, like God is supposed to do, but from an ongoing committed encounter with others and the world. Catherine Keller, a contemporary feminist theologian, has expressed this notion of self as a verb form: "selving." As Keller puts it, "Thus the self contains within its parameters everything that is not itself, yet the self is clearly distinguishable *as* itself. It *selves* its world. There is nothing that is not somewhere part of it; yet in a moment it parts with its own selfness."¹⁴ If a sense of self only emerges in sensitive and responsive dialogue, it is not a private matter, nor is it a holding onto something previously achieved. It is about finding a way in which, when meeting others, we can all add what is distinctive about us, so each of us is reflected in the emerging process, as the dancers are in their dance. When Tayo listens to the wisdom of the elders, when he follows the advice of Betonie, and when he takes up the tasks left to him by his Uncle Josiah, his distinctive "way" emerges in this performance of the ceremony and tasks. Someone else

following the same path would have a somewhat different journey, with results that were unique to him or her.

Yet, initially, Tayo was not "there" at all and had no sense of self, as he painfully discovered while being swallowed up in "the white cloud" in which he felt himself contained while he was in the veterans hospital. He had retreated from any real encounters with others. He finds "himself" when the elders and medicine man put him on a path of encounter with his world. Similarly, Ada, at the beginning of her years on Cold Mountain, feels utterly empty and lost with no idea who she was or is or could become in her isolation. Relying on her own resources, she is at a loss. Often, when we look "inward" as individuals at odds with the world, what we find is nothing. When Ada takes a risk, out of desperation because she literally might not survive, to trust Ruby and join forces with her, she starts a process of painful give and take with Ruby and the strange natural and cultural world around her from which a growing sense of self emerges.

This sense of responsibility as the engaged and gradually learned ability to respond keenly and sensitively to the relationships that beckon to us from the surrounding world leads us into an increasing emotional delight. It differs from notions of responsibility and self that call for the self to deny itself or the richness of relationship with others and the world. However, such an emotional resonance only emerges from a long process of development and transformation. It is not the quick fun or elevated mood of entertainments that amuse without resonating with multiple aspects of self and its network of relationships.

It is at this moment, the moment that leads to joy, that the aestheticism, the distancing from the entangling interaction of earthbodies, and the constant distraction of our current culture shows its saddest face. When we considered the additive power of the Internet, we discussed how Nietzsche had the vision, more than a century ago, that humankind might become a race of beings who had lost faith in themselves and the creative power of life, who announced with pleasure, intoxication, and self-satisfaction, "we have invented happiness!" and blinked. At a time when we seem happy, we may be most lost. At a time when we seem most happy, we may have given up on the kind of responsibility we uniquely have as earthbodies that leads to joy. If our consumer society aims to provide continual pleasures, experiences which amuse us because they appeal to the senses' momentary stimulation or with possessions that are valued, this cannot substitute for joy, as it is being used in this context. Joy emerges from a vitality, purpose, and belonging that come from honing our timing with the world: we have met other human beings or animals or inanimate beings in a way that drew out mutual value. The shining on the horizon that the girl, Umai, found in the Yurok tale that we considered is the sign of joy when one has been able to find the rhythm within oneself and the world that resonates in mutual recognition and wonder.

If self is a process that emerges from a painstaking care and creative engagement with as many facets of one's world as possible, it finds joy after a long and faithful struggle with pain, necessity, and challenge, since these experiences are intrinsic to forging ongoing relationships with diverse beings. It is by pursuing

greater connection with the complexities of the world as a vital and varied process, and by fully immersing in its energy flows and currents of meaning, that the spiral of self comes round and branches into new directions of development and inspired spirits. This is the source of joy, which is akin to the delight we feel in hearing one of those Tibetan "singing bowls." The different metals that make up the bowl are imparted vibration through the sensitive motion around their perimeter—the rhythmic pressing and guiding of the wooden clapper around the edge, which is a kind of caress of steady focus and flow beyond boundaries as energy is expressed through the hand. The metals sing with a deep ringing resonance that seems as if the very matter of the metal has been given a voice of celebration and declaration. The smile that hearing one of these bowls sing inspires springs from feeling the different parts of the environment, and in some sense the world at large, vibrating together in a resonance that celebrates each part as precious, as adding to a beautiful sound, a song. Joy would be a similar sense, but one that comes not from the singing bowl but from deep within our earthbodies, as through its interactions with myriad parts of the world there is the same kind of reverberating resonance struck through the hand and heart circling its world of care.

Such joy is very different from the kind of happiness our culture promotes. A popular song of a number of years ago had the refrain, "Don't worry, be happy." It expressed perhaps more blantly than we often do a cultural desire to find continual occasions to experience the much hyped state of "happiness." This emotional state can be marketed and promoted, and is usually seen as a goal to be pursued. Yet a life of such happiness, does it ring hollow in its failure to bind us to the world, to direct us towards meaningful expression, and to just "pass time" pleasantly? If we were to substitute, "Don't worry, be joyous!", the refrain doesn't work. Why?

Nietzsche considered the direct pursuit of happiness not a human goal, but, as he put it, a bovine one. Cows chewing their cud were happy. Yet, certainly we all desire a happy life. The vital distinction here is whether happiness as an emotional state is desirable as a goal *in itself*. We can stimulate part of our brains with an electrode, take various chemicals, and can promote a feeling of happiness as an "inner mental state" by many other means. Here, the dualistic mind/body phrase is warranted, for such a feeling does come closer to the aesthete's vision as we discussed it earlier in the book (staying defended in one's mind as a fortress, and enjoying whatever happens in the world as a "mere occasion" from the vantage point of one's "inner psyche"). We can try to split our minds off from our bodies or emotions or other more immediate entanglements in the world. Like the drunk who severs his consciousness from the world and elevates it to a "high," such happiness is a way of avoiding our place in the world with its challenges, relationships, and opportunities for authentic expression. Just as a drink now and then, there is no harm in some occasions of escaping the call of the myriad relationships and commitments of our lives, but as a constant craving, as something which runs our lives, the pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of being diverted from who we are and how we can be creatively here together. It is a way of blocking out our earthbodies. It is a diversion and, at worst, a kind of dissociation with the world, savoring one's psychological

states and finding ways to promote them as a way of staying entertained by life. *A life spent seeking to stay happy as a direct goal, to be stimulated by means at hand, becomes a trivialized and distant life.* It works by shutting out who we are, the currents that flow through our earthbodies. Since they beckon to us to transform ourselves in giving ourselves over to engagement and the effort to actualize the possibilities within our world, they would disrupt this pursuit of happiness.

There is an uplift of the spirits that comes from working creatively within relationships with others and with the world, where the feeling engendered emerges from within the process of an engaged interaction. The goal at those moments is to be involved in the interaction or the commitment of whatever sort we have with the world. The feeling state is an *indirect* outcome of the responsiveness, the expressiveness, and the satisfaction of creating something worthwhile with another or with the world, whether it be learning to harvest wheat, holding a stimulating conversation, making passionate love, or helping build a house.

Instead of “passing time,” in responsive commitment we become, as we described at the beginning of this book, *capable of being time*. We have that experience where “things come together” or “fall into place” as having “timed” ourselves with others and with things, so that we have fed into each other. We are carried along within the current of flow that is the heart of time. There is both the erasure of boundaries *and* the simultaneous feeling of being most ourselves. As we have described it, at this moment we feel a new depth, an expansiveness, and impulsion of energy and meaning that is joyous. We have both “let go” in moving into the fluidity of intermingling transformation—in a way that struck terror into Lestat, as it does to all of us insofar as we have slipped into being vampires, ghoul, aesthetes, addictive consumers, entertainment junkies, etc.—and also “let be” in the sense of truly witnessing, registering with acute senses, and feeling with sensitive emotion and imagination, something we can’t when only partially or minimally present.

Happiness is often about the simple. To be enjoyed, to be consumed, and to be entertained simply can bring happiness: eating that ice cream cone, scoring that victory in pinball, or watching that fireworks displays. These experiences are mere events that do not require much of us and do not perplex or challenge us. They have a place in our lives. But as the goal of life, they speak of a lack of faith in ourselves as earthbodies. This was Ivan Ilyich’s terrible discovery, when he realized he never *lived* with his life of happiness about card playing, fancy furniture, and the status of his job. The faith that is required for joy is to believe in the richness of our experience, to open to its depth and ambiguity, and respond to it or be responsible in the earth-body sense of that term. The belief is in the flexibility of bodily capacity and how it opens us to a reality of experience, based not on some outside foundation, but on its own vitality and depth that moves towards its enlargement through encounter and interchange. We won’t experience these depths without a sense that mere happiness grows to joy through such an opening, the world has its own order, its own offering of meaning, and that by entering into its sway, its facets are highlighted, the world deepens, and we will expand.

Joy of this sort has a dimension of peace that is not from an imposed secure order, closure, or cessation of challenge. Rather, it is the peace of dynamism, of having let go into a process that has achieved rhythm, that is affirming in each contribution entering into the dance of constituents and calling forth further flowing change from all who are participating. This is the joy of vitality, of belonging, and of responsive capability. It is as though that childhood joy, the sense of well-being which seems so difficult to achieve the older we get, lurks within all things and all creatures. It will come out to play with us, or within us all so participating, if we move from being caught in time as an alienating force, a dimension outside us that relentlessly moves along towards our ending, to becoming time itself.

As time itself, the old is new as coming to exist again in the “coming together,” the timing of which we are all part and can celebrate by making our lives ceremony. In the moment of encounter, fully entered in awareness and with all the dimensions of our earthbodies, sensual, perceptual, emotional, thoughtful, intuitive, imaginative, kinesthetic, and recollective, we come into being as this particular meeting with tree, smile, roar, color, idea, operation, or whatever, and so does all that we greet in encounter. To bring into our awareness this sense of ever-springing-forth newness, means the person we love, the canyon we’re in, or the house in which we dwell doesn’t have to be abandoned for a literally new one. We have experienced in the fluidity of the world how it always flows out from itself back into itself in a renewal we need to witness, and it is this dynamic renewal which is the sheer joyousness of all the existences of which we humans are a part. We don’t have to generate vitality, meaning, or depth. Through the indeterminacy of our earthbodies we are drawn into currents of the world’s sense that in their interplay among themselves through us, enliven, illuminate, and deepen us.

We speak of the joys of entering into various relationships, whether the joys of parenting, of creating—whether art or a way for people to improve their neighborhood—or the joys of a commitment to an activity, like backpacking, wood crafting, or teaching. These joys emerge from working with factors that are given to us, that means we have to accept necessity—that what resists us or challenges us gives meaning to us as its particular gift. Without the force of gravity against us or the heat wearing on us, hiking up the hill has no meaning and fosters no deepening relationship with the path, the air, and sky. Without the difficulty of student’s learning, teaching can’t happen in its progress.

Also, the way in which some beings exist within processes that go at angles of collision to our own trajectories is what is meant by hurt or pain. We are continually hurt, “impacted upon.” Whether this happens within the collectivity of forces that make up my body (and cells collide in trajectories in disease or muscle collides with bone in trauma or in effort), or whether among people (and there are those who want different policies or represent different ideas), or whether among humans and natural forces (such as the trajectories of weather forces and human activities), the impact that wrenches us in this experience of being hurt or pained can lead us back to these points of intersection and understanding our network of

relationships. Our current cultural intolerance for pain robs us of connection with parts of the planet.

Pain and the world's necessities, sometimes quite unexpected in their emergence, can become interlocutors in working with them towards joy. Despite their difficulty, they can become part of the substance of our relationships and creative processes culminating in joy. For a culture that would only seek happiness in life, the earth's resistances are always to be conquered or managed or walled out of our lives. This narrows continually who we are and can become creatively. It leads us to not take care with parts of our planet, including each other. Happiness often is promoted as an escape from creatively dealing with the planet's complexities and from the task of understanding them. Joy is a kind of understanding that comes from working through relationships. It is not mindless. It is not bodiless. Rather, if earthbodies are affirmed in their myriad entanglements with the planet, sensitively using their capacities for discovery and expression in the process of a give and take in relationships, the felt sense we have of this working through challenges tends towards joy.

Afterword

A Poem

As a poet as well as a philosopher, I would like to end this book with a poem that I wrote that captures the heart of the message of this book (reprinted with permission of *Ellipsis: Literature and Art* 36 (Spring, 2000), pp. 32–33.).

Inexorably Marching Time and the Other Time of Encounter

The silvers of time's soul
are said by scientists to wait unmolested
from the guts of decaying particles,
yet the same scientist thinks of neutrinos
as his wife shudders beneath his touch
and looks aside as his dog's dying eyes
sink into glacial pools of milk.

For the rest of us, when we think of this
fugitive time, we would like to nail
its heart to the floor and give it some pain.
We know that right now it runs by our houses,
smirking in the windows, and feel the fingers close
on the back of our necks, below the ears,
where the pumping of blood drones,
and see its moments as several fingers
squeezing in a heavyweight grip
with all the cards and a sadistic mind.
We call it the cheap pimp of death,
and locked in this wrestling match,
we can't find the imp behind the machine,
or see flowers growing in the sidewalk's cracks.

Yet, when two suns crisscross on their way
across the sky and the rocks signal quiet joy

to the gulls, the clam that shatters
 by the drop from soaring air to sea ledge,
 not only yields its smashed flesh
 but offers a twinned darker glow of another passing
 from the shell of the sky answered by stone.
 The gull laughs knowingly at the welcome
 of this other time of encounter, the time we can hear
 when we pause on deserted beaches.

The second type of vibration held within
 the dusky interior of relentless time,
 only emerges in shattering,
 when air and rock and sky and flesh seem to collide
 but each is lost in the others,
 shifting outside themselves, like when
 the beam of the child's eye caught by cerulean,
 laughing at the sky
 hits yours
 and you splinter in the reflected gleam,
 and find yourself within caverns
 you thought lost long ago.

Whenever we feel the throb of the neck
 we imagine the grip and time's night,
 and dream ourselves pursuing as superspies
 saving our families from the international terrorist
 whose explosives are concealed in all things.
 Instead, the fears we send out collide with everything
 since clumsy and unseeing they lunge ahead,
 convinced time will collect them, so they must hit first.
 But, if we are lucky in how they smack their heads,
 it is the fears that die, shattered
 against the sight of the spring green of leaves
 or the softness of skin pressed,
 or by smells of the vaporous thicket of fruit stalls
 at market. If we're really lucky, the gulls spot them
 and drop them for us onto the rocks.

Only then do we come to the doggy knowledge
 outside the realm of science that was in the eyes
 when the tail wagged in recognition
 of greeting the time of encounter. Its story
 is found within the shade of all real meeting
 and the blurring of hand on hand,
 when the particles cease the straight lines
 of decay and begin the round dance
 about the glow of shimmering

and the soft and the pungent
 and all things become a gesture
 of fingers clasped and folded back
 with others within themselves.