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Aesthetic Mind-Meditative Mind: Reflections On Art As Yoga And Contemplative Practice

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AESTHETIC MIND—MEDITATIVE MIND:
REFLECTIONS ON ART AS YOGA AND CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

A DISSERTATION
submitted by

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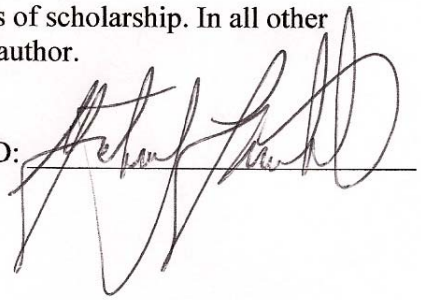
SIGNED: 

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Abstract

AESTHETIC MIND—MEDITATIVE MIND:
REFLECTIONS ON ART AS YOGA AND CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

by Michael A. Franklin, M.A., ATR-BC

This dissertation examines visual art as a form of yoga and contemplative practice through the lens of art-based research (ABR) and methods of meditation. Essentially, yoga joins together cognitive, somatic, and socially engaged practices that illuminate a synergistic view of our finite physical self with our infinite Self (*Atman*) as embodied consciousness. Included in this discussion are contemplative seeing (*darshan*), art as worship (*rasa*), the Shaivite view of creation (*spanda*), theophanic imagination, and the origins of images. This research was further catalyzed by the author's diagnosis of prostate cancer. As physical disease progressed from diagnosis through treatment, art and meditation became applied methods for studying these events. Consequently, a deeper understanding of how art is yoga and contemplative practice resulted.

Note to the reader:

The Sanskrit words in this dissertation are spelled out in English rather than with the proper diacritical marks. The author acknowledges the importance of accurate pronunciation in the Sanskrit language; however, this paper is not attempting to address matters of language as much as the importance of specific theoretical concepts and connections. The author therefore has made an effort to make this work accessible to a wider audience than religious studies scholars of language and philosophies related to Yoga traditions.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this project originated with a personal, practice-based desire to examine the converging relationships between visual art processes and contemplative techniques, specifically meditation practices from yoga-based traditions (Coomaraswamy, 1917, 1934, 1957; Dehejia, 1996; Feuerstein, 2001, 2003). This original intention was further catalyzed for me by the surprise diagnosis of a life-threatening illness. As physical disease progressed from diagnosis through treatment, it became clear that art and contemplative practice would become applied methods for investigating and surviving these unanticipated challenging events. Consequently, an expansive understanding of art as yoga and contemplative practice resulted yielding an integrated understanding of how both subjects complement each other.

It is important to mention from the outset that these two overarching parallel themes, yoga theory and practice including meditation along with art practice, run side by side throughout this research. Yoga and meditation along with art have been the contemplative oxygen of my life. I do not separate them. Throughout the dissertation, and especially Chapters 1 and 2, general connections are therefore made between the art process and the subjects of yoga and meditation. These general connections become more specific in Chapter 3 when actual art from my prostate cancer experience is shown and discussed.

When a crisis struck, it was art, yoga, and meditation that reoriented me towards inner homeostasis; therefore, a thorough understanding of art and yoga that moves beyond theory into practice is offered. As life sustaining practices, this research makes a

commitment not to skirt around these subjects with cursory attention. The intention is to penetrate these subjects and intimately understand their dimensional connections.

Whereas this research likens art to yoga and views art from the perspective of yoga, the overall focus of the dissertation is to build a theoretical understanding of art as a contemplative practice by investigating core principles from yoga traditions, studio art practices, and Art Based Research (ABR) methods including viewer-response interactions. Towards this end, connections are made with meditation traditions such as *tantra* (Feuerstein, 1998), the *Shaivite* view of how words and images emerge (Muller-Ortega, 1989), *rasa* theory (Schwartz, 2004), *darshan* and contemplative seeing (Eck, 1998), and other subjects related to art as yoga (Coomaraswamy, 1934, 1957). *Darshan* means "auspicious sight" (Eck, 1998, p. 3) and "the 'seeing' of truth" (p. 25) Darshan also infers a practice of standing in the company of a Deity and to see and be seen by this holy murti (sculptural embodiment of divine spirit). The Indian aesthetic system known as *Rasa* theory, which is the sacred practice of savoring direct experience, views the arts as a way to taste and delight in how art and spirit become one (Schwartz, 2004). Devotional seeing, according to Schwartz, also considers how the artwork provides entry into a private space where art and spirit are one.

A tantric view of art consists of a truthful search to make the subtle dimensions of human experience manifest so that the creative imagination can become an ally during contemplative practices. Through direct engagement with the malleability of art materials and the resulting symbolic content, a tantric approach to art can express ineffable subjects that defy concise definition. Whether working from the subtle to the manifest, or the manifest to the ineffable, art facilitates this bidirectional practice of inquiry, especially

during moments of personal upheaval. Artisans working from tantric and rasa foundations can cultivate embodied introspective states by gently infusing the created object with revered meaning that is ripe for contemplative research. Merging contemplative and spiritual intentions with visual symbols is a theme observed throughout the history of the Western arts (Knight, 1987) and the Eastern arts (Coomaraswamy, 1934, 1957). Combined together, art and meditation practices can be employed to remove obstacles and restore pathways to insight and wisdom.

Based on these views of rasa and tantra along with other perspectives to be conjoined in this dissertation, it is the view of this writer that the synergy of yoga combined with art defines creative work as an inclusive *sadhana* or spiritual path. In addition to art being a spiritual path, the field of expressive therapies has traditionally been interested in holistic expression as a way to articulate esoteric themes like soul, imaginal space, and how the process of poiesis allows one to look into the "groundless abyss" of one's being (Levine & Levine, 1999, p. 30). It is this groundlessness particularly that manifests during a crisis, along with the curiosity to explore it aesthetically through ABR.

General Outline of the Dissertation

The first chapter offers a concise introduction stating the intentions of the dissertation including definitions of terms. Chapter 2 reviews and summarizes specific material from yoga traditions and how this material relates to art as a contemplative practice. This chapter consists of three core sections: section one addresses the contemplative and transpersonal roots of art therapy; section two reviews and presents a theoretical basis for the integration of art with yoga traditions; and section three examines

connections among meditation practices as found in Buddhist and Yoga traditions, art, and the use of imagination. Chapter 3 investigates art-based research methods applied throughout this dissertation. Two time-sensitive phases comprise this chapter. Phase I reflects back to artwork created during the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer. The information gleaned from the art process at this time allowed me to track, aesthetically and contemplatively, a personal crisis that unified creative work with meditative practice. This data is important because it catalogues an actual seismic personal event that was profoundly supported and transformed by meditation and art. Because this event began unfolding 6 years ago, however, it is also important to address new and current artwork. Phase II therefore addresses more recent artwork created in response to this time 6 years ago. Charcoal and clay were selected to help access and articulate these longitudinal somatic memories that were identified in the original analysis of the initial artwork from Phase I. This second phase of artistic inquiry addresses how I presently continue to reflect on the transformative insights associated with my cancer experience. This post-treatment art could also serve as a method of inquiry for others involved in a similar situation. The artistic processes and methods undertaken in this dissertation could help these people to observe critically and contemplatively the ongoing longitudinal aspects of life-changing events as they are written within the body and expressed through art over time.

Chapter 4 conveys the results from a showing of the artwork from Phases I and II to a group of colleagues. The essence of this chapter is about taking the work out into a public venue for a select group of viewers to see, witness, and respond to the art. It was assumed that showing these combined pre and post efforts to a group of known

colleagues would provide a way to revisit my cancer experience and investigate the artist-viewer feedback loop concerning our collective life themes of fragility and resiliency. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion that considers further questions and applications of art as yoga and contemplative practice.

The repetitive quality of the artwork produced throughout this dissertation served as a visual mantra practice for focusing attention and carefully witnessing the cognitive movements of my mind. For the purposes of this introduction, the art created privately and shown publically to others helped the viewers, including myself, to see aspects of the divine in each other and the larger human condition of fragility and resiliency. Through this version of collective sustained engagement with the work, a form of theophanic imagination was initiated. According to Corbin (1969), this is the imaginal opening where divine wisdom may appear. This point is a central focus of the entire thesis and is embedded throughout this dissertation.

In addition to these identified sections, this dissertation, overall, takes the next step by defining theoretical constructs arrived at through research approaches that combine interactive theory building with art-based and transpersonal methods (Braud & Anderson, 1998). The interactive studio methods used in this dissertation tease out the subtle differences between projecting onto images and receptivity to images as visiting "others." The result is a practice-based view of how art functions as a contemplative practice. Necessary to accomplishing this goal is a fresh examination of the contemplative elements of art as yoga, inner pilgrimage, and transcendent ways of seeing and savoring experience along with the outward, service-based empathic expression of these emerging understandings. It is important, therefore, to mention from the outset that

although I have had an ongoing interest in this subject and have published essays on related themes, much more remains to be researched and understood. Spiritual transformation involves a lifelong process of engagement with specific practices that help to surface inner compassion as well as outward expressions of this empathic worldview.

Fundamental to an understanding of the theoretical foundations and explorations of this dissertation is a definition of terms related to art and contemplative practices. The following section presents the etymological and historical bases of these terms.

Definitions and Meaning

To Contemplate

Etymologically, *to contemplate* means to observe with reverent attention in the sacred environment of a temple (Ayto, 1990). Earlier meanings were more specific and concerned with the alert observation of omens, or others, while gazing with attentive awareness. The Latin root *con-tem-plum* references a two- or three- dimensional space that orients one to observe sacred realities. The result of this form of vision is in-sight or the capacity to see "things as they really are" which is the meaning of *contemplari* (Mahony, 1998b, p. 57). Combining these root meanings as *concentrated awareness*, *temple*, and *lucid vision* raises several questions. First, where is the actual location of this temple, and what sort of vision is needed to locate it? Is it within oneself, as in the *Atman*, the innermost transcendental Self, of which the Indian philosophical, nondual view from Advaita Vedanta speaks (Deutsch, 1969)? Or does it refer to an actual holy site of pilgrimage or even an art studio? Could it be that this "temple" is a seamless construct where the personal, immanent microcosm and universal, transcendent macrocosm are intimately connected?

Finally, how does one train oneself, through contemplative practices and the arts, to participate in one's inner life and outer surroundings with focused attention, regardless of whether one is in an architectural temple, nature, or a noisy urban setting? This study holds that contemplative experiences can emerge any time, anywhere, such as during a silent meditation retreat, during a crisis, or while doing civically engaged work such as gathering trash to clean up a neighborhood.

A significant aspect of this etymological analysis is that the words *temple* and *to contemplate* have similar origins that imply attentive perception in any encounter where the sacred can spontaneously emerge as direct, tangible experience that can be seen and known. The practitioner absorbs such an experience, and conversely, the practitioner is absorbed by what is being contemplated. This connection suggests that to contemplate—direct, fully engaged absorption of meaningful experience—results in the establishment of valued, internal and external, reverential awareness whereby all moments in time can become sacred pilgrimage. The fresh, ever-emerging moment is the magnetic pull that attracts awareness to observe itself and thereby awaken and recognize itself. It is this engaged, observant, and reverential quality of perception which results in true insight, which I refer to as *contemplative and aesthetic mind*.

This description also depicts an orientation from which many artists operate: for example, artistic work invites careful deferential observation of internal, subjective meaning while focusing on external subject matter (landscape) and processes (use of materials). The artist as well as the viewers who intentionally hold this curious and potentially reverent orientation can access deep aesthetic experiences that awaken the full range of numinous revelation.

This entire dissertation, with its foundations in art and meditation, has been an exercise in contemplative focus and investigation. Observant attention, which is a cornerstone of contemplative inquiry, is uniquely accessed through the art process because it materializes layers of experience. These layers deserve to be witnessed, investigated, and reabsorbed as crystallized awareness. Accessing, manifesting, and harnessing or yoking together these layers is an essential component that defines art as a contemplative practice closely aligned with yoga.

Yoga

Yoga is a vast subject, likely originating with indigenous shamanic societies, that spans several cultural traditions as well as a time period of over 5,000 years (Feuerstein, 2003). Essentially yoga is a procedural practice of "harnessing" (Mahony, 1998b, p. 60), yoking, or joining together the finite physical self with the infinite spirit in order to dissolve the barriers that prevent one from realizing one's transpersonal potential. A thorough and accurate accounting of this immeasurable history and expansive subject is well beyond the scope of this project; however, core principles are discussed throughout this dissertation with a focus on how art and yoga are related practices (Coomaraswamy, 1934, 1957; Mahony, 1998a). It is important to clarify early on that yoga is not religion but rather a set of transformational technologies, cultivated over millennia, that demonstrably frees human potential to seek its fullest expression of self-realization.

Although difficult to pin down and define, *yoga,* a Sanskrit word, represents "spiritual discipline" (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 3) in Hindu, Jaina, and various Buddhist traditions. This parallel connection between spiritual discipline and yoga essentially links it with other world wisdom traditions and their branches of mysticism that encourage

disciplined practice. According to Feuerstein, Jewish Kabbalah, Moslem Sufism, and Christian mysticism are traditions that emphasize similarities to yoga through their transcendental search for union with the Divine (p. 3).

Essentially, yoga is "mystical absorption" (Hewitt, 1977, p. 389) through practices and techniques that perfect mind, body, spirit, and cultural alignment. This contemplative absorption is concerned with the belief that human beings are pure, expansive, embodied energy, as consciousness, that can ultimately know its elemental and eternal nature. Consciousness, or pure awareness, is the process of this awareness seeking to know itself, to awaken to itself.

Shiva, Shakti, and Spanda

When attempting to define and discuss yogic principles such as *Shiva*, *Shakti*, and *spanda*, it is important to clarify that I am not referring to metaphorical constructs. These ideas are revealed truth that emerged out of disciplined practices refined from generation to generation by adept scholars, yogis, and rishis. Five-thousand-year-old systems such as yoga are to be carefully considered as wellsprings of precious wisdom waiting for the discerning seeker to scrutinize and thoughtfully explore. These adepts were the consummate example of the heuristic quantitative and qualitative researcher engaged in plumbing the depths of consciousness. Their research into the phenomenology of embodied consciousness offers a paradigm for contemporary, practice-based research. Polistsky (1995c) would likely argue that these yoga scholars represent the research orientation of a particular humanism. This perspective is concerned with *mythical consciousness*, a term which suggests a quality of deep self-inquiry into personal and cultural mythology relevant for excavating wisdom and knowledge (p. 311).

Indian philosophical systems, overall, subscribe to the foundational view of a triadic pantheon where Brahma is the Lord of creation, Lord Vishnu is the preserver of the universe, and Lord Shiva is the deity of destructive cycles. Together they represent the blueprint of all creative acts as a recursive loop of creating-manifesting, preserving-sustaining, and destroying-dissolving. On closer inspection, each deity has a complex description beyond this simplified shorthand explanation; however, Shiva, in the Tantric worldview of Shaivism, is the primary focus of the forthcoming discussion. He has many names and roles that represent much more than this abbreviated description of destroyer. He is also known as *Nataraja,* the Lord dancing the universe into its myriad forms of creation (Coomaraswamy, 1957). He is, as well, *Mahadeva*, the eternal archetype of the primordial contemplative sitting in timeless meditation. Together with his inseparable consort Shakti, who embodies the universal feminine (Muller-Ortega, 1989), they manifest the entire ALL that is. It is this notion of creation, as fresh emergence between the synergy of the Divine masculine and feminine, that is discussed throughout this dissertation.

Concerning the notion of Creation, the *Spanda-Karikas* (Singh, 1980), a core text from the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism (Muller-Ortega,1989), articulates a view of infinite consciousness as emanating from the finest subtle origins of throbbing vibration, which is Lord Shiva himself. Imagine the very genesis of any creative urge, especially the impulse that has manifested this entire cosmos or the first marks made on a blank canvas. This subtle creative vibratory pulsation is called *spanda* (Singh, 1980).

Shakti, which can be synonymous with *Devi* or Goddess, is that eternal and universal presence that manifests the entirety of creation. She is at the heart of tantric

practices and is the focus of ritual and worship. The etymological root *shak* means "to be capable of" (Muktananda, 1979, p. 20). This capacity refers to that aspect of consciousness that is active. This active presence is the ultimate cause and change within the entire known and imagined universe. Shakti is therefore the ultimate muse for the artist to receive and commune with. As Devi, she is transcendent; her ultimate, vast power includes her capacity to create, maintain, destroy, and absorb, simultaneously, the entire known and unknown universe (Khanna, 2004). She is also immanent and therefore alive in all beings (Pintchman, 2001). She is the supreme Divine Mother consciousness that has the power to manifest every conceivable possibility. As this ultimate, blissful, and wrathful creative presence, she manifests and reabsorbs all things at all times, in all places. She has three forms—*iccha* (will)*, jnana* (knowledge), and *kriya* (action)—and therefore manifests as many shaktis. When the word *Shakti* is capitalized, which occurs frequently throughout this dissertation, the name signifies the singular, ultimate Divine Feminine (Kali, 2003). In this form, she has no beginning or ending point. To worship her is to revere creation itself, offering adoration to the supreme creative principle.

Practice

Practice is referred to in this dissertation as the sustained, disciplined effort of directing personal will and awareness towards various pathways of knowing and experiencing inner events. This outlook assumes a long-term view of dedication to contemplative intentions and their fruition (Feuerstein, 1979). Practice can include ascetic austerity, cultivation of silence, skillful speech, selfless service, study of sacred texts, refining of physical health, ethical and moral analysis, and artistic inquiry.

Whereas one receives the phenomenal world through the senses, one can also become highly distracted by the outward stream of awareness stimulated by these seductions and sensual diversions. One therefore needs practice-based strategies such as art combined with yoga and meditation to redirect these distractions. Together, these practices aim at attuning the outward flowing channels of expression with the inward channels of mindful reflection. In fact, expression without its counterbalance of inner mindfulness creates an imbalanced method of knowing and perceiving, especially in the arts and expressive therapies.

Dispassionately turning awareness inward, towards its source, is a key component of practice as discussed in this dissertation. To be clear, *dispassion* does not mean cold detachment but instead means freedom from bias and ultimately achieving an anchored relationship with the inner life of contemplative engagement. Today's world presents many distracting external seductions. Diagnostic categories and drug-based interventions have been established to help treat attention deficits and foster improved concentration. The practices of art and meditation, when combined, attune and synchronize mindful engagement with inner impressions and expressive urges to emote and sublimate personal narratives.

Art

This dissertation likens art to yoga and views art from the perspective of yoga. Art, as yoga, is a way to receive and yoke together, with awareness, inner subjective impressions with direct sensory experiences received from the outer world. Although divided between inner and outer sources of stimuli, the notion of a dualistic perspective is momentarily transcended as the experiential information received from these inner and

outer sources is fused together, through direct manipulation of materials, into a single unified composition. This flexible, simultaneous glimpse of duality and unification implies a strong relationship between art, yoga, and enlightened mind.

Additionally, art is a way to cultivate a personal and socially engaged attitude of reverential awareness that facilitates transformative experiences. The truths of the world such as suffering, beauty, interconnection, and cause and effect can crack a person open and awaken his or her capacity for compassion. Art is also a way to directly and empathically feel into, engage with, and respond to these truths and answer them back with the articulate language of the imagination.

Furthermore, art trains empathic attention to self and other through absorbed interaction with art materials and practices such as figure drawing, whereby the other is fully seen and rendered with intentional regard. Chogyam Trungpa (1996) refers to this intentional posture as “Dharma Art” (p. 1). The focus of Dharma Art is to attend to the rich, detailed qualities inherent in objects and materials while deliberately responding with mindful intention when engaging with the phenomenal world.

Art is also a way to skillfully contemplate and regulate intense emotion through artistic sublimation (Kramer, 1971, 1979). By virtue of training attention, regulating affect, and cultivating reverential awareness, art is viewed as a contemplative practice. This view of art seeks to articulate the *Advaita*, a nondual perspective wherein the subjective and objective elements of experience and perception exist within a seamless holding, assimilation, and eventual aesthetic integration of opposites ripe for contemplative reflection. An example of this perspective in art is when, through the simultaneous presentation of foreground and background, warm and cool colors, smooth

and distressed textures, and the integration of feelings with these formal elements, the artist skillfully blends opposing themes into a unified visual imaginal field of form and content (Berry, 1982; Hillman, 1978; Julliard & Van Den Heuvel, 1999; Langer, 1951). This unified, composed view of concurrent events in an artistic composition constitutes and metaphorically references the qualities of a unified, nonjudgmental mind.

This quality of mind accessed through art is particularly facilitated by aesthetic lessons on space. When working with materials, one is creating space and making it visible. Art is a process of entering space, adding space, subtracting space, editing space, mixing space, filling space, emptying space, and layering space. These explorations of space are especially true when crafting the pots that have been the focus of this study. The clay has to be readied, opened, and listened to. Some of the pots focus on editing and mixing space by creating multiple chambers, whereas others are solely about emptying space or filling space, as evident in Figure 1, towards the lower right, with added sawdust.

Figure 1. Working with clay and space. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

A finished work acts as a simultaneous signpost that implies past processes and efforts as well as current manifestations of that past while pointing towards the waiting potential of future possibilities to be explored in subsequent projects. Attending to this seamless stream of past, present, and prospective images engages an open quality of a panoramic yet focused mind. An open mind, like a blank canvas, amorphous clay, or raw film, is potential space. Marks, lines, and shapes, which merge into images, are the thoughts that fill this space. Once these images are manifested, both art and meditation encourage open, absorbed attention that welcomes and inquires into these images. The result of this process is flexible, open-minded perception that fosters self-regulation, observation, intention, and attention, which are inherent in the art process and contemplative practices overall.

These qualities also represent a model of mind whereby wholeness is achieved through the direct expression of opposing themes (warm and cool colors or sharp and smooth forms) and their eventual compositional integration. This integration is further developed through the ongoing spatial unification of disparate visual elements that continue to emerge throughout the art process. These elements eventually reach a perceived and integrated assimilation of formal elements with content themes (Julliard & Van Den Heuvel, 1999). Some fragmenting patterns of thought are bound to continue and surface as ruminations that never quite reach assimilation or homeostasis; however, within art, unified visual forms and structures that hold and express these disparate themes also model a healthy view of a contemplative mind that can embrace, unify, hold, and even transcend dualities of perception.

Related to this perspective is a *tantric* view of art that sees human frailties as natural and worthy of direct aesthetic engagement. In addition to the points made earlier, a tantric perspective is essentially the vision of one unifying consciousness that becomes two and eventually the infinite forms of the physical world through the emergence of Shiva and Shakti in union. Although two, Shiva and Shakti are essentially sides of the eternal one and the endless possibility of all unlimited, ever-evolving forms of the physical universe: Shiva, the male presence, supports the purpose of consciousness as pure essence; and Shakti, or the female presence, manifests the world through her elemental power (Cortright, 2007). Blended and merged together, they unfold the cosmos.

A tantric view of art also acknowledges significant instinctual urges such as sexual libido and neurotic content as notable aspects of human drives that can be sublimated through engaged practice (Feuerstein, 1998). Tantra, however, sees libido and other expressions of instinctual urges as having deeper, subtler embodied origins. It is here that the conscious intelligence of the *Kundalini-shakti,* which is the primordial, feminine, cosmic, creative energy, emerges as the ultimate manifesting life-force impulse. This understanding is at the core of a tantric view of art. At a fundamental level, art and the creative process are the kundalini-shakti emerging through the progression of imaginative work. Early psychoanalytic thinkers, with their interest in instinctual urges and unconscious motivation, were on the right track. Although certainly interested in the depths of the psyche, they were not probing far enough beyond their limited view of the ego and the analytic unconscious into the farther depths of divine consciousness.

Art, as discussed here, directly references ways of working with these nondual origins of the primordial creative spanda impulse (Singh, 1980). This primary, nondual force inevitably manifests in the world of objects as humanly perceived dualities ripe for artistic investigation. The artist empathically inquires into these diverse themes with questions that orient the practitioner to a contemplative, reflective perspective. In the context of this research, art is understood as a synchronous embrace of purposeful and spontaneous engagement with materials and processes that reverently collaborate with the spanda impulse. This stance fosters a mindful (Trungpa, 1996) openness to aesthetic ideas, imaginings (Watkins, 1984), and the numinous that can be cast into some quality of visual form for introspective and cultural reflection. Within this framework, the relationship between art and meditation is strengthened, because they both support absorbed, contemplative pilgrimage into oneself, into physical materials, and into manifested objects produced through principles of creation.

Art as yoga and contemplative practice aims to align with the universal creative spanda force. Inspired work motivated out of devotion to the principles of creation is art as prayer and contemplative practice and therefore a way to worship enthusiastically and serve the Divine (Knight, 1987). *Enthios,* Greek for "the God within" (Ayto, 1990, p. 203) is the etymological root of the word *enthusiasm*. This enthusiasm for creativity and imaginative work is at the core of art as a contemplative practice of worship. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) emphasizes that happiness is to be found through direct absorption in engaging experiences. Immersion in the moment will lead to focused attention whereby time stops, concentration increases, and action eventually merges with awareness (Cooper, 1998).

Art Based Research (ABR)

ABR, as it is applied in this research, is viewed as the aesthetic study of direct experience combined with meditation and contemplative practices of witnessing the mind as the creative process unfolds. The methodology employed throughout this study is therefore referred to as "Art-Based Contemplative Inquiry." Within the art processes pursued in this research project, I observed refined interdependent systemic relationships that unfolded within the following cyclical equation of: action/stimulus ➔ effect/ outcome/consequence ➔ contemplative observation/inquiry of the effect ➔ understanding/insight ➔ integration/application/relevance. This general equation always seemed to be present as I engaged with the materials, formal qualities of the work, content imagery, symbolic narratives, and observations from other viewers. This material is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Overall, these conjoint methods of contemplative inquiry consider the expansive spanda qualities of the imagination. Art, as spanda, is the imagination inquiring into itself, spawning visual or symbolic offspring of itself with which to commune. ABR also utilizes rational empirical methods related to the scientific method along with primary-process, spontaneous methods such as free association. As a holistic process, art accesses and coordinates rational, imaginal, empirical, emotional, somatic, and cultural pathways in the service of expressive communication with the goal to become a "student of oneself" (Franklin, 1999).

Many of the early modernist artists of the 20th century were interested in seeking the essence of form through empathic, aesthetic methods of inquiry. These artists model a style of visual research methodology that combines first-person and third-person

investigative approaches that can open doors into a spiritual aesthetic. Their systematic experimentation with emotion, form, empathy, and essence allowed them access to deeper questions about creation, nature, and the ineffable quintessence of deep aesthetic experience. This urge to use the art process as a way to access obscure, hard-to-define personal questions is a cornerstone in the foundation of art therapy and ABR. In many ways, art therapy is an offshoot of this early modernist lineage that so fiercely clung to the importance of subjective experience as legitimate and real subject matter. Art therapy, considered from a transpersonal perspective (Cortright, 1997), seeks to understand how first-person investigations can reveal further insights and questions that ultimately point the artist towards spiritual and contemplative themes that deserve to be examined. In order to accomplish this goal, the art process itself consistently becomes the complex third-person part of the equation to be studied.

Many authors in the field of art therapy have consistently called for a return to the creative process as the place to begin building a comprehensive theory for the field (Allen, 1992; Franklin, 1996; McNiff, 1998; Moon, 2004; Rubin, 2001). Of primary concern in this call for a homecoming to the creation process as the method of experimentation and inquiry is the notion of sustained involvement in expressive work and the resulting psychological benefits afforded to the practitioner (Allen, 2001). Extended engagement with the arts invites immersion in the content of the creation process. Mapping this territory, in large part, is a primary focus of ABR that consists of an oscillating perspective between first-person and third-person, or subjective and objective investigation.

The arts, according to Langer (1951), allow for subjective experiences to be objectified and for objective experiences to be subjectified. Bringing internal amorphous experiences to the outside through the art process, where they can be contemplated and then reabsorbed for further investigation is an important recursive loop inherent in artistic process. It is this loop of experiencing that opens a direct pathway to the consideration of sustained involvement with art processes as a viable approach to research.

In the context of this dissertation, the subject of art materials becomes a significant component of ABR. Personal will, when merged with art materials, creates collaboration with intention and undiscovered possibilities. Creative intentions of the artist eventually end up as a finished product. It is not uncommon to see this process imbedded in the product. Looking carefully at art forms can reveal their historical transformations. Similar to the way a geologist looks at rock formations or an archeologist examines artifacts, viewers of art can see stratified evidence of the creative process and how it transpired in the product. This word *artifact*, which I prefer to read as *art-fact*, signals that facts can live in forms.

The archeologist's work, in part, is to reconstruct the content of ancient civilizations that are long gone. The remaining unearthed art-facts offer an opportunity to reconstruct, with relative certainty, what was culturally true for this buried civilization. Flesh will decompose at a rate much faster than ceramic clay or iron. Humans make objects that easily outlive their own temporary physical forms. Human consciousness will one day leave each body, but this consciousness will not leave the living imagery imbedded in the ancient object. When these objects are found, they inspire teams of researchers to decipher carefully their purpose and meaning. It is humbling to see how

these discoveries stir enthusiasm. The objects cannot talk, they seem lifeless, yet they call together members of the scientific community to study their purpose. How can a still, silent, dead ancient object stir so much response? This aspect of archeological work is similar to the intentions of ABR.

Part of this question can be answered by considering that the object is alive with a particular form of imbedded narrative memory. It holds tangible knowledge that stimulates the curiosity of science. Although the memory lies dormant, it waits to reveal itself to those who can listen and consider its existence from its point of view. This sentiment is found in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats (1994, pp. 221-222). This poem speaks to the quietness of "silence and slow time" (p. 221) alive in a clay urn: "Will silent be; and not a soul to tell/. . . . Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought/. . . . 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'– that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (p. 222). Images, in this case, that of a Grecian urn, have quiet presence until engaged. The silence of an image shifts one into beauty as it reveals its qualities of life and transfers its breathing narrative into the living observer's psyche. Ancient Greece is long gone, but many art-facts remain, whispering truth across the generations to us from their original materials, makers, and culture. We make pilgrimage to see them in museums.

Although nothing is permanent, which is a central teaching in Buddhist philosophy, degrees of transitory permanence exist with certain materials. The search for enduring materials allowed for deities to find a home in a sculpted form that would outlive the current generation. Bronze and gold held the guarantee that future generations could visit, again and again, a holy shrine site. Ritual therefore could not easily occur

without materials to carve or paint. The resulting objects would in turn support the intended ceremony, which in turn held the community (Dissanayake, 1992). Materials were alive and so, therefore, were the many results of their application.

Art materials teach one about the physical world from their vantage point of possibilities and limitations. Each material is endowed with far-reaching potential waiting to be discovered. To know a material is to explore its points of familiarity and resistance. M. C. Richards (1964), my first ceramics teacher in the mid-1970s, taught that clay had its limits. From her, I learned that materials were alive and could teach about resistance and relationship. Clay can be pulled only so far without collapsing. To know that edge just before collapse is to know when to rest, stop, or engage. It is the point where opposition lives, signaling the place inside of one that can know the paradox of willingness and holding back. Materials thus teach about relational connections that emerge in the process between a merging of materials with objectified forms. As I learned yet again, working with clay and charcoal before and during this dissertation (see examples, Figures 2 & 3), each material has its own personality and set of relational and contemplative possibilities and limitations. A core theme in this research is that materials inspire images and images live as waiting potential within materials.

Figures 2 & 3. Clay and charcoal experiments. Sculpted and drawn by the author.

Finally, ABR has many correlations with the scientific method. Art-based first-person approaches to aesthetic inquiry can be blended with the steps of the scientific method that consist of framing questions, constructing hypotheses, and initiating background research. In addition experimentation, evaluation of these experiments, analysis of results, and report of findings completes the scientific methodology. The following brief outline explains how the scientific method can unfold during the ABR process.

All preliminary research begins with questions. These questions can emerge from direct observations of an event, including intuitive inner awareness of an emotional state or a cultural event such as a political occurrence that raises curiosity. The important consideration is to reflect and freely associate, without judgment, on the sparks of interest that inspire inquisitive impulses to further investigate a subject. Qualities of beginners mind are a helpful posture to maintain at this stage so that various themes are not lost to unnecessary judgment and censorship. This is also the territory of negative capability, as discussed further on, and openness to the depth of experience.

Next comes the due diligence of pursuing background information on this framing question. In terms of ABR, the artist can, for instance, draw images from dreams, create sculptural maquettes and visual thumbnail studies, look at the work of other artists, and observe visual themes and historical patterns that are imbedded within the culture at large. These musings are eventually boiled down into a hypothesis and clear statements that define the trajectory of the subject to be studied through the artistic process. The information gathered from these studies help to clarify the if-then qualities of the creative process; for example, if one type of wood sawdust is added to the firing of clay, then a

certain carbon imprint on the surface of the clay is likely to result. Intentional experiments with this scenario can begin to unfold the physical behavior of the clay during this approach to firing. This method is not meant to suggest the pursuit of a confining approach to creative work that can restrict the spontaneity of artistic processes. Instead, spontaneity can be enhanced as information is inputted into the process. It is important, however, that sustained commitment to the work be maintained.

The hypothesis is then thoroughly examined through the emergence of convergent and divergent information that is surfaced during this phase of the investigation. Mindfulness practices can also add meaningful perspective during this part of the process. Lifting off labels that can confine perception is one way mindfulness can impact this stage of the research. Furthermore, the artist can connect with wide-ranging experiences without self-deprecation. As the work unfolds, the artist can keep records, including journal notes and photographs that document stages of the processes. These visual data trails can, for example, further identify and refine implicit waiting questions that are imbedded in the work and help to retrieve information easily lost due to the rapid, seamless movement and symbolic quality of artistic work. This sort of emerging information can be the catalyst for an ongoing series of works that investigates a specific theme over time.

The next phase of the scientific method consists of analyzing the results. Analyzing involves studying and reviewing the work in a thoughtful manner. Examination of the visual data trail can deepen an understanding of the symbolic text. Careful inventory of the formal elements can help to expose content themes that have not yet been observed. This material can be further studied through the journaling process,

which includes methods such as personification and imaginal dialogue. Also, the data trail of the process, over time, can be distilled through photography and video.

Ultimately, the results can be reported through various avenues; for example, the work can be shown and presented to others. Eliciting viewer response is one way to gain a reflective perspective. Numerous ways to show the work are possible, from on-line venues to gallery showings. Showing work in a gallery setting is similar to a peer review process. The ways findings are reported can therefore vary. An important aspect of soliciting responses to the work is that it be shared in a way that invites reflection on its essential qualities. This opens the feedback loop for further input from interested others. For this reason, a book with blank pages is often available for viewers to sign when visiting a venue where the work is being shown. Gathering the viewpoints of others can reignite the process to begin again.

Meditation

It is estimated that 10 million practitioners of meditation exist in the United States (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Walsh and Shapiro define meditation as "a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration" (p. 229). Increasing calm, clarity, and concentration while reducing stress through meditation has been an interest of medical researchers since the early 1970s.

Benson (1975), a physician at Harvard Medical School in the 1970s, was deeply interested in stress and the physiological ramifications of what he refers to as a "hidden epidemic" (p. 18) of hypertension. During the course of his research conducted with

Transcendental Meditation (TM) practitioners, he observed considerable physiological changes in these meditators that were opposite to arousal states usually experienced when stressed or overcome by the fight-flight response (Benson, 1975; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Blood pressure was lowered, for example, and oxygen consumption was reduced as were arousal states. These results are in total opposition to the fight-flight reaction. Benson and his colleagues called this phenomenon the *relaxation response* (Benson, Beary, & Carol, 1974). This response has always existed in religious traditions, specifically in Eastern cultures (Benson, 1975). Prayer and contemplative techniques have quantifiable effects that can be studied and even explained. Benson identified four stages to eliciting the Relaxation Response: creating a serene environment; using a mental intention to repeat, in a certain way, a word or phrase; cultivating a passive attitude; and maintaining a comfortable position for the body (p. 27). Benson and his colleagues theorized that ongoing exposure to the relaxation response would reduce the harmful effects of stress and contribute to overall health.

The four stages of the relaxation response outlined by Benson can also be duplicated in the studio. Creating a serene environment in the studio is essential. Attention to light, surfaces to work on, comforting sound and smells all help to create a peaceful space in which to work. The mental, coordinated intention to repeat a word, phrase, or image inspires deeper connection to that subject. The cultivation of a passive attitude is enhanced by the ability of art to manifest one's thoughts before one. One can see one's thoughts emerge and notice immediately one's state of mind. Maintaining a comfortable position for the body is also essential in the studio. Whether working at an

easel or on the potter's wheel, the body must be listened to in order to support the creative process.

In the context of this research, meditation is viewed as the practice of cultivating, engaging, and sustaining present-centered awareness. A key component of this form of awareness practice is developing the capacity to become the witness-observer of the thinking mind. Along these lines, Indian sage Ramana Maharshi says, "All scriptures without any exception proclaim that for salvation mind should be subdued (as cited in Walsh & Vaughan, 1993b, p. 48). Taming the mind takes discipline and practice. Kabat-Zinn (1990) outlines seven "attitudinal foundations of mindfulness practice" (p. 33) that help to achieve this goal: nonjudging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, nonstriving, acceptance, and letting go (pp. 33-40). Research has shown similar outcomes, finding that the results of meditation practice can be summarized in the following five categories:

1. Nonreactivity to inner experience
2. Observing/noticing/attending to sensations/perceptions/thoughts/feelings
3. Acting with awareness/automatic pilot/concentration/non-distraction
4. Describing/labeling with words
5. Nonjudging of experience (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006)

Within Buddhist traditions are two main approaches to meditation, Vipassana and Samatha (Smith, 1999). These two approaches offer a foundational understanding of meditation in general. *Vipassana* means "insight" (p. 136) awareness into what is unfolding as it is occurring and is the oldest Buddhist meditation practice. *Samatha* means "concentration or tranquility" (p. 151), which is achieved by focusing attention

without indulging its reflexive urge to wander (Baer et al, 2006; Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005; Gunaratana, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Essentially Samatha meditation cultivates mindful attention to the present moment. Remaining present to whatever arises, including the randomness of thoughts and emotions begins to develop nonattachment. If one is attached to one's various stories and the thoughts and emotions that accompany them, then these personal narratives will have a powerful influence on one's life.

Nonattachment to mind narratives helps one let go of the neurotic discourse so common in everyday thought. Eventually, one learns the specific qualities and styles of thinking that keep one fixed in a personalized succession of recycled stories. Ultimately, one learns, through this practice, that these recurring patterns of thought are negotiable and even no longer necessary. One also learns not to reject sources of discomfort and instead move toward them. Often, through the irritant, the antidote is discovered. In this case, the remedy is not to deflect, suppress, or resist but to let go of resistance, meditatively titrate receptiveness to the struggle, and not abandon oneself. Observing the rising and falling of thoughts rather than contracting around them and becoming hijacked by distorted thinking is the basic focus of meditation.

According to Chodron (1997), each fresh moment is the ideal teacher. The newness of here-and-now encounters offers an alternative to resistance, avoidance, or giving into thoughtless impulses. Rather than freeze with denial or avoidance when displeasures arise, one can intentionally choose another approach to what is unfolding. Meditation offers an alternative path of relationship to one's thoughts and somatic sensations by revealing a spacious experience of the ever-moving, thinking mind.

Meditation, overall, is an indispensable, supportive discipline geared towards tracking and managing states and qualities of mind. For many, the habitual, unconscious patterns of cognition occur with little awareness. The *Bhagavad Gita* describes, in the following terms, the slippery slope of untamed human emotion and sense perception gone astray:

> For a *person* dwelling on the objects of the senses, an attachment to them is born; from attachment, desire is born; from desire, anger is born; from anger arises delusion; from delusion, loss of memory; from loss of the memory, destruction of discrimination; from destruction of discrimination one is lost. (Kripananda, 1989, p. 30)

This loss of awareness, created by attachments to desires, is one critical reason why contemplative discipline and practice, combined with art, is important. Within this discussion, art particularly is caught in a precarious position because it depends on the power of visual perception with its direct access to the sensory and, therefore, the sensual world. If one is not careful, as the *Bhagavad Gita* suggests, perceptions at certain times can be taken over by temptations and distractions. Disciplined practice with art and meditation can serve to untangle these hijacking impulses by manifesting the knotty layers of experience. Consequently, this project advocates for a return to art as a form of self-inquiry whereby the artist focuses on gaining contemplative insight through expressive work. Towards this end, a review of the art therapy literature that is sympathetic to contemplative, spiritual, and transpersonal themes is required.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Throughout human history, in the East, West, North and South, the arts have served as a pathway to engage directly the healing urges of spiritual and empathic aspirations. Consideration of this premise is examined from several perspectives below, in section I, ranging from early modernist Western art, to philosophical studies on art and empathy, to yoga and rasa theory. This literature review begins with a discussion of Indian culture and art and then shifts to specific 19th-century Western influences on art. Beginning with the Nabi movement in late 19th-century France and their interest in art and spirituality, the discussion then turns to the work of Theodore Lipps and Robert Vischer and their work on art and empathy. Next, the field of art therapy and expressive therapies is addressed. Specific authors who have focused on articulating the spiritual, contemplative, and transpersonal nature of the field are highlighted. The focus of then shifts, in section II, to core themes from Yoga traditions. Section III examines specific connections between meditation and art.

Section I: The Contemplative and Transpersonal Roots of Art and Art Therapy

An historical legacy exists in Indian (Coomaraswamy, 1934, 1957; Dehejia, 1996; Khanna, 1979) and Euro-American (Knight, 1987) views of the arts that ties creative and aesthetic experience with spiritual intentions and traditions. Western artistic traditions, for example, include many accounts of how the arts connect spiritual and creative forces for the contemplative artist or philosopher (Knight, 1987). According to Knight, William Blake, John Milton, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Sir Walter Scott, and Samuel F. B. Morse all referenced spiritual connections with their creative work. Knight emphasized

Goethe's belief that all longing was in fact a yearning for God or the numinous. Similarly, many yogic traditions address the idea that suffering is actually the result of feeling separated from the Divine. For Knight, creative work is the imaginative conduit that actively fulfills the yearning for sacred connection (p. 366). Creative work is not only a way to join with the creator but also a way to merge with this Divine presence.

A rich history of integrating the arts with religion also exists in India (Schwartz, 2004). There, the arts have traditionally been integrated into many different practices concerned with the simultaneous spiritual transformation of the artist, the audience, and the culture at large. Unlike many classical approaches to Western art, the traditional arts of India did not focus on art as a form of rational knowledge or emotive self-expression. Instead, the arts were usually seen as a way to cultivate spiritual transformation. Coomaraswamy (1934) recognized that before post-Renaissance art in the West and the subsequent extroversion of Western consciousness, the West and East did in fact have similar artistic impulses. Throughout the ages after the Renaissance, traditional artists of India practiced differently from their European counterparts. Well before European modernism, Indian artists were engaging in deep spiritual practices through their many art forms. These artists operated as revelatory visionaries by moving subtle qualities of unmanifested consciousness into manifest form in order to foster the savored response of rasa. They accomplished this by translating universal Divine intuition into the artistic structures of theater, music, and architecture (Khanna, 1979; Schwartz, 2004). With the birth of modernism in Europe and America, however, the Western mind returned to direct forms of subjective and spiritual investigation through art.

Many of the abstract and nonobjective Western artists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (e.g., Archipenko, Brancusi, Kandinsky, Klee, Marc, Malevich, and Serusier) were experimenting with the relationships between form, essence, and spirituality. In many cases, these artists were deeply absorbed in the process of empathically abstracting the formal, quintessential, visual qualities of their medium into tangible qualities of spiritual essence. The rational perspective that influenced and dominated so much of Western thought was now being tempered with intuitive, and I would add, contemplative subjectivity. An early influence on this approach to art was H. P. Blavatsky, a founder of Theosophy, and her occult interests.

The Nabi group (Hebrew for prophet), working mostly in Paris during the late 19th century, was influenced by the ideas of Rudolf Steiner and also Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society. In an attempt to merge science with theology, Blavatsky and others such as C. W. Leadbeater (1971) had influenced many of the artists from this group, which considered the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment to be a function of art (Welsh, 1987). Lead by Paul Serusier, the Nabi's were overt with their embrace of the occult and the Gnostic ideas of Theosophy. According to Welsh, many early modernist western artists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian confronted the rationalist and materialistic tone of Western culture through their art. Kandinsky pursued an "anti-materialist" agenda in his work by considering art as a pathway to cultivate a "spiritually enlightened society" (pg. 10).

Leadbeater's book, first published in 1902, had potent illustrations of the color fields, known as auras, surrounding the human body. This book offered a direct correlation between the auras of the subtle or soul body and the meaning of these colors.

It is likely that this publication may have influenced the palette of these artists immersed in the spiritual dimensions of their art.

Another early modernist artist, Constantin Brancusi, was also interested in working with form and essence. He said, for example, “I am no longer of this world, I am far from myself, I am no longer a part of my own person. I am within the essence of things themselves” (as cited in Chipp, 1968, p. 364). This comment infers Brancusi’s sculptural pilgrimage to penetrate into the transcendent essence of material matter that exists both in and beyond form. This example shows precisely why art is so intimately connected to contemplative practice. Many early modernists of the 20th century boldly experimented with intelligent abstractions of form. Their thoughtful research into abstraction resulted in a new vision for investigating the formal elements of art. Artists like Brancusi, however, not only used abstraction to examine form but also as a way to probe the deeper dimensions of form and matter and enter into the essence of the subjects they were abstracting.

Franz Marc was also experimenting with form and essence as he searched for a “spiritualized aesthetic” (Partsch, 2006, p. 24). He was interested in the contrast between pictorial representation and emotional representation and how visual space could be a “soul shattering” (p. 12) place to roam and experiment. Specifically, Marc wanted to paint the “inner spiritual side of nature” (p. 20) through color and form. Early on, in the works of van Gogh and Gauguin, he found cues and examples to aid him in his search. Drawn to the world of animals, Marc was careful not to anthropomorphize his subjects. Instead, his method was to see his subject matter empathically and compose his work from this intersubjective place of attuned observation. The contrast between empathy and

anthropomorphizing a subject is an important distinction. The difference between these two ways of working with images is also central to the ABR methodology pursued in this dissertation. Rather than project personal material onto his subject, Marc wanted to feel with and into his subject and, like Brancusi, access the soul or essence of his topic of focus, which he so eloquently did in his short career.

The term *form* is used here in a broad sense to include form and formal elements in visual art, cultural forms, and academic cannons. Many of these early 20th-century Western artists were making use of form to confront the aesthetic rules established by the academy. One way they accomplished this was to insist on the primary importance of the way in which aesthetic form necessarily fuses with subjective experience. The Post-Impressionists, the Nabis, the Expressionists, the Surrealists, and Dada artists thus were breaking down cannons of visual form while simultaneously breaking down cultural forms established by the academy (Chipp, 1968). This led many on a pathway into the deepest recesses of their subjective, interior selves. For many artists, this pilgrimage ultimately revealed the contrasting spiritual dimensions inherent in the dualities of the form-and-essence, subtle-and-manifest equation. The practice of telegraphing personal awareness into objects, another person's inner life, or the form, content, and essence of a work of art inspired research into the subject of empathy.

Art, Sympathy, and Aesthetic Empathy

A long, rich period of relating art with aesthetics, sympathy, and empathy began in the 19th century and extended into the early 20th century, particularly in Germany and America. Summarizing the work of Vischer, Titchener, and particularly Lipps, Jahoda (2005) outlines the historical antecedents of art, sympathy, and aesthetic empathy.

According to Jahoda, Vischer introduced the term *einfuhlung*, or emotional projection, in relationship to art. Lipps widened this concept to include interpersonal attunement or understanding, and Titchener, so it seems, eventually translated *einfuhlung* to mean aesthetic empathy, although there is some debate on this historical perspective.

Notably, on several occasions Titchener (1909) refers to the muscles of the mind, which are expressed through empathy, which is a "rendering of *einfuhlung*" (p. 21). He seems to mean that what can be empathically imagined can also be inwardly felt as a unique form of knowing. In fact, he uses the term *motor empathy* to suggest a difference between "imaginal" and "sensational terms" of experiencing when considering a memory of an event that carries emotional weight (p. 185). These empathic muscles of the mind help an individual to know another or the content of a work of art, and it was Lipps who wrote persuasively about this subject.

Lipps insightfully studied connections between art, sympathy, and empathy. In fact, he saw a fluid relationship in the inward excitation of sympathy and empathy fostered by careful observation of others as well as objects. He was interested in how one comes to know the mind of another through the instinct for *einfuhlung* or empathy rather than through analogy alone (Jahoda, 2005).

Lipps was a prominent thinker, influencing early analytic thinking as well as the field of phenomenology. He considered how contemplated artworks enter and fuse with the observer (Jahoda, 2005; Mallgrave & Ikonomou, 1994). Furthermore, he noticed how the observer could be transported into an image. This quality of transfer is related to both aesthetic imitation and aesthetic *einfuhlung* (Lee, 1912), which means to feel intersubjectively within or into. This intersubjective projection into artworks is enabled

by the flexible dimensionality of the human mind entering into the layered qualities of the imagery itself. Lee noticed, for example, how visual forms in art exist as inert forms and therefore do not act. The intersubjective perceptions of the viewer conjugate movement and meaning as visual form and content are contemplated.

Lipps, as Jahoda (2005) suggests, recognized ways of knowing beyond what the senses communicate. Emotions cannot be accessed through the senses in the way smell or taste reach awareness; rather, one comes to know another's emotion by letting it become born within oneself. At its core, empathy is therefore an intersubjective, deeply imaginal practice of perceptive entrance into the world of another. This view of art is reminiscent of the way Brancusi described his relationship with his own artwork (Chipp, 1968).

Arnheim's (1966) pioneering research on a Gestalt theory of expression is also relevant to this discussion on art and empathy. Arnheim examined how expression and perception are intimately related and how artistic expression serves as a means for "perceiving with imagination" (p. 64). This view of imaginal perception considers affect actually to exist in the object of perception. Empathy is one way to locate and explore this implicit affect alive in visual imagery. Empathic perceiving with the imagination is therefore also ostensibly related to the working methods espoused by Marc and other early modernists such as Brancusi, who were trying to access essence rather than anthropomorphized interpretations of their subjects.

This discussion on empathy, artist, and art can also be correlated with what is now known about mirror neurons (Gallese, 2008; Gallese, Keysers, Rizzolatti, 2004); that is, carefully observed actions such as those seen in another person creating art will fuse with the observer at subtle neural levels. For Lipps, this progression of events happened

through a process of aesthetic imitation that is also related to aesthetic *einfuhlung* (Jahoda, 2005; Mallgrave & Ikonomou, 1994). In addition, Lipps noticed that he could feel within himself what was active in the observed other.

Jahoda (2005) goes on to describe the earlier work of Robert Vischer that associated *einfuhlung* with the perceptual appreciation of art-based stimuli through "emotional projection" (p. 153). During this process Vischer observed how the sensory ego can become saturated with feeling when projected into the object of one's focus (p. 154). In many ways, this viewpoint is a central premise in the field and practice of art therapy. The unification of art with therapy is directly concerned with empathically creating and viewing art as a form of access to the full range of human experience, extending from the mundane to the numinous.

Art Therapy and Spirituality

For some in the field of art therapy, art is considered to be a spiritual practice (Allen, 2001; Farrelly-Hansen, 2001) because it articulates layered, symbolic themes, which unite unconscious and conscious realms (Harding, 1961) that can ultimately point one towards the Divine (Franklin, 1999; Knight, 1987). Along these lines, the field of art therapy has produced literature on the subject of spirituality (Cane, 1951; Farrelly-Hansen, 2001; Garai, 2001; Horovitz-Darby, 1994), transpersonal applications (Franklin, 1999; Franklin, Farrelly-Hansen, Marek, Swan-Foster, & Wallingford, 2000; Kossak, 2009; Lewis, 1997), contemplative applications (Monti et al., 2006; Rappaport, 2009), and shamanism (McNiff, 1986, 1992).

Florence Cane (1951) was likely one of the first visionaries in the emerging field of art therapy to be actively engaged with art, yoga, and meditation. She integrated these

interests into a series of art exercises that engaged body, breath, and voice. She keenly observed how art could unite body with mind and spirit by balancing opposites through a series of art exercises. Cane felt that the resulting outcome of these procedures could integrate the personality and awaken spiritual awareness through the core functions of movement, feeling, and thought. Cane's sister, Margaret Naumburg, had similar interests that influenced her work as an educator and later as an art therapist (Detre et al., 1983).

Joseph Garai (2001), an early practitioner and art therapy educator, studied humanistic psychology and holistic healing and how these progressive subjects integrated with art therapy. He formulated methods for cultivating human potential that included meditation and art as a means to developing a healthy mind-body-spirit connection (Garai, 1984).

Another farsighted pioneer in the field of art therapy was Joan Kellogg, who was interested in the spiritual dimensions of artwork. Early in her career, she collaborated with transpersonally oriented theorists like Stanislav Grof. During this period, she collected stacks of mandala drawings from clients and, from these, developed codified ideas on the 12 categories of the Great Round utilized in the Mandala Assessment Research Instrument (MARI) (Thayer, 1994). This art-based evaluation is aligned with transpersonal theory and research methods (Braud & Anderson, 1998) in terms of its probing interest into mandala imagery and spiritual development.

More recently, Ellen Horovitz-Darby (1994) has written about the clinical relationships between art and spirituality. She insisted that spiritual elements not be ignored in clinical work and, in fact, felt obligated to invite them to surface in her clinical practice. The art process also inspired Horovitz-Darby to return to the studio as a deep

well to dip into and find healing solutions to life challenges that supported her own spiritual unfolding (Horovitz, 1999). In addition to the authors mentioned so far, others in the field of art therapy have addressed the subject of spirituality from various perspectives: for example Chickerneo (1993) and Feen-Calligan (1995) have integrated spiritual aspects of substance abuse treatment with art therapy.

The subject of spirituality has been present in art therapy and expressive therapies since their beginnings. The drive of this focus within these fields continues to gain exciting momentum. There is, for example, an emerging and ongoing interest in transpersonal psychology along with meditation and their connection to art therapy (Franklin et al., 2000), yoga and meditation (Franklin, 1999), and expressive therapies (Kossack, 2009; Lewis, 1997). An early spokeswoman for this perspective in art therapy was Edith Wallace (2001), a physician and Jungian analyst interested in utilizing Jungian methods such as active imagination as a cornerstone for her clinical work. She feels and boldly proclaims that all art is related to meditation. Within this declaration, Wallace conveys that art exposes the presence of the ego and invites this quality of mind and identity to relax its influence so that the contents of the unconscious can emerge fresh and unencumbered. She advocates for a state of receptive emptiness (p. 98) along with Winnicott's notion of a "non-purposive state" (p. 100) that defines a quality of playful openness to emerging imagery.

In addition to these earlier authors, a current interest is emerging in the applications of art-based mindfulness meditation in clinical settings such as cancer treatment (Monti et al., 2006). The subject of meditation, along with related approaches to art therapy and expressive therapies, continues to gather momentum. Contemporary

researchers increasingly see the seamless connections between art creation and contemplative practices such as mindfulness meditation, focusing, and intermodal work.

Intermodal Emphasis in Art Therapy

Notably and most recently, Rappaport (2009) has insightfully bridged the focusing work of Eugene Gendlin with art therapy. Somatic intelligence, when merged with artistic methods, reveals innate inner wisdom that can shift stress, foster self-care, and help manage psychological trauma. The question is, how does one learn to listen to and hear the inner wisdom of physical sensation that emerges as the felt sense recognized by Gendlin? Rappaport demonstrates how the physicality of the felt sense can bring a person into the present moment and reveal greater overall awareness, which is a common goal for meditation practices. Six steps comprise the focusing method: clearing a space, choosing an issue and felt sense, finding a handle/symbol to describe the felt sense, asking or interviewing the felt sense, and openly listening to and therefore receiving with understanding the insightful wisdom of the felt sense (p. 37). Through this six-step process, one learns to be compassionate and friendly towards the emerging body-based awareness.

Emotion is feeling with a story. The felt sense is feeling without a story that is gently brought into focus (Rappaport, 2009). Like the visual image, it is innate, physical, and simultaneous rather than discursive, mental, and linear. Using the metaphor of focusing, by bringing something vague into focused attention, inner contemplative awareness of somatic experience is deepened. It is here that art and meditation compliment the focusing method. Art catalyzes the vagueness of sensation, memory, and narrative into a physical form that is ripe for reflective investigation. It is through the

visual and tangible qualities of art that a metaphoric handle is attached to an amorphous inner experience. Once this awareness is acknowledged, it is then gently brought into focus through methods like dialoguing, which in turn shift it forward to where it can be received with greater empathic awareness. Rappaport also emphasizes how focusing relates to other expressive modalities and the importance of intermodal work.

Knill (1999), a seminal writer and educator in the expressive therapies, has also focused on the intermodal importance of the arts. His work addresses the role of play and imagination, the unique form of work involved with creating, and nourishment the soul through polyaesthetic investigation. In his view, and the view of his colleagues, "imagination is intermodal" (p. 40). Play and imagination are specifically engaged in intermodal exploration as a way to connect the unreal with the real. Concerning the work-oriented approach to expressive therapies, Knill articulates the inherent continuity within the formation of an object that preserves the layered logic of the process and the disciple of art in general. This intrinsic fact is important to nurture and contemplate so that the existential importance of the arts remains accessible to all.

Like Knill, Rodgers (1999) works in an intermodal way utilizing movement, visual art, music, writing, and improvised sound. She identifies her work as "person-centered expressive arts therapy" (2001, p. 163), which includes self-discovery methods such as meditation and imagery work. The arts, according to Rogers, cultivate unique forms of awareness that surface empowered choices, especially regarding existential suffering. She believes that human suffering can open one to explore the spiritual realms of one's being, and through art, one can release pain and suffering while cultivating insightful awareness related to that, pain.

Moon (2004) expands on the theme of spirituality and existential struggle. The artist, according to Moon, manifests personal myths in visual form. He finds that creating is an act of prayer, a way to make a sincere request or confess a personal secret. Images therefore are visual prayers communed with through the art process. Discipline is required in this process of creative manifestation. At times, art is a process of failing better, struggling harder, to bring forth truthful compositions. Moon goes on to say that concentration, faith, and mastery are also important benefits gained when considering art as a spiritual practice.

Levine and Levine (1999) strongly advocate for a deepening into the therapeutic essence of art-making. They identify the common denominator between all intermodal works as the imagination; therefore, the imagination and the vast territory that it occupies within and beyond itself, is the foundation of research in the expressive therapies. It is through imaginal methods of inquiry that the core theoretical values of the expressive therapies can be articulated.

These are uncertain times. Levine and Levine (1999) cite Yeats, repeating the adage that "'Things fall apart; the center cannot hold'" (p. 19). Chaos, the authors say, is answered back with a search for an orderly foundationalism. Order and chaos, two eternal themes of philosophical inquiry, are also subjects repeatedly investigated in aesthetic theory. Levine and Levine also discusses Nietzsche's view of art as an expression of human will to receive and embrace suffering as a significant part of life. Through art therefore, humanity affirms all of life, including the many afflictions faced in living. This is also a core value of contemplative practices. Rather than resist and avoid pain, one overcomes the urge to reject suffering by moving towards it with openness. The goal is to

be with what is emerging in this moment. This view of contemplative presence, combined with imagination, is the foundation of any given moment, because time is an unstoppable creative process whereby anything is possible. Art becomes the way to aestheticize the moment, receive and contain it, so that this unique event can be accessed.

Art as Spiritual and Contemplative Practice

Knill (1999), Levine and Levine (1999), Moon (1999), Rappaport (2009), and Rogers (1999, 2001) all describe theoretical views as well as applied methods that are sympathetic to the ideas on contemplative practice promoted in this dissertation. Focusing is a proven method for directing attention and cultivating awareness. Intermodal work allows the artist to translate thoughts and feelings between expressive disciplines, arriving at greater sensory and cognitive awareness. Visual art slows the mind down and focuses concentration in the service of increasing faith and mastery in the creative process. Another art therapy author, Pat Allen (1992, 2001), also views art as a spiritual practice. From among her many contributions to the field of art therapy, her community-based work in tandem with her connection to McNiff's (1986, 1992,1997) work on imaginal approaches is most relevant to the context of this study.

Allen (2001) has addressed specific practice elements in her community-based approach of setting an intention, attending to the working process, and witness writing. In many ways, her studio approach also resembles models of meditation. Within Allen's model, for example, is an attunement between identifying purposeful subject matter and sustained, focused engagement with art processes that also invites communal witnessing. Although Allen is specifically interested in group witnessing she is also interested in inner witnessing, which is a hallmark of meditation practice (Anantananda, 1996).

Allen's (1992, 2001) work aligns well with McNiff's work (1986, 1992, 1997). Both hold a similar vision for the field of art therapy, specifically regarding the importance of working with images and imagination. The practice of imagination inspires reconnection with a rich inner life grounded in the evolving images alive within a person (Berry, 1982; Hillman, 1978; Watkins, 1984). Absorption in and exploration of the images that populate the psyche is the privilege of a human life. Both McNiff and Allen see this imaginal approach to art as soul work, wherein the ongoing invitation is to reclaim, follow, and delight in the archetypal truth of personal imagery. Engagement with this language of images takes place through nonjudgmental interaction with the phenomenology (Betensky, 2001) of both the symbolic form and content of artworks. The visual symbol acts as enclosures and containers of archetypes thus making this material tangible (Politsky, 1995a). This spontaneous, self-referential act of internal ministrative resourcing is soul manifesting through art, and it is this notion of soul that relates to the contemplative elements of both art and aspects of yoga discussed throughout this dissertation.

Although their references to the word *soul*, as it relates to art, are subtle and at times difficult to define precisely, McNiff (1992) and Allen (2001) are clear that art reconnects one to soul. McNiff (1992) makes an effort to describe soul in terms such as "kinesis, process, creation, interplay, and continuous motion" (p. 54). For him, soul and psyche are synonymous, and when in trouble, the psyche will minister to itself through the imaginal language of the arts. Many in the field of art therapy believe that by creating images and staying close to their unique presence, the imaginal elements of soul can be directly experienced. This encounter is precisely what Politsky (1995a) describes

regarding the spontaneous archetypal eruption that surfaced so eloquently in classical Jungian themes through her drawings. Similarly, McNiff (1992) believes that images move through one as offspring, inheriting the artist's psychobiological attributes. He also states that similar to children, images have a right to manifest their unique potential, which in turn influences their creator. Likewise, from a related art historical perspective, Paul Klee, observing a connection between the laws governing universal processes in nature and how these processes are reproduced and accessible to the artist, saw art as a metaphor for the Creation (Grohmann, 1987).

Related to his work on soul, imagination, and art, McNiff (1988) also identified contemporary archetypal and ethnographic connections between shamanism and expressive therapies as far back as 1979. His effort to understand and appreciate shamanic principles, as they relate to imaginal work, has culminated in an inclusive view of the expressive arts as an extension of the shamanic metaphor. McNiff explains that his viewpoint is not an appropriated expansion of specific rites and rituals from indigenous cultures, but instead, he views the current actions of the expressive therapist much like a lineage of universal, indigenous, archetypal metaphors. This view of archetypal lineage offers a lens through which shamanic traditions are seen as the allegorical roots of the creative arts therapies.

McNiff's early work made the scholarly distinction between a culturally appropriated view of the shaman metaphor and the "indigenous experience of the soul" (1988, p. 287) inspired by studio practices that excavate contemplative awareness. A good example of a studio practice that fosters an understanding of depth awareness is Authentic Movement (Pallaro, 1999). The Authentic Movement form, which evolved

mainly through the work of Mary Starks Whitehouse and Janet Adler, was influenced by the relationship between active imagination and the body that serves as the conduit for the cultivation of layers of awareness. Through moving and witnessing, the mover along with the community of movers can travel deeply into numerous versions of depth awareness similar to those described by McNiff. The convergence of movement and related art-based forms of inquiry eventually culminated in McNiff's (1998) theory on how the indigenous archetypal elements of the arts can be utilized for a unique form of research methodology for qualitative investigation.

Building on McNiff's work, I propose a correlation among the shaman metaphor he outlined, the expressive therapist, and the mystic *yogi* or *yogini*. The words *yogi* (male practitioner) and *yogini* (female practitioner) are derived from the same source as *yoga*: the root *yuj*, which means to "yoke" or "bind together" the lower, ego-based self with the transcendent Self, or Atman (Feuerstein, 2003). Throughout the history of yoga and Indian art, artistic imagination has inspired ritual practice that bridges the lower self with the transcendent Self. This inspiration has led to the view of the artist as a yogi or yogini (Feuerstein, 1998). Feuerstein, echoing Coomaraswamy (1934, 1957) considers traditional Indic art to be a form of yoga.

This current research suggests that the expressive therapist immersed in creative investigation is similar to the mystic yogi or yogini artist engrossed in the phenomenology of directly studying states of consciousness and self-awareness through art. This study views art as fostering disciplined absorption in seeing and perception (Eck, 1998; Sewall, 1995) and deep participation in somatic sensation (Pallaro, 1999; Rappaport, 2009) as well as facilitating encounters with a continuum of states of mind

from ordinary to extreme (Tart, 1975). Like the shaman, the yogi and yogini were skillful researchers adept at plumbing the depths of the human psyche. These contemplatives were proficient at conducting experimental introspective studies aimed at unearthing consciousness in its most refined, subtle, and evolved potential state.

According to Mahony (1998b) ancient practitioners of yoga would often externalize their awareness, for the good of others, by drawing an image of their contemplative insight on the floor or wall. This act of drawing unified the inner elusive truth with the outer expression of that truth by translating these experiences into visual, geometric terms. Their contemplative work, in many ways, began with introspective investigation of the multifaceted, intricate subject of creation and manifesting aspects of the universal oneness.

Parallels may also be drawn between McNiff's (1992) view of soul and the Self, or Atman (Deutsch, 1969; Feuerstein, 2003). For the purposes of this current study, *soul* is further understood, from its numinous descriptions, to represent the quality of the subtle body or eternal spirit as the poetic backdrop of a human life that also transcends and survives the physical body after death.

Indian philosophical traditions posit a Divine core Self or Atman within all sentient beings which is comprised of the same essence as the larger Supreme creative reality of the entire cosmos (Deutsch, 1969; Feuerstein, 2003; Mahony, 1998a). This essential foundational tenet conceives the fundamental nature of the infinite, subtle, outer universe as also contained within each being as conscious essence to be affirmed and even pursued. This quest for the Divine can unfold while engaged in such activities as mundane household chores, formal contemplative practice, and art. This overall

perspective establishes a worldview of eternal causality whereby self-awareness in human beings is literally the universe contemplating itself. Most important is that humans can realize this reality of eternal essence beyond narrow views of limiting, ego-based identity and perception.

The term *Atman* therefore references the residency of the universal Brahman within all human beings. It is the pilgrimage of the yogi, mystic, and contemplative artist to journey to this inner realm. In fact, the goal is to experience Atman-Brahman as one and the same reality. Through disciplined practice, the cultivation of various forms of awakened states becomes achievable, including the possibility of enlightenment as the eventual conclusion of a soul's glacial journey. This is the essence of the great *Upanishad* statement, "*Tat Tvam Asi*," which translates as "That art thou" (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 258). This core teaching infers that the universal One is, in fact, human beings' essential core nature, which can be known through the lens of self-aware consciousness.

Most important about this worldview is the idea that one can realize this truth because individual consciousness is always juxtaposed against the background of universal truth (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 258). This belief, which has flourished for millennia in India, has influenced many Western thinkers and artists such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Aldous Huxley, and J. Robert Oppenheimer (p. 258). All of these great minds were strongly bent towards mystical contemplation. This desire to contemplate and seek out encounters with the ineffable, numinous nature of consciousness has many names, including "God."

Armstrong (1993) addresses the point that the mystical search for God consists of specific attributes that are familiar to all faiths. She notes that the search is a subjective

encounter with a specific sort of inner journey carried out through "the image-making part of the mind, often called the imagination, rather than through the more cerebral, logical faculty" (p. 219). Additionally, analogous to the artist who pursues numinous content, the mystic, according to Armstrong, internally creates deliberate somatic and cognitive exercises that cultivate visionary access to the Divine. In essence, an intentional pursuit of what is holy and Divine proceeds through imaginal pathways, somatic exercises, and mind-training exercises such as meditation and art.

Furthermore, Armstrong points to contemplative traditions that go back to Greek Orthodox practices known as *hesychasm*, a term which originates from a root that means "tranquility or inner silence" (1993, p. 220). It was believed that inner images and inner conversation could become distractions that pull the practitioner away from the serene inner landscape of tranquil stillness. The mind, Armstrong suggests, could be reigned in through techniques similar to yogic practices that value methods of concentration that clear the propensity to think and imagine. This method of stilling the mind ultimately promotes an interior "waiting silence" (p. 220) that transcends categories and therefore favors an apprehension of Reality beyond conception. Many mystics from various traditions have suggested that silence is the language of the Divine.

These two points that Armstrong (1993) outlines, imaginal questing and stilling the mind to promote inner silence and tranquility, lay the groundwork for a dialectic that recursively unfolds throughout this dissertation. From formlessness emerges form, and through the contemplation of form, the practitioner can find the pathway back to the formless. This equation of the formless taking form for contemplative engagement and then leading back to the numinous was practiced over and over with clay and charcoal.

The raw amorphous clay was sculpted into various forms for contemplative inquiry. Touching, holding, and modeling clay had qualities of being present for a tactile sermon where revelations could be heard in the silence of the process. The wisdom of these two materials, clay and charcoal, repeatedly revealed contemplative insights made available through imaginal listening to the silence of the creative process. The clay example in Figure 4 conveys how the pot was opened and fashioned into concentric chambers, suggesting a solidified view of the moment when a pebble is dropped into water.

Figure 4. Clay example of concentric circles. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

The practices of imagination, through art, and meditation therefore are not necessarily divided; in fact, they continually cross paths in the creative process, as one is needed in order to promote the other. Often with the aid of imaginal exercises, the mind is used to still itself so that its contents can settle and the background expansive silence of consciousness can move to the foreground of inner sensation and awareness. It is here that the yogi or mystic becomes absorbed and even established.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James (2002) takes up the subject of mysticism including yoga and mystical states. James recognizes the ineffable, noetic quality of mystical states. He also observes a connection between the inner messages offered up by the arts and mystical susceptibility and receptivity. Of particular interest are states of consciousness beyond the normalcy of waking and rational consciousness. Citing several accounts of direct mystical experiences from figures throughout history, James considers the notion of *cosmic consciousness*, which is an embodied awareness of the larger cosmos. Concerning yoga, James writes,

> In India, training in mystical insight has been known from time immemorial under the name of yoga. Yoga means the experimental union of the individual with the divine. It is based on persevering exercise; and the diet, posture, breathing, intellectual concentration, and moral discipline vary slightly in different systems which teach it. The yogi, or disciple, who has by these means overcome the obscurations of his lower nature sufficiently, enters into the condition termed *Samadhi.* (p. 436)

Samadhi is a state in which one "comes face to face with facts which no instinct or reason can ever know" (Vivekananda, as cited in James, 2002, p. 436).

Superconsciousness and cosmic consciousness, according to James (2002), emerge not through the faculties of conceptual thought but rather through a process similar to how sensations surface within a person. James notes that God's truth is not known as much through discursive methods but instead emerges more as intuitive knowing whereby immediate feeling, which has no content at first, emerges long before judgment can set in. Essentially, when in mystical states, "we become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness" (pp. 457), which is the "everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by difference of clime or creed" (p. 457). Furthermore, James notes that well-developed mystical states, which are a private and

privileged humble matter, have an authority of experience. These encounters with mystical feeling and expansive merging register as “enlargement, union, and emancipation” (p. 464) of a limited identity. Throughout history, these experiences have often been minimized and even pathologized by the dominant culture of the time. This misperception of the prevailing cultural attitude resulting in pathologizing the sacred is a core interest and focus of study for the field of transpersonal psychology.

Transpersonal and Imaginal Foundations

Transpersonal psychology is often viewed as a fourth force emerging from within the existing three dominant Western psychological paradigms: psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioral, and humanistic (Cortright, 1997; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993a). Transpersonal psychology developed as a response to these earlier models, each of which, truth be told, brilliantly researched their specific slice of human consciousness (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993a). The early pioneers of transpersonal psychology firmly believed, however, that human development was capable of evolving well beyond the stages outlined by each of these respective theories (Davis, 2003). The transpersonal view of development sees a gradual, homeostatic shift from the dominance of the ego to an eventual disidentification with this limited perspective of human possibility (Lewis, 1997). In essence, the dominance of the ego offers necessary tools to examine the ego itself and eventually dismantle self-defeating cognitive patterns. Narrow views of identity mired in cognitive distortions, for example, utilize ego resources such as self-observation techniques to untangle these self-deprecating thoughts (Persons, 1989) in order to make way for spiritual unfolding.

Spiritual development is fundamental to human existence. Transpersonal psychology was intent on studying this fundamental urge towards transcendental wholeness by researching the full developmental spectrum of consciousness along with the surfacing of spiritual material in clinical and nonclinical settings (Scotton, Chinen, & Battista, 1996; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993a; Wilber, 2000a). The prefix *trans*, in this usage, thus implies pathways beyond, through, and across limited views of identity and existential limitations, toward the fullest human potential (Cortright, 1997). Caplan, Hartelius, and Rardin (2003) add to an understanding of this slippery prefix *trans* by suggesting that the "trans" characteristics of the transpersonal need to evolve through all experiential levels of the personal. Ken Wilber (2000b) named and defined a related concern as the "pre/trans fallacy" (p. 210), whereby he explained three stages of development: the pre-personal (pre-rational), personal (rational-egoic), and transpersonal (trans-rational). In his explication of the pre/trans fallacy, Wilber corrects other developmental theories that can confuse pre-rational states with transpersonal states. A significant point within this perspective is that one cannot skip steps when sincerely traveling a spiritual path. The ego has many ways of protecting itself while on the spiritual path, particularly when falsely rationalizing spiritual development through unacknowledged defensive measures. Also known as *spiritual bypassing* (Wellwood, 1984) or *spiritual materialism* (Trungpa, 1974), clever forms of avoidance can be rationalized as spiritual work. Said another way, spiritual practices like meditation can be used to bypass essential "unfinished business" (Wellwood, 1984, p. 64). The necessary ego work must be done before trying to transcend its essential presence, or, according to

Jungian theory, one must go though the shadow archetype to get to the Self archetype (Storr, 1983).

Concerning this expedition through developmental stages and eventual transcendental experiences, Western culture has tried to take the inward journey by a number of alternate routes (Tart, 1975) including drug-induced methods, sensory deprivation, and organized religious practices (Boorstein, 1996). For many, especially those with a contemplative orientation, the arts serve as another way inward—as a form of yoga (Coomaraswamy, 1957). From research on the Western, Eastern, Northern, and Southern hemispheres' traditions, many accounts demonstrate how the arts unify body with mind (Pallaro, 1999), emotion (Langer, 1951, 1953), and spirit (Knight, 1987).

Politsky (1995a), for example, thoughtfully validates this claim through her own unanticipated self-exploration process during a significant crisis in her spiritual life as a woman religious. Through a series of spontaneous drawings, she was able to move into, through, and eventually beyond the contents of an unexpected archetypal eruption that threw her life at the time into turmoil. Her unique process points toward the articulation of an archetypal spiritual function within the human psyche that is innately imbedded in a Jungian and transpersonal view of the visual arts. The urge of the psyche to articulate its contents in images and through their imaginal movements is well documented in imaginal and archetypal psychology (Berry, 1982; Hillman, 1978; McNiff, 1992; Watkins, 1984).

Creating art can access and therefore recreate for contemplation the widest range of life themes through formed images. Active imagination, for example, a practice first outlined by Carl G. Jung, advocates for a careful invitation to listen to and follow images as they present themselves (Chodorow, 1997). Jung felt that the activity of the

imagination was an inborn inner necessity that had qualities similar to meditative techniques (Chodorow, 1997). Jung did not discover the imagination; he merely made its significance known to contemporary depth psychologies by highlighting his own immersion into various art processes as methods for activating imaginal wisdom (Jung, 1961/1989). As autonomous entities, images can influence their maker to pay attention to them as guides and authorities of their own existence (Chodorow, 1997; McNiff, 1992).

In this sense, images have a quality of *spirit*, a word that originally meant "breath" (*spiritus*) as well as "soul" (Ayto, 1990, p. 494). It makes sense, then, that when individuals commune with images, they impart wisdom and soul, breathing their spirit back into the individual as latent potential ready to inspire the next project. This viewpoint implicitly addresses a straightforward equation that is imbedded throughout this dissertation: that breath, as true life force or Divine *prana*, animates the soul and body, and when the body then engages with art materials which manifest form, form holds content, content is image, and images are alive, holding and referring back to their pranic origins of primeval life force. Breath is creation itself, a topic not generally covered in the literature on creativity, much of which addresses manifesting and bringing new ideas into being by way of a genesis process (Rothenberg & Hausman, 1976). Although keenly interested in this process of manifestation and soul, this dissertation is also concerned with the presence of life force, or prana, as an essential ingredient in the act of creation. The connections between life force, breath, and art materials are discussed in detail later in Chapter 3; however, this view begins to lay more foundation for thinking about art as yoga.

Coomaraswamy (1934) considered yoga and art to be related practices and was, in fact, the first contemporary author to equate art with yoga. He saw the yoga in art as the integral union of dexterity, attention, concentration, and absorption literally taking form in the practice of aesthetic acts. The artist working from this perspective according to Coomaraswamy (1934) is one who combines contemplative presence with the notion that he or she is visiting the realms where the angelic live, seeing what needs to be reproduced on earth, and manifesting this vision so that others may participate in experiences of revelation. Adding commentary on this theme, Coomaraswamy said,

> The arts are not for our instruction, but for our delight, and this delight is something more than pleasure, it is God-like ecstasy of liberation from the restless activity of the mind and the senses, which are the veils of all reality, transparent only when we are at peace with ourselves. From the love of many things we are led to the experience of Union. (1917, p. 9)

Through the arts of India, direct knowledge of the sacred was made available to those searching for direct experiences of the Divine (Daumal, 1982). Indian art practices have traditionally served as a culturally sanctioned avenue to "perform the Divine" (Schwartz, 2004, p. 3) as an act of sacred worship. Consequently, art was seen as a medium offered in "the service of sacred understanding" (p. 9). According to Schwartz, performance in drama or visual poetry, dance, and music, when enacted according to specific protocols, was literally an act of worship that would bring the practitioner to the doorstep of the Divine. Art forms such as sculpture were used to present the qualities of rasa to the viewer. In this view of the arts, spirit and art become one in the Indian imagination, and through the experience and practices of rasa—consuming beauty and tasting this delight—the artist and audience join with the creator in these tangible forms that supported performing and worshipping the Divine.

Many of the aesthetic traditions of India saw the search for form as the search for the essence of the inner soul "imprisoned in the material" (Khanna, 1979, p. 132). The artist working within this tradition was a translator of "universal spiritual intuition into visual terms" (p. 132), thereby articulating an approach that transcended art for the sake of art and self-expression. Cultivating accurate forms to hold spiritual content offered the means to penetrate Divine truth rather than serving as a badge of successfully anthropomorphized self-expression. For the traditional Indian artist, skillfully created visual form references the containment of symbolic, archetypal, transcendent truths. These aesthetic acts of devotional observation and eventual manifestation of imagery occur when the "knower and known, seer and seen, meet in an act of transcending distinction" (Coomaraswamy, 1934, p. 6). The act of creating art has many correlations with yoga, the focus of the next chapter. With the completion of section I, this discussion now turns to the subject of yoga and how this vast topic relates to art as yoga and contemplative practice.

Section II: Yoga, Art, and Contemplative Practice

This section examines philosophies of yoga through several lenses and relates this material, in general, to art as a contemplative practice. The section begins with a general overview of yoga. Next, an historical review of various traditions is presented. The importance of silence and solitude is then discussed as it relates to the artist as yogi/yogini. Insights on spanda and creation are offered next, followed by a discussion on the emergence of images from the perspective of Kashmir Shaivism. Lastly, a discussion on darshan (seeing the Divine), mantra, yantra, and rasa theory completes this section on yoga, art, and contemplative practice. Discussion of this material is essential to this

dissertation because it clarifies the philosophical backdrop of art as yoga. All too often, people attempt to engage and use complex spiritual practices without ample study and understanding; therefore, this section follows a commitment to address this subject adequately and relate this vast material from yoga traditions to the practice of creating artwork.

Of equal importance to this dissertation is an explanation of the direct relation of material covered in this section on yoga to the practice life that supported me during my cancer experience. This material, as it was applied to daily life, was also deeply imbedded in the artwork created during this time. The following is a summary outline of the specific content areas discussed in this section.

1. Historical review of yoga traditions:

   Yoga is a multifaceted term that encompasses numerous definitions representing a diverse history of philosophical traditions and practices (Chapple, & Viraj, 1990; Feuerstein, 2001; Frawley, 1994; Yogananda, 2003); however, it is relatively safe to say that all approaches to yoga have one basic goal: the transcendence of limited, ego-based views of self.

2. Samkhya and the three gunas:

   Samkhya is a system that plumbs the ontological categories of existence (Feuerstein, 2003). All of nature, known as *prakriti,* is comprised of three main dynamic forces known as the *gunas*: *Satva* (sublime/subtle essence)*, Rajas* (fluid/kinetic)*, and Tamas* (inertia/stability)*.* These three qualities of prakriti are specifically related to the art materials of clay and charcoal. They also describe a yoga-based method for working with materials.

3. Advaita Vedanta and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali:

   Advaita Vedanta, which means nondual Vedanta, was expounded upon by Sankaracharya (c. 788-820 C.E.). Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (100-200 C.E.) elucidated significant transformational technologies of yoga (Chapple & Viraj, 1990; Feuerstein, 1979). Specific aspects of Patanjali's system are related to characteristics of the art process.

4. Art, silence, and solitude:

   Silence is a key part of both art and contemplative practice. Both are discussed in this section.

5. Art as yoga, from a Kashmir Shaivite perspective:

   A system of yoga originating in Kashmir that focuses on the dimensional archetype of Shiva and Shakti. Shiva is viewed as pure consciousness and Shakti as the manifesting power.

6. The Five Acts of Lord Shiva and Creation:

   A blueprint of the creation and creative process is presented along with how this model relates to universal qualities of the art/creation process.

7. Matrika Shakti: The levels of speech and the emergence of images:

   This section examines how subtle sounds become letters, which eventually become words, which ultimately create cognitions or thoughts that produce personal reality. This material is helpful in terms of understanding the origins and emergence of images.

8. Art, mantra, and repetition:

   The word *mantra* is made up of two roots: *trana* ("that which protects") and *manas* ("mind") (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 297). The practice of mantra recitation protects the mind by focusing it on sacred, consciousness-transforming sounds form the Sanskrit language. Mantra is also the sound form of a deity. Mantra recitation, which is similar to art practices of recreating something over and over, is discussed as a parallel process.

9. Visualizing the divine through mandalas and yantras:

   A *mandala*, which means universe, is tantamount to sacred space or sacred enclosure (Leidy & Thurman, 1998). *Yantras*, which share similar qualities with mandalas, are sacred illustrative forms that visually translate and hold hidden primordial and universal themes for contemplative practice (Khanna, 1979). A yantra offers a practice for visualizing, and therefore internalizing a deity. This section highlights the use of visual (usually geometric) forms to support meditation practices.

10. Darshan: Seeing the Divine:

    Darshan is a form of perception as well as an act of visually contacting and seeing the Divine. In Hindu culture, the practice of *darshan*, a term which means "auspicious sight," is a way of focusing attention on the direct experience of God (Eck, 1998, p. 3). It is this approach to seeing the phenomenal world that connects spiritual vision with artistic work.

11. Rasa theory and the expressive therapies:

    Rasa and rasa theory, which translates into savor, taste, flavor, or essence, examines Indian aesthetic theory through an investigation of the *rasas*, which are specific emotional states that reference transcendent connection to the Divine (Chaudhury, 1965; Daumal, 1982). Connections are outlined with the expressive therapies.

12. Tantra, karma, and sublimation in art:

    Tantra concerns itself with a set of practices to elevate the seeker to embody the seamless continuum from transcendence and immanence. Tantra teachings represent the full spectrum of realities that can be realized.

    Karma considers how one's personal thoughts, words, and deeds are direct influences on the law of cause and effect. If one's perceptions are flawed, then one's behaviors will likely be inappropriate (Feuerstein, 2003). A contemplative view of this cause-and-effect relationship recognizes that a lack of skilful perception resulting in consequential outcomes increases suffering for oneself and others. Art is considered as a way to clarify the behavioral cause and effect relationship.

    Sublimation, in art, is an efficient strategy both to access directly and to transform powerful, usually unconscious arousing desires into visual compositions (Kramer, 1971). It stands to reason then that sublimating powerful urges through art rather than directly acting them out reduces the notion of karmic debt.

13. Yoga and the practice of imagination:

    Yoga stills the mind, the practice of imagination is a way to observe and skillfully work with the images that populate the mind. Together, both practices optimize contemplative awareness.

14. Karma Yoga, Buddhism, and the socially engaged artist:

    Service, compassion, and empathic engagement with the world through art define a view of art that is moral and responsive to social need.

15. Cultivating compassion through maitri and tonglen in art:

    Maitri is an attitude and a practice of cultivating loving kindness towards oneself. Tibetan for "sending" and "taking," *tonglen* is about skillfully receiving the pain of others and offering back compassion during sitting meditation or silently to oneself when out in the world (Chodron, 2001). Both practices are discussed in terms of working with images and creating art.

Overview of Yoga and Art Practice

Some definitions of basic principles of yogic tradition and art practice are presented as background for the discussion in this section.

Yoga is a multifaceted term that encompasses numerous definitions representing a diverse history of philosophical traditions, attitudes, precepts, and practices (Chapple, & Viraj, 1990; Feuerstein, 2001; Frawley, 1994; Yogananda, 2003). It is relatively safe to say, however, that all approaches to yoga have one basic goal: the transcendence of limited, ego-based views of self. Contemplative practices seed and cultivate an evolving realization of the compassionate, transcendental Self. This evolved state of unified

consciousness implies a far-reaching developmental process through the layers of *sac-cid-ananda*, with *sat* translated as "being," *chit* as "consciousness," and *ananda* as "bliss" (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 367).

In a related way, nondual Hindu yoga traditions such as Advaita Vedanta profess belief in the oneness unity that transcends all conceptual categories. This unified, nondual perspective of refined awareness, referred to as *Brahman,* moves beyond all subject-object characteristics. Brahman names the "timeless plentitude of being" (Deutsch, 1969, p. 9). The terms of sat-chit-ananda represent how the human mind tries to apprehend the widest spectrum of consciousness and being through this triadic integration. In essence, these three qualities—being, consciousness, and bliss—describe the transcendent universal certainty of the "manifold universe" (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 257) that resides as the infinite pure awareness within each person. This single universal core of yogic traditions is also the innermost subject of contemplative and spiritual pilgrimage.

Art images and processes in general, and the work created during my cancer experience, have served a similar function in terms of utilizing the dimensionality of symbols to help access unnamable wordless concepts that are at the core of spiritual practices. Art is also a strategy for pilgrimage into the qualities of being, consciousness, and bliss.

In terms of *Sat*, or being, art as contemplative practice is essentially a present-centered activity of visually manifesting thoughts and ideas. In essence, art is a candid, image-based version of externalizing active thoughts within the mind that are ripe for contemplative investigation. Within this perspective, art is seen as a practice of searching for honest imagery that can lead the practitioner though various shades of personal and

universal truth. As a result, awareness is increased and ultimate reality is increasingly revealed.

Chit, or consciousness, is pure awareness as the eternal inner Witness. Chit unfolds in the art process as the artist experiences moments of awakened awareness. This awareness emerges through acts of tangling and untangling, forming and transforming multiple inspirations into refined, distilled compositions. In this current study, *distillation* and *refinement* refer to qualities of discriminating perception required for sorting out the numerous pathways the creative process can take. Distillation is therefore an act of making still and refining the multiplicity of ideas and images into resolved arrangements of forms with content. Every act of forming ideas visually is also an act of seeking resolution and, therefore, transformation or moving beyond previous shapes and structures. Consequently, the created artwork serves as a visual witness, receiving and capturing the movements of the mind.

Ananda, or bliss, is available in the art process as deep satisfaction is felt when the full range of human subject matter, including grief and suffering, is sincerely manifested. This sense of intuitive fulfillment afforded by the art process can connect one to a larger blissful view of consciousness that inspires, creates, and is aware.

What is most striking is that this developmental process and potential state of enlightened wakefulness, wherein exists an integrated awareness of ultimate reality described in the yoga traditions, is the attainable birthright of all humans. This is the essence and goal of all yoga traditions.

Historical Review of Yoga Traditions

Yoga is informed from many historical angles and traditions such as the *Vedas*, *Samkhya,* and *Vedanta*. Samkhya, which envelops many schools of practice, is a system that plumbs the ontological categories of existence (Feuerstein, 2003). All of nature, known as *prakriti,* is comprised of three main dynamic forces known as the *gunas. Guna* literally means "strand." In terms of the metaphysics of yoga and Samkhya, the three gunas are the irreducible foundation of the material world. Whereas art is a practice of receiving and responding to the subtleties of the phenomenal world through the use of physical materials, these concepts are of the upmost importance. *Satva* (sublime/subtle nature) represents resiliency and illumination. *Rajas* (fluid/kinetic) is movement, agility, and stimulation. *Tamas* (inertia/stability) is dormancy, static, "inert, and concealing" (Feuerstein, 2001, p. 75). As demonstrated further on, the irreducible qualities of the gunas are also aptly explored through art materials.

Samkhya and the three gunas. When one is serene and unruffled, one is governed by sattva; when one is stirred up and agitated, one is influenced by rajas; and when one is complacent and bored, one is directed by tamas (Feuerstein, 2003). All three of these qualities also show up in the creative process. While creating art, many traits and characteristics of mind and body come to the forefront of one's direct experience. Emerging are patterns of resistance (rajas), blocks (tamas), and breakthrough (sattva).

Whereas infinite combinations of the three gunas are possible in terms of how they may interactively manifest, they can be understood to represent the essential aspects of the creative process. Cane (1951) refers to creative work as an alternation between

active and receptive rhythms. Within activity and receptivity are sattva, rajas, and tamas. These fundamental activities are also present in art materials.

Regarding art materials, it is important to mention that any one material can contain all three elements of the gunas. Charcoal, which is a primary material researched for this project, is a good example of how wood (tamas/dormancy), when burnt (rajas/activity), is used to model light through chiaroscuro effects that capture the essence of light (sattva/light and illumination). Oil paint applied in a thick heavy fashion would have a tamasic quality. Thin washes of oil paint would imply rajasic attributes. A balance of density and buoyancy in color usage that can reveal striking qualities of subtlety, as in Rembrandt's work, would imply a sattvic outcome.

Also, any work of art can travel the pathway of all three gunas, uniting and therefore contributing to the creation of significant and living form (Langer, 1953). Many creatives, for example, describe moments of artist block (tamas). Movement from this blocked place suggests rajasic activity. The final project that represents the culmination of transforming the blocked material into a completed work is related to sattvic transcendence.

The presence of the three gunas was palpable while creating art during my process with cancer. There were tamasic moments when I was blocked, almost assaulted by the heaviness of uncertainty. When I was agitated, rajasic states of mind were present, and during moments of clarity, sattvic qualities were permeating my thoughts. What I was thinking and feeling naturally fused with the artwork I was creating. This fusion of inner emotional states with the visual elements of art is known as isomorphism. Arnheim's (1966) pioneering work on isomorphism and his Gestalt theory of expression

addressed how there is a similarity in organization between inner emotional states and the outer visual structures of art utilized to express those internal conditions. The manifestation of the three gunas in the work I created, or in any artwork, provides another avenue for observing isomorphic relationships in art. The characteristics of the gunas are as follows:

1. *Tamas*: dark, static, inactive, impenetrable, and dormant embodiment. A person behaves in a sedentary way with little or no exercise. Tamas manifests out of ignorance. Tamasic behaviors or lifestyles include being inactive, passivity, fearful, and overeating. Food preferences in a tamasic lifestyle would be lots of meat, high fructose corn syrup, and meals full of heavy calories, and one would leave the table stuffed.
2. *Rajas*: energy, action, movement, change, transformation, and overdoing things. Rajas lifestyle patterns would consist of being a workaholic; listening to loud, fast music; being attached to outcomes; and engaging in a great amount of discursive thought. Foods preferences would include spicy seasonings and stimulants such as coffee.
3. *Sattva*: harmony, lucidity, balance, joy, thoughtful, wisdom, equipoise, flexible perception of events and relationships. Ultimately, sattva is a proportioned balance of tamas and rajas. Foods chosen would be fresh vegetables, fruit, pure water, and one would not overeat. In fact, leaving the table slightly hungry would equate with sattvic personality traits.

Art materials, depending on how they are used, would manifest the properties of the gunas, as in the following examples: tamas, in stone, steel, and other dense materials;

rajas, in water color and other liquid paints as well as other flowing materials that move such as film or video; and sattva, in layering processes such as collage, light sculpture, and other light and buoyant materials. The two primary materials researched for this project are clay and charcoal. Table 1 examines the gunas inherent in each material, and Figure 5 illustrates working with guna qualities in charcoal.

Table 1

The Three Gunas Inherent in Art Materials

Materials	Tamas	Rajas	Satva
Firing clay	Has mass, bulk, and density; is physically heavy, earthy; invites exploration of thickness, weight, gravity, flatness, and solidity; fires hard; perceived as dirty to some.	Thins and mixes with water, water eventually evaporates and becomes greenware; can quickly change form; undoing is fairly easy at various stages of the process; can blow up in the kiln due to the expansion of trapped air heated up during the firing process.	Is pliable, flexible; holds and communicates space; supports layering; holds and communicates opposites; has additive and subtractive qualities; awakens insight into transformation and resistances through the resistive qualities of the clay.
Charcoal (vine and compressed)	Is burnt wood; application yields dark, dense fields of solid black; absorbs light; undoing is difficult; perceived as dirty to some, areas can quickly become murky and the skin can feel caked and grimy.	Transforms from one form of carbon to another (wood to charcoal); smudges easily, challenging to blend, light areas can quickly change and become muddy as the material is added to lighter areas.	Produces chiaroscuro effects, rendering atmosphere and degrees of light; supports blending, holds and can represent opposites through application of darks and lights; has additive and subtractive properties when using an eraser.

Figure 5. The author working with charcoal, experimenting with moving from tamasic density to rajasic blending.

An understanding of the three gunas, as they relate to the use of art materials, is helpful in determining aspects of ones inner state. The intentions of the artist, for example, can originate with stagnating tamasic sensations. The materials can mirror this inner state and also help to shift this orientation. The transformational capacity of different art materials can actually hold all three qualities of the gunas and therefore assist the artist in both noticing these aspects of presence and also help to shift them.

The discussion now turns towards Vedanta, yoga, and art. Vedanta, which implies the culmination of the Vedas, is often perceived as a significant and influential period within yoga traditions. It embraces the equation of the relationship between *Brahman* and *Atman.* In Vedanta, the view of Brahman is a monistic construction: Brahman is the all that is. Samkya, which is a nontheistic system, on the other hand, views the universe as ontological categories of existence to be codified for the purpose of inner contemplation so that pure awareness (*purusa*) can disentangle from *prakriti* (Feuerstein, 1998; Hewitt, 1977).

Advaita Vedanta and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. *Advaita Vedanta*, which means nondual Vedanta, was thoughtfully expounded upon by Sankaracharya (c. 788-820 C.E.), who was considered a practical theologian and a highly accomplished yogi (Feuerstein, 2003). Advaita Vedanta was based on awareness of the illusive and misleading nature of the physical world. This confusion, known as *maya,* requires practices for overcoming the dualistic perspective of humans' separation from the Oneness that is Brahman-Atman. An analogy that helps the Western perspective grasp the importance of this philosophy is to consider that "the *Vedas* are to Hinduism what the Old Testament is to Christianity" (p. 258).

A key text that informs many approaches to yoga practice is Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (Chapple & Viraj, 1990; Feuerstein, 1979). In this text, Patanjali (100-200 C.E.) elucidated significant transformational technologies of yoga. The *Yoga Sutras* were written in four chapters: *Samadhi Pada* (the absorbed state)*, Sadhana Pada* (practice and discipline)*, Vibhuti Pada* (the power of manifestation)*, and Kaivalya Pada* (isolation, solitude, and emancipation) (Chapple & Viraj, 1990; Feuerstein, 1979). This brilliant system is comprised of eight limbs or steps. The first two, the *yamas* (five restraints or abstentions) and *niyamas* (five observances) offer instruction on how to behave and live a principled moral life. The additional six limbs are *asana,* which addresses attention to the body and the importance of postures that promote physical and psychological health; *pranayama*, which focuses on the science of skillful breath regulation, control, and management of overall inner energy; *pratyahara*, consisting of lessening incoming stimuli, withdrawing the senses from this stimulation, and turning attention inward; *dharana,* or concentration; *dhyana*, or contemplation; and *samadhi* or Self-realization.

The latter three help to cultivate indrawn awareness, concentration, and liberation (Ajaya, 1976; Hewitt, 1977).

These main principles of yoga practice guarantee a contemplative working methodology in the art studio. *Asana*, with its focus on correct bodily postures, calls attention to the importance of how one physically orients oneself to the easel or potter's wheel. *Pranayama* and the importance of breath control, relates to the tangible manifestation of physical energy. It also calls forth engaged awareness of how breath, as the essence of inspiration, fuses life force with artistic intentions. *Pratyahara* is the filtering of incoming stimuli. It is so easy to become overstimulated with the extreme amount of information one is exposed to on a daily basis. This was perhaps the most significant filter to call upon during my cancer experience. By monitoring incoming stimuli and also concentrating on my trained capacity to witness my thoughts, I was less inclined to become emotionally hijacked. Withdrawing my sensory attention from derailing stimulation and turning this awareness inward resulted in a cleared pathway for focused engagement with creative work. *Dharana,* which is the practice of concentration techniques, along with *dhyana* or contemplation, completes the contemplative working methodology in the studio. Art often requires absorbed attention so that one may concentrate on the intimacy of the art process. The processes, as well as the product, are ripe for contemplative investigation. Over time, I could see the benefits of integrating the practices of *pratyahara, dharana,* and *dhyana* into my working process.

In additional to Patanjali's system, other approaches and traditions such as Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina have connections to this and other yogic practices. Feuerstein

outlines 40 diverse types of Hindu-based yoga (2003, p. 36). The seven main branches are as follows:

Raja-Yoga: Classical Yoga originating with Patanjali

Hatha-Yoga: (Forceful Yoga)

Karma-Yoga: (Yoga of action)

Jnana-Yoga: (Yoga of wisdom)

Bhakti-Yoga: (Yoga of devotion)

Mantra-Yoga: (Yoga of sacred sound)

Tantra-Yoga: (Kundalini and Laya Yoga) (p. 10)

These yoga approaches offer a systemic blueprint for cultivating the major pathways of contemplative practice. Hatha yoga, for example, cultivates a healthy body-mind-spirit connection. Karma yoga insists on cultivating selfless, compassionate, socially engaged action in the world. The goal of karma yoga is to prevent focus on the prideful ownership of the outcomes associated with one's deeds. Instead, the goal is to strive selflessly to offer our daily efforts to the Divine. Jnana yoga acknowledges that disciplined study of ancient and contemporary texts is essential when embracing and following a spiritual path. Study is also essential when trying to master a craft or contemplative practice. Mantra yoga stills the inner mind with the repetition of sacred names and sounds that inspire tranquil calm. Repeating certain imagery, remaking a certain pot, and practicing over and over various skill sets are reminiscent of mantra recitation. Tantra yoga embraces various techniques that include sound (mantra), form (yantra), and deity worship, for disciplining the neurotic tendencies of the mind and body.

Art can be understood as an effective pathway for sublimating unconscious, base impulses.

The artist working with a contemplative focus is aligned with these inherent transpersonal principles of spiritual life. Selfless, embodied, tranquil, disciplined efforts that are applied in the studio and mindfully brought into the world help to bring forth conscious, awakened art. A significant part of this process is the importance of silence inherent in creative work. In many ways, the contemplative artist is like the mystic working in the solitude and sanctuary of the studio. Art is a form of inner pilgrimage into levels and layers of experience. In order to commune with the resulting discoveries from this process, art is often best practiced in silence and solitude.

Art, silence, and solitude. Art has an innate capacity to promote comfort with silence. Drawing, for example, is a way to see and render silence. Many artists enjoy the solitude afforded them by the creative process. The chance to go inward and listen to the emergence of thoughts as well as the quieting of these thoughts is a part of the territory experienced when creating art. For many, the studio becomes a place of refuge and solitude. Working in nature also becomes a way to access and see silence and solitude (see Figure 6).

Words related to *solitude* are *desolate*, *solo*, *solitary*, and *sullen* (Ayto, 1990). The mystic can often be misunderstood as living in a state of sullen withdrawal, yet the mystic is one who often seeks out solo, solitary experiences to deepen contemplative practices. Additionally, many who do not pursue the full lifestyle of the solo mystic are, however, prone to seeking, cultivating, and protecting contemplative solitude. Given the unyielding

noise and distractions of the current world, the need for quiet stillness, often available in the sanctuary of the studio, is a sensible aspiration to satisfy.

Figure 6. Landscape drawing as a way to see and listen to the textured silences of nature.

Contemporary Western culture has often misunderstood the person who seeks a solitary way of life, including artists. Storr (1988) makes the point that mental health in the West is often predicated on relational success. Attachment theory (Schore, 2003; Schore & Schore, 2008) and object relations theory (Hamilton, 1989), for example, focus on relational bonding and the capacity for intersubjective attunement throughout the life span. There is a cultural paradox suggested here in that being alone is considered aberrant whereas being relationally engaged is related to emotional stability and overall mental health.

D. W. Winnicott (1965) and John Bowlby (1980) saw a unique twist on this perspective. Both suggest that the relational exchange between see-er and seen in object relations theory is essential in order to cultivate secure attachment along with the capacity to be alone. Winnicott (1965) observed a curious paradox concerning the young child's

need to be alone while in the company of a nurturing figure. Being alone in the presence of a caring peripheral adult sets the stage for the emergence of true self-discovery and inner homeostasis. Without this paradoxical foundation of aloneness and connection, according to Winnicott, the experience of a true self along with a thriving penchant for solitude cannot be cultivated. This ability to introject and maintain inner comfort while alone, yet while also in the presence of another, is a form of intrapersonal attunement (Siegel, 2007).

Numerous historical accounts report the existence of highly productive, creative individuals who chose to decline the relational institutions of their time such as marriage and parenthood. Instead, they embraced the solitary nurturance of the creative process and a lifestyle devoted to contemplative practices such as prayer. Storr (1988) mentions that many forms of prayer are not petitions to a deity for a response but instead are ways to create a poised inner state of equanimity within the mind and body. This is a form of relationship that is worth acknowledging, because for many, the inner satisfaction and relational comfort afforded by the creative process or contemplative practice is enough.

Similarly, through the creative process, according to Storr (1988), one seeks self-discovery and the refashioning of identity. This convergence of ideas linking prayer and creative work within a framework of solitude is important. The pursuit of silent practices is not a state of social withdrawal; instead, the declaration of retreat comes to mind. Retreat, says Storr, is the pursuit of time and space for religious practice, meditation, and reflective worship. In fact, the term *retreat* was also used to name a famous psychiatric institution in England. According to Storr, “The Retreat” was a well- known hospital for mentally ill patients founded by Samuel Tuke in 1792. Tuke had hoped that by setting up

an environment that granted safe asylum for reflective solitude, healing would unfold for people suffering from mental illness.

In many ways the goals of retreat described by Tuke have qualities similar to the art studio setting sought while creating art about my cancer process. An art studio is a place where freedoms of expression are exercised. The advancement of personal expression often takes place in silence. The studio environments that I have created and also participated in, even when many people are present, often become silent without the invitation to do so. The inward pull of the creative process automatically invites the artist into inner reflection. Internal silent conversations emerge and are listened to as the work unfolds. Inner safety to explore personal imagery is also supported through an outer environment where the materials and actual physical space receive the imaginal, free speech which is seeking expression.

Meditation teachers as well as art teachers frequently speak about the importance of pursuing silence as a natural state and invite their students to abide in this space of stillness while engaged in practice. The cultivation of stillness within silence serves many purposes. One learns to be inwardly at home in spite of the prattle of rising thoughts. Quiet, parasympathetic relaxation becomes an available inner state to enter and maintain.

One learns a great deal about silence and solitude through the objects that become subjects for art. So many aspects of the phenomenal world are instructive on this important contemplative subject: for example, the silence inherent in landscapes such as sedentary, gravity-bound rock formations; vast lakes with rippling currents; and fanning plants, vibrant flowers, and rooted trees. Sky silence, climate silence, animal silence, and

the silence dynamically alive in a still painting as well offer lessons on how simply to be and cultivate the tranquility of present-centered witnessing of *being with*.

When faced with events responsible for one's greatest suffering, accessible resources to navigate through this uncertainty are required. Seeking equilibrium within any event by noticing the space around that event moors one to one's reliable interior center. Like figure and ground in art, contemplating the implicit space around a ruminating thought lessens the tendency to contract around that thought. This skillful shift of perspective allows the practitioner of yoga to strive for honest and authentic engagement with the world in all of its manifestations, including a diagnosis of cancer. The gift is that persistence with yogic practices develops homeostasis between body, mind, and spirit.

Art as yoga: A Kashmir Shaivite perspective. A significant component of understanding art as a contemplative practice from a yoga perspective rests in a consideration of creation and therefore creativity from the point of view of the mystic or yogi. For many reasons discussed further on, this material has direct relevance for this dissertation. When considered from a contemplative perspective, human creativity as well as systemic evolutionary processes embrace all aspects of the creation equation. Even cancer is considered its own version of a creative process.

My own diagnosis of cancer provided me with a significant journey into a yogic view of creativity. Between denial and acceptance were many hours of silent practice that supported my passage to a truthful embrace of my circumstances. Creative process simply became a tangible place of refuge. It was here where I could minimize intrusions other than the interruptions of my own thoughts, which eventually settled down by

literally becoming tangible objects. Committed participation in art and meditation facilitated processes of letting go and dissolving old patterns, which eventually led me to the embrace of a new understanding of struggle and transformation as an embodied creative process.

Reframing creation as a progression of events that is at once about manifesting as well as dissolving becomes a liberating perspective to consider. The forces of erosion that carved the Grand Canyon, metaphorically and quite literally, are also alive inside of me. If everything is in process, then everything is unfolding in such a way that, if one pays close attention, awakening from psychological numbing can occur. The archetypal themes and messages imbedded in yoga traditions have helped practitioners to uncover and therefore awaken, albeit often at a protracted pace, from forms of psychological slumber. One way to aid the development of awakened awareness is through the yogic view of creation uniquely found in the writings of Kashmir Shaivim.

According to the traditions of Kashmir Shaivism, if the entirety of Creation were to be represented by one deity or cosmic being, it would be the creator/preserver/ destroyer that is Lord Shiva (Muller-Ortega, 1989; Zimmer, 1946). In terms of Kashmir Shaivism, this ultimate Creator, *Paramasiva* (Shiva as Supreme Lord), and his consort *Parasakti* (Shakti as Supreme power) exist in the form of pure light. It is this pure light that is the highest, quintessential presence of all quivering energies emanating as the absolute freedom of Lord Shiva's all-encompassing creative presence. Spanda is the self-referential primordial throb that originates in the ecstasy of the Divine Paramasiva, who, in loving unison with Parasakti, initiates a divine spanda pulsation in the service of ultimate creation. The great silence of the *anima mundi*, or "universal spirit," crescendos

with a primordial tension where Shakti agitates this stillness into a wave configuration within the Absolute. This wave formation is the flickering of consciousness self-referring itself into "the foundation essence of all manifest reality" (Muller-Ortega, 1989, p. 120).

The following paintings with their linear vibratory qualities are attempts to visualize this original throb rising out of the primordial essence. From a color-based horizontal perspective (Figure 7) and a second perspective that is vertical and black and white (Figure 8), an effort is made to visualize and see this moment of emergent potential. According to the Tantric perspective of Kashmir Shaivism, consciousness is a union of primordial awareness that is Shiva and energy that is Shakti. The process of creation results when these two related transcendent themes within the ocean of energetic potential become specific enough to vibrate into emergence (Feuerstein, 2003).

For some, particularly Westerners, the notion of a Hindu deity, as conscious essence manifesting the many from the one, can border on inaccessible mythology, obtuse folklore, or even heretical doctrine. This view of creation, however, parallels significant elements of contemporary physics that postulate an ever expanding and contracting universe originating with a big bang (Capra, 1975), which marks the beginning of space and time. Nevertheless, contemporary science cannot account for the state of events prior to this cosmological genesis. Remarkably, Indian literature on Shiva (Muller-Ortega, 1989) and spanda (Singh, 1980) does offer, at the very least, a philosophical-historical, practice-based window into events prior to this theoretical big bang, as understood by adept and, one might say, *enlightened* contemplatives.

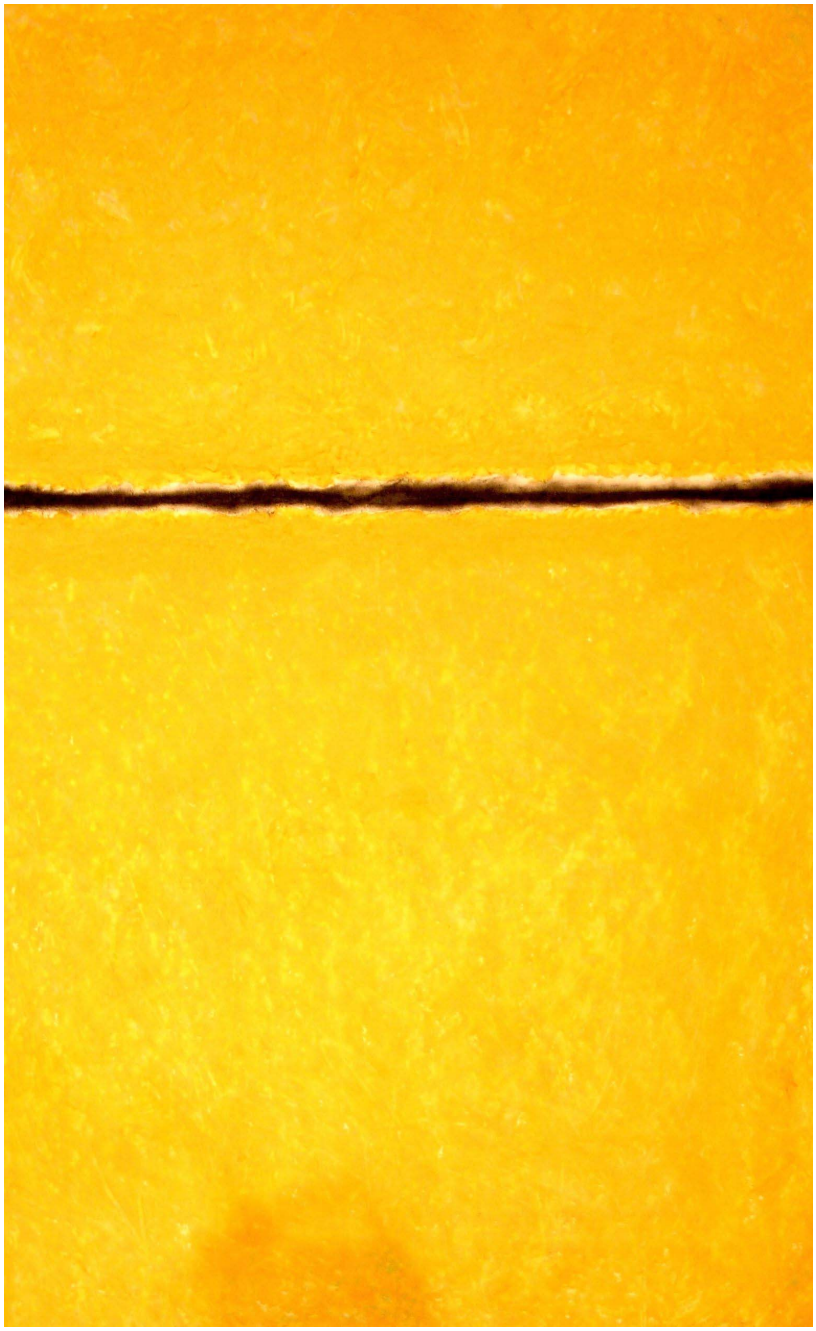

Figure 7. Imaginal view of the Spanda throb. Oil paint and charcoal on paper, by the author.

Figure 8. Imaginal view of the Spanda impulse. Charcoal on paper, by the author.

One reason why this view is relevant is because it emerged from self-referential, inward-drawn spiritual practices and austerities that revealed the origins of embodied consciousness. Also, similar to McNiff's (1992) view of the primordial shaman archetype, the Shiva archetype represents an elemental image of the initiator who instigates the emergence of the cosmos. Artists along with other creatives directly practice these values within their process of making the subtle manifest through materialization, preservation, and ongoing oscillations between dissolution and resurrection.

It is important to consider that in order to conceptualize this original throb and imagine the vastness of this subject, a name is needed along with a visual reference—thus, the presence of Lord Shiva, who is activating his complete freedom (*svatantrya)*, which is used to create any aspect of this universe. In this sense, spanda, as movement towards expansion and contraction, is the initiating origination of any creation or creative act. Said another way, with complete freedom, the cradle of conscious intelligence, in this case known as Shiva, references its creative potential, known as Shakti, into existence through a throbbing impulse to manifest any or all possible form.

Corbin (1969) conveys a similar attitude held within Christian and Islamic traditions: the notion that the Godhead has command of the forces inherent in the complete freedom of the imagination. Within this equation, God internally imagines the universe and through this process creates the universe "from the eternal virtualities and potencies of His own being" (p. 182). According to Corbin, the spiritualist or mystic contemplative objectively views the world from a triadic perspective: (a) intellectual perception; (b) sensory perception; and between these two worlds of logic and sensory

awareness, (c) the realm of the imagination, which is the intermediate territory of unique ideas emerging as images. Layered between the cosmos of "pure spirit" (p. 182) and the phenomenal world, is the intermediate realm of "Idea Images" (p. 182) known to the Sufis as the space of "supersensory sensibility" (p. 182), where luminous "spirits are materialized and bodies spiritualized" (p. 182). To enter this sacred space is to connect with qualities of imagination, resulting in effects for the practitioner that are profoundly real. These potent effects can shape the practitioner into the form of what has been imagined, even the Divine Godhead. Adding art to this process of imagining the Divine furthers the dialogue of the subtle taking form for aesthetic contemplative engagement.

Through the organ of the imagination, "the spiritual takes body and the body becomes spiritual" (Ibn 'Arabi, as cited in Corbin, 1969, p. 4). Like a phantom appendage directly, yet subtly connected to the body, the imagination, as Corbin (1969) sees it, is a noetic organ that senses and perceives the numinous universe. The image therefore, which serves as a "body" that receives and holds the "thought and will of the soul" (p. 182) is the action of the imaginal divine, or within the Shaivite view, is the Spandasaki manifesting itself.

One can become aware of the recurring imaginal unfolding of creation that is spanda within oneself by glimpsing this subtle presence manifesting in ways such as will, action, or thought (Dyczkowski, 1987). Art is process that receives and catalogues these qualities of spanda. Additionally, Shiva has access to infinite Shakti, which is his creative aspect. The universe is therefore a continual "opening out" (Singh, 1998, p. 8) of ever-unfolding expansions of this Shakti. According to Singh, the five main shaktis are the following:

1. Self-revelation, or *cit.*
2. Absolute bliss, or *ananda.*
3. The will to create, or *iccha.*
4. The power of knowing, or *jnana.*
5. The power or action to assume any form, or *kriya.*

Like the artist whose creative work spills forth out of joyful desire, Shiva, as the supreme artist, pours forth his love for Creation as creation, states Singh, by manifesting the totality of nature. Through the blissful revelation of creative will, any form can emerge from this original impulse known as spanda.

Contemporary studies in systems theory reveals a theme of innate qualities, similar to the five shaktis, required for the manifestation of living structures. Fritjof Capra (1996) identifies, for example, three criteria for a living system: first, a configuration of patterns of organization (similar to *iccha*); second, a structural embodiment of these patterns (similar to *kriya*); and third, evolving processes (similar to (*jnana*) that continually embody the systemic patterns of organization.

Autopoiesis, which is how living systems organize, is the essence of this view of life (Capra, 1996). Combining *auto*, meaning "self," and *poiesis* meaning "making" (p. 97), autopoiesis offers a model of self-making or systems-making that acknowledges self-organizing, self-referring elements of a spanda-like network. Within this far-reaching systemic network, each element participates in the production of other elements in this systemic web, thereby recursively recreating itself. Capra, citing the work of Maturana and Varela, addresses how autopoiesis, or self-making living systems, is summed up by "the product of its operation is its own organization" (p. 98), a process that seems similar

to the spanda principle and the art process. An example of autopoiesis and living systems can be observed in Lovelock's notion of Gaia, whereby the entire earth is viewed as a conscious living system that regulates itself (Capra, 1996; Lovelock, 1979).

Autopoiesis can also be considered as a systems' view of the spanda process within art process. Compositional elements of an artwork unfold through a series of self-referring and self-organizing principles. Each act of making a mark is a reference point to the marks that came before it. One learns that process and product are not separate from each other. Specifically, one also learns to see the process in the product. Eventually, as with the clay work presented in Chapter 3, one final product became the motivation for engaging in the next version of the art process and following the ensuing ideas seeking expression.

Spanda is at once a related and larger-essence view of systems theory. In fact, spanda represents when "the power of consciousness is recognized to be the spontaneous expression of the absolute made manifest in the variety of forms it assumes without compromising its essential unity" (Dyczkowski, 1987, p. 79). Abhinavagupta, a great sage of the Kashmir Shaivism tradition, addresses this viewpoint with the following statement:

> Creation is to make that which shines within, externally manifest while it still preserves its original internal nature. Therefore, [the object] must be made manifest by that in relation to which it is said to be internal and which makes the internal externally manifest. (As cited in Dyczkowski, 1987, p. 79)

The five acts of Lord Shiva. Kshemaraja wrote the *Pratyabhijna-Hrdayam* in the 11th century C.E. *Pratyabhijna-Hrdayam* translates as "The Heart of Self-Recognition," and is a main text of Kashmir Shaivism (Shantananda, 2003; Singh, 1998). This text describes additional views of creation known as the five acts of Lord Shiva (Shantananda,

2003; Zimmer, 1946). They are emanation or creation (*sristi*), dissolution or destruction (*samhara)*, concealment or veiling (*vilaya* or *tiro-bhava*), concealment or veiling (*sthiti*), and the dispensing of grace (*anugraha*) (Zimmer, 1946, p. 154). Through these five acts, Shiva carries out all creative processes that unfold in the universe.

In their immanent, embodied nature, human beings also carry out these five acts during their daily lives. Whereas these acts comprise all creative work, they are also certainly embedded in any creative process. In fact, they offer a helpful conceptual model for the creative process. Paying attention to the five acts of Lord Shiva alerts one to the deeper fundamental rhythms of creation. Observing and imbibing the five acts throughout the day can inspire what Abhinavagupta recognizes as the practitioner's capacity to realize "that he himself is, in the fullness of his freedom, the agent of the five operations" (as cited in Shantananda, 2003, p. 207). In fact, these five acts offer a slowed-down view into the subtleties of creative work. Together, these acts can comprise the domain of the artist who intentionally practices a contemplative approaches to art.

The five acts of Lord Shiva—emanation, dissolution, concealment, maintenance, and grace (Zimmer, 1946)—could therefore be observed in the art process in the following way. A painter sets up his easel in an inspiring landscape. The distant formation of hills and trees emanate, beckoning inspiration (*anugraha* or grace). This inspiration is literally a way of visually inhaling and joining with the waiting revelations present in both the scene before the artist and the creative process about to unfold. Next, the artist is moved by this moment to respond by making those inspirations manifest. Soon thereafter, the artist begins to apply paint and engage in his or her craft of creation (*srsti* or emanation). Thoughts of the details in the painting are held and maintained in

perception (*sthiti* or maintenance). Moments occur when the artist responds to the emerging work and realizes that there are flaws and, therefore, that changes need to be made, thus dissolving previous ideas and remaking, or repainting, different sections (*samhara* or dissolution). All kinds of blocks can emerge at this point that seem to paralyze the next moves needed to further the painting process. It is at these moments that the artist is experiencing *vilaya*, or concealment, whereby progress is stalled by inaccessible, perhaps suppressed information. On the other hand, if the artist embraces the notion that there is opportunity in this confusion or conflict, then *anugraha*, or the dispensing of grace, is set in motion.

In addition to cycling through the art process, the five acts of Lord Shiva constantly cycle in all living processes and systems. When Mount St. Helens in Washington State exploded in 1980, total annihilation spread across the landscape. The destruction was immense and severe, leveling entire forests for miles. Today, years later, this same land is greening, alive now as it was before the eruption. As the five acts of Lord Shiva demonstrate, all creation embodies the constant oscillation between emanation, manifestation, maintenance, concealment, and graceful emergence. Just as the ashes of the funeral pyre are reclaimed by the ground to support the ongoing cycle of life, so too is each work of art a tutoring in systemic cycles necessary for the unfolding of creative process (Capra, 1996). In a similar way, fruits, which function as the ovaries of the tree, drop to the ground, making way for the meat around the seeds to serve as fertilization for a new tree to emerge.

To see creation as a process that embraces only manifestation is to miss the point. Artists know all too well about scraping away paint or cutting and arranging imagery

from a magazine into collage pieces that will reemerge as a new composition. Attachment to one point of view negates the vision of the five acts of Shiva. In addition to the qualities of these five acts, consideration of how the shakti moves from the subtle to the manifest in images and speech is essential. The following discussion on the levels of speech, known together as *matrika shakti*, helps to elucidate this point further. These connections are clarified by offering a comparative model linking the subtle levels of sound that become formal speech with imaginal stirrings originating at preconceptual levels that eventually become manifest imagery. The five acts of Lord Shiva together with matrika shakti can explain the subtle processes of creation and how visual and verbal symbols are formed.

Matrika shakti: The levels of speech and the emergence of images. One of the primary curiosities for me as an art therapist is the emergence and presence of images. Although this personal interest has existed for decades, it crystallized when I studied ceramics with M. C. Richards in the mid-1970s. She would wonder out loud where the words and pictures were before they were spoken or painted. This section addresses Richards' question from a perspective that considers how the emergence of consciousness moves into sound, which becomes letters, and then words and concretized images. Words are images. They are the garments of the breath. Before they exist in manifest form, they emerge from subtle quintessence. Through a process of subtle sound becoming manifest, sound, word, and image fuse together and surface as meaning. Similarly, so it would seem, image is a form of silence that is eventually cognized into solidified form.

As the primary healing phenomena of the psyche (Berry, 1982; Hillman, 1978; McNiff, 1992; Watkins, 1984), images hold a numinous potency that continues to inspire a series of questions. From where do they emerge? How are they formed? What is the relationship between words, sounds, and images? This section attempts to discuss these questions. Throughout the ages, yogis, sages, and committed contemplatives, through the aid and lineage of enlightened masters, have plumbed and charted the depths of embodied consciousness. From this research has emerged an understanding of consciousness, sound, words, and images. A helpful way to understand this complex subject is considered from the perspective of Kashmir Shaivism and *matrika shakti,* which views the power of sound as the matrix of the cosmos.

Lakshman Jee (1988) offers insightful clarification of this science of sound, which he terms *matrikacakra.* He explains how subtle sounds become letters, which eventually become words, which ultimately create cognitions or thoughts that produce personal reality. This evolution of subtle consciousness emerging into gross or manifest form is also relevant for visual art. The importance of matrika shakti is that it not only offers an understanding of how the pure and subtle inner human territory of consciousness becomes letters and words, but also represents a way to understand how images move from subtle to manifest form. A spoken word reversed to its origin would lead to the very genesis of embodied consciousness. It is here that Shakti is untainted, pure, and in her essential genesis state.

The view of this section is that the same or at least a very similar process applies to images. If inquiry into the origins of sound and speech is possible, then these constructs can also be utilized to understand the emergence of images. This dissertation,

therefore, is suggesting that sound which seeks the signifier of letters in order to manifest speech is similar to archetypal psychology, which holds that images and imagination occupy the recesses of the inner subjective (Berry, 1982), where the visual symbol serves as the physical enclosure of primordial archetypes (Politsky, 1995a). Imagination is the internal referent for inner realities coalescing and moving from vague condensations into manifested objective entities (Chodorow, 1997). Within this view of images is a concurrent manifestation of all parts that Berry (1982) describes as a "full democracy" (p. 60) of any symbol in terms of its migratory origins to its final fruition. These simultaneous multiple realities reference a similar journey described immediately below.

Muktananda (1992) discusses matrika shakti as the power and matrices of sound imbedded in the alphabet. How this sound is ultimately cognized determines, right or wrong, understanding or perception. Behind the subtle sounds that become letters that form the words, there is a supreme power that spawns all conscious and unconscious cognition. This transformative process of pure consciousness into sounds that become letters and eventually words and thoughts is also a model of creative manifestation.

According to matrika shakti, four levels of these sounds form speech. These levels reveal an understanding of how the subtle, presound state moves to a manifest result. The deepest and most subtle level is called *para-vak* (Shantananda, 2003). This word, meaning the "supreme speech" (p. 235), which is beyond the *tattvas* (categories), is the pure presence of God within, as Shiva in union with Shakti, rising out of the silence toward manifestation. Within the embodied human being, this realm of "soundless sound" (Feuerstein, 1998, p. 189) is the origin of pure consciousness where all waiting potential exists. Para-vak subsumes all forms, all words, "all objects, all beings—

everything that is to compose the created universe" (p. 238). Para-vak, at this level, is alive with pure potential. It is where the Supreme Lord existing as Shiva and Shakti, is literally quivering as *aham*, or "I am," which is the very pulsation of the Self within each human being (p. 238). The entirety of creation, with her infinite vibratory sounds, exists in the silence of this great void of genesis potential where the yet-to be-formed images exist.

From par-vak, sound rises to the level called *pashyanti*, which means visionary or visible speech, located in the subtle heart region (Feuerstein, 1998; Shantananda, 2003). Here the sounds begin to take form as letters, but all is still concealed and only accessible at best through clear intuition. At this point consciousness is starting to divide into duality as it seeks to manifest. Similar to mitosis or cell division, the pashyanti level references the dividing of consciousness seeking form. Both the para-vak and the pashyanti levels remain unconscious unless one is an adept yogi or yogini capable of tuning into these extremely fine levels of inner experience. At this unconscious level it is surmised that the visual symbol is seeking form. Harding (1961) recognizes that a true symbol emerges as a transporting mechanism to bring unconscious, shadowed material to the surface in an accessible metaphoric form.

The next point of emerging sound into language is the *madhyama* stage known as the intermediary level. It is located in the area of the throat. Here, words take shape as the intonation of thought; however, they are not yet articulated. At this point, the intellect (known as *buddhi*) is starting to have the awareness of rising cognitive activity. This is where one sees in the mind and not yet out in the manifest world. The madhyama level is similar to the preconscious realm, where information is rising but not yet fully accessible.

At the madhyama level, letters coalesce and form in varying orders of discursive thought; eventually, these thoughts attach to designated objects.

The madhyama level is seemingly analogous to the metaphoric realm alive within a dream or work of art. This is the territory where emerging symbolic material is surfaced but still unknown. At this level of the process, a great deal of art therapy takes place between client and therapist. Art therapy is a practice of allowing latent material its metaphoric manifest form. The image is not to be tampered with by forcing it into conscious awareness. Instead, dialogue adheres to the language of the imbedded metaphor, respecting its imaginal wisdom to communicate important content.

Lastly, speech surfaces into the *vaikhari* level, where sound takes on a gross audible form becoming verbal speech (Muktananda, 1992). *Vaikhari* literally means "quite solid" (Shantananda, 2003, p. 243) and is recognized as language both spoken and heard. At this level, the designated name or word that forms a context is synonymous with the manifested image.

Having traveled through the levels of speech, it is important to mention that if no letters surface to become words, the mind, according to Muktananda (1979), remains still. During the first moments after a nap, for example, before thoughts arise, exists a brief moment of compete stillness—no thoughts, no words—just fleeting, momentary, silent stillness. In this instant before thoughts are constructed out of letters, one is touching ever so briefly the pure expansive "I" state that is Paramasiva.

When creation manifests vibrationally as sound, Shakti is manifesting as para–vak, or supreme speech. Spoken phonemes are basically externalized, gross expressions of "phonemic energies" (Dyczkowski, 1987, p. 198). In essence, according to

Dyczkowski, the perpetual fullness of latent consciousness is expressed objectively through the waiting potential inherent in language. The energy through which this prospective essence manifests itself into expressive language and the "world of denotation" (p. 198) is called *matrika*.

> Summarizing matrika shakti, Muktananda has said:
>
> > From letters, a word is formed with its own meaning. From words a sentence is formed with its own meaning. That meaning carries an *image*. Once an image is formed, you begin to feel good or bad. . . . If you divide the letters of a particular word, those letters have no meaning in themselves. For example, take the word *fool*. Now, if you just say these letters—F-O-O-L—one at a time, in themselves they don't carry any meaning. But when you combine these letters and say "Fool!" it really has its own power. It has meaning and it bears fruit too. The fruit of words is either painful or pleasurable; sometimes it is sweet, sometimes bitter, sometimes sour. This is a brief explanation of *mātrkā śakti.* (1994, p. 402)

Key in Muktananda's description is how sound rises into letters that form cognitive images that can influence perceptions or beliefs. Images are therefore intimately related to sounds.

The pathway describing how images emerge from their subtle spanda-like emanations to manifest form can be illustrated with a personal view of the later paintings of Mark Rothko and the physics of liquids. Over and over again, when I have been privileged to directly experience Rothko's works in various museums, I have delighted in seeing what I perceive to be an artist's rendition of the spanda phenomenon as well as the notion of matrika shakti. His work, for me, shimmers with the subtleties of the para-vak level, where waiting potential, as the light of consciousness, is stirring (Dyczkowski, 1987). Within this space of emerging possibility, a likeness to the physical similarities of liquids can be drawn as a way to conceive of the itinerant trajectory of symbolic images.

Fluids have alchemical properties that can assume solid, liquid, and gaseous form. Because the molecules of liquids flow freely, like the content of the imagination, they can assume multiple appearances, from the subtleties of fog and mist to enormous, mountainous walls of glacial ice. Endless opportunities exist in the innumerable manifestations that liquid molecules can assume.

Similarly, Rothko's work (Borchardt-Hume, 2008) appears to imply, all at once, an emerging from the innermost origins where spanda-like essence is coalescing, like the gasses of uncognized feeling rising towards sensation. His work articulates how color emerges as a field of subtle shimmering light moving towards the solidity of tangible form. This contrast between form and light infers the migration of an image from its vapor-like subtle origins, to its fluid meandering, and finally to resolved yet fog-like formal compositions. This example also infers the same perennial relationship seen in many contemplative traditions in which the subtle becomes manifest. This sequence can also works in reverse, where the manifest becomes a pathway back to the subtle through the physicality of art materials blended with the creative process of manifestation.

Along these lines, the great Indian contemplative Sri Aurobindo (2001) addresses this point when he speaks of the synthesis of matter with spirit. Through involution or descent and evolution or ascent, a dual movement of human development unfolds between the material world and the world of spirit. Within Aurobindo's view of reality, God is in matter and, therefore, matter is God. He speaks to the conviction that "life takes hold of matter and breathes into it the numberless figures of its abundant creative force" (p. 74). The contemplative seeing and eventual revelatory comprehension of this statement combined with the example of Rothko's work described above is an example

of how form and formlessness are steered by the spanda impulse. Also, the Creator along with the artist as creator and that which is created are all one and the same.

This discussion now turns to the recitation of sacred sounds known as mantra practice. Repetition of revered sound and images opens up pathways for greater insight into the many forms consciousness can assume.

Art, mantra, and repetition. As documented in the next chapter, the repetitive quality of working with clay and making pots while reciting certain mantras became for me a visual mantra companion practice. The word *mantra* is made up of two roots: *trana* ("that which protects") and *manas* ("mind") (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 297). The practice of mantra recitation indeed protects the mind by focusing it on sacred, consciousness-transforming sounds. Psychotherapists working within a cognitive-behavioral model espouse the slogan that in order to change behavior, one must change one's thoughts. While certainly true, more than thought-restructuring techniques is required to alter thoughts and behaviors within the deeper layers of the psyche. According to a yoga perspective, mantra practice smoothes out this habitually patterned terrain where thoughts and their resulting behaviors originate.

Technically, each letter of the Sanskrit language is a seed mantra. The vibratory quality of specific sounds, as letters, configured and recited in the proper way, releases a potent effect upon the practitioner (Khanna, 1979). Khanna comments on how mantras are not grammatical parts of speech. Instead they are "non-discursive symbols" (p. 36) that express ineffable, transcendent, elemental truths through sound. Often transmitted through the empowered lineage of the *guru*, or teacher, the mantra carries within it immense power when recited with devotion by the student. Beyond the sounds audible to

the human ear is the subtlest of sounds that are uncaused and originate from the infinite vibratory origins of spanda (Feuerstein, 1998). The primordial, well-known essence sound is *AUM.* According to Paramahansa Yogananda (2003), AUM is synonymous with "*Hum* of the Tibetans, *Amin* of the Moslems, and *Amen* of the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians" (p. 277).

A key component of mantra practice is repetition of the sound, word, or phrase. By repeating the mantra, the sound penetrates into subtle layers of the psyche, soothing the body and mind. Aside from the sound quality of the mantra, it is this notion of repetition that is significant. When learning music and the skills to play an instrument, the course of study involves ongoing sessions of disciplined rehearsal. The student practices day after day, exercising the skills needed to progress to the next point of competence. Eventually, the teacher encourages the student to build on the skill sets gained through repetition of the notes and chords by playing the music of accomplished masters. Commitment to this form of rote process yields several results. First is the experience of accomplishment and dexterous familiarity with an instrument. Like a lover, the musician holds the instrument with the respect that any love affair would command. The pupil also experiences the miracle of recreating the music of celebrated maestros who have inspired generations of musicians.

Similarly, the study of art often includes phases when the student copies the works of the great masters. As in music, this custom seeks to attune the pupil to the complex decisions made by the master that are imbedded in both the process and final product. Eventually, the student learns to see the process in the product through hours of reinterpreting these paintings. A stockpiling of techniques also occurs, aiding the artist in

becoming intuitively aware of the materials and their manifesting potential. The series of 80 pots displayed later in this dissertation conveys the notion of a visual mantra practice. Repeating the same actions in order to create these pots had a similar stilling and focusing quality of auditory mantra repetition. Repetition breeds stillness, awareness, and concentration.

Reverently repeating visual images that transport the artist to realms where inspired observation and emotional attunement are deeply felt is a form of art-based mantra repetition. Artists such as Giorgio Morandi (Lucie-Smith, 1986) and Paul Cezanne (Plazy, 1990) painted and repainted many of their subjects. Morandi, often in reclusive solitude, repeatedly produced still lifes, specifically bottles. These subtle paintings invite close inspection to see what at first might appear to be a mundane subject. By coming close, one observes the gentle intimacy of the ordinary. The color is serene and soft, invoking the intimate silence accessible through the practice of still life painting.

Cezanne, also prone to a reclusive life, replicated Mont Sainte-Victoire near Aix-en-Provence, over and over again (Plazy, 1990). Cezanne's repeated attempts to reinterpret this scene resulted in a penetrating understanding of a new and radical analysis of form and space on a flat, two-dimensional painting surface. His tedious experiments of repetitive investigation resulted in a complete shift for the future of Western art. Cezanne is often credited with freeing the surface of a painting and influencing subsequent generations of artists to continue challenging canonic rules of form, figure, and ground.

Morandi and Cezanne offer examples of how rote and repetition are related to contemplative practice themes in art. Their recursive investigation into a subject and how

it yields deeper understanding of the essence that is that subject is reminiscent of other repetitive rhythmic practices such as mantra repetition. Simply stated, repetitive probing takes one deeper into essence, whether it is in painting or the recitation of sacred mantras.

Tantric traditions consider several factors required for mantra practice: initiation from the master, recognition of the potency alive within the sounds, and the charging power of recitation (Feuerstein, 2003). A substantial number of frequent, mindful recitations deepen the benefits of the practice. These three subsets of mantra repetition have parallels with the working habits of artists like Cezanne and Morandi. Students of Cezanne were initiated into a certain way of seeing form. Through replication of a scene, Cezanne modeled the potency alive in his subject. The repetitive present-centered engagement with a subject demonstrated by these two artists along with their sizable output of work deepened their understanding of their research methods and the ordinary subjects investigated. Staying present with the ordinary and mundane holds promise for deeper insight into a subject. Such experiments with careful observation can also yield discoveries about boredom and the dulling of perception. Similar outcomes can also be experienced with repetitive exposure to visual forms of mediation found in mandalas and yantras.

Visualizing the Divine: Sacred methods for contemplating containment, edges, and center. Many spiritual traditions utilize visualization techniques to deepen practice. Rabbi Schacter-Shalomi (1993) writes, for example, about the *Shiviti* chart for gazing at the "Divine Name" (p. 25). From this practice, the power of the name is internalized and the practitioner is filled with its illumination.

An important connection between Buddhist meditation and visualization techniques is to be found in the long and rich visual history of *mandalas*. For several reasons, this history cannot be fully documented due to the fragile and ancient nature of these icons. Evidence suggests that, during Vedic times, there was a practice of forming a circle in which to worship (Leidy & Thurman, 1998). These were likely temporary formations to create sacred place and space. It is significant to note that in reaching far back into history there appears to be a synonymous urge to marry the circle form with practice.

The word *mandala* is tantamount to sacred space or sacred enclosure that references the universe depicted through sacred geometry. As a noun in Sanskrit, it conveys any form of circle or disc shape such as the moon (Leidy & Thurman, 1998). Mandalas serve as "cosmograms" (p. 8) or "cosmoplans" (p. 17), whereby a certain divinity *in* the universe dwells *as* the universe. The encapsulation of this sacred space can be two- or three-dimensional, as found in the architectural mandalas referred to as *stupas*. These round, complex, and often large structures were burial sites to honor a great teacher. Leidy and Thurman point out that a stupa is a place of pilgrimage and worship that is sanctified over time by both the practitioner and the deity who resides there. Within the literature of mandalas is found a long history of acquired benefits received by "creating, looking at, praying to, or meditating" (p. 18) on these precious icons.

In the yogic and tantric traditions, practitioners often imagined and then manifested inner states in geometrical form known as *yantras* (Mahony, 1998b). Specific contemplative rituals and practices focus on these symbolic forms (Khanna, 1979). Khanna outlines the meaning of the word *yantra*, locating its origins with the root *yam*,

which infers a quality of maintaining, holding, or support for the intrinsic energy held within an object or concept (p. 11). Yantras, which share similarity with mandalas, are sacred illustrative forms that visually translate and hold hidden primordial and universal themes for contemplative practice. They are constructed out of three main principles that focus on "form, function, and power" (p. 11). The revered area defined by the yantra, from the edges to the center, serves as a vehicle for concentrating on the body of the deity held within (Feuerstein, 1998). Just "as body is to soul . . . a *yantra* is to deity" (p. 24), thus further articulating an understanding of visual containment through form and how it is similar to the body as the container of infinite consciousness. The placement of the dot in the center of the yantra, the *bindu,* has special significance. It can represent a focal point for concentration as AUM, a symbol for the origins of the universe, or a depiction of transcending dualism (Khanna, 1979). The bindu can also represent one's innermost Self as the heart center of the practitioner. The ultimate pilgrimage for the adept is to focus awareness on this center and journey through practice to the Divine within. Whereas form is sound condensed as matter, the relationship between yantra and mantra is significant. Both are always found together. Bindu is also the original seed emerging out of the great void with exponential possibility. It can expand into all forms as it splits into the many and reabsorbs into the one. Finally, the practitioner working with yantra meditation internalizes the bindu as his or her innermost center of solitude and stillness. This image provides a tangible reference to the ineffable.

These sacred forms or enclosures offer access to subtle states of human consciousness represented by different deities. A yantra is literally a transformative dwelling place for various deities (see Figure 9). To contemplate a yantra is to absorb and

be absorbed by that quality of that deity. Yantras are true images of transformation. They represent a visual tradition wherein the image is not a picture of the Divine but rather the abode of the Divine.

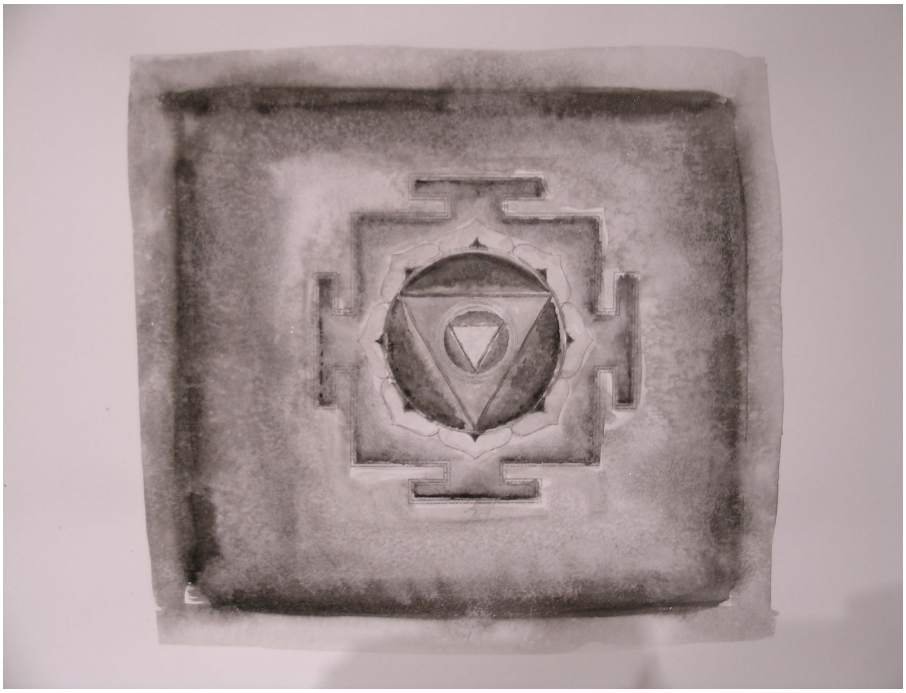

Figure 9. An example of a Yantra (Devi as Chinnamasta). Watercolor on paper, by the author.

This notion of merging yantra imagery with deep spiritual content implies a transpersonal view of form as content in visual art. Form is the basic structure or shape of something. As mentioned earlier, the root meaning of *trans* is to move through, across, or to the other side; therefore, the word *transform* means to move beyond a known shape of something towards new forms of transmuted possibility (Jewel, 2002). Each act of artistic transformation thus progressively makes room for the habitation of ever-evolving themes. As modeled by the tradition of yantras, seeking authentic form with materials in art progressively transforms physical matter along with meaningful content into honest

creations that inspire contemplative reflection. It is this process of seeking authentic forms to hold sincere imagery that establishes art as a contemplative practice. Works of art have their spatial elements. Film, for example, works with movement and time; painting, with color, light, and form; and sculpture, with making space visible (Julliard & Van Den Heuvel, 1999).

Once visual imagery is manifest and accessible for contemplation, a perceptual strategy is needed to engage respectfully with these numinous realities. Two such strategies are the practice of darshan (Eck, 1998) and an understanding of rasa theory (Schwartz, 2004).

Darshan: Seeing the Divine. The practice of darshan, which has a long history within Hindu traditions, represents a way of seeing that is about more than just casual looking. This form of perception is an act of visually contacting and seeing the Divine. In Hindu culture, the practice of *darshan*, a term which means "auspicious sight," is a way of focusing attention on the direct experience of God (Eck, 1998, p. 3).

An example of darshan is found in a story that Thomas Coburn, the past president of Naropa University, shared with me about his observation of the spontaneous emergence of another person's darshan experience (personal communication, March, 2009). His observation of this event became a personal moment of darshan for Coburn as well. During a trip to India, Coburn went to the Ganges early one morning. While others were engaged in their morning oblations, he observed one particular woman in the near distance take a lump of clay from her bag, form it into a *Shiva Lingam* (a symbol of Shiva), and proceed to worship the spontaneous idol. Once finished with her prayers, she balled the clay back up, placed it back in her bag, and went along her way. Deeply moved

by what he saw, Coburn recalled this memory with affection as a noteworthy example of darshan, his and hers. The reason that this account is so moving is that the use of a neutral lump of clay, cast into a holy form, transported both practitioner and observer into a state of reverential insight. It is this open quality of spontaneous or intentional sight that deferentially sees the ever-present Divine.

According to Diana Eck (1998) and William Mahony (1998a), Hinduism is a highly visual and imaginal religion where the sacred is seen in the manifest world. The Divine is not imperceptible but rather visible and to be found in the entire spectrum of life, from the mundane to the inspirational. All of life can be seen through this "polycentric imagination" (Eck, 1998, p. 25) that accesses the multiplicity of the one. Overall, the traditional Indian artist throughout the centuries was attempting to manifest the unseen and articulate the visual theology of his or her tradition. The artist working within this convention was therefore not trying to make aesthetic statements of beauty but instead was inspired from the perspective of *yoga* (union) and *bhakti* (devotion) (Coomaraswamy, 1957). If *iconography* means "writing in pictures," then this approach to art articulates visual investigation as a form of artistic scripture (Eck, 1998, p. 12).

Darshan can occur at any time; the sacred and holy are always waiting for one who is ready to attune perception to see with deep appreciation the stunning interconnection that unifies the web of life (see darshan seat in Figure 10). Towards this end, Laura Sewall (1999) offers a model of active and intentional visual perception that, for this writer, is related to darshan and also to perceptual awakening. This practice of contemplative perception untangles the existential isolation so prevalent in Western culture.

Figure 10. Pilgrimage to the actual darshan seat of Bhagawan Nityananda, Ganeshpuri, India. Photograph by the author.

Existential alienation is perhaps the result of an absence of the sacred in one's life (Gablik, 1991). In philosophical resonance with Gablik's claim, Sewall's (1995) suggested remedy for alienation is engaging in contemplative practices that cultivate ecological perception. Explaining these practices, Sewall states that, first, one is served well by learning to attend fully to what is before one. This sort of open attendance is the opposite of psychological numbing, because one's perceptual view must remain open to the full range of stimuli, including what is thought to be negative. She emphasizes the importance of the second practice of perceiving relationships and training oneself to notice the overt and subtle forms of interconnection within the web of life. The third practice, perceptual flexibility, or the attempt to hold the world-view of beginner's mind, implies a form of fresh vision that skillfully remains open to what is presented. Fourth is the act of re-perceiving depth by shifting worldview through both sensual and reverent

vision. Fifth is maintaining access to the imaginal self by aligning what one sees with the imagery one carries internally. This way, what one observes can continue to come to life as imaginal narrative, keeping one connected to one's internal sense of the external world.

When describing this quality of seeing from a Western perspective, I am reminded of my first figure-drawing class in college. I would spend hours observing the model, moving from mere looking to a penetrative seeing that connected my drawing tool to the curves and forms of another person's body 20 feet across the room. Visual observation became empathic, nonverbal interpersonal connection as I translated what I saw through the various filters of perception onto the page of my sketch-book. My charcoal that was touching the paper was simultaneously, although at a distance, touching the skin of the model. A love of the human form emerged again and again, inspiring intimate qualities of union with this unknown other person. Eventually, at unexpected moments, she or he would become me—for just a second or two, there was no separation. I literally experienced an erosion of distance as well as an appreciation for the sacredness of the human form and seeing myself in the other. In retrospect, there was a quality of darshan unfolding. From this repeated experience, I could not help but recognize the body as holy temple and the other as myself.

Another story comes to mind involving a related visual encounter with darshan. In 1981, just out of my art therapy training in graduate school, my first job was at a high school for teenagers in an urban setting. During the winter months, the weather often turned for the worse, with rapidly dropping temperatures and nasty impromptu storms. On one such day, I ducked into a McDonalds to get out of an emerging ice storm. Not

surprisingly, others had the same idea. The eating area was packed with people wrapped in their coats and scarves and even still wearing their hats. The noise volume was also loud, due to the crowded nature of this spontaneous place of refuge. Peering through the crowd, I noticed an older man sitting 20 feet away, alone at his own table. He carefully opened up his breakfast box, set it down, closed his eyes, and began to pray a long prayer. With surprising curiosity, I watched him go inward, slowing down his pace amidst the frantic environment of this fast food establishment. To this day, as I recall this story, I am deeply moved by the memory of a salient prayer of thanks offered to a simple meal in an overstimulating, chaotic environment. Something cracked open inside of me that spoke directly to the quiet sanctity of personal prayer. The juxtapositions of noise, crowds, warmth, quick food, and this man finding stillness was a vicarious prayer for me as well. Undoubtedly, this was an encounter with darshan.

According to Eck (1998), the sacred can be seen anywhere in the manifest world, all one has to do is look with a contemplative gaze—the temple is all around. Darshan is a practice of visual theology wherein the artist is inspired from the perspective of yoga (union) and bhakti (devotion) (Coomaraswamy, 1957). Considering the stories mentioned above, darshan can occur at any time. When standing in the presence of a holy person or an object such as a sacred yantra (Craven, 1976), darshan inspires deep ecstasy when in the company of this truth.

In addition to the worship of holy Gods, Goddesses, and sacred objects, in India Saints are deified who are both living and deceased. Those who have left their bodies and taken *Mahasamadhi* (the great *samadhi*, when a yogi consciously leaves the body at death), have literally merged into all things and all realms. It is customary in India to

sculpt a statue or *murti* of these great beings so that a reference to their past living form is tangibly available for reverent adoration. During certain celebrations, the murti is lovingly washed in ghee, milk, honey, and other precious offerings. This is called *abhishekham*, the bathing of a holy image with auspicious liquids as a form of worship (Karunamayi, 1999).

While living in India, the first time I observed this practice, I was confused. Watching Brahmin priests bathe a statue was a foreign experience. My Jewish upbringing was firm about the worship of idols. From an early age, I was taught about the unseen, ever-present, single God of my ancestors. To me, God was invisible, like the air that filled my lungs.

Eventually, the dissonance shifted as I watched the priest bathe the murti with what was simply gentle behavior grounded in love, not unlike a parent stroking his or her beloved child for the first time. I recognized a quality of attunement similar to the ideal loving exchange and gaze between parent and caregiver described in Western attachment literature (Schore, 2003). I delighted in the care with which the priest caressed the murti, tenderly washing this bronze being. Slowly, I began to weep at the literal and symbolic love pouring over the statue. This was not about idol worship but rather the deepest longing to express affection for the very principles that awaken the call to essence and prayer. Bathing a murti pointed to the inherent adoration alive in the imagery of the murti. As it was washed in flowing liquids (representative of the elemental categories from Samkhya) meandering down its bronze body, I too was being bathed in the tears of love that were streaming down my face—all inspired by an object, a statue, a bronze

sculpture, a living image. This is the essence of darshan, which is always available to one who witnesses the imagination spawning forms that inspire reverence.

Images are thus inner murtis, alive inside of one as muses, Gods, and guides leading the way towards internal searching. Seeking and worshipping images and symbols stimulate the very process that spawns the spanda-based connection of art with contemplative practice. This inner pilgrimage has the capacity to heal the splits that prevent the embrace of imagination. Imagination, as a subtle form of consciousness, is the creator alive inside of all humans as *Spandasakti* asking for collaborative participation from the seeker. Access to this pilgrimage can be granted by encountering the rasa or nectar available from the complete aesthetic experience.

Images then unfold a refined taste for the intermediate realm between intellectual perception and the world perceived by the senses. Through this refined, well-honed capacity to savor imaginal wisdom, one tastes the Divine. Darshan illustrates specific visual traditions of contemplative practice, whereas mantra describes the traditions centered on sound. Rasa, which is the focus of the next section, is the essence of savoring these multifaceted experiences. Rasa combines and integrates bodily awareness with emotional insight to inspire dimensional encounters with sacred perception (Schwartz, 2004).

Tasting the Divine: Rasa, yoga, and art as worship. The poetic essence of many approaches to art, East and West, is to savor transcendent experiences that are evoked by the creative process. This is the essence of rasa theory, an elaborate, multimodal aesthetic theory from India. In this section, Rasa theory is outlined and

explained and correlations are drawn with the multimodal qualities of the expressive therapies.

Rasa describes a central aesthetic foundation for the traditional arts of India. Ancient texts in India, such as the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, incorporate references to music and dance (Schwartz, 2004). Bharata is credited as the author of the main text on rasa, called the *Natyashastra,* which is dated between the 2nd century B.C.E. and the 4th century C.E. (Schwartz, 2004). Although the *Natyashastra* is a highly influential text that has been studied for over 1,500 years, to this day, the arts are primarily taught through the oral tradition between student and teacher, or guru. Just as this comprehensive aesthetic theory guides, defines, and furthers artistic work, it simultaneously describes culinary references (Schwartz, 2004), in which ingredients blend together in aesthetically nourishing encounters. Rasa theory, which translates into savor, taste, flavor, or essence, examines Indian aesthetic theory through an investigation of the *rasas*, which are specific emotional states that reference transcendent connections to the Divine (Chaudhury, 1965; Daumal, 1982).

Rasa, partly through its marriage to cooking and flavor metaphors, provides a symbolic lens for understanding the performing, visual, architectural, and literary arts of India as spiritual practice that inspire direct sensory experience (Schwartz, 2004). Indian cooking, which is brilliantly nuanced with an array of spices, is an alchemical act of blending multiple elements together in a celebration of life. As with the culinary treasures of any culture, all ingredients are carefully selected, combined, and integrated through the cooking process into a nutritious synergy of flavors. It is this amalgamation of cooked ingredients that stimulates the visual, olfactory, and gustatory senses to receive a direct

and full culinary experience. The blended essence within the food is related to an overall aesthetic experience of sensual awakening. Food wakes up the palate, and art wakes up the spirit. Through the direct experience of taste, which is a physical knowing, the taster is moved from the manifest back to the subtle realms of spiritual yearning. The alchemy of cooking food is thus similar to the alchemy of artistic creation: both transform ingredients into a new experience that is nourishing and life-giving. This life-sustaining perspective sees food as a special form of offering or, in India, *prasad.*

All human beings are alive as the result of eating something that was once living. This offering, prasad, which is the essence of communion rituals, allows individuals to consume life so that they may go on living theirs (Campbell, 1988). Even if one is a vegetarian, the ingested, living plant or seed is still being received as a form of sacrifice. When one consumes this substance, one engages in the sacrifice of one life in order to maintain one's own. This form of ingesting life in order to have life stimulates an awareness of systemic connection beyond oneself (Capra, 1996). Thus tasting and eating is a conscious act of awareness and attention. An astute palate understands something of the origins and fusion of what is being received, savoring the many flavors that it tastes.

Once cooked and then tasted, digestion further unfolds the process of transformation as well as the qualities of rasa. This digestion provides life and is therefore a sacred exchange of vital sustenance required for life. In an analogous way, art serves a similar purpose. As one dines on a work of art, visually tasting how form articulates content, one is moved to a new place of awareness. As this process of tasting the rasa within a work of art unfolds, it is also quite possible that one could experience moving towards spiritual insight. Working from the manifest towards subtler experiences

of awakened awareness is in fact a quality of rasa theory. Part of this emerging awareness can be understood through the integrative traits of the rasas as they surface in art. The eight rasas, enumerated by Schwartz (2004), were originally identified by Bharata in the *Natyashastra* as the following:

1. *shringara* (love in union and separation)
2. *hasya* (humor)
3. *karuna* (pathos, sorrow)
4. *raudra* (anger, wrath)
5. *vira* (heroism)
6. *bhayanaka* (fear, panic)
7. *bibhasta* (distaste, recoil, discussed)
8. *abdhuta* (wonderment, surprise)

A ninth rasa, *shanta* (peaceful content), was added in the 8th century. Each rasa also has its own corresponding color and deity.

The individual rasas reference a specific gesture or body-based expression. The *bhavas,* which are emotional stimuli, cannot be separated from the rasas. Like two sides of a coin, the rasas are animated by emotion, or bhava. Emotion along with the rasas, offer an equation wherein satisfying ego-based desires is not the primary focus (Schwartz, 2004). Instead, the arts become vehicles to transcend the *maya* or illusion of egoic perception. The rasas are therefore actual art-based referents to human experiences that help one realize the developmental layers of one's evolving transpersonal potential. Here, the sensual is merged with spiritual recognition. This blending of experiences through creative work ultimately fosters the transpersonal experience of Brahman, which

signifies one's direct, simultaneous connection to the personal and universal transcendent (Schwartz, 2004). Art in this context is literally a form of prayer and worship.

Rasa also views the arts as way to engage and savor the emotions that animate the transcendent and immanent spiritual aspects of the entire person. In fact, art exists beyond mere representation by remaking rather than representing the universe, a theme that was most helpful for me during my cancer experience. The art that I thought I was creating was also recreating me. Personal struggle, physical pain, and the grace of transformation became the subject matter of the art that was moving through me. While I partly viewed myself as the one creating, the imagery also confronted me back with unsuspected messages. I was seeing myself as both a body with disease and a body housing the essence of consciousness. In this example and in the overall translation process uniquely available though creative work, the arts recreate the universe as a direct analogy of Divine creation (Daumal, 1982). In addition to re-creation, rasa theory also posits the need to establish emotional connection between a person and the archetypal universal. Due to its incorporation of movement, sound, and visual elements, theater is given prominence in this regard.

Concerning visual art, the making of plastic forms is an act directly related to creation (Daumal, 1982). *Pramana*, which relates to "right proportion and analogic precision" (p. 9) is present in two- and three-dimensional art as well as in architecture. In addition to achieving accurate proportion, states Daumal, rasa is also crucial as the quality of savoring these accomplishments and the direct connection to a specific state of being inspired from these works. Rasa is not concerned with expression of the personality as much as with what is beautiful in terms of that which "is the evocative power of truth"

(p. 10). This was a guiding principle that buoyed me throughout the art process described in Chapter 3. The clay and charcoal pieces that have evolved over the years during this research became less and less about me and more about the materials as wisdom teachers. Collaboration with clay is collaboration with fire, earth, water, stone, darkness and light, and space. As I touched and formed the clay, it in-formed me in return with insights that I never could have arrived at on my own. Charcoal is another ancient "fire" material that offers instruction on qualities of light. Through the simplicity of making marks and filling in space, I received constant emotional instruction on contrasting themes such as figure and ground, opacity and translucency, and light and dark.

Within all traditions, art is made from specific aesthetic codes and rules, which include comprehensive knowledge of the materials. From the point of view of this dissertation, the purpose of many art forms is to savor the transcendent experiences that are evoked rather than the expression of base emotions. During such a moment, consciousness is inspired by savoring the direct experience of rasa. The artwork described in Chapter 3 highlights this point. The art process, including work with clay and charcoal along with meditative practice, revealed a new taste, a new way of seeing cause and effect relationships that previously might have derailed me. The dharma or truth teachings offered by this triadic relationship between process, materials, and meditation, became a form of intimate prayer whereby I could protest, surrender, and savor. All that literally needed to be held was received and merged into the artwork.

This process of savoring initiates a set of cognitions that reveal evidence of the essence within the art form. As in a sentient being, this essence, or Atman, also metaphorically exists in work created by the artist. The reason for this imaginal view is

that the art, which becomes living form (Julliard & Van Den Heuvel,1999), is an actual repository of numerous cognitions and emotions. Furthermore, in its fullness, Atman is the same Self-awareness embodied in both artist and viewer and referenced in the work. This crucial point emphasizes the Soul present in the art as well as in the creator. Both share in this original essence: the art reflects and holds the symbolic Soul of the Creator, and the artist ultimately creates out of this place of Soul or Atman.

Rasa, when unfolding, occurs when emotions are stimulated and appreciated beyond their usual meaning and inspire a contemplative perspective (Chaudhury, 1965). Within this introspective aesthetic view, the egoic outlook of a limited self is replaced with a poetic, imaginal perspective that stimulates the contemplative self to keep seeking itself. According to Chaudhury, the experience of rasa is like the experience of great poetry waking one up beyond one's "egoistic shell to reveal the universal enlightened self within" (p. 147), where joy and revelation abound. This is not just an experience of art for it own sake but of art as a form of worship.

One unifying theme for this research can be observed in the progression from the romantic aestheticism of art for art's sake (a translation from the French *l' art pour l' art* [Wilcox, 1953]), to Dissanyake's (1992) notion of art for life's sake, and finally to a view of art for God's sake and the aesthetic theory of rasa (Schwartz, 2004). All three of these perspectives are relevant for this discussion as they represent a holon-based nesting progression (Wilber, 2000a). Just as an atom is part of a molecule, and a molecule is part of a cell, and a cell is part of an entire organism holarchy (Wilber, 2000a), this progression of approaches to art similarly describes a particular aesthetic. This holarchy integrates creative urges that originate with the personal self in art for art's sake (Wilcox,

1953), then progresses to a biological relationship with culture and community in art for life's sake (Dissanyake, 1992), and lastly to an offering for the Divine in art for God's sake (Schwartz, 2004). Simply put, a holon relationship exists where whole parts become a full component of the subsequent whole (Wilber, 2000a.). In this case, art for art's sake, as a whole, is held within art for life's sake, and ultimately, within this perspective, both are nested in art as an offering to the Divine.

Nothing is more generous than the larger view of Creation and the infinite forms that emerge from this generosity. The totality of this bounty is vast, spanning the ages as geological, biological, ecological, aesthetic, metaphysical, and cultural fact. This list of signposts only approximates the vast reaches of creation in its countless forms and processes. The human cultural and spiritual perspective of these markers, which consists of the primary question of why people create, deserves ongoing study and investigation. It is the contention of this study that humans create, in part, because this act affirms that there are always solutions to be found in the midst of any chaotic ambiguity, including separation from deeper aspects of humans' true, nonegoic Atman nature. It is this awareness that cultivates psychological resiliency and spiritual exploration through the expressive arts.

For this writer, rasa theory and yoga philosophies in general integrate into a perspective that supports the philosophy of art as worship and an offering to the Divine. Rasa and yoga also serve as a direct link to the expressive therapies. Both rasa and the expressive therapies recognize and view the arts as a way to acknowledge, express, and thereby communicate the full spectrum of the human condition. Although it is crucial that the arts be investigated for their humanizing purpose, they also must be investigated in

terms of their spiritual and transcendent necessity. Over the years, many art therapists have advocated their own version of this perspective (Allen, 2001; Farrelly-Hansen, 2001; Franklin, 1999; McNiff, 1992; Moon, 2004; Rappaport, 2009); therefore, in addition to an egocentric view of creative work, the call from past contemplative traditions along with specific authors from the expressive therapies beckons a closer look at the contemplative elements of the arts.

Of particular interest is the Vedic blueprint of how the Gods and Goddesses manifested their creative intentions. Mahony (1998a) remarks on the Vedic perspective of deities as celestial artists who would create the many forms of the universe. He points out that they would accomplish this first through cognitive conception and then externally project those conceptions into time and space, ultimately inhabiting these forms that they had created. This movement from cognitive contemplation to projecting coalescing thought into the temporal life of form and then inhabiting these forms calls to mind numerous elements of imaginal work within the expressive therapies. Conceived ideas move through a process of making latent material manifest. As this process unfolds, it is crucial for those engaged in a creative process to meet and confer with these emerging images and invite their voices to move through them. The converse is also true: that is, to allow the images to inhabit themselves and move through each other.

This is the meaning of *poesis*, which is a willingness to sidestep controlling impulses and openly collaborate with what is emerging (Levine & Levine, 1999). The shift from dominion over the image to serving the image is a fundamental core value within the expressive therapies that is similar to a core value in yogic practices. As entities that emerge as harbingers of connective insight, these unfolding images inspire a

certain kind of listening and thinking. Fundamental to the expressive arts therapies is the integrative nature of thinking with the senses (Arnheim, 1966) and the body (Pallaro, 1999; Rappaport, 2009). This aesthetic assimilation of sensory pathways is the basis for intermodal work within the expressive therapies (Levine & Levine, 1999) and select contemplative practices such as yantra gazing, chanting, and concentration exercises. These various practices can be tied to a tantric view of art that seeks to work skillfully with human urges and instinctual impulses.

Tantra, karma, and sublimation in art. The age and evolution of tantric practice probably began 5,000-6,000 years ago with shamanic cultures (Feuerstein, 1998). When trying to locate more specific origins, it is likely that tantra practice dates back before the *Vedas*, which began around the 3rd or 4th millennium B.C.E. As tantric practices evolved, they existed side by side with Vedic traditions rather than in opposition to them. In fact, it seems that tantric traditions influenced Vedic thinking, especially in performing the many approaches to *puja,* or worship rituals. These ritual practices have many visual prescriptions to follow carefully in terms of how altars are set up for the performance of the ritual.

When tantra addresses inward-dwelling reality, the viewpoint of inner transformation is the focus (Johari, 1986). This immanence, when expanded, allows for the realization of how the essence of the larger oscillating universe also exists within the human psyche. From an open-hearted perspective, tantra views life as it simply is (Mehta, 2008). The human condition is humanized and accepted in a tantric perspective, thereby minimizing the impulse to analyze irrational urges and limitations. Within this framework, instinctual energy is directly focused on and integrated into practice.

Ignorance, whether intentional or unintentional, incites a cascading series of cause-and-effect relationships to unfold as behavior and become manifested in the world. Known as karma, this action ripples out beyond oneself, initiating untold and unseen impact around and beyond one. This is where sublimation in art could be seen as having tantric practice qualities. According to Mehta, a tantric perspective sees human urges as normal and needing an outlet to sublimate them. These urges are then rechanneled into constructive practices such as art, where they can be expressed and transformed.

Rather than become hijacked by these spontaneous impulsive urges and unconsciously act them out, creating karmic debt, another way exists to work skillfully with their disruptive consequences. Of the many ego defense (A. Freud, 1936/1966) mechanisms that help to create psychological homeostasis, such as projection, repression, and reaction formation, sublimation emerges as an efficient strategy both to access directly and to transform powerful, usually unconscious, arousing desires (Kramer, 1971, 1979). These inner states can be sublimated and therefore transformed through art, which lessens impulsive unchecked emotions from being acted upon.

This notion of organized disarray hints at the beauty inherent in the tantric process of art and sublimation. Art allows direct access to the original impulse while transforming that urge into a composition that retells the story of that impulse to oneself and to others. At this juncture of the unconscious urge, the displaced externalized impulse, and the ultimate aesthetic composition containing this emotional array of feeling, ignorance to one's actions is lessened. Art fosters insight into unconscious ignorance by making these hidden narratives apparent through the creation process.

A tantric perspective of art would acknowledge instinctual urges, such as sexual libido, as one facet of human drives to sublimate through practice (Feuerstein, 1998); however, tantra sees this expression of drive energy as originating at deeper, subtler levels, where the kundalini-shakti stirs and creates. The first psychoanalytic thinkers were essentially on the right track; however, they did not probe deeply enough beyond the limited view of the unconscious that they plumbed and promoted.

This discussion on sublimation and tantra precisely dovetails with the subject of karma. According to the notion of karma, one's personal worldview directly influences one's behaviors and actions. If one's perceptions are flawed, then one's behaviors will likely be inappropriate (Feuerstein, 2003). A contemplative view of this cause-and-effect relationship recognizes that a lack of skillful perception resulting in consequential outcomes. These results likely increase suffering for oneself and others, each trapped in a perpetual cycle of distorted thought, flawed behavior, and distressing outcomes. Describing this process in such terms is a shorthand explanation for the complexities of this vast subject of karma. Basically, one reaps what one sows.

Karma, as defined by Patanjali, is "a memory trace recorded in the unconscious by any action or thought" (Coward, 1983, p. 49) initiated by a person. The recorded memory is etched in the unconscious as a file waiting to be activated, thereby initiating the same memory trace to manifest and behave in ways similar to past related patterns. Under the right circumstances, a pattern of thought and behavior will repeat, banking a debt of guaranteed future consequences that eventually will have to be confronted. One is thus not a blank slate when one arrives in the world. From this perspective, human beings bring with them what they have sown in past lives and accumulated in this current life.

While karmic memory traces, or *samskaras,* imply that this debt is active and accumulating, free will still exists as a means to untangle these thorny webs of accrued patterns and obligations.

Thoughts create karma, as do actions. According to the Buddha, every action manifests through the three doors of body, speech, and mind, which are the pathways through which karma is created (Sivaraksa, 2005). The Buddha also taught that all actions begin in the mind. From the mind, actions are then expressed through the body or through speech. Skillful means, or *upaya,* are therefore needed to monitor the inner thoughts that spawn karma so that appropriate actions can and will be performed. Art is one significant way to monitor these emerging thoughts before they become actions.

According to a Buddhist view, violence begins in the mind and therefore must be transformed in the mind. Within the mind, there are three main types of violent poisonous thoughts. In fact these three forms of mental violence are known as the three poisons. They are: “greed, hatred, and delusion or ignorance” (Sivaraksa, 2005, p. 3). In terms of speech, verbal violence can manifest in four primary ways: “divisive speech, gossip, harmful words, and slander” (p. 4). Concerning behavioral violence, the three primary forms are: “killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct” (p. 4).

Art, as understood through the process of sublimation, is one way to practice restraint and free will when it comes to acting out impulses. Art is not proposed here as a panacea that remedies this complex perspective on cause and effect relationships. Instead, art is viewed as a contemplative tool to develop awareness by directly sublimating impulses through creative work rather than acting them out. Art also directs emerging awareness towards insight by promoting new choices such as creating visual equivalents

for these urges (Kramer, 1971). Kramer further argues that sublimation through art results in actions that are socially productive. This viewpoint is key to connecting karma with art. When art is created to reference charged subject matter through symbolic pathways rather than through destructive behaviors, a caustic pattern is bifurcated and redirected. More to the point, the connection between art and contemplative practice becomes evident when considering how sublimation helps to circumvent karmic obligations that must be accounted for.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna instructs Arjuna on the basic premise that all manifestations in Nature inevitably move; additionally, action is inescapable, so one must engage with the world skillfully (Kripananda, 1989). Sublimation and art are skillful ways to express, manage, and transform complex movements of human affect. The full range of human affect, when cast into visual images, summons forth what Watkins (1984) refers to as narrative movements in imaginal space. The underlying essence of this quality of space and image can be understood through a yogic lens of cause and effect being contained within the art materials and the creative process. With symbolic imagery, aggression, for example, is aimed at the art process rather than at another sentient being.

Understanding this notion of imaginal space is the focus of the next section. Images that freely move within the flexible space of one's interior imagination carry wisdom and healing messages that can be studied. This theme is revisited through several lenses throughout the remainder of the dissertation.

Yoga and the practice of imagination. What is it that moves within one and offers solutions when one is in crisis? Prostate cancer was certainly a crisis, yet it also set in motion an entire array of visitors in the form of inner images. The more I

acknowledged these visual entities and allowed them their say, the more I was guided by an ethereal inner wisdom. Similarly, Hillman (1983) noticed that when Jung was most alone during a difficult period in his life, he turned to his images. Hillman describes how Jung engaged with these inner personified images, or daimones, as an active imaginative fiction. Concerning the visitation of his spirit guide, Philemon, Jung (1961/1989) writes, "There are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life" (p. 183). Jung goes on to say that psychologically, Philemon signifies "superior insight" (p. 183) in a form similar to the Indian notion of *guru*. This form of superior insight to which Jung refers may be considered a manifestation of Shakti as inner wisdom originating out of psyche's need to minister to itself (McNiff, 1992). Hillman (1983), paying homage to Jung, refers to the inhabitants of the imagination as *beckoning entities* or *daimons*. These entities sound the call to "know thyself" through a welcoming and active engagement with them (p. 55).

According to Hillman (1983), the term *daimon* refers back to Hellenistic times and the "polytheistic paganism" (p. 56) that considered daimons to be spirit friends with wide-ranging personalities. This view of subtle entities, dynamically present in mythology and later recognized in the active imagination work initiated by Jung, is reminiscent of the polycentric imagination of Vedic times described by Eck (1998) and Mahony (1998a). Hinduism is a religious tradition steeped in the imaginative or image-making practice of seeking the sacred in the phenomenal world (Eck, 1998). Mahony (1998a) suggests that early Vedic texts view imagination as the power by which the Gods and Goddesses create, which is similar to the imaginal process by which humans create. The early Vedic worldview saw the mysteries of the world as emanations created by

divine deities. Within this perspective, the divine imagination forms images of the "artful universe" (p. 4) and makes them accessible to the human imagination that perceives beyond the mundane and penetrates into the deeper mysteries of life. This is the view of imagination that Jung was criticized for indulging, yet he courageously shifted his attention from the dogma of the academy and ultimately followed the emerging images guiding him during challenging times in his life. Other scholars such as Henry Corbin (1969) also resonated with this process and deepened the discussion on the mystical relationship between images that emerge in the imaginal field and the person who receives them.

Active imagination, according to Corbin (1969), is also theophanic imagination where divine deities appear. The appearance of these symbolic messengers can be illustrated through the example of prayer directed towards the Divine. This willful act of focusing prayer on what is holy creates the Divine (epiphany) and simultaneously materially reveals the Divine (theophany) or Godly manifestation to the practitioner (p. 183). This activity of the theophanic imagination is how the inner and outer voice of the heart-felt creative spirit communicates.

Within this imaginal view is the emergence of the inspired heart. It is here that theophanic visions appear; that is, deities emerge as truthful apparitions to be welcomed and engaged. It is important to clarify that this is not a description of fantasy-based themes that occupy a narcissistic or hedonistic mind. Corbin (1969) sees the activity of the contemplative imagination as a theophanic organ whereby revelatory epiphanies will emerge. When seeking to be "alone with the Alone" (p. 6) in contemplative solitude, which is also *kaivalya*, the goal of all yoga, the organ of the imagination will reveal

meaningful symbols that go beyond rational allegory to present significant coded elements of a deeper numinous mystery that can never be fully explained. The symbol thus extends an invitation to be replayed again and again, not unlike a musical score that is repeated in order to arouse revelatory insight. Like mantra practice, the symbol is repeated through a liturgy practice, recurring dreams, or a series of artworks so that it can reveal subtler forms of insight to be savored.

This was certainly the case with the clay works presented in Chapter 3. Repeating the pinching of clay into pot after pot became a form a visual mantra practice. Between the messages alive in the clay such as flexibility and resiliency, along with narratives within the visual forms that emerged, the contemplative altar of the imagination set the stage for inner daimons to appear. In my case they were not actual characters; they were subtler than that. The narratives were more like three-dimensional songs where the sound track was imbedded in the language of the clay. Through gentle whispers received while sculpting the clay, I was instructed on various themes such as rupture, shattering, repair, and wholeness.

Hillman (1983) offers a similar point of view where he at once deifies these visitors, these daimons, and also refers to them in as-if terms as "fictional and factual" (p. 55) arrivals that weave a tangible mythic encounter. For Jung, this was the middle realm of "psychic reality" (p. 56) situated between "theological religion and clinical scientism" (p. 56). The poetic imagination, oscillating between these two points, seemingly exists as the literary imagination that is soul and is always alive and moving within and without, in spite of humans' lack of awareness to the contrary. "Our life in soul" Hillman says, "is life in imagination" (p. 56). It also seems appropriate to say that one's life, in and of

Shakti**,** is life in imagination, the inner domain that this research would suggest spawned Jung's Philemon.

The arrival of Philemon, who emerged as an inner guru and guide (Chodorow, 1997), raises several questions. As Jung's psychagogue, or primary image leading the soul, Philemon was directing him, at a soul level towards important insights about the nature and behavior of the unconscious (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 184). For this reason, Jung, knowing full well the meaning of the term *guru* referred to Philemon at first as a guru-like figure. He desired such a teacher to help him untangle the disquieting web of themes and fantasies emerging during this difficult time.

Philemon along with Ka, another guiding figure to emerge for Jung, were perplexing entities to him. Chodorow (1997), citing significant excerpts from Jung's writings, points out that Jung addresses these figures from two directions: (a) recognizing them as an arrival of actual entities that have come to guide and teach and (b) viewing them as eruptions from the unconscious that are dealt with through methods of personification. Jung's goal was to dialogue with these figures, ask them questions, and strive for integration between the conscious and unconscious realms within the psyche. Furthermore, the essential focus in such a process is to "differentiate oneself from these unconscious contents by personifying them" (p. 32) and foster a conscious relationship with them. The question emerges: how deep and wide is the unconscious? Is Philemon an important fantasy to be observed, engaged, and integrated only through personification methods indicative of active imagination? Or is it possible that Philemon arrives from yet a deeper place? Whereas the unconscious can and will surface symbolic content needing

attention, in the emergence of figures such as Philemon, there certainly seems to be a quality of both emanations from the personal unconscious and the deeper Self, or Atman.

At one point, Chodorow (1997) reports, Jung consulted with an Indian man, asking him similar questions about his inner life and relationship to his guru. Curiously, this man did not dismiss visits from his own guru, the great Shankaracharya, likely born in 788 C.E., as arrivals to personify and integrate with the ego. For this man, it seems that the encounters he was having were in fact viewed as actual visits from Shankaracharya rather than psychological emanations. Jung's meeting with this man calmed him from thinking he had "plummeted right out of the human world" (as cited in Chodorow, 1997, p. 31) and fostered a viewpoint of normalization with these phenomena. It seems plausible from the earlier discussion on the levels of speech, that this theophanic vision was likely inspired from the pashyanti (visionary or visible speech) level of revealed wisdom.

Soul, daimon, and imagination provide direction towards a poetic understanding of the quality of inner life in and beyond the ego, but curiosity still insists on deeper probing. What is the origin of the guru-like figure of Philemon, and why did he show up in that specific form and at that specific time? Why would Jung listen so intently? Some deeper wellspring from which these sacred manifestations originate seems to be indicated.

According to several authors (Chodorow, 1997; Harding, 1961; McNiff, 1986, 1989, 1992; Watkins, 1984), symbolic images are living entities that command attention. Jung believed that the symbols held within dreams were factual emissaries that needed to be followed (Chodorow, 1997). A contemplative yogic view of active imagination would

likely view symbolic images as having shakti or an existence of their own, not needing ego-based integration, and therefore necessitating being approached according to their own living presence. Dreams, active imagination, and artwork all embody a quality of living authority. Symbols and images bring revelations as they embody and reveal the shakti, moving from the para-vak level to a manifested state.

Another consideration is the movement of images from the unconscious into awareness, where insight shines light on internal imbalances within the psyche (Harding, 1961). Images are complete statements that hold their own logic, knowledge, and life force. They are passages between realms without a necessary destination. Creating art is an important part of this form of travel because it manifests subtleties into tangible form that is an observable record of both latent and manifest processes ultimately spawned by the Divine Shakti.

This section concludes with an imaginary story that I have conjured up as a way to help me comprehend the subtle difference between the process of projection, personification, and theophanic imagination. The process of the shaman's ear or the yogi's form of listening and engagement with every aspect of the living world is illustrated in this fictional story set at a time some years ago.

A chance meeting occurs between a Western-trained artist and an indigenous aboriginal holy man. After initial greetings are exchanged, they both decide to spend the day in silence and wander about in the backcountry. Riding on horseback, they intentionally stray from the path and enter the wilderness. Traveling deeper and deeper into the bush, the trail eventually leads to a clearing. Beyond this point is a massive ancient oak tree. As the path opens up, the breathtaking scene puts a wall around the

men's silence, and each drops into a receptive state of communion with this magnificent tree. For the Western-trained artist, the tree speaks through creative engagement with projection and personification, leading the way into an inner contemplative dialogue. Similar to a playwright penning the words of a character in an emerging story, active dialogue occurs between the ancient oak and the artist. The exchange is subtle yet certainly grounded in the construction of a projective narrative that is deeply meaningful but also placed onto the tree.

For the aboriginal man, the process of encounter with the tree is different. In fact, he has encountered a seamless system of interconnection and unity between all things from the moment the sun rose to this moment. For this shaman, it is simple: the tree is simply alive pulsating with its own voice, speaking directly, as trees do. In fact, for him, all of nature is known to be alive and ensouled, constantly communicating to his receptive ear. There is nothing to personify.

For the Westerner, the process is rich, unfolding wisdom as he practices his form of imaginal exchange through projection and therefore placing meaning onto the tree. The indigenous figure engages in a different form of encounter. His attention is focused instead on deep listening to the shared consciousness that underlines and fuses all of life, the animate and inanimate, together. Rather than placing meaning *onto*, he is focused on listening *into* a unified view of life force. In Hindu yogic traditions, this unifying principal of universal life force is known as *Brahman*: that which is and manifests the all that is through the subtle power of the Kundalini Shakti, the eternal, ever-present force that animates every single particle of this universe. Beyond personification and projection

is this inner consciousness, manifesting all movements, all actions, and all that is possible.

Many methods of contemplative practice consist of turning attention and awareness inward towards the pulsating Shakti. This inwardly drawn focus develops insight by fostering intimate, contemplative communion with the Self. In order to accomplish this goal, the faculty of imagination is required. One way to understand meditation as a practice of imagination is to consider the word *insight* and its meaning in further detail.

Insight is seeing inwardly, with clear perception, that which is imminently observable through processes like meditation and art. Intuitive self-awareness arises out of this practice. Imagination, which is regarded as the voice of the Shakti, is that faculty that creates, communicates, and perceives with and through images (Mahony, 1998a). Insight and intuition emerge out of communion with inner images that spontaneously arise, as with Philemon, or that are intentionally created in art. Through intentional meditative engagement with these spontaneous or intentional images, this faculty is further developed.

This final section of the literature review investigates the subjects of meditation, art and imaginal practice. Surfacing and detailing the connections between these three subjects reveals the practice-based connections that are at the core of this dissertation.

Section III: Meditation, Art, and the Practice of Imagination

The following is a summary outline of the specific content areas discussed in this section.

1. Overview of meditation, art, and the practice of imagination:

   Meditation is a way to self-regulate the overt and covert connections between the body and mind (Cahn & Polich, 2006). Walsh and Shapiro (2006) define meditation as "a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration" (p. 229).

   Meditation and art are often described as practices that can refine various forms of awareness such as perceptual wakefulness, focused absorption in the moment, and increased awareness of inner narratives.

2. States and traits of meditation:

   The term *state* references the emergence of sensory, cognitive, and self-referential awareness that is altered while meditating. *Trait* refers to an enduring change as a result of meditation. Similar state and trait outcomes exist for art and meditation.

3. Meditation and the practice of imagination:

   Hillman (1978) sees a direct relationship between image and attention, which is a cornerstone of meditation practice. Attention, as Hillman acknowledges, is the main definition of consciousness. To aim one's attention at an inner or outer image implies that one is in relationship with imaginal narratives with absorbed focus.

4. Islamic Sufi meditation and the imagination:

   Sufi traditions use contemplative visualization to engage and inhabit ineffable content. This content is made accessible through the faculties of imagination, visualization, and symbol formation. The result of contacting and engaging with the Divine through these pathways is love and affection for the object of contemplation, including deeper insight into the spiritual mystery of introspective revelation.

Overview of Meditation, Art, and the Practice of Imagination

Meditation is a way to self-regulate the overt and covert connections between the body and mind (Cahn & Polich, 2006). A direct correlation exists between the experience of direct inner events and the attention cultivated through meditation and art. Basically, meditation falls into two categories: mindfulness and concentrative approaches (Cahn & Polich, 2006). According to Cahn and Polich, mindfulness involves allowing whatever is emerging at the conceptual or sensory level simply to surface. Concentrative approaches employ strategies for focusing the mind.

During my prostate cancer experience I needed simply to be with what was emerging and also to keep my mind focused as uncertainty appeared. Through a sitting practice combined with an art practice, I had two proven pathways to rely on when ambiguity emerged. In many ways cancer amplifies the dualities of mortality. The distance between life and death shortens, as does the distance between uncertainty and predictability along with hope and fear. These dualistic relationships rush forward towards the foreground of *now*, existing side by side. Banked years of dedicated meditation practice brought a precious payoff. Rather than make up fictions and imagine

all sorts of invented stories, I was able to disengage from unhelpful fantasies and remain steady and present with my direct experiences. Although this may sound ordinary and obvious, which it is, this occurrence demonstrates how the embodied fruits of practice saved me from the daily onslaught of tormenting thoughts.

Art also offered similar forms of comfort. Although meditation trains the mind to focus, it does not necessarily decode or dissolve unconscious material. This is a key point to make and is a fundamental reason why this research focuses on integrating both practices. Visual symbols in art surface the hidden language of the psyche. During the time described in this research, it was most helpful to see felt, but yet-to-be-known-and-understood feelings. My unique symbolic language was made available to me through art, especially through the materials with which I was working. Within this intimate space where manifested feelings and latent meaning existed side by side, I was able to receive these ambiguous images and commune with their specific yet uncertain messages. Over and over, since childhood, art has taught me to receive the ambiguities of life through the instruction of this core theme inherent in the art process. Embracing ambiguity and working in consort with it is one of the primary gifts of artistic work. As this chapter explains, the long term benefits of practicing art in conjunction with meditation results in a variety of desirable outcomes. As unconscious symbolic material is met with compassionate awareness, the result is an increased sense of calm, greater responsiveness to the sensory field, and improved witness awareness. An overall change in relating to thoughts, feelings, and views of self is an inevitable effect (Cahn & Polich, 2006). One becomes proficient at observing thoughts rather than reacting to their repetitive content (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). This facility is the central focus of this chapter. Meditation

cultivates presence in the moment while art crystallizes unconscious processes allowing for imaginal engagement with all that is emerging. Meditation and art together create an algorithm of multiplied pathways for absorbed observation in what is unfolding. As shown in this chapter, especially as a result of guidance from the imaginal lens revealed from Sufi and yoga traditions, human acts of creation are a way to join with the subtle and ever present "Creator."

The discussion now turns to the specific relationships between art and meditation practice that help deepen the connections between both practices. Understanding the states and traits of meditation and how they relate to art and the practice of imagination follows.

Sigmund Freud coined the aphorism that dreams were the "royal road" (1900/1965, p. 608) to the unconscious, a maxim that is similar to the viewpoint that meditation is the royal road to the transpersonal (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993b). This declaration implies that meditative strategies and contemplative pathways exist that lead to the underlying recessed layers of the psyche and the vast potential of human consciousness. These states of consciousness and the developmental unfolding needed to support passage towards, into, and through these states are obtainable outcomes facilitated by time-tested contemplative practices such as meditation. Transpersonal psychology attempts to study the past, present, and cross-cultural benefits offered by wisdom traditions that result from contemplative practices such as meditation. Art and meditation when practiced together become two passports into these limitless realms.

According to Walsh and Vaughan (1993b), transpersonal technologies and disciplines unfold multistate, transpersonal experiences. Reason alone cannot penetrate

into the essence of these subtle layers of consciousness. The authors state that when deductive methods are used to explain these numinous territories and resulting experiences, dualistic incompatibilities are generated that cloud these legitimate truths. The likely results from this form of convergent inquiry can create even greater distance from the unifying revelation of an immanent and transcendent source espoused by the perennial philosophy (Huxley, 1944). How does one access and cultivate this wisdom as a means to renegotiate one's relationship to suffering and one's human potential? Over time, contemplative practices such as sitting meditation, scriptural study, service, austerity and surrender, devotional worship, and aesthetic experiences reveal this layered intuitive, insightful knowing.

States and Traits of Meditation

Central to a discussion of meditation is an examination of the states and traits that result from the practice and how they relate to art practice. The term *state* references the emergence of sensory, cognitive, and self-referential awareness that is altered while meditating. *Traits* refer to enduring changes as a result of meditation. These changes do not have to be directly engaged through contemplative practices such as meditation; however, the long-term trait changes derived from practicing meditation are summarized as expanded calm, increased awareness of the sensory field, increased witness awareness, and a change in relating to cognitions, affect, and views of self (Cahn & Polich, 2006). Overall examples of state and trait changes in meditation are a profound sense of calm, a slowing of discursive thought, and perceptual clarity. A shift in awareness also occurs, from ruminating on thoughts to witnessing them as "observed phenomena" (Cahn & Polich, 2006, p. 181).

The study of states and traits related to meditation practice is still unfolding. Techniques in the fields of neurophenomonology and neuroimagery, such as positron emission tomography (PET scans) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), have significantly advanced this research. Although considerable progress has been made, conclusive outcomes have yet to emerge due to the amount of subtleties in brain states which occur during meditation (Cahn & Polich, 2006). Cahn and Polich review this question in detail, offering important insight on where this research is heading in the future.

A shorthand sketch of meditation would describe a range of practices that "self-regulate the body and mind" (Cahn & Polich, 2006, p. 180) in such a way that affects "mental events" (p. 180) through attentional focus. Among the many approaches to meditation discussed earlier, are mantra recitation (Feuerstein, 2003), yantra gazing (Khanna, 1979), mindfulness practice (Baer et al., 2006; Germer et al., 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Siegel, 2007), and practices from yoga and tantric traditions (Brooks et al., 1997; Feuerstein, 1998, 2001; Yogananda, 2003). As mentioned previously, all traditions and practices of meditation fall into two basic categories: mindfulness and concentrative (Cahn & Polich, 2006). According to Cahn and Polich, mindfulness involves allowing whatever is emerging at the conceptual or sensory level simply to surface. The practitioner maintains a quality of nonjudgmental attention to these events, while sustaining open, unattached awareness of the unfolding phenomenal field. Examples of this approach cited by Cahn and Polich include Zen and Vipassana meditation and Kabat-Zinn's (1994) approach to mindfulness meditation. These practices promote an ongoing

return to awareness that is open-minded as the sensory and cognitive risings of sensation and thought emerge.

Concentrative approaches, originating with yoga and Buddhist traditions, work with conceptual or sensory material by intentionally focusing on a mantra, an internal image, a yantra, or the breath. Another aspect of the concentrative approaches is the cultivation of witness awareness. Mantra recitation, for example, fills the field of the mind with an observable sacred sound. With focus and attention, the practitioner returns over and over to the phrase being recited, thus becoming the witness of the emerging thoughts within the mind.

All meditation approaches from various traditions basically strive towards the same results: cultivation of attention, observation or witnessing of awareness, concentration, and insight. The qualities of wakefulness, attention, and insight can lead the practitioner to a more refined embodiment of awareness and degrees of self-realization.

State and trait similarities between meditation and visual art. Several questions arise when comparing the traits and states that emerge from meditation practice with the states and traits indicative of art practice: What are the enduring traits of creative work inherent in the art process? Can art cultivate attention, concentration, insight, and increased observation or witnessing abilities? What are the similarities then between art and meditation when it comes to the inner states generated from each process? Are they truly similar? Whereas yoga and meditation help the practitioner to observe and still the mind, art surfaces unconscious narratives that also need to be compassionately managed. Some may critique this position and consider art as a way to indulge thoughts, which runs

counterintuitive to the stilling efforts of meditation and yoga. Imaginal psychology, however, has demonstrated the credibility of contacting inner narratives and communing with their innate wisdom (Berry, 1982; Hillman, 1978; McNiff, 1992; Watkins, 1984). To tame the wildness of the mind without also excavating the driving latent content behind these thoughts results in an imbalanced psychological equation. In addition to this point, it is also important to acknowledge how art and meditation help to reduce stress by creating a visual representation of one's thoughts. The combination of the two practices together helps to untangle unconscious enmeshment with those thoughts.

Walsh and Shapiro (2006) examined various approaches to meditation, the diverse effects of meditation, the various psychological and philosophical histories of meditation, and the many implications required for careful study of this contemplative practice. Based on their extensive review of the literature, the authors revealed several points that are relevant for this study. They found, for example, that it is likely that the practice of mindfulness meditation enhances perceptual sensitivity along with creativity and the reduction of stress. For this writer, artistic process, in part, is closely linked to perceptual sensitivity, creativity, and observational skill. Meditation and art are often described as practices that can refine various forms of awareness such as perceptual wakefulness.

The practitioner of meditation becomes adept at observing rather than reacting to or identifying thoughts, a skill known as *disidentification* (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Just as the meditator becomes the skilful witness of the mind, the artist similarly does the same through careful observation of externalized thoughts and feelings directly reflected in the art. Art is an externalized version of the thought contents from the mind fixed in

the aesthetic language of symbol and form. Rather than observe thoughts on the inner screen of the mind, the artist observes these cognitions as they materialize, for example, on canvas, video, or in stone. Seeing and actually holding thoughts fixed in tangible forms offer additional access to inner awareness.

Another point of connection between art and meditation can be drawn when considering states of consciousness that directly manifest during each practice. Regarding states of consciousness, Western researchers mostly consider a *monophasic* view, which is basically the waking state (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). The sleep state is also studied along with inebriated states from alcohol or drug use. This Western, ethnocentric view of inner states is limited compared to other cultural views of human consciousness. By contrast, cultures that have long histories with endemic meditation practices are most interested in *polyphasic* or multiple states of consciousness (p. 232). These cultures also have imbedded in their language words and phrases that address this worldview. As discussed earlier, the Sanskrit vocabulary, for example, reveals terms such as *sac-cid-ananda*, or "being," "consciousness," and "bliss," and *Tat Tvam Asi*, which translates into "That art thou" (Feuerstein, 2003, p. 258). These phrases point towards a more inclusive albeit elusive transpersonal view of cosmic consciousness and creation. Within this polyphasic view, the essence of pure consciousness is supremely intelligent, possessing the ability "to create any and all worlds" (Grof, 1993, p. 163) or forms seen and unseen, known and unknown to scientific instruments. Because this view of creation and the creative spanda force is beyond form, it is impractical to attempt to explain these numinous concepts directly, yet through commitment to contemplative practices such as

art and meditation, access can be granted. The combination of active imagination and archetypal work is one way this can be achieved.

The practice of active imagination (Chodorow, 1997), which allows for the excavation of archetypal imagery, is an example of art-based, polyphasic entry into nonordinary states of consciousness. According to Walsh and Shapiro (2006), active imagination and imaginal work are therefore viable avenues for shifting ordinary consciousness. Looking at and understanding esoteric imagery such as mandalas or yantras designed to inspire contemplative states can also facilitate a shift in consciousness. These sacred icons help to catalyze and synthesize ethereal concepts and reveal their truth through aesthetic forms that can stimulate intuition and insight to resource itself.

Another point of connection between art and meditation is the cultivation of compassion and wisdom. The history of art is laced with numerous accounts of artists creating works that help them to cultivate empathy for themselves and others. Käthe Kollwitz made moving works attempting to understand war and death (Kearns, 1976), Edvard Munch used the art process to explore his concerns about dying and death (Hodin, 1972), and the animal paintings of Franz Marc persuasively penetrate into the natural world of these noble creatures (Partsch, 2006). These artists were seemingly able to understand themselves better and cultivate inner wisdom through introspective practices inherent in the art process.

Additional investigations into the convergence between art and meditation can be found in Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) notion of flow and the autotelic personality. He defines *flow* as effortless engagement whereby full attention is directed towards an

activity for its own sake. This is the very meaning of the *autotelic* personality he posits—*auto* being the Greek root for "self" and *telos* the Greek root for "goal" (p. 117). Autotelic and flow activities are sought-after experiences because a committed encounter with any process that is pursued is worth doing for its own sake, which is the main goal. Joy and happiness emerge out of full absorption in these activities. Unlike the "exotelic" (p. 117) personality reinforced by outside goals that fulfill needs of competitive or public acknowledgement, the autotelic personality is self-fulfilled as a result of absorbed engagement.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) description of the autotelic personality sounds strikingly similar to the mystic or yogi. Both are likely to avoid mindlessly gathering material possessions. They also would not seek out forms of distraction from the opportunities available in life, such as misusing public power or fame. The flow activities of art and meditation instead directly provide rewards from cultivating contemplative ability as the primary sources of meaning. Additionally, the autotelic personality, according to Csikszentmihalyi, is not submissive but instead operates from a disinterested position, which basically means that the focus is not on a particular agenda. Meaning and fulfillment is provided instead through the captivation with full attention and discovery-oriented behavior that is devoted to what is being done.

The state of flow, which is highly subjective and strikingly similar to practicing beginner's mind (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), usually emerges when one feels great challenge to one's skills in a specific area. For the contemplative artist, a great deal of time is spent in this sort of equation with an open and fresh welcoming perspective for what is emerging. This perspective is the essence of staying in the mind of the beginner when approaching

novel or familiar problems to solve. Working from this perspective results in the likelihood that an abundance of energy will be devoted towards these activities. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) suggests that when one has clear goals along with applicable feedback as well as balanced challenges and related abilities, attention will be ordered and completely invested. This dynamic sounds strikingly similar to both art practice and meditation practice. Both require clear goals and relevant feedback that inform the process. It is also important to mention that clear goals do not necessarily imply step-by-step, sequential objectives and outcomes. The goal could be to enhance spontaneity and to relax regarding the impulse to control results. Also, the relationship of skills to challenges does imply a static, one-time event. Skills and challenges of absorption evolve over time as the artist and meditator become practiced in their areas of focus such as painting and sculpture or sitting and chanting.

Cohen (2006) noticed outcomes similar to the autotelic personality in a research study he conducted on the positive impact of the arts during the aging process. His work on creativity and aging during the second half of life has resulted in a holistic view of health during this important and often misunderstood phase of human development. For many, creative expression during the adult years emerges as an attractive, even necessary practice. Cohen makes the point, for example, that older adults primarily dominate the folk arts, a phenomenon that is undeniable. The reason why this is the case has become clearer through his research. Cohen addresses several of the mechanisms related to the outcome traits of art practice that are important when considering creativity and aging. These outcome traits are a sense of control, the influence of the mind on the body, the importance of social engagement, and how art contributes to brain plasticity.

The importance of *a sense of control*, as noted by Cohen (2006), relates to how art helps to develop increased feelings of empowerment through mastery of a chosen activity. Similar to the autotelic personality, if a person is good at one thing, then it is likely that he or she will be good at another when full attention and effort are devoted to that endeavor. Cohen's finding regarding *the influence of the mind on the body* relates to the field of psychoneuroimmunology (PNI), which studies the influence of the mind more specifically on the immune system. Positive emotions, for example, have a resulting effect on the immune system such as a sense of control. Developing and therefore feeling greater control resulting from art practice, according to Cohen, will boost immune cells such as T cells and NK (natural killer cells) that attack cancerous tumor cells (p. 9).

Social engagement (Cohen, 2006) cultivates health through several avenues. A healthy body is particularly aided through meaningful relationships. The arts offer numerous opportunities for meaningful social contact. Cohen notes that singing groups, poetry groups, quilting circles, bands, acting groups, and art studio groups all help to increase social activity (pp. 9-10). Lastly, in terms of *brain plasticity*, the brain adapts and keeps itself vital. Cohen explains that sustained engagement with bilateral stimulation available through artistic activity can spur on the development of new dendrites and result in enhanced brain reserve. In later life, the brain savors these forms of concomitant stimulation. Like "chocolate to the brain" (p. 10), left and right hemispheres can remain flexible through the experiences afforded by the arts.

To summarize, art and meditation set up feedback loops that offer direct pathways to enter the flow state and become absorbed in the task at hand. Both art and meditation foster absorption in the moment and management of the thinking mind. They also

cultivate concentration, control, and attention through activities that inspire absorption. Both practices consider beginner's mind as central to maintaining fresh openness to what is emerging. Meditation and art also reduce cogitation on ruminating thoughts with a shift towards witnessing these thoughts as "observed phenomena" (Cahn & Polich, 2006, p. 181). This witnessed or observed material is then folded into the creation of artworks that in turn stimulate the state of flow, setting this feedback loop in motion to occur again and spawn subsequent works of art. Lastly, art is a way to take contemplative awareness out into a social venue and foster relational connection.

The autotelic personality and the cultivation of the flow state in art are analogous to what I experienced when creating art with a cancer diagnosis. Over and over again, I was able to center myself and become engrossed in the process of creating while struggling. Creating is a way to coexist with the ambiguous messages of immortality so prevalent with a cancer diagnosis. The art process slowed time down to where I could see each action and moment as a holy gift. These fleeting moments became elongated through the need to respond with deliberate decisions when working with clay and charcoal. The art materials captivated me with their flexibility to receive and hold my known and unknown intentions. The three gunas were candidly present as I moved through moments of sedentary despair to lighthearted hope peppered with distracting thoughts of avoidant wishes and fantasies. The emotional upheaval of uncertainty agitated its way into the form and content of my work. As Cohen (2006) suggests, I was able to gain moments of control in the art and meditation process during this meandering process of uncertainty. In an ordinary way, I felt sane and at ease while working. I could see my thoughts unfolding before me in the art process. I could see that I was oscillating

between struggle and hope, fragility and resiliency, yet the art process and materials held it all.

Most important was how the imaginal realm opened up through art during this time. The diagnosis of cancer becomes a portal through which a flood of new images emerges. At times, I was overtaken by these images. The immensity of the medical system, the complications of personal relationships, the impending decisions concerning treatment, and the idea of a reliable future surfaced an ongoing series of cascading images. Understanding the movements of the imagination is essential during a process like this. Towards this end, it is the practice of imagination in conjunction with meditation that surfaces the layers of intuitive knowing readily available in the art process.

Meditation and the practice of imagination. Hillman (1978) sees a direct relationship between image and attention, which is a cornerstone of meditation practice. Attention, as Hillman acknowledges, is the main definition of consciousness. By holding attention on an image, one becomes attuned to the present moment. In fact, an image makes one present to oneself, thereby cultivating unique encounters with precision and presence to what is imaginally before or within one. The effort, states Hillman, is to stick to the image, become absorbed in its presence, and consider the bidirectional pathways for it toward oneself and for one toward it. This concept implies that ego holds only one perspective. For Hillman, image is the simultaneity of "context, mood, and scene" alive within a true symbol (p. 159). Such a symbol is not a fixed and optical picture but is metaphorically vital and animated. To aim one's attention at this view of an image implies that one is in relationship with oneself within a moment of absorbed focus. With

this view of image and its simultaneous parts, imaginal attention can roam. In this way, imagination as a practice is similar to meditation in the attempt to become present to what is unfolding, without judgment for the contents of one thoughts. Instead, as with beginner's mind, one is present as the witness for what is internally and externally unfolding.

Many religious traditions have developed sophisticated meditation and visualization practices to aid their congregants in their moral and spiritual unfolding. Many of these practices call upon, in some profound way, the faculty of imagination as a way to contact and foster contemplative insight. Christian Centering Prayer, for example, offers a manageable and accessible practice of contemplation. Summarizing the work of Merton, Keating (1994) mentions how Merton was the first to use the term *Centering Prayer*. The practice emerged out of interreligious dialogue with representatives of Eastern traditions as well as inspiration from a 14th-century text, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, by an anonymous English monk (1981; Benson, 1975). Centering Prayer simplifies the orthodoxy of contemplation practice previously known in Christian traditions. It achieves this by minimizing the obstacles of contemplation traditionally seen as a lifestyle for renunciates, monks, and committed adepts. In a sincere and forthright way, practitioners invoke the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and intentionally consent to commingling with this sacred presence.

Judaism also has a documented tradition of meditation practice. Jewish methods of meditation attempt to achieve higher states of consciousness as a way to move closer to God. Direct references in the Old Testament attest to the prophets attaining meditative states through chanting and music (Kaplan, 1985). According to Aryeh Kaplan, rabbi and

meditation teacher, evidence also exists that large masses of the Israelite people practiced meditation under the guidance of prophets who were under the direct supervision of the prophets cited in the Bible. These practices were steeped in the cultivation of discipline including control of emotions.

The esoteric book of Ezekiel in the Bible describes, in detail, the prophets' visions of the Lord's throne (Kaplan, 1985). Within one tradition, this biblical passage was considered the key to practicing meditation and attaining the gift of prophesy. The practice was known as the "discipline of the chariot" (p. 43). As the centuries passed and the Diaspora scattered, this practice evolved into the silent Amidah, which was to be practiced three times per day over one's lifetime (p. 103). According to Kaplan, the recitation of the Amidah has some similar connections with mantra repetition; in fact, he mentions how the phenomenology of Jewish meditation is similar to forms practiced in other traditions.

Kaplan (1985) outlines three key words that capture the essence of Jewish meditation: *kavanah*, *hitbonenuth*, and *hitbodeduth* (pp. 49-53). *Kavanah* has several meanings including "concentration, feeling, or devotion" (p. 49). Kavanah also references directing consciousness towards a specific goal such as the heart. Like an imaginal practice, kavanah implies a quality of clearing the mind in order to surrender to the essence of the images inherent in the liturgy. Kaplan explains that the ego, as in so many mystical traditions, is subordinated to a place of minimized control while the language of the service carries the practitioner into the essence of the prayer.

Hitbonenuth directly translates as "self understanding" (Kaplan, 1985, p. 50) or self-awareness. Engagement with hitbonenuth implies that one communes with the

phenomenal world rather than dispassionately disregarding its miraculous contents. Kaplan points out that hitbonenuth is the sense that one is an integral part of God's creation and that it is important to contemplate this relationship.

Lastly, *hitbodeduth,* which means "self isolation" or "seclusion" (Kaplan, 1985, p. 52), is the state of solitude. Seeking solitude is an important part of contemplative practice, and various forms of self-imposed isolation are essential to a life of practice. One must acquire the skills necessary to quiet the mind and turn inward towards the source of consciousness. In this sense *hitbodeduth* is strikingly similar to yoga-based practices aimed at silently disciplining the mind and body in order to become still and seek inward pilgrimage.

Additional writings on Judaism and contemplative practice have been masterfully plumbed by Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi (1993, 2005). As a mystic and a contemplative fully engaged in the world, he offers deep insight into practices such as prayer. With devoted intention, the heart can grow lips and speak directly to the Divine. Schacter-Shalomi (2005) offers many moving accounts of this timeless practice. In one passage from his book, *Jewish With Feeling*, he describes an indelible moment when as a little boy he witnessed his father's tears spring forth while in prayer. He tenderly describes the moment when he realized that tears are not only about bruises and pain but are also about the literal fallout of opening the heart.

Islamic Sufi meditation and the imagination. The following examination of Islamic and specifically Sufi approaches to meditation and contemplation includes discussion of several stages of contemplation (Badri, 2000) including, imaginal visualization (Chittick, 1989), the practice of self evident truth (Chittick, 2005), and those

described in Corbin's (1969) views of imagination. These stages are important because they directly relate to the earlier material mentioned on the subtle becoming manifest. The previous discussions on matrika shakti, yantras, and tantra, for example, describe similar revealed wisdom directly accessed through insights that emerge from practices that focus on engaging images.

The Islamic practice of contemplation moves through four stages: sensory-based perception, appreciation of these emerging sensations, inspiration, and finally cognition (Badri, 2000). According to Badri, the first stage consists of knowledge emerging from the sensory perception of a contemplated object. Two forms of sensory perception are possible: (a) direct access through the sensory channels of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste; and (b) indirect sensory perception that emerges from the imagination. Regarding this first stage, the overall experience can remain mostly discursive and cognitive.

The second stage of contemplation engages with this rational data through closer inspection (Badri, 2000). This examination can include aesthetic wonder about what was originally perceived. Wonder can mean opening to the beauty and ineffable qualities of the observed object. Deep appreciation and passionate admiration along with delicate emotions are in play during this phase of contemplation.

The next stage of contemplation involves crossing the line between the created object and God, the ultimate Creator behind this and every other object in existence. In this stage, according to Badri (2000), the practitioner becomes swept away by emotions of surrender and deference for the Creator. This awareness between the object of inspiration and the Creator is practiced again and again, leading the way to the fourth stage. In this stage, one experiences the embodiment of the entire pathway travelled

between sensory awareness of the object and surrender to God. The practitioner fully absorbs the fruits of this practice until it becomes his or her embodied nature. The result, states Badri, is greater love and respect for God.

Sufi and other traditions use contemplative visualization to engage and inhabit indefinable content. This content is made accessible through the faculties of imagination, visualization, and symbol formation. The result of contacting and engaging with the Divine through these pathways is deep love and affection for the object of contemplation and its capacity to point the practitioner towards deeper insight into spiritual mystery and contemplative revelation. Sufi practitioners are masterful at employing these refined methods of communing with the Divine.

Within Sufi traditions of Islam, the practice of imagination is a primary way to engage with the mysteries of creation. The word *Sufi* likely has several origins. Corbin (1969) observes that the Arabic word for *wool* is *suf*; hence, woolen garments were the identifying attire for the Sufis. The Greek word for *sage* is *sophos*, a word which some believe to have some association to the term Sufi (p. 30, footnote 5). Trimingham (1971) offers a broad definition of the Sufi practitioner as one who embraces the possibility of having a direct experiential encounter with God, a state which the practitioner commits to working, with devotion, toward accessing. Engagement of the imaginal faculty is one way to realize this intention. A brief review of the subtleties of contemplative techniques in Islamic traditions helps to understand how the imagination is utilized in practice.

The Islamic meditative technique and spiritual practice of self-evident truth is directly related to the testimonies of faith known as the *Shahadahs*. A central pillar of a self-evident truth is “no god but God” (Chittick, 2005, p. 32) or, in nontheistic terms,

there is “no reality but that which is truly real” (p. 32). According to Chittick, the first Shahadah reveals the primary technique of meditation, based on the belief that reality exists in divine names. Within the Koran, God possesses the most elegant names. The meditative practice of the Shahadah invites the practitioner to unravel the word *God*, which is the most intangible and therefore difficult to penetrate of the divine names. All of the other names are contained in this true One.

If no other Shahadahs existed but this first one, God would be remote and inaccessible; however, the Koran contains a complementary perspective of God’s immanence, which is to be found in the four domains: “the natural world, the human self, the activities of the prophets, and scripture” (Chittick, 2005, p. 34). Within these domains, which are all versions of creation, is the “Divine reality that gave it existence” (p. 34). It is through these domains that God reveals his infinite and absolute Self. One way to enter into the divine territory of the four domains is through prayer and the faculty of imagination.

Within Islamic and specifically Sufi traditions, prayer is a practice of imagination that fosters great freedom to discern and penetrate numinous mystery. Corbin (1969), in his work on Ibn ‘Arabī (abridged from Ibn al-Arabī), a Sufi mystic and philosopher, reveals the importance of imagination as an appendage-like faculty needed to penetrate the mysteries of contemplative themes. In essence, reason can only take seekers so far until they need other forms of transport into the mystical and spiritual realms of the Divine. Corbin therefore wonders about the meaning behind human creations and the inner world from which they originate. Not only does this inner world spawn creations, he finds, but it is also created. Said another way, the imagination imagines itself

imagining. Corbin observes how imagination is often reduced to fantasy when empirical sources of knowing take precedence over other sources of inquiry and understanding. He notes a lack of validation for "an intermediate level between empirically verifiable reality and unreality" (p. 181) or fantasy. He states that between the empirical rational realm and the impulsive, unchecked realm of fantasy resides the imagination.

Chittick (1989), in his study of Sufi master Ibn al-Arabi, opens his book by paying homage to Corbin, who, in his view, imparted greater understanding of the *imaginal*. Chittick notes that the intellectual traditions embraced by the West resulted in a split from other faculties of inquiry and knowing practiced in the East. By returning to Oriental traditions, the rediscovery of imagination was inevitable. In addition to rational methods of study and inquiry, states Chittick, imaginal perceiving opens the heart and soul to the *"mundus imaginalis"* (p. viii) which is the territory where "invisible realities become visible and corporeal things are" (p. viii) accessible as spiritual reality. The imaginal visionary realm allows abstractions to become accessible and even concretized. As this process unfolds, it is seductive to fall into the flexibility of the imagination to spawn a polytheistic pantheon, which can distract the practitioner. It is as if imagination becomes a plaything to exploit and satisfy misguided egocentric tendencies, or as Wilber (2000a) might suggest, imagination can be blindly applied to pre-trans impulses to skip necessary developmental steps essential for spiritual maturation.

According to Islamic and Sufi perspectives, by imagining the universe, God created it from within his vast, unlimited potential. Between the tangible and the intangible is the imaginal or the idea of images. Here, in this domain, the practitioner can develop what the Sufis call the "supersensory sensibility" (as cited in Corbin, 1969,

p. 182), whereby the Divine can arrive through images and be communed with and served. Corbin sees this perspective as opposite to the more embraced position of "*creatio ex nihilo"* (1969, p. 182), which means God creating everything from nothing. Such a position, Corbin feels, degrades the notion of the imagination. Creation is *theophany,* or the appearance of the divine through imagined images. Prayer then is the theophanic imagination creating access to God. The God to whom such a prayer is directed creates God and therefore God reveals Himself in this version of creation. Lastly, this is just one of many theophanies "whose real Subject is the Godhead revealing Himself to Himself" within the divine space of the imaginal appendage of the body (p. 183).

Summary

This chapter has concluded by summarizing meditation and art from the point of view of state and trait outcomes that result from these combined practices. Overall, these conjoint methods cultivate attention, awareness, tranquility, and greater concentration. This chapter has also examined various traditions that utilize imaginal processes for encountering the Divine. With a focus on Sufi traditions, contemplative visualization has been discussed as a means for accessing ineffable content which is reachable through the gift of imagination. Contacting and engaging the Divine through these pathways results in love and affection for the object of contemplation, introspective revelation through imaginal contemplation, and knowledge of the Creator ultimately responsible for these musings. These three points are discussed further in the next chapter from the point of view of personal artwork created in response to a life threatening illness.

CHAPTER 3

FRAGILITY AND RESILIENCY: TRANSPERSONAL AND ART-BASED RESEARCH METHODS APPLIED TO THE STUDY OF A LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS

This chapter begins by framing the ABR methods that I refer to as "Art-Based Contemplative Inquiry." This method includes correlations with an overall process equation discussed below, the imaginal engagement of others, and general connections with the scientific method previously discussed in the section on definitions and meaning.

First, a discussion on the process of Art-Based Contemplative Inquiry is offered. Following is a discussion of the combined use of meditation and imaginal methods with art including an examination of the many "others" who arrive through the art process. A review of specific art materials from a yoga-based contemplative perspective is offered next. The particular materials discussed are breath, clay, and charcoal. The review of methods and materials is then followed by Phase I of my process of Art-Based Contemplative Inquiry, which is entitled "Listening to Innate Intelligence: The Efficacy of Practicing Meditation and Art During the Treatment of Prostate Cancer." Phase I revisits my previous cancer experience as documented in the art created over a 1-year period beginning in June of 2006. Phase II, entitled "Post Treatment Artwork and Longitudinal Connections," refers back to this time in 2006 by presenting and discussing current art responses—a set of current, up-to-date artworks—that reference my original visual work. This additional reflective process offers a way to observe further the seamless unfolding of this life-changing, embodied, imaginal narrative embedded in my

story of prostate cancer. This work was developed in retreat-like circumstances and also in a community art studio setting. Both facilitated further contemplative connections between art, meditation, and a life-threatening illness. Chapter 4, "Making the Private Public: Engaging the Feedback Loop Between Artist and Viewer," documents findings from the presentation of the work (drawings, and clay sculpture) to a group of professional peers (meditators, artists, colleagues, and survivors). The discussion and conclusion in Chapter 5 closes with a consideration of further questions and possible applications on the subject of art as a contemplative practice including the subject of art as service and karma yoga.

In general, various methods helped to orient me throughout this process. They consisted of working with the images that were alive in both the materials and symbolic imagery described in the artwork. The first method was the practice of suspending judgment and remaining open to the imaginal narratives that saturate all aspects of the art process. Second was feeling *into*, referring to the guiding principles offered by the "spiritualized aesthetic" of Franz Marc (Partsch, 2006, p. 24) and the aesthetic empathy of Theodore Lipps (Jahoda, 2005; Mallgrave & Ikonomou, 1994).

Marc was interested in how visual space could be a "soul shattering" (Partsch, 2006, p. 12) place to roam and experiment. Throughout my work process, the visual space provided by the three-dimensional yet flexible quality of clay combined with the dramatic light and dark passages of charcoal offered many unique opportunities for collaborative experimentation. As these experiments unfolded, it was important to remember that the images were not mine even if I primarily perceived myself as creating them. They were visitors, manifestations of the shakti. Like imagery in a dream, these

"others" came to me, I do not own them. For this reason, they are to be welcomed and respectfully engaged.

The empathic aesthetic work of Theodore Lipps also guided me. He and his colleagues noticed how the observer could be transported into an image. This quality of transfer is related to aesthetic *einfuhlung* (Lee, 1912), which means to feel intersubjectively *within* or *into* (Jahoda, 2005; Mallgrave & Ikonomou, 1994) rather than projecting *onto*. Together, these guiding principles are summarized below as the blueprint for how I worked with the imagery in this dissertation.

Lastly, there is a need to hold a compassionate perspective for oneself when engaging in complex image work. The practices of maitri and tonglen, from Tibetan Buddhist traditions, were most helpful during moments of uncertainty. Even though I implicitly trust the art process, it is often the case that emotionally laden material can surface too quickly and upset the homeostasis of egoic perception. During such times, the practices of maitri and tonglen, significantly aided my overall process.

Art-Based Contemplative Inquiry

The approach to ABR utilized in this research includes the integrated study of direct aesthetic experience combined with contemplative practices. The application of practices such as witnessing the mind as the creative process unfolds results in awareness and applied insight made available for daily living. Overall, this approach to aesthetic inquiry observes an ongoing equation of cyclical, interconnected, systemic events inherent within the art process. To reiterate, these events progress in this way: action/stimulus ➔ effect/outcome/consequence ➔ contemplative observation/inquiry of the effect ➔ understanding/insight ➔ integration/application/ relevance.

Action/Stimulus

The event of creating art can begin in many different ways. Usually something inspires the call to engage. A body-based sensation, an emotional incident, a memorable dream, or spontaneous engagement with the materials can initiate the event of creating art. For me, the process usually begins by choosing materials and then making a spontaneous mark on the paper with charcoal; or, if working with clay, I generally begin by making a spontaneous opening with my thumbs and forefingers. Next, I respond to this event with another spontaneous silent reply to the previous mark. The overall process at this stage is moving from the randomness of unplanned acts towards a final integrated form or composition.

Effect/Outcome/Consequence

Every act asserted during the art process results in an effect or outcome. The consequences of these outcomes are fixed in the materials and therefore are ripe for investigation. The overall process can move so quickly and seamlessly that most actions pass by unnoticed; however, when attention is focused on these stimulus-response moments, they provide fascinating material to observe, perceive, and examine.

Contemplative Observation and Methods for Working With Images

The examination of these events, or manifested images, is pursued through a contemplative process outlined in the following list of ABR and contemplative methods for working with images:

1. Practice contemplative receptivity: Suspend judgment and receive the totality of the imagery spawned by the materials and the visual symbols. The goal is

to maintain beginner's mind and to try and maintain the orientation of the witness, that is, the stance of observing rather than judging.

2. Receive the darshan of the image: Images are the arrival of the spanda shakti and often theophanic others. Welcome and believe in these visitors as emissaries of knowledge, wisdom, and insight. The intention is to listen to and follow the image.
3. Practice deep listening: Feel intersubjectively within or into these others encircled by visual form. Notice the possible releases and experience of rasa.
4. Look, see, and observe as a form of visual listening: Carefully describe the phenomenology of the simultaneous aspects of the imagery and listen to what emerges through careful descriptions of the formal elements scaffolding the imagery.
5. Collaborate with the image: Invite these others into a process of discourse. *Owning* the image is monologue, whereas *collaborating* with the image is dialogue. Within this approach, dialogue is pursued by listening to rather than speaking for the image. Practicing tonglen with the actual imagery, when difficult content arises, supports contactful dialogue with the imagery.

Understanding/Insight

By working with the processes outlined above, clarity emerges as the visual narratives become accessible. Known as *insight*, perceptive understanding of previously hidden or veiled content results from mindful receptivity to the artwork.

Integration/Application/Relevance

With the arrival of insight and wisdom comes the responsibility to apply these lessons to daily life. Insight alone is not enough; the lessons have to be embodied, applied, and practiced directly.

With this equation in mind, the discussion now turns to the combined practices of art, meditation, and imagination. Meditation is a form of active witnessing whereas active imagination is a process of receiving images and following their lead. Corbin's (1969) work is helpful in terms of teasing out these subtle connections.

The Combined Practices of Art, Meditation, and Imagination

The earlier discussion on Corbin (1969) noted how he observed the unfortunate reduction of imagination by some to mere fantasy, whereas empirical rationalism could be considered the best source for unfolding knowledge as well. Within this view, empirical sources of knowing would take precedence over imaginal sources of inquiry and understanding. Corbin, who wrote about the imaginal realm from a Sufi perspective, pointed out the lack of validation for "an intermediate level between empirically verifiable reality and unreality" (p. 181) or fantasy. Situated between the empirical, rational sphere and the impulsive, unchecked sphere of fantasy is the imagination, the realm of daimonic wisdom (McNiff, 1992), a subtle and evasive territory that defies categories and easy definition.

The daimon is the relational pathway whereby the objective psyche, as Jung called it, reveals inner archetypal themes with which the conscious mind can commune (Hillman, 1983). ABR can be directly about this form of inquiry. According to Hillman, the introspective maxim espoused by Jung to "know thyself" (p. 57) can represent the

primary heading for this form of art-oriented research. This approach to inner knowing is uniquely archived through open, yet objective, introspective encounters with daimonic wisdom. Through this form of introspection, one's egoic consciousness is aimed at entering imaginal consciousness in order to know oneself from the perspective within images that might arrive through dreams or artwork.

This process of aiming attention at imaginal occurrences is similar to certain aspects of meditation. Specifically, one directs attention towards what emerges and allows it to surface without contracting around the resulting thoughts. Like active imagination, whereby control over conscious thoughts is relinquished to allow imagery to move and flow, meditation is about restraining the impulse to grasp thoughts that are projected on the screens of the mind and body; therefore, like active imagination, meditation might be called *active attention* or *active witnessing*.

Transpersonal research techniques capitalize on this sort of contemplative methodology. Some of these methods call for the engagement of subjective techniques for gathering data that authentically communicate, through careful scholarship, the fullness of human experience (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Within transpersonal research methods is a running conviction that transformation of the researcher is inevitable and worth studying as an epistemological theme. Intuition, subjective experience, creative/aesthetic or expressive work, and contemplative practice all point toward a paradigm that values the phenomenology of direct experience, according to Braud and Anderson. The authors note the many ways to gather information in the service of constructing meaning, such as intuitive inquiry, organic research, and the investigation of

exceptional human experiences, the latter of which is closely aligned with this research, as it is the study of numinous encounters such as near death experiences.

Similarly, ABR is at once an introspective and empirical method of inquiry or first- and third-person investigation of subjective (inner experience) and objective (the phenomenal world) data. As a research methodology, a key focus is to unfold meaning through the active, contemplative engagement of subjective states as they manifest in response to external events such as created objects. The unique processes embedded in each artistic form (e.g., painting, music, drama, dance, poetry) also become primary modalities for engaging in psychological, cultural, and social inquiry. Furthermore, the creative process and the resulting creations are seen as collaborative participants in this research methodology. Not only is the perspective of the artist appreciated as a source of data, but so also is the creation itself.

This creation is also situated within a larger cultural context. Locating the work as a cultural artifact adds context to the credibility of this methodology. This threefold lens between artist, process/product, and culture outlines the tripartite model of ABR. The approach to this information is will vary from researcher to researcher and can include imaginal dialogue (McNiff, 1992), phenomenological description (Betensky, 2001), performance (McNiff, 1998), witness writing (Allen, 1995), or contemplative practice (Franklin, 1999). All of these forms of engagement proceed from the authority of the creative process and resulting products.

Regarding the notion of absorption and immersion in the creative process, it seems logical to consider that creative work is a form of art-based pilgrimage to the inner holy site of the Self. In terms of this dissertation, this pilgrimage is a source of artistic

motivation because it is literally a process of creation emerging and returning to it-Self. In short, universal Creation is answered with personal creation. Contemplative inquiry inherent in the arts and in world wisdom traditions, combined with methods of understanding artistic data can help to unfold a synergistic model of ABR.

The following section considers how the scientific method can be applied to ABR practices. This model has been helpful when trying to understand the layered processes that have emerged in the art studio throughout this research project. Also, a central premise of all research, quantitative or qualitative, is astute observation. ABR includes many engaged acts of careful observation under way at any one time, including observation of oneself, the process, the product, the viewer, and the larger culture (Franklin, 1991).

Contemplative Relationships: Art as a Process of Manifesting Others

It is important at this point to peel away the layers of stratum in art that manifest throughout the process from inception to completion as the arrival of "others." Within the art process, many others can be considered to be present, such as the materials, symbol and image, metaphoric qualities of the process, product themes, the implied next incarnation of the narrative, and so on. The theophanic realm is also made visible through art, wherein imaginal receptivity invites apparitions of guides and the Divine to appear (Corbin, 1969). Each of these symbolic sources of data serves as a legitimate presence ripe for collaborative investigation.

In meditation practice, as in art, many qualities of the other, as guides, are present as well: for example, the breath, somatic sensations, mantra, yantra, puja or alter, photos of the teacher or guru, and sacred objects for ritual and worship. Whether an imaginal or

symbolic entity or an object infused with sacred meaning that inspires contemplative reflection, there comes a point when the object becomes an aesthetically embodied arrival perceived as other.

Contemplation is a practice of imaginally engaged reflective perception. As such, it inquires into the subtle structure of the subject contemplated. According to Arnheim (1981), perception is the "discovery of structure . . . [and] all perception is symbolic" (p. 248) in that the percept signifies the symbolic other. Arnheim believes strongly in the authentic reality in created objects. He believes that these embodiments of imagination should be taken seriously. Given this view, artistic creation of the object, the resulting object of perception, and the perceiving of that object are all acts that have the capacity to manifest much more than a figment of the imagination. In fact, through these pathways, the symbolic other is born in the heart and mind of the practitioner.

This discussion is attempting to frame these painted, sculpted, or worshiped objects as others or entities, similar to the view held by Corbin, (1969), Jung (1989), Hillman (1983), and McNiff (1992). These symbolic emissaries arrive as messengers carrying yet-to-be-discovered information. At first glimpse, they appear as insignificant physical or material objects that can be known through casual touch and fleeting visual glances. For many, this is as far as it goes when engaging with other objects; however, these objects can represent an arrival of narrative content that is ripe for researched investigation. Others, as symbolic objects, invite many forms of investigative relationship to unfold. This is especially the case when considering humans' innate social urges towards relationship.

Because humans, and mammals in general, live in complex social groups, they are dependent upon relationships with others as a way to know and understand themselves (Yalom, 1995). They are also dependent upon others for their developmental survival. This is certainly a theme in developmental psychology, specifically attachment theory (Schore, 2003) and contemporary neuroscience (Cozolino, 2006). Object relations theory also uses the word *object* to denote the importance of relationship between infant and caregiver and how, ideally, the infant internalizes the good object of the caregiver (Hamilton, 1989). In a related way, artists often describe or refer to a work as an art *object*. This is a unique take on an object relations theory perspective: the art object is in direct relationship to the artist and, in fact, was born through the artist and now exists beyond the artist in the physical world when, all the while, it is still inwardly maintained. The artist therefore still holds within himself or herself this internalized object, which spurs on the next project related to its object-based predecessors. For these reasons, the many qualities and kinds of others manifested through the art process become data worthy of direct relational examination. These data are more than passing impressions of visual material. As visual symbols rich with embodied content—theirs and the artist's—they deserve to be thoroughly studied.

One way to begin this study is to consider the term *other* in greater detail. The word *other* is often used to convey difference and distance between people. The root of the word is *alter* (Ayto, 1990). According to Ayto, the same origins for *other* and *alter* are also roots of the words *alien* and *altruism*. This is a curious convergence of meanings which is relevant to this research, which suggests that by working with these others, one first engages with what at first is perceived as alien and then arrives at an altruistic

understanding that is imbedded within these relationships. Furthermore, in the case of art, the other is also a version of oneself, and both are engaged in the act of expressing and creating each other. Taking a larger yogic view, when looking at the phenomenal world, one is actually seeing one's Self within the many forms of the one Shakti, imbedded in the web of life. The other is always, in fact, a unique external manifestation of one's very own conscious Self.

This larger view can seem like a confounding perspective to hold and articulate, because the world of things and objects exist beyond oneself. Furthermore, from the individual, subjective perspective of "I feel X when I look at Y," for example, as in Rothko's work discussed earlier, "I" equates with the perceiving subjective ego and is the experiencer of the emerging feelings of X. Y, as the other, is stimulating various responses and corresponding thoughts and feelings. This I-it perception and what often emerges as possessive ownership of the symbolic other is an ingrained, primarily acknowledged Western perspective. Rather than an I–it relationship, however, my experience with Rothko's work inspires an I-Thou relational encounter, which is similar to seeing the entire phenomenal world as an ensouled embodiment of Shakti.

Martin Buber (1923/1970) clarified this I-Thou perspective by examining the relational dialogue existing between beings and how existence is predicated on encounter, which is a key point in this discussion. Buber examines word pairs such as I-it (he or she), I-you, and I-thou. In I-it encounters, the two participants, like subject and distant object, have the illusion of sincerely meeting and connecting. In I-thou encounters, relationship is genuinely reflexive as two manifestations of the Divine.

Buber (1923/1970) considered the creative process in art, along with the resulting painting or sculpture, to be present in such a way that it acts on the viewer as the viewer acts upon it. In this sense, and similar to Jungian (Chodorow, 1997) and imaginal (McNiff, 1992) perspectives, the imagery in a work of art is considered to be a presence to receive and relate to by means of an I-thou encounter. Within this perspective is a holistic fusion that occurs as one welcomes and communes with these thou-others. Just as Buber (1923/1970) would describe this relationship between the art object and the viewer as an I-thou relationship, so too would contemplatives from yoga traditions likely perceive this same quality of consciousness to be present between viewer and object—a quality which is at the core of seeing the Divine in darshan practice. When looking at a tree, for example, the perspective would be not that God is in the tree, but that the tree, in its totality, is a direct manifestation of God consciousness.

Western psychology has a preference for the study of projection and how a person transfers unrecognized unconscious material onto another person or object. Significant techniques utilized in the psychotherapy process are identification and analysis of transference and anthropomorphizing. Both are innate phenomena that fill the social field in which people exist. One important outcome of contemplative practice and dedicating mindful observation to one's thoughts is that one can reclaim one's projections, own their content, and begin to see the other as not only separate from one's projections, but a true manifestation of divinity. If this, in fact, can happen, then a different view of the other emerges, and one begins to see essential qualities of this person and oneself engaging in mutual receptivity. Similarly, this is why in India, when people greet, they are actually engaged in a contemplative practice of acknowledging the Divine in each other. The

meaning of this *namaskar* greeting is that what is Divine in me sees and recognizes what is Divine in you—we are of the same Self.

Some may critique this perspective and point out that the entire experience being diagramed is internal and therefore a collection of clever subjective associations or projections. Although this argument is important to recognize, Jung (1961/1989), Hillman (1978) and others (Chodorow, 1997; Harding, 1961; McNiff, 1992) offer persuasive arguments to the contrary that advocate for the complete I- thou-centric autonomy of this sort of symbolic imagery. According to these authors, symbols are visitors, guests, or entities that exist in their own right, with their own rights, and that beg one to illuminate the full democracy of their presence (Berry, 1982). This research aims at articulating the importance of the vibrant art object or artifact (art-fact). Through contemplative excavation, the I-thou equation inherent in the visual symbol can emerge. This perspective is a core value and a central rationale for viewing the art process as a legitimate form of research conducted in the laboratory of the studio.

Finally, there is a Haitian saying that "when the anthropologists arrive, the Gods depart" (Cooper, 1998, p. 63). Similarly, when approaching works of art in an overly literal interpretive or rational way, a quality of possession emerges whereby the imaginal territory is colonized by a dominant perspective that can deny the full democracy of the image to which Berry (1982) refers. By allowing images their full presence, the observer remains open to the simultaneity and multiplicity of the parts that exist within the image. In this sense, creating and viewing art is a political act whereby the friction between the ego and ownership, the rational and the imaginal, can become acquainted and eventually listen to each other. As this form of internal inquiry is practiced, it is surmised that

similar impulses could be reined in, owned, and therefore less likely to be projected outwardly onto human or aesthetic others. In this sense, art becomes a noetic research practice where mind and intuition are used in imaginal processes of inquiry directed towards an imaginal relationship with the divine.

Politsky (1995b), citing the work of Mitroff and Kilmann (1978), would classify this research orientation as the *particular humanist* perspective, which is concerned with "mythical consciousness" (Politsky, 1994b, p. 311), suggesting a quality of deep self-inquiry directed towards articulating personal and cultural mythology as a guiding method to excavate knowledge. This viewpoint resonates with this project. Most important is recognition that the studio as laboratory and the materials as instruments of inquiry support methods of study that reveal meaning.

During my inquiry, there were times when revealed meaning surfaced too quickly. At these moments, I needed compassionate strategies for maintaining my openness to the disruptive narratives that were emerging. The practices of maitri and tonglen served me well during these times.

Working With Challenging Images: Maitri and Tonglen

Maitri is an attitude and a practice of cultivating loving kindness towards oneself. In essence, one begins with oneself, untangling knots and webs of unworthiness accumulated over time. Although this is a laudable goal, it is often compromised by self-deprecating beliefs. Shame, disgrace, fear, loss, humiliation, indignity, and embarrassment are basic, debilitating human experiences that make maitri a challenging goal and a necessary practice. One way to work with this debilitating emotional material

indicative of universal human experience is to cultivate the qualities of maitri, which can be summed up as unconditional companionship with oneself (Chodron, 1997).

The practice of maitri does not ask one to fix or necessarily solve the problems that confront one. With skillful awareness, the practitioner strives not to collapse or contract around these events and label them as bad. The practice shifts perspective and provides awareness that it is one's choice whether or not to identify with a ruminating thought. With simple clarity, maitri invites one to muster curiosity and notice that loving kindness for oneself and others is a radical means for remaining empathically focused on the belief in the basic goodness of all. If this is possible with regard to oneself, then it is possible with another (Franklin et al., 2000).

The practice of tonglen*,* when combined with maitri, accelerates the expansion of inner altruistic attitudes. Tibetan for "sending" and "taking," *tonglen* is also referred or receiving (Chodron, 2001, p. 3). According to Pema Chodron, the tonglen practice has four steps. The first step is to cultivate a state of open mind. From this form of openness comes an intrinsic quality of tranquil clarity or "true compassion" (Fabrice, 2004, p. 129). In essence, true compassion emerges out of emptiness rather than from the screen of a fictional ego. In this context, *emptiness* means a view beyond fixation and the neurotic, straightjacket limitations of a constrained personal identity.

The second step in tonglen practice is to work with the full range of emotional textures that might arise from claustrophobic agitation. The notion is not to reject anything (Lief as cited in Fabrice, 2004). Chodron (2001) defines this step as "working with the textures of claustrophobia and freshness" (p. 26). The mind and breath are

synchronized to breathe in that which is a source of discomfort and breathe out what is desired or wanted. Inhaling the challenge, exhaling related possibilities.

The third stage of tonglen practice is to work with a particular person or situation that calls to one (Chodron, 2001). If one is feeling sadness due to the death of a love one, for example, on the in breath, one could inhale "I long for my deceased husband" and on the exhale, "May he be at peace." After many cycles, the intention could be expanded outward to others who suffer from the loss of a loved one, a practice which exemplifies stage four. Here the practitioner is encouraged to intentionally take in the pain or joy of another on the in breath and offer back compassion or positive regard with the out breath. Breathing in another's sorrow reminds one that it is one's sorrow as well. Chodron encourages the practitioner to remember others when all is well and to think of them when they are not well. This is the core of the practice. The true meaning of compassion is that all people suffer separately, yet together, and that through these coordinated empathic breaths, they allow themselves to make somatic contact and, for a moment, erode their separation.

The cycle of tonglen is repeated over and over again in silence. This focused form of considerate attention is further enhanced by *bodhichitta,* which means "noble or awakened heart" (Chodron, 2001, p. 86). Ever-present within each person, the tender territory of bodhichitta is enlivened when one allows the vulnerabilities of life to enter one and affect one's heart. This sort of humane, kindhearted receptivity naturally merges into compassion. In this practice, the reflex to avoid, suppress, fight, or flee is reduced and eventually reversed, and a sense of accepting flow unfolds. One takes in the pain of

another, receives it, holds it, filters it, and silently offers back a sense of altruistic caring (Franklin et al., 2000).

Tonglen in Art Practice

In many ways, art practice is tonglen practice. The example of portraiture illustrates this point. Portraiture penetrates into the various complex internal states of the model conveyed through assorted facial expressions. The artist translates layers of human affect into a final single image that distills a complex personality into visual language. Successful portraiture represents multiple aspects of the model's personality within this distilled rendering of the sitter. To accomplish this, the artist must gently inhale and penetrate the personality of the model and integrate many observed character traits into the final execution.

The same process unfolded for me while making the clay pots and charcoal drawings presented later in this chapter. Through breath and image, I was inhaling themes related to cancer, and exhaling and forming aesthetic responses. Over and over again, these visual mantra practices became a soothing way to touch the pain and also acknowledge the humanity of living in a human body confronted with malignant cells.

Through an art-based approach to tonglen practice, I was able to cultivate deeper insight and compassionate presence. At its core, art is related to elements of attunement and empathy. When I was outwardly expressing anguish, for example, through art I was also able to receive these thoughts and silently offer back a compassionate response conditioned by my own practice of maitri and tonglen. The final artwork became an empathic record of these careful observations.

In practicing tonglen with people in an art therapy setting, I have found that when disturbing art is created, and the final product confronts the artist, responses such as fear, resistance, and shame can emerge. Often, the unconscious projection placed into the artwork, when manifested, can still remain unconscious or preconscious. Like any true symbol, the meaning can remain alien to one's awareness, even though the image is now concretized. Rather than explain the image or seek mutual interpretations, the artist is invited to practice tonglen, for example, by taking in fear and breathing out safety. It is important to remember that tonglen can be a practice of titration, whereby the receiving and sending is made manageable with simpler, emotionally congruent statements. I have found that the intense power of the image is eventually softened by relating to it in this way. I have also found this practice helpful when practicing art therapy in a clinical setting. I, too, can silently be doing tonglen for the image and the client. The beauty of the art process is that what is stirring within one can be aided into existence through materials. Through tonglen, we have a practice for working with whatever emerges.

This next section considers more closely the importance of the life-giving force inherent within art materials. These tangible resources are viewed as both unique others and also as the vehicles through which these others are born. Also, a significant part of tonglen practice, and most if not all forms of sitting meditation practice, focuses on the breath. It is through breath that one cultivates and tracks awareness. Through the art process, one can also cultivate awareness by observing the coordination between breath and mark making or any other direct engagement with materials. A consideration of breath, as the primordial art material is therefore considered next.

Breath, Art Materials, and the Inner Imagination

Art materials hold waiting potential. Similar to the breath, they literally help one to experience and discover the moment by receiving one's direct touch. Each available moment can be known through contact with the phenomenal world and attention to the life force of the breath. Artworks honor the breath because they are born out of its life-giving properties. The breath is always flowing, unfolding and emerging into the next opportunity. Concentrating on the intake and output of oxygen brings one to a state of moment-to-moment absorption. Immersion in the moment leads to focused attention where time can slow down, concentration can improve, and action can eventually join with awareness (Cooper, 1998). Art becomes a way to make the mind full of each moment as concentration eventually leads to completed works of art.

Materials guide this process; little would happen without knowledge of their properties and potential. It is as if materials store information that eventually connects with a question that is seeking a solution. This form of revelation is like a magnet seeking metal: one pulls on the other resulting in emerging connections. Both forces—materials and questions—act on each other, generating outcomes. Materials are not just stuff; they are contemplative tools that receive and help move breath and ideas into form. The term *flow* can reference the autonomic aspects of breath, as it is always flowing in its sinuous dependability. Materials are also dependable. They do what they do, obeying their own physical laws, like the breath, demonstrating reliable consistency (Erikson, 1979).

While creating, breath is always exchanged as the artist participates in the labor and delivery of art forms. In one day, the average person will inhale and exhale over 22,000-24,000 times. Although breathing is part of the autonomic nervous system and

therefore automatic, it is easy to perceive it as an insignificant, background presence. Concentrating on the inhale and exhale of the breath forms the bedrock of many meditation practices for significant reasons.

Prana and Creation

The first thing humans do when they enter the world is inhale. Their last act before death is to exhale. In between these two points is a flow of countless inhales and exhales, or small deaths. Attention to this vital teacher, breathing, prepares one to participate in the final death process. In any given lifetime, one literally experiences millions of small deaths as one takes in oxygen and releases it. In general, most adults, when relaxed, breathe in and out approximately15 times per minute or 900 times an hour. If a work of art takes 12 hours to complete, then it holds approximately 10,800 rounds of breath and therefore also holds life force as well as numerous small deaths. If creative process is the engagement of spanda oscillations between manifesting and dissolving, then the breaths which transpire over these 12 hours are constantly modeling receiving and releasing. Intentionally merging creative process with breath unites the essence of the creative spanda principle at the subtle and manifest level.

It is no accident that spiritual traditions focus on the breath as a vehicle for centering concentration and preparing for a graceful exit during death (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993). Air is humans' most important food (Yogananda, 2003) as well as the vehicle for life force or *prana*, the essential energy that moves the entire physical world (Hewitt, 1977). In Buddhism, prana is said to be "the vehicle of the mind" (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993, p. 68) because the mind could not move without this precious life force. Breath is behind and within all that one does, all that unfolds. Universal Consciousness, God,

becomes prana and moves in and out of one with each round of breath (Muktananda, 1992).

Creating art creates life as images, which are born to unfold their unique story. In return, the images influence their maker to listen to them as authorities of their own existence. Images have a quality of *spirit*, a word that originally meant "breath" (*spiritus*) and "soul." When a person communes with images, the images impart wisdom and soul, breathing their spirit back into that person as waiting potential for the next project. Breath, as life force and inner spirit, is the shakti emerging within a person. What emerges then takes form. The art process is a constant cycling between forming, informing, and transforming (See Figure 11).

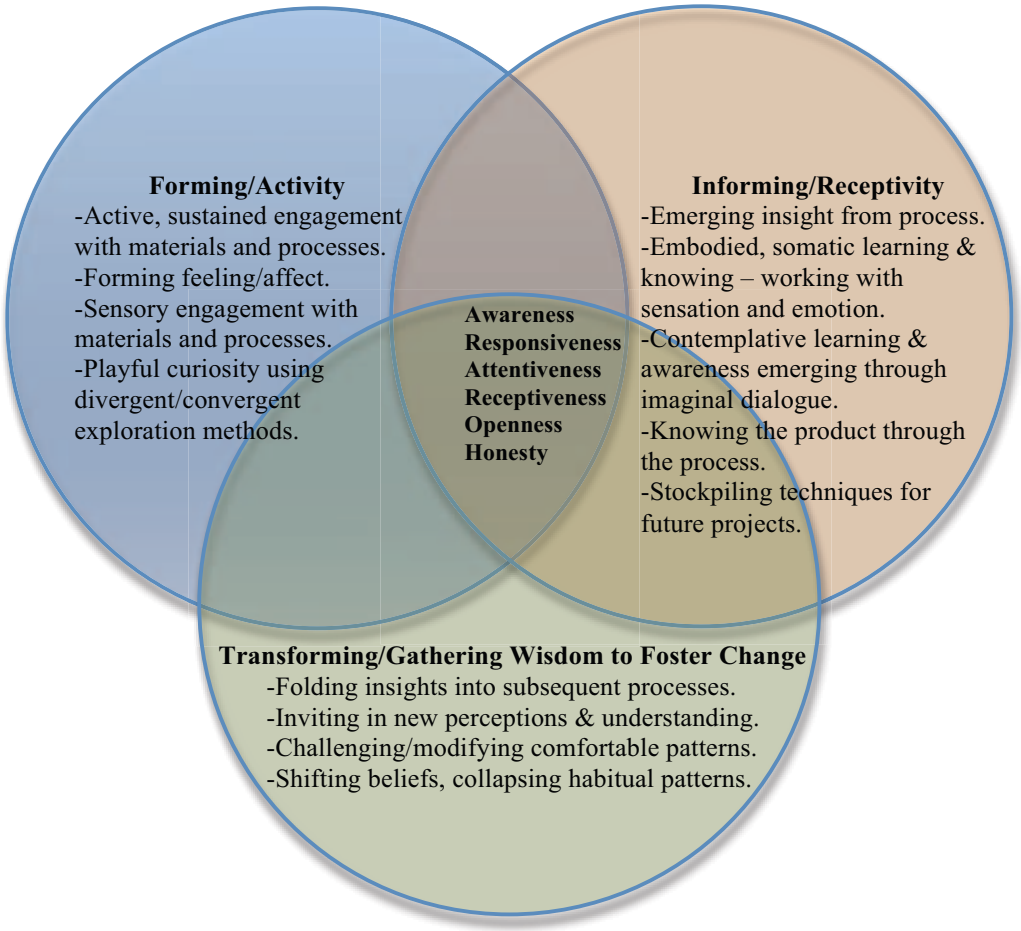

Figure 11. Forming/Informing/Transforming Through Art

Clay, Namaskar, and Mandalas

When people meet in India, they join their hands together in a prayer position at heart level and say, "*Namaskar*." This form of greeting has deep roots. According to Shri Vivek Godbole (1993) the five fingers represent the five elements. The left side of the body is Shakti, the universal Kundalini energy, which animates the universe, and the right side of the body is Shiva, the infinite forms that the Lord will assume. In namaskar, the elements, along with both sides of the body, unite, transcending duality as Shiva and Shakti merge and are offered to the one being greeted. Watching this practice and participating in it while living in India inspired recognition of the Divine in another. Only in two other situations have I observed this sort of hand gesture: in prayer and while observing people at work on the potter's wheel.

From my first ceramics teacher, M. C. Richards (1964), I learned a deep respect for materials and craftsmanship. With humble passion, she prayed on the potters wheel as she carefully breathed and namaskared to the clay in the centering process. She worshipped clay for its receptive flexibility and insistence on replicating genesis. For her, pottery was a collaboration with fire—indeed, with all of the elements and senses. Fire cannot burn without oxygen. Prana is needed to feed the fire (rajas/activity) that bakes the malleable clay earth into stone (tamas/dormancy), which eventually exists in and holds space (sattva/light and illumination). As the clay comes into center, an emerging vessel is formed, rising like a *linga* (symbolic form of Shiva) into its life shape, and simultaneously, an empty center forms as eternal space, similar in form to the *yoni* (symbolic form of Shakti)—Shiva and Shakti together. With clay, air and solidity, breath and action all merge into living form. The final pot holds secrets of its "innerness" (p. 20)

which is held “but can not be seen” (p. 20). This unseen quality that Richards describes, I believe, is the presence of prana, Shiva and Shakti, alive in the living form of the pot. Breath, as life force, creates the creator, who in turn creates the pot that holds universal life force. Before anything gets made on the wheel, however, the material itself exists; life exists inside of the clay long before hands touch it. As earth, it is made of organic matter that has simmered in the ground for millennia.

Clay, emerging from the ground, directly references the Great Mother as earth, who selflessly provides. This earth holds whatever is asked of her to hold. The ground can burn, freeze, regenerate, or sink. It grows humans’ food and holds their rubbish. Humans bury their dead in her body and spread their ashes upon her surface. Within her body, they find clay. Whereas the clay of the earth retells the story of life and transformation, it is no accident then that indigenous peoples held this material in high esteem, because it simultaneously holds within it all of the five earthy elements: water, air, earth, fire, and ether or space.

This story of transformation begins with digging for clay. Once found, this moist viscera is removed from the ground and brought to the studio. Eventually, one merges one’s intentions with it, squeezing and pulling forms into existence (see Figure 12). As one’s work comes to completion, the water element in the clay needs to dry. In time, the water inside evaporates and the clay shrinks into a brittle bone-dry state. The transformation process continues by placing the clay object into the fire, one of the most powerful elemental forces. Out of the fire, it emerges as a hardened form insisting on its own teaching that forming leads to transformation.

Like the clay, when engaged in contemplative practices, one is forever taking oneself apart and rebuilding, losing and finding oneself. All art materials inwardly hold their own version of this process. Through the materials along with breath, spanda, and creative intentions of the artist, images emerge to be seen and known. Every object created thus has, as part of its essence, the breath of the artist and the prana of the material from which it was created.

Working with clay, for me, is a love affair. As an embodiment of the beloved, I receive her, stroke her, and hold her. She is a generous lover, in how she offers back by allowing me to move with her. She mirrors my touch, accepting my imprint with evidence of my contact. With her kind and munificent flexibility, I am able to transform through our relationship of mutual offering and receiving. It always seems to be like this.

Figure 12. The author working with clay.

Another significant aspect of practicing with clay and forming pots is the direct connection to mandalas and yantras as sacred space. In my experience, creating pots offers the opportunity to consider carefully the inner and outer spaces of emptiness and

form, solitude and containment, and edges and center. Whereas mandalas and yantras can be three-dimensional, pots become a way to maintain a connection to these ancient practices. Although I am not attempting to create formal iconographic versions of either, I am trying to remain connected to the fundamental principles of these visual meditations. The clay works represented in this chapter also replay for me this process of falling apart and rebuilding myself. It is as if the materials, in this case clay, guarantee a certain form of receptivity and compassion. The clay is willing to accept all gestures directed towards it, from handling it to firing it. In many ways, clay was my most trusted companion during my cancer experience. It listened to me, received me, bent to my will, pushed back, fell apart, and always allowed me to return for more. Over and over, it allowed me to find trust in an unpredictable process. Similarly, charcoal allowed this as well. As a fire-based material, like clay, it also offers a collaboration with fire and also light.

Charcoal: Visits With the Edges of Light and Dark

While watching wood burn in my fireplace, I can completely surrender my attention to the fire. Surrender is an act of equipoise that favors openness to the moment and emergence of fresh events. Both fire and wood interact together by receiving and transforming the other. As the fire becomes hotter, the wood becomes more charred. The result is black carbon that makes beautiful bold and subtle lines on paper.

For this project, I made several pilgrimages to National Parks that have had significant fires on their land over the years. Particularly important were my visits to Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and Glacier National Parks (see Figures 13 & 14). I collected samples of burnt wood from several sites to use in my drawings. My intention was to include remnants of life from these charnel grounds and place this history into the

drawings that I was creating. I was careful to choose very small pieces (Figure 15) and not disturb the land. Something massive had happened in these wilderness areas. Entire ecosystems were affected and transformed. What remained as burnt wood was still decomposing and nourishing the new growth that was slowly emerging. In a small way, I had hoped to bring this renewal into my work, but it was difficult to do. I often hesitated.

Figures 13 & 14. Views of national park fire areas (Yellowstone and Grand Teton) and sites for collecting charcoal. Photographs by author.

Figure 15. Charcoal harvested from the fires by author.

This charcoal graciously held the element of fire and for now, I wanted to leave it that way, at least for a while. I did however use traditional charcoal, which is like mixing fire with light, night with day. Charcoal therefore holds paradox. It is like working with the edges between dawn and dusk, midnight and high noon.

Charcoal has an austere simplicity. As burnt wood, it easily transferred to my skin as I picked it up in the parks. The same also happens with paper. If one is not careful, charcoal can go everywhere, smudging clean surfaces of white drawing paper. As a left-handed artist, I must be careful with this quality of the charcoal. Many times it has gotten away from me, ending up where I did not intend it to be.

Within this working relationship between myself, the charcoal, and fire, is a need for attentive openness to surprises and mistakes. Undoing the charcoal is not easy. Generally, it is best to work from light to dark and, in my case, from right to left. It is also exhilarating to make bold, thick, dense heavy black marks. In fact, it is thrilling to make large tracts of the drawing surface into an opaque darkness. Within minutes, the entire environment of the page can become a shadow land. These dark places can be negotiated with an eraser, of which there are many kinds to choose. And removing dense black to allow the light to appear through is equally as thrilling. Even more exciting, for me, are the edges where the darkness meets the light. I love this place of contact, within the interstices offered by the charcoal, where negotiation, collaboration, and apprehension interact. Overall, charcoal provided access to another fire material. Like clay, both require collaboration with fire in order for their properties to emerge. Something elemental exists in working with both clay and charcoal together, particularly around the ashes from the clay firings. The ashes of one can be merged into the other: for example,

each clay firing results in a pile of ashes, which can be blended into the drawings. The metaphors and stories about fire are many. The phoenix rises, the funeral pyre consumes, and the ashen charnel grounds receive the cremated body. There are trials by fire, fiery personalities, sitting in the fire, the heat of the moment, and global warming. Clay and charcoal situate me in these metaphors. These images are not all hot, however; they are also cooling, because charcoal and clay are cool to the touch. Dense black passages in a drawing are also soothing for me to see. The values from grey to white and black remind me of how the world looks at night during a full moon or how it looks on a fog-laden day.

Charcoal helps me to see deeper into the experience of *veil* and *concealment*, both essential metaphors for the art created during my cancer experience. Both of these words are also at the core of contemplative practice for me. So much is concealed and veiled by limited knowledge, avoidance, distraction, and fear. Through practice with charcoal, these layers were eventually dissected and peeled away. Every day in the studio with clay and charcoal was about directly experiencing their collective wisdom as both helped me to unfold my questions and observations into deeper pathways of contemplative inquiry.

Phase I: Listening to Innate Intelligence: The Efficacy of Practicing Meditation and Art During the Treatment of Prostate Cancer

The first two chapters of this dissertation carefully evaluated relationships between the contemplative practices of art, yoga, and meditation. This chapter now turns to the examination of directly applying these connections to the artwork created during my personal experience with prostate cancer. This seismic event placed significant hurdles and barriers in my way. It also presented me with precious moments of grace and loving kindness that I was able to find within myself and also receive from others. The

practices of meditation, art, and journal writing literally rescued me during this time from the moment of diagnosis to surgery. Combined, these practices supported a discriminating investigative view of fragility and resiliency, grace and panic. The most terrifying adversary in this experience of illness was simply my own mind. More than the cancer, it was what my mind could make up about this renegade tumor that had the potential to torment me. Day after day, I was poised to make up fictions about my future. Would I die? What did this diagnosis mean for my sexual life? How might prostate cancer reconstruct my known conceptions of manhood? Like a plane in flight with a lame propeller, I was in freefall, not knowing if or where I would land. What brought me to center was a combination of sane practices, particularly art and meditation, and the disciplined incorporation of them into my daily life.

Artwork

From the moment of diagnosis to the final surgery, I made many drawings and clay works while maintaining an active meditation practice. The underlying theme throughout this time was the active exploration of fragility and resiliency directly experienced in the art materials, sitting practice, and in my life. The artwork presented in this chapter represents this series of drawings and clay works.

All of the artwork that was created explored, in some way, an interior focus of my body. The images were deeply subjective and intuitive, showing me the subtle visceral textures and themes alive in my unconscious experience. Figures 21 and 22, for example, were drawn during an classroom exercise based on the Diagnostic Drawing Series (DDS) (Cohen, Hammer, & Singer, 1988). To my surprise, these images emerged without any preconceived planning on my part. At first they were mysterious and confounding. This

was certainly unusual imagery for me to create, yet I was drawn to these X-ray images of root vegetables and their foreign characteristics.

As I sat with them, describing their visual features to myself, I noticed the emerging language of disease imbedded in visual form. All along, I simply needed to see what I could not see. What did the cancer look like? How far along was it? What side effects might I have to endure and will my life be cut short? It was this last series of thoughts that plagued me most.

A cascading set of priorities must be considered when treating prostate cancer. The first priority is the attempt to cure the cancer, and the second is the hoped-for outcomes of preserving continence and virility. In order for these outcomes to occur, the nerves that are wrapped around the prostate gland have to be peeled away so that the encapsulated cancerous gland can be removed. These nerves, which control sexual function, can also be cut away as the surgeon tries to preserve safe margins between the diseased and healthy tissue. Removing the cancer and gland and still preserving these nerves is known as the *nerve sparing* technique (Walsh & Farrington, 2001). Some surgeons are better at this than others. Fortunately, the surgeon I chose, Patrick Walsh, was the originator and an ongoing innovator of this technique. I am forever indebted to him, his meticulous skill, and his competent staff at Johns Hopkins.

I contemplated these drawings for some time. As I studied their visual qualities, I opened a dialogue with them and began to invite their message to surface. As has occurred many times before, a narrative was set in motion that revealed, with precise accuracy, the ignored details of my greatest anxieties associated with having cancer.

Eventually, after reading and studying several books, I realized what the content of my X-ray drawings was all about.

A man's prostate is deep within his body. The drawing in Figure 16 instinctively images this fact. I was about to undergo a complex surgery that is also quite bloody according to the literature and could result in incontinence and loss of sexual function, but definitely infertility. The theme of X-ray images, which emerged into the series presented in Figures 17-22, revealed to me living plants held deep in the earth. Wide margins had to be placed between the plants, which are quite phallic. Although they are buried in the dark soil, they also are reaching up towards the sun and the light. This image is a metaphor called the "Crossing Point," which Richards (1973) passed on to me when I studied with her. It was a primary metaphor for her. She loved the simplicity that lived in the complexity of photosynthesis and rootedness. The thin point where the plant crosses between growing down and growing up represents the dynamic quality of the human shadow and unconscious as well as humans' reaching for enlightened awareness.

The crossing point that I was living was basically about a surgeon's skills excavating deep and down into my body so that I could have my life. Although the art I was doing exposed unconscious material, meditation practice afforded me the skill-sets needed to sit with these emerging fears. In meditation, the resisted emotion is the point of connection, and this is how the crossing point metaphor manifested in my sitting practice. Just as the plant knows to grow down into darkness for rootedness and up into light for photosynthesis, the point of transition at ground level between these two dynamic impulses can become consumed by fear alive within the mind. There were dark unknowns and always the desire for a hopeful outcome, and yet, there was the direct,

simultaneous experience of opposites tugging at me where deeply buried fears were coexisting with the potentiality of positive outcomes. Both perspectives were essentially illusions because they were future-based perceptions influenced by patterns of thought learned from previous circumstances. Meditation practice was crucial for managing these chaotic thoughts.

Sitting meditation is sitting in the crossing point between all of these emerging thoughts and sensations. Meditation practice taught and allowed me simply to be with what was emerging. Whereas art exposed the unseen, meditation helped me to tame the impulse to manufacture reckless imagined outcomes. Combined together, art and meditation were the perfect combination needed to surface my embodied unconscious and still my active mind. The process was truly that simple.

I spent a lot of time in the hospital having tests, seeing doctors, garnering second and third opinions, preparing for surgery, and recovering from the entire ordeal. Every time I went for scans, I noticed that no longer were these departments called “X-RAY.” They were now referred to as “IMAGING.” I found delight in this change of nomenclature, marveling at how parts of my body could be seen into with precise accuracy. The art process was facilitating another view by imaging my internal experience through my investigation of art materials and processes. The results from the art process surfaced many versions of insightful understanding beyond what I could immediately comprehend and what these sophisticated tests could detect. The information from my personal research and consultations with doctors was immense. Retention of facts, statistics, projected outcomes, and potential side effects clouded my usual capacity to track and comprehend. It was the art process that imaged for me what

the other technologies could not see. A longitudinal view into my emotional life was also necessary, yet primarily ignored by the traditional medical approaches that I was exposed to throughout this entire process. Art showed what I could not at first see. It showed me to me and, on occasion, showed me to my doctors when I shared my work with them.

Prior to the technological breakthroughs of CT scans, MRIs, FMRIs, and PET scans, there has been art. With aesthetic precision, the arts allow one to see not only *in* but also *into the depths* of personal experience. The arts facilitate the imaging of deep affect, sensation, and overall somatic events. In my opinion, right next to the IMAGING department in hospitals there needs to be the other kind of IMAGING found through the arts. Medical culture marvels at the rapid pace of hi-tech advancement inherent in imaging technologies, but the arts, as ancient and trustworthy vehicles for healing, are also available as imaging remedies for the ailing psyche. Although it is important to focus on imaging biological facts stored in the body, it is also important to image the totality of the psyche if complete healing is to occur. The following drawings catalogue this form of imaging process. It is through the art process that I was able to see and know myself with greater clarity.

A significant technique used in many of the drawings shown below is the device of x-ray imagery. As a visual strategy, it helped me to cut away what was impairing my vision so that I could literally see myself in greater detail. At first, this process of arriving at this technique was completely unconscious. Some inner insight beyond my personal choices selected this manner of working. In time, I understood why this style of imagery was so important to the unconscious processes carrying on beyond my awareness.

Much of the diagnostic medical experience surrounding cancer has to do with imaging tests. At the time of my treatment, however, there was no way to see the tumor or its growth accurately; therefore, based on the diagnostic results of blood tests and a biopsy, my treatment strategies were few. Eventually, after research, study, and numerous medical opinions, the only sensible intervention was surgery. Still there was much that I could not see. As a visual person, I learn through observation and investigative seeing. Eventually, I fully embraced the initial manifestation of unconscious X-ray imagery. As my conscious awareness caught up with this unconscious visual method, it made complete sense to my curious mind and therefore became a comforting working method. I then began intentionally to work with x-ray methods, feeling empowered by the form of vision it afforded me. Although I could not see the actual progression of the tumor, I could see the progression of my psyche.

Then it occurred to me, in part, why I was drawing root vegetables. The prostate gland is located in the region of the Muladhara chakra. Also known as the *root* chakra, the Muladhara chakra is the symbol and subtle energy center of earthly survival instincts indicative of universal human experience. The place where I sit and contact the earth, which also holds connection to reproductive opportunity, was sick within my body. It made sense that unconscious imagery such as this would come forth and help guide me.

Neither art alone nor meditation alone would have been enough; I needed to see my inner unconscious processes and the wisdom of its working methods. Only art could facilitate this need to see and perceive my interior self. Once exposed through art, I could then intentionally join with the x-ray strategy through meditation and therefore collaborate with these contemplative methods of tracking my process.

These conjoint practices of art and meditation supported this process of allowing me to become the witness of my thoughts initiated by the imagery. The artwork was not a stand-in for the events that were unfolding. The art was like a net cast wide, catching the "others" in their form of inner narratives frantically swimming about in the shadowed recesses of my unconscious. Meditation combined with empathic dialoguing methods was the preferred strategy for receiving this information surfaced by the art. Any additional ruminations could also be skillfully handled by my sitting practice. Together, art with meditation was the perfect method for receiving and working with complex unconscious and conscious emotional material.

Following is a series of artworks (Figures 16-27) created throughout Phase I. Because enough has already been said about the methods for receiving and observing them, they are presented without further commentary.

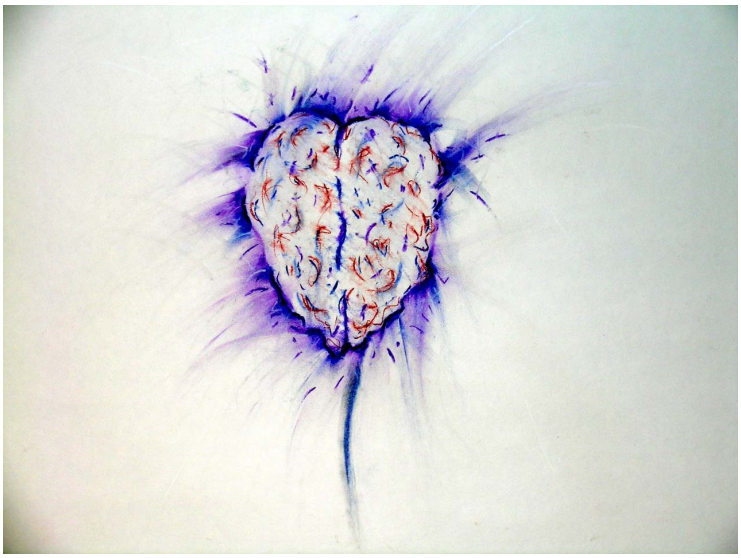

Figure 16 An intuitive drawing, early in my diagnosis, of my prostate gland after seeing illustrations in the doctor's office. Pastels on paper, drawn by the author.

Figure 17. The first X-ray drawing, early in my diagnosis, of plants living deep in the darkness of the ground, at the crossing point (Richards, 1973). Charcoal and chalk on paper, drawn by the author.

Figure 18. An X-ray drawing of plants living deep in the ground. Charcoal and pastel on paper, drawn by the author.

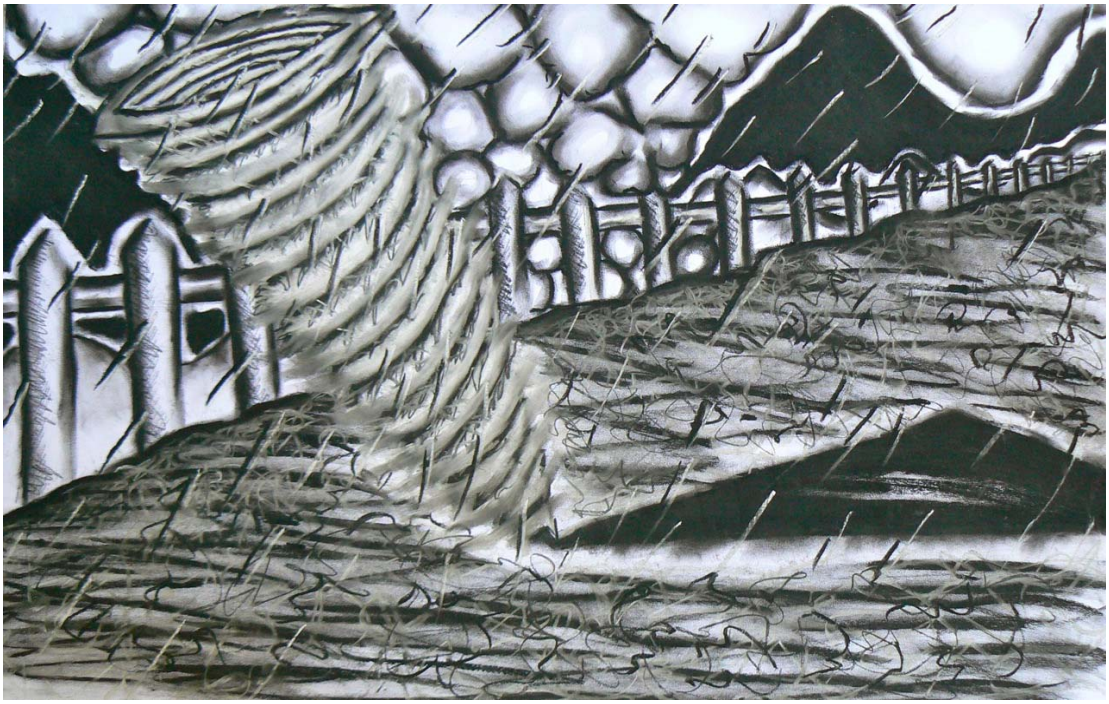

Figure 19. A reworked drawing about rendering turbulence. Charcoal on paper, drawn by the author.

Figure 20. An X-ray drawing of a plant living deep in the ground. Charcoal and pastel on paper, drawn by the author.

Figure 21. An X-ray drawing of a plant living deep in the ground. Charcoal and pastel on paper, drawn by the author during a Diagnostic Drawing Series exercise (Cohen et al., 1988).

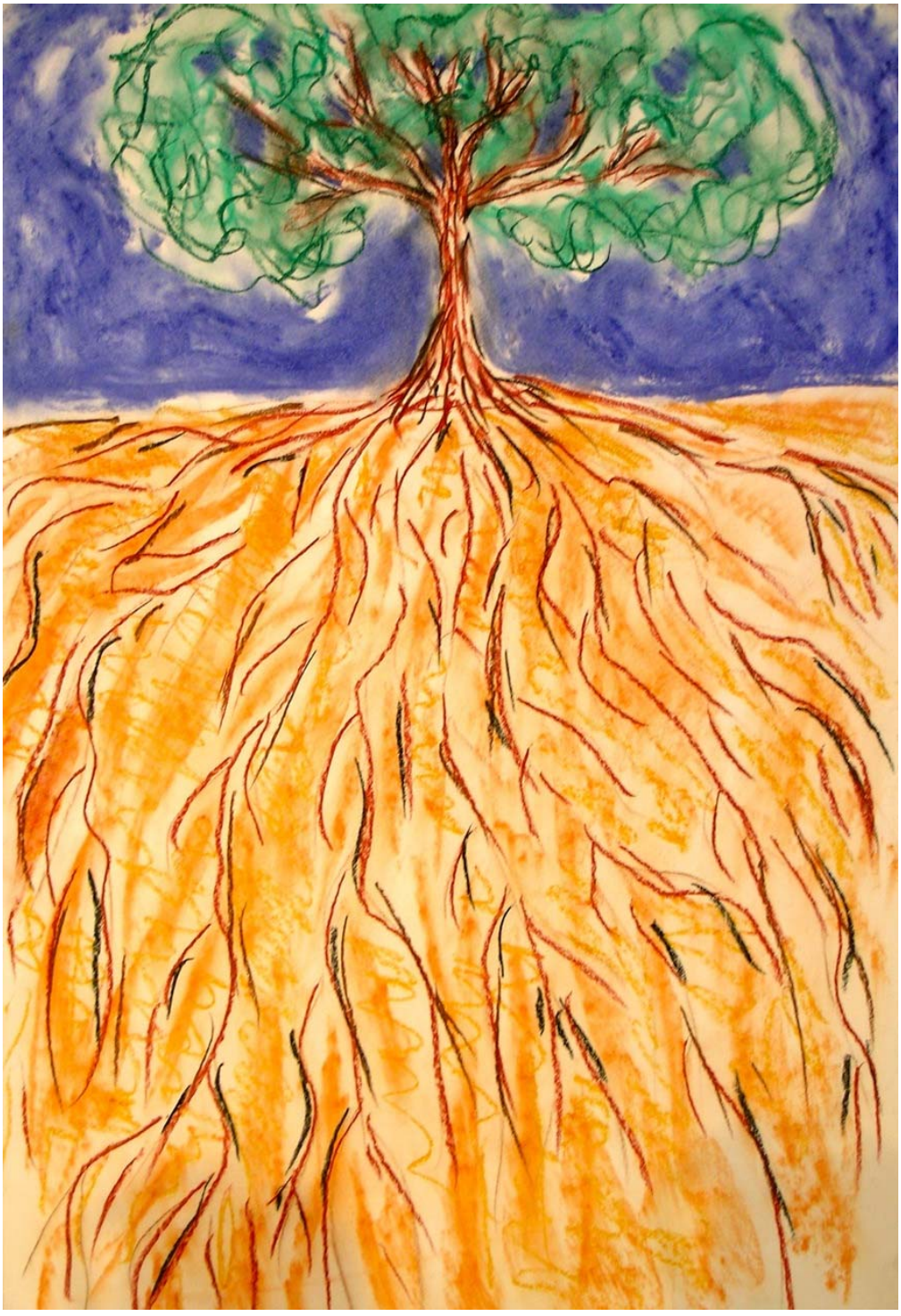

Figure 22. An X-ray drawing of tree roots deep in the ground. Charcoal and pastel on paper, drawn by the author during a Diagnostic Drawing Series exercise (Cohen et al., 1988).

Figure 23. A reworked drawing about disease and what I imagine I look like inside. Charcoal on paper, drawn by the author.

Figure 24. A reworked drawing/painting about life, fragility, and resiliency. Charcoal and oil paint, drawn by the author.

Figure 25. Samples of clay pots created during Phase I. Sawdust-fired clay, sculpted by the author.

Figure 26. Samples of clay pots created during Phase I. Sawdust-fired clay, sculpted by the author.

Figure 27. Clay pot created during Phase I. Sawdust-fired clay, sculpted by the author.

Concluding Insights From Art and Meditation

The process of creating the pots and the drawings was deepened through a dialogue with the imagery. This process was initiated both during the creation process and also at the end when the pieces were finished. Because the work was essentially a collaboration between the emerging imagery and myself, I felt an ethical imperative to receive openly and listen to what emerged. Basically, this process involves a fundamental calling simply to allow the "other" to be present and have its voice. This conversation, to the outside observer, does not look like the usual conversation between two people; instead, the exchange is more about listening to what comes and then responding back through journaling, an actual comment, or with additional expressive responses. The right of the image to be heard is as much about learning to listen to personal intuition as it is about listening to the aliveness in the quiet other. This moral necessity to remain present and open to the collaborative exchange between image and artist furthers the creative process in the moment while mindfully paving the way for subsequent works to emerge. This form of dialogue also insists on the voice of the other as a welcomed contributor to the process, which is related to the notion of darshan.

Seeing and welcoming the Divine is also about receptively listening to and hearing what is sacred in the moment. In time, rather than seeing myself as the primary creator of the images, it became abundantly clear that we were working together, that darshan was present through the unexpected visual narratives that were emerging between us. One way to gauge the arrival of darshan is by noticing the heart response: a tangible sensation of a somatic heartfelt opening and agreement when contact is made with noetic truth. This form of deep intuition was evident, for example, when the x-ray

imagery spontaneously emerged. Without planning, an inner wisdom was clearly seeing exactly what was needed and transporting these messages from the *para-vak,* or most subtle level of speech of the unconscious, into my awareness. With amazement, I was constantly moved by the refined offerings of precisely what was required for collaborative healing.

When difficult material emerged, tonglen became a helpful practice for receiving and responding. An examples was many moments of "I do not understand what is emerging in this artwork" on the in-breath and, on the out-breath, "May I understand when the time is right," over and over again. Another example of tonglen in practice occurred regarding the unknowns of treatment, specifically surgery. During these moments, the tonglen practice spontaneously manifested as "I fear for my body and its vitality" on the in-breath and, on the out-breath, "Be gentle with yourself as you sit with these frightening unknowns." Also, tonglen was performed with the imagery itself. On other occasions, the visual symbols were harsh and confronting. Figure 38 is perhaps the best example of a challenging image that directly confronted me. As the image was received, on the in-breath I heard myself say, "I am seeing my deepest fear" followed by an exhale of "and I have been waiting a long time to see you." The practice of tonglen, when I remembered to do it, had a welcomed calming effect on the ambiguity of the entire treatment process. Through the vehicle of the breath, coordinated with receiving the concern and offering back a direct compassionate statement, awareness increased simply to relax into the moment.

When tragedy strikes, over time, there are many possible responses. As time progressed, I noticed that I was feeling greater connection to all of life through the art

process. Membership in the global community of living beings is accelerated when confronted with pain and a diagnosis like cancer. The known and unknown stories of collective suffering are blatantly real, and they are told countless times every day. Ideally, someone is there to listen. In a way, I felt closer to this unknown group, listening to them through the tangible albeit private struggle that I was directly experiencing in the artwork. Opening to this believed truth took me beyond myself, allowing for an unexpected dimension of the healing process. When in pain, the body constantly reminds itself that there is a tender wisdom alive inside, while outside the body, endless versions of suffering stories are being told throughout the world at the same moment. Paying attention to this fact unravels the sensation of existential separation. In part, the purpose of pain is to awaken and connect people. The wisdom of suffering is that it is a form of social connective tissue that bonds all people together. It was helpful to experience this point of view directly and then express it in my artwork when I could. When releasing contracted grasping of how things should be, opening is inevitable. Then the opportunity to connect with the wider world presents itself in a way that cracks the heart wide open. This is the foundation of the urge to serve.

As I look back, I could not have made it through this process without the appendages of art and meditation. Together, they offered me a place to practice clarity and presence with what was constantly emerging. Being able to see my direct inner experience through art and then surround these visual narratives with meditative stillness and solitude, besides surgery, also saved my life.

Phase II: Post Treatment Artwork and Longitudinal Connections

Much had happened to me from the time of diagnosis to surgery. Even though the surgery was successful and my cancerous prostate removed, the story was still alive in my body, continuing to inform me through ongoing related narratives. A year after my surgery, for example, I went to an alternative health care provider. He asked me many questions about my sleep, digestion, stress levels and so on. Eventually, he asked me about my prostate gland. I responded that I could not answer his questions because it was somewhere in Baltimore. We both laughed. The revelations have never stopped, and not all were funny. In fact, the process was still revealing information to me as I sat and wrote this next passage. This section acknowledges this reality by further examining, years later, the living narrative of cancer treatment and outcomes that inform my current life.

Works in Clay

A series of clay works were created during this past year that catalogue this embodied narrative. Selected samples of these pots are shown below. At first, and in hindsight, there was some arrogance on my part thinking that there was little else to surface and inform me about my cancer experience after such an involved process of creative investigation in Phase I—and I also knew better. The works that emerged did in fact have more to tell me, especially about being a man in midlife. The theme of scars was particularly prevalent, coming to me through the back door of the art process. Surgery left me with a long and noticeable scar. When the pots I was working on began to crack, they too were baring prominent scars. At first a bit daunted and again impressed

by the unexpected arrival of surprise information, I summoned the courage and invited these scars directly into the art process.

In many ways, as previously discussed, the pots reference the circle and, indirectly, general aspects of mandalas and yantras. When they began to crack, for example, I was reminded of the sand mandala practice performed by Tibetan Monks. Having had, in the past, the good fortune to witness this process from start to finish, I found that the end is particularly challenging to grasp for the Western worldview that wishes to preserve and hold onto such a beautiful result. Instead, after days of patient focus by the monks, these beautiful creations are swept into a pile of sand and returned to a nearby river or stream. Impermanence, renewal, and cyclical process abound. Similarly, when the pots began to behave with a mind of their own, there was nothing to do but join with their latest version of fractured sides and edges. I too was being swept up into a pile to be reclaimed and reformed. It was best not to resist this turn of events but instead join in the collaborative I-thou relationship with the clay.

The pots were created in two settings. One was a retreat-like format in the studio where I could be alone with the process and the emerging material. It was important to me to create a space of occasional solitude where I could practice with breath, tonglen, and art. A few of the works required steady engagement because they brought forth material that was not always comfortable to receive. The added component of these combined practices helped me to receive what emerged. Rather than withdraw, these practices helped me to move towards and embrace these emerging themes. The other setting where most of the work was created was the Naropa Community Art Studio (NCAS).

Working in the NCAS on these forms was an act of making the private public in a titrated way. For 3 years, I have facilitated a group in the NCAS for adults successfully living in the community with some form of mental illness. I know and cherish the members of this group. Together we have practiced various forms of public vulnerability throughout the years. In fact, this is a significant intention of the NCAS. Over and over again, I have observed an unfolding equation:

1. Art, with its capacity to loosen psychological defenses, invites inner sincerity and honesty to emerge.
2. Engaging in personal honesty in the art process, within a community studio, fosters collective vulnerability.
3. Private vulnerability, when shared, results in communal intimacy.
4. Intimacy based on personal honesty and collective vulnerability, when witnessed, results in community.

I try to model this form of public art practice in the NCAS. The pots that I created have spurred on many meaningful conversations about illness, fragility, and resiliency. One example was when a woman who has attended the group since its inception became unusually curious about my work. I told her about the overall intention behind the pots and drawings which was artistically to address my cancer experience. A surprising conversation followed concerning her own cancer experience, a subject that she had never mentioned before. Several tender conversations between us, and the larger group, followed that acknowledged many stories of personal vulnerability. Her curiosity about what I was doing helped her to see that the art process could be used to explore her own internalized living stories. Everyone has stories about his or her own health issues.

Publically listening to these private narratives has been a significant part of our community studio.

Two series of pots are displayed in Figures 28-38. The first series (Figures 28-31) depicts experiments with forms and firing methods that were about refining craftsmanship and developing surface and form techniques. I was also searching for beauty and how to infuse this goal into the clay. Making beautiful objects became a tantric method for partnering with the spanda impulse and honoring the Shakti.

The second series (Figures 32-38) plumbs deeper into the subtlety of the embodied cancer narrative I was still carrying. I could not have gotten to this shadowy, painful place without the previous pots. The long scar that I get to see every day became an emblem of my survival and likely guaranteed cure. It is also cosmetically challenging to see. In a strange way, this scar has kept pace with my own healing process. At first, it was blatantly apparent, there was no way to avoid it. Also, there were many moments when I preferred to look elsewhere. After these clay pots were created, I now look at my scar and accept its place on my body. The clay has helped me to see the beauty in the challenge of this arduous process. Metaphorically, the clay is easily wounded when it is scratched. It can be scared with one pass of a tool and then just as quickly smoothed over with a little water and completely hidden. Within seconds, clay enacts the process of manifesting both wound and recovery, an immediate process that has taken me years to accomplish. With love and devotion, I bow to the clay, an extraordinary teacher that has revealed both the splits of dualistic challenge and the antidote of patience and love for the body.

Figure 28. Clay pot created during Phase II. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

Figure 29. Clay pot created during Phase II. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

Figure 30. Clay pot created during Phase II. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author

Figure 31. Clay pot created during Phase II. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

The clay had a way of teaching me how to touch and feel. Each time I picked it up, it felt like cool skin inviting me to know more about it secrets. As I opened a mound of clay, as M. C. Richards has instructed me decades earlier, I was opening to myself. I was also opening into the challenging experiences I was facing.

My working method was about listening with my fingers and hands. I would pinch the clay into the thinnest walls I could achieve. This quality of touch often felt like the same awareness needed to hold and cradle a baby's head. I was learning to be gentle with myself, to reinforce the perception of maitri and, more importantly, believe it. The clay insisted I honor its limits and possibilities. Like my circumstances, I too was facing certain physical limits as well as transformational opportunities.

Scarred Pot

One day in the NCAS, I made a beautiful pot that I loved. Sometimes gravity, the viscosity of the clay, my deliberate style of pinching, and the dry atmosphere of Colorado and the studio all conspire to help produce a certain outcome. This particular product was extremely pleasing, signaling a new possible departure for future work. As has occurred many times before, discoveries were made that reconfigured what I thought was possible with the clay. Another interesting characteristic of clay work is that there are several products, within the process, to which one relates along the way. Each step offers an invitation into a new relationship with what came before. The clay asks of its partner that he or she have patience and understand the strength and delicacy of its alchemical body.

I appreciate waiting for the wet clay to become bone dry greenware that is parched and brittle. This part of the process, as well as the firing, insists on reigning in enthusiasm, because outcomes are still unknown. Greenware, which is extremely fragile,

has to be handled carefully. During this part of the process, the clay showed me yet another way of how to cultivate patience to receive the surprises that wait like hidden secrets along the way. I carefully wrapped the pot up in plastic and damp paper towel, as I have many times before, placed it on the shelf, and left.

When I returned 2 days later, I unwrapped the pot and found that it had cracked. The NCAS members were shocked. I too was surprised, not anticipating such severe fault lines in the dried clay. It looked like it had sustained a concussion, with significant cracks prominently displayed in several places. I was reminded of Duchamp's big glass piece that fractured while being transported. Rather than moan and complain, his response was that it was the destiny of things and that the piece was "a lot better with breaks, a hundred times better" (as cited in Cabanne, 1971, p. 75) in this current unanticipated form. I always liked and admired Duchamp's work and transpersonal ethics regarding art, process, and random events. With his guidance and my effort to embrace unforeseen destinies learned from prostate cancer, in this moment, I was not bothered. Instead, I held what was broken and caressed it. Following this came a whole new series of works that soothed a much deeper wound.

I decided actually to amplify the cracks by carving into them and exaggerating their spontaneous fractures, a move that previously I would have avoided and, instead, would search for a way to fix the perceived mistake. This time, as I carved into the fractures, some additional pieces broke off. I watched my alternating thoughts cycle between attachment and separation, permanence and impermanence, contraction and expansion. My entire body was immersed in this process. Over time, no matter how careful I was, many pots cracked. At times, my breath was labored as I lived through yet

another and then another surprise of unanticipated breaks. While certainly different, these images of wounding and fracturing were important. Unquestionably, what is fragile needs to be protected. Just when I had the work where I thought it needed to be, another piece would break off. I marveled at how attachment so easily leads to disappointment. I persevered, believing that it would all lead me to places of unanticipated discovery. It did. (See Figures 32-38.)

Figure 32. First clay pot, about collaborating with my somatic scars. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

Figure 33. Second clay pot, about collaborating with my somatic scars. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

Figure 34. Third clay pot, about intentionally scarring the clay to access somatically held emotions. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

The clay and I eventually reached a compromise. The more I listen to it, the more it does not disappoint me. More than merely trusting the process, in the name of craftsmanship, I am called to study carefully and acquaint myself with the personality of the clay. As a true relationship, one must therefore truthfully listen to the messages imbedded in the clay. Clay, like hatha yoga, has many positions of flexibility to understand. It does not disappoint, if I listen and carefully observe. If I am consistent with my part of the relationship, then trusting the process is straightforward and even effortless: for example, the cracks became a welcomed surprise visitor. During this period of hand-building, I never would have done to the clay what it did back to me. Afterwards, I remained open to future cracks in subsequent pots, and many more splits and fissures did, in fact, arrive. (See examples in Figure 35.)

As I reflected on what was happening week after week with these cracked pots (pun intended), I became intrigued with the lessons that surfaced. Prostate cancer surgery left a significant scar on my body, from my navel midway down to my pubic bone. It is quite prominent when I look at myself. The entire surgery had scarring effects on my physical and personal life. Certainly, there was much to celebrate, and there was also much to mourn, such as the fact that I could no longer have children. These unseen scars had now been made visible through the art process with clay. It is not worth hiding from them. The message before me was indelible, like the scar; however, I also worked with the clay and the spontaneous process of the fire to accentuate the scars and even make them beautiful. This was an extremely important part of the process.

Figure 35. Broken pieces of clay pot that access internal emotions about brokenness. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

Like being my own surgeon, I attended to these clay scars with great care. I carved into them, smoothed them, and exaggerated them. Finding what was beautiful and the resiliency within the tragedy has been an ongoing theme made accessible through the clay.

Thinking that I was well-acquainted with this process of accepting the loud emergence of breakage made visible through the clay was folly. Another round of unanticipated surprises visited me while working on another pot in the NCAS. On this day the clay was too wet and therefore unwieldy, behaving like an unleashed dog with its own mind to wander. This form of relationship was challenging to sustain. The only way to coexist was to surrender and surf the wave of the clay's unruliness. What followed was an emotionally exhausting process that art uniquely provides when the veils are made

thin between the illusions of desire for an outcome and truth that the clay insists on showing. This pot (unfired in Figure 36 and fired in Figure 38) was not beautiful and did not want to be arranged so. It was ugly, horrifying in its torn-up, pock-marked, broken passages. In many ways this is by far the most successful pot and it took 6 years to make. It is simply a deeply held truth that years later I could now see, touch and hold. It was a view of the cancer that I never saw, nonetheless, the cancer that changed my life.

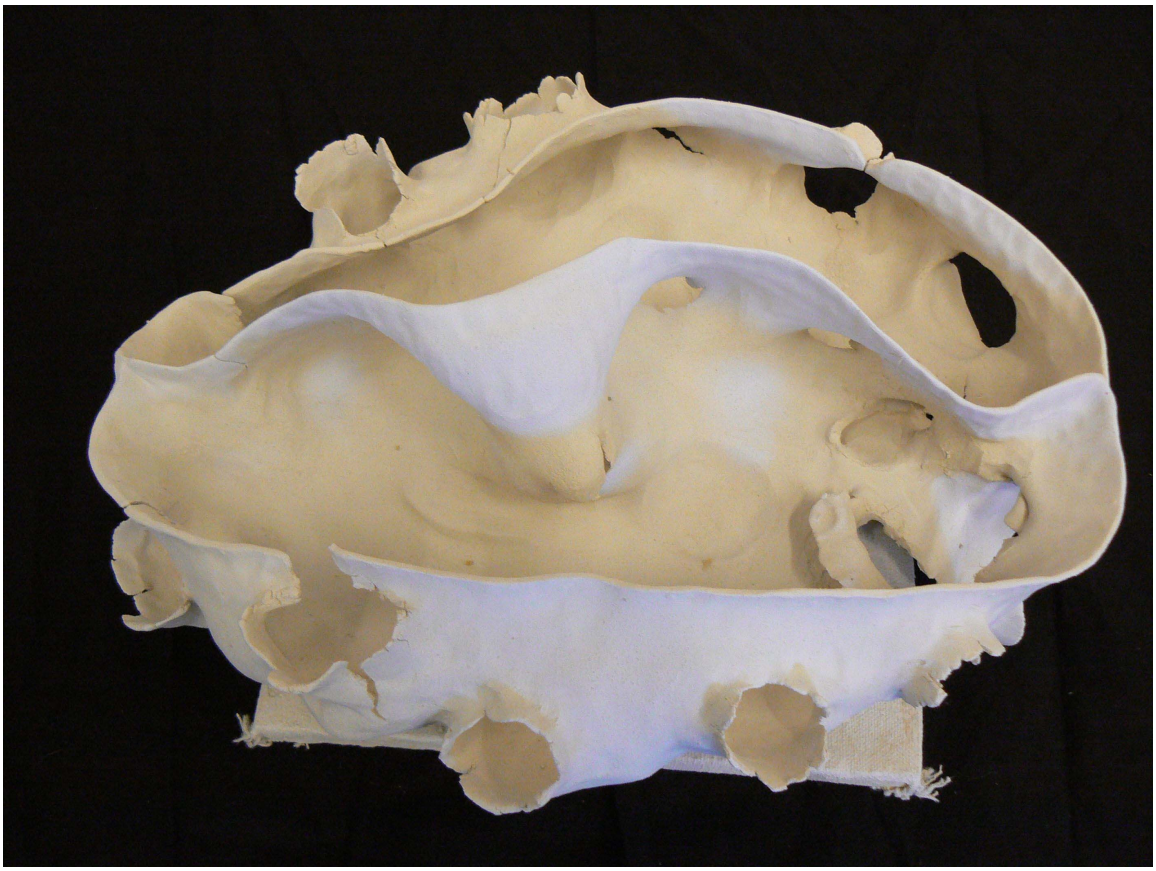

Figure 36. Clay pot about seeing a diseased prostate gland. Hand-built and bisque-fired the author.

Then there was the firing of the pot. M. C. Richards always referred to pottery as collaboration with fire. I usually fire the pots in my home fireplace (Figure 37). I always

light the fire before bed so that the process can unfurl during the quiet of the night. While I sleep and dream, it cooks, simmers, and transforms.

Figure 37. Firing clay pots in home fireplace by the author.

In the morning, I hurry over to this impromptu kiln and dig through the ashes for the treasure. What was waiting for me that morning was truthful, exposed, unadorned beauty (see Figure 38). The austere surface brought me to tears as I received the story of cancer and held it close. Although I can not have children, these pots are welcome offspring, born through earth, air, water, and fire.

Figure 38. Clay pot (same pot as in Figure 36) about seeing my diseased prostate gland. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

The Symptom Holds the Cure: Conclusions on Art as an Expedition Into Oneself

All of the artwork presented from the time of diagnosis to the current work that responds back to that time reveals a set of recurring themes. First, art combined with meditation helped to set up feedback loops that allowed me to become an observer of thoughts and somatic process especially during periods of extreme uncertainty. These feedback loops, discussed earlier are: action/stimulus ➔ effect/outcome/consequence ➔ contemplative observation/inquiry of the effect ➔ understanding/insight ➔ integration/application/relevance.

Second, the properties of the clay and charcoal supported opportunities for penetrating observation particularly as the edges of the clay dried and the contrasting

edges of the charcoal revealed chiaroscuro effects. The theme of edges, in hindsight, manifested a significant dialogue around limits, fragility, and the search for resilience. Clay, when pinched thin, can only go so far. While I find these thin edges to be beautiful and engaging, I am also exposing the walls of each pot, as well as myself, to the possibility of collapse. Sometimes the walls did fail. It was striking to observe the ways in which the clay collapsed along with the subsequent language of healing metaphors that followed. These metaphors mostly surfaced in terms of contrasting polarities such as "falling short" and "shoring up" or "falling to pieces" and picking them up to be reassembled. Words like *weakness*, *frailty*, *tenderness*, *vulnerability*, and *breakability* were prevalent when the clay cracked was drying. I would take appropriate precautions to guard against fractures, yet they still would occur. The clay was my collaborator and it was in my best interest to listen carefully.

Both art and meditation supported the focusing of my mind, making management of my thoughts much more tolerable. Concentration, control, and attention were enhanced through sitting meditation and art. Ultimately inspired absorption was deepened through both practices. Beginner's mind was not a concept but instead a way to refresh and renew my relationship to my overall engagement with ambiguous events.

Both art and meditation slowed events down, making them manageable by rendering my ruminating thoughts as witnessed, observed phenomena (Cahn & Polich, 2006). This witnessed or observable material was then folded into the creation of artworks that in turn stimulated the setting up of additional feedback loops that spawned subsequent works of art. As the work progressed, time became an additional element to observe.

Charcoal and clay each have their own agenda when it comes to time. The drying and firing time for clay presented significant concerns and questions. At the very core of these queries were the words *expansion* and *contraction*. These two laudable words, each inherent in both the physical healing process as well as the drying and firing process, invited me to pause and reflect on my own process of expansion and contraction.

Charcoal did well to slow me down to simplify terms and render them in black and white. The importance of blending also became a mantra, signaling the need to mix the materials skillfully. In addition to *blending*, words like *merging*, *unifying*, *combining*, and *mingling* regularly floated to the surface of my mind. Working with charcoal taught me many things, including the need to lighten up and also to endarken. Thick fields of dense black felt very satisfying to place down on the paper as did subtle grey tones reminiscent of soft light and gentle wind. The materials taught me to practice both maitri and tonglen with myself. I would take in my discomfort, and my hands would offer back to the materials responses of caring concern. I savored the actual contact made between my hands and the materials such as firm pressure and light touch. As I readied myself for the surgeon's hand, I too was performing precise maneuvers with my pots and drawings.

During this time of creating the pots, I also became fond of Wendell Berry's (1987) poetry. His work has an ordinary clarity that penetrates deeply into ecological and contemplative themes. With a wise economy of language, he has helped me to observe and receive connections and patterns that I might otherwise miss. His poem, "Enriching the Earth," for example, conjures up images of sowing seeds into the torn-up, plowed ground. The earth's body, inside, is dark and accepting, holding all that she is asked to receive. One day, the remains of our physical bodies will return to this inside place.

The earth selflessly offers her abundance to us, yet we do a great many things to her. We bury our dead in her, place our trash inside of her, and she still insists on serving us with her abundance. Berry's (1987) poem reminds me of the crossing point images and how my body needed an X-ray view into how unseen cancer cells were growing inside of me. Without these images, my innermost life could not directly speak its imaginal truth.

As with the farmer's plow (Berry, 1987, p. 110), my skin was also cut into so that renewal could unfold and grow. The cutting of skin in surgery and the scars, physical and emotional, that endure afterwards, come to mind when reading this poem.

Enriching the Earth

To enrich the earth I have sowed clover and grass
to grow and die. I have plowed in the seeds
of winter grains and of various legumes,
their growth to be plowed in to enrich the earth.
I have stirred into the ground the offal
and the decay of the growth of past seasons
and so mended the earth and made its yield increase.
All this serves the dark. I am slowly falling
into the fund of things. And yet to serve the earth,
not knowing what I serve, gives a wideness
and a delight to the air, and my days
do not wholly pass. It is the mind's service,
for when the will fails so do the hands
and one lives at the expense of life.
After death, willing or not, the body serves,
entering the earth. And so what was heaviest
and most mute is at last raised up into song. (p. 110)

Rend, rip, split, slit, sew, scar, heal, renew, plant, grow, resurrect, tear into earth, tearing into skin, surgeon, farmer, surgery, planting, tear to renew, transplant, grow, resurrect, prune—these words come to mind as the shorthand images that define this long process and journey which has often felt like an expedition into the core of my life. The art

process so eloquently facilitated this undertaking as the world of duality, polarity, and division emerged around me at every turn. Throughout my encounters with opposing themes, there is still only one guiding presence, behind all of the scenes, that is creation Herself. In order to heal beyond the skill of the surgeon's hand, I needed to delve into the inner images of my overall process. Meditation and art, in terms of this dissertation, are about facing what is at first resisted. In essence, the symptom holds the wisdom of a cure. All of the artwork created has allowed me to see the longitudinal effects of a powerful embodied narrative. While I certainly have not combed through all of my inner process, I have encountered primary images of symptomatic wisdom.

Lastly, art is a way to take contemplative awareness out into a social venue and foster relational connection. All of this work I created was then assembled and presented as a one-time-only installation. A select group of colleagues was assembled to see and witness the work. The following chapter addresses this last phase of moving the work from the private sphere of my personal life into a public and communal venue.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS FROM MAKING THE PRIVATE PUBLIC: ENGAGING THE FEEDBACK EXCHANGE LOOP BETWEEN ARTIST AND AUDIENCE

In order to investigate contemplative aspects of the artist-viewer feedback loop, I presented the art that I created to a small group of personal and professional peers. The membership of this group consisted of five colleagues and acquaintances who were either part of my professional community or who have some direct experience with cancer or a life-threatening disease as either a caregiver or a patient. My goal was to present and demonstrate how the core themes of contemplative practice, specifically from yoga and meditation, lived within the work process and product. As mentioned earlier, the Latin root *con-tem-plum* references a two- or three-dimensional space that orients one to observe sacred realities. The result of this form of vision is literal in-sight including the capacity to see "things as they really are" which is the meaning of *contemplari* (Mahony, 1998b, p. 57). My intention for our day together was for the artwork to facilitate the opening of this sort of inner and outer contemplative space. Because yoga is essentially "mystical absorption" (Hewitt, 1977, p. 389) that yokes together the finite with the infinite, other principles discussed in this dissertation would also emerge as tangible results, such as spanda, darshan, and rasa. Art, as spanda, is the imagination inquiring into itself, spawning visual or symbolic offspring of itself with which to commune, thus opening the potential space of darshan to emerge.

Additional intentions for this part of the study were to demonstrate how this work ultimately serves as a springboard for others to contact and articulate, through story

telling, spontaneous discussion, and art-based responses, their own accounts of resiliency and fragility. Consequently, it is important to point out that this work is not just about my experience, for at some point, either due to the course of normal aging or a failure in health, all people encounter challenged relationships with the mind, body, and spirit connection. My experience is only one story.

Practice and Intentional Space

The contribution of this part of the dissertation helps to complete the feedback loop of artist-viewer interaction within a contemplative art-based group format. The result of this research section will help to deepen the nascent body of literature on ABR by articulating additional contemplative methodology that is characteristic of creative investigation and interactive theory-building strategies.

In terms of methodology, several concerns were carefully considered:

1. *Setting up the space, including presentation of the work*. My intention was to create a prayerful space that could sustain silence, emotional responses, spontaneity, or any other honest contribution that was alive within the group. This was accomplished by offering light snacks needed for a three-hour event in the middle of the day, an intimate circle of chairs, easy access to the work including a chronological separation between the two main groups of pots, and time to see and interact with the work fully.
2. *Invoking the relational experience of darshan where there is a direct encounter with an object, person, or sight (insight and/or outer-site) that inspires contact with what is sacred*. This objective was carried forth through the theophanic imagination that was inspired by the tangible quality of the work. Imaginal

wisdom can be accessed through careful interaction with stimulating objects that call to one.

3. *Considering the work as representations of visual mantras, or objects of intentional focus*. The pots and drawings served as focal points that gathered and sustained attention. Gazing with the intention to see while self-observing the experience of seeing was an important goal.
4. *Considering objects of focus as objects for contemplation that could be held, touched, spoken to, or listened to*. Touching the work, holding it, and directly engaging with it facilitated personal and interpersonal contemplative conversations to emerge. The work also inspired a quality of inner listening where thoughts, feelings, and sensations could be quietly witnessed.
5. *Practicing becoming the witness of the personal and group mind*. This was accomplished through qualities of receptive presence where we could each be present in our own unique way. The work provided something physical to observe which set in motion thoughts that could be witnessed and observed.

All in all, many of the earlier themes concerning contemplative practice, yoga, and meditation were present during the unpacking of the work, the 3 hours that we were together, and repacking the work. We all became very present as witnesses of each other, the work, and our own minds. Like visual mantras, we spent time intently focusing on individual pots and drawings, carefully observing our inner processes which were written down and are highlighted below. This practice brought us to a quiet internal place that filled the collective space with punctuations of silence and outward celebration.

Oscillating between these two points, as a group, allowed us to attend collectively to what was emerging in the moment.

The physical presence of the work also provided a quality of darshan, as it helped us to see relational aspects of the divine in the sacredness of the materials, the final products, and each other. Darshan means “auspicious sight” and “seeing the truth” (Eck, 1998, p. 3). This form of seeing is a direct conduit for experiencing the emergence of sacred encounters. Darshan also infers a practice of standing in the company of a Deity and seeing and being seen by this holy murti. A feature of this sort of exchange occurred when looking, with a sustained gaze, at the pots and drawings. I am not inferring that the clay work is or was indicative of a holy deity, not at all; however, I am suggesting that the work brought forth theophanic imagination whereby divine wisdom could appear (Corbin, 1969). This point is a central part of the entire thesis embedded throughout this dissertation.

Rasa was also in the air as we tasted, through interpersonal attunement, the many offerings from each other and the work. Through the practice of devotional seeing, we observed how the work was performing entry into a private place where art and spirit are essentially one (Schwartz, 2004). As visual poems, an intense aesthetic experience was made accessible through the art. In fact the day took on a flavor and quality of *satsang*, which means to be in the company of the truth. Usually satsang involves a gathering of practitioners to chant or study dharma teachings together. This gathering was similar in that those present had an opportunity to listen to each other reflect on their own embodied experiences with fragility and resiliency and how the artwork could inspire this conversation.

An additional goal in offering my work to others was for them to contemplate and aesthetically respond to their own body-based awareness regarding vulnerability and resiliency. This sort of collaborative exchange continues to add to the field of ABR. This is accomplished through conjoint artistic processes intended to unfold personal and collective insight into witnessed stories. The artwork presented in this dissertation offers an example of how other people might reflect upon their own version of a crisis situation and how they can use contemplative approaches to art to cope with their circumstances.

Although my goal to invite art-based responses was mentioned from the outset of the gathering, this did not occur. This unanticipated result is discussed in the description of Stage II below.

Stages of Assembling the Installation

Related to the showing of the work on March 21, 2010, were three noticeable stages. The first stage was focused on setting up the installation. This involved meticulously unpacking the 80 pots and numerous drawings that were shown. Besides unpacking, there was also a need to arrange the pots (Figure 39) and the drawings. The second stage was showing the work to a group of colleagues. A total of five people plus the videographer attended the 3-hour showing. The third stage was repacking the items.

Stage I: Setting Up The Installation

The process began by locating the 10 boxes of pots in my home. They were in various locations, all carefully placed and protected. I include this comment because the work is fragile and needs to be thoughtfully considered when storing, packing, and unpacking the contents. A deliberate quality of mindful attention was directed towards this part of the progression of events. It was as if many of the pots and drawings had been

sleeping, tucked safely away until called upon again. Like waiting, reliable friends, they were on stand-by, ready to show up be on display.

Figure 39. An aerial perspective of the pots from Group I and Group II. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

Unpacking the pots was also reminiscent of the museum work carried out by the conservator who carefully unwraps the protective casing surrounding each item. With great care, I spent hours with this process. The sound of the bubble wrap and packing paper peeling off of the clay forms marked an intimate moment of seeing old friends reemerge and return.

Once everything was unpacked, the work had to be displayed. All table surfaces were meticulously covered in black paper. Then the pots were divided into two groups. The first group (Figures 40 & 41) was a representation of the pots created during the year I was diagnosed and treated for prostate cancer.

Figures 40 & 41. Group I: Examples of pots created during the year from diagnosis to treatment. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

The second group consisted of the pots created during this past year (Figures 42 & 43). As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, this work intentionally looks back at the time when the first group of pots was created. The goal for this entire body of work was to notice the longitudinal narrative still alive and unfolding as embodied text somatically written in image and metaphor.

Figure 42 & 43. Group II: Examples of pots created during this past year. Hand-built and sawdust-fired by the author.

I felt emotionally moved after seeing everything arranged. The blackened quality of the clay juxtaposed against the charcoal drawings was beautiful to me. The smell of charred pots lingered in the air around the latest pots to come out of the fire. The charcoal

drawings, with their chiaroscuro edges, quietly punctuated the silence of the pots (Figure 44). Overall, the images were like time machines, transporting me back to specific moments of indelible personal memories. A significant view of my personal history lay before me, and I was deeply moved by the convergence of images and the colleagues who were soon to arrive.

Figure 44. A view of the installation with drawings and pots. Hand-built, sawdust-fired clay and charcoal and paint on paper, by the author.

Stage II: Showing the Work

My colleagues arrived at 11 a.m., prepared for a 3-hour visit with the work. There was something extraordinary about presenting the work in this venue format. We were not overrun by the usual stampede of viewers that can fill a gallery opening. This was a

quiet, gentle, and intimate gathering. The work was silently seducing each of us, calling us to look at it, touch it, hold it, and listen to it.

A specific schedule was basically followed, not rigid overall but more like a series of bookmarks to consider as we moved through the day together. I wanted to make sure that we had flexibility to receive and address spontaneous needs that might arise. As it turned out, this was an important strategy that accommodated moments of unprompted offerings. Below is an outline of the schedule as it was proposed to the group members.

Welcome: 11:00
Framing of the Process: 11:10-11:15
Review of Work: 11:15-11:45
Silent Writing: 11:45-12:00
Reflection Question: Write up any responses that you might have after seeing the work and consider reading your responses to the group.
Art Making: 12:00-12:40
Comments, Performance, Stories: 12:40-1:30
Reflection Question: Consider your own body-based inner narratives concerning fragility and resiliency. Please contemplate, and if moved to do so, offer to the group your own art-based response practice around these themes. This could take the form of writing, singing, movement, visual art, or performance.
Final Thoughts: 1:30-2:00

Response of participants. Even though I set out art materials, as it turned out, no one used them to create reflective art during the designated time. This was a curious result because everyone had been alerted beforehand that this would happen. Also, most of those who attended were seasoned professional artists (one dance/movement therapist, one performance artist, and one visual artist). Although they were invited to respond directly through their home-base art form, they all seemed drawn to interact with the clay pots (see Figure 45), charcoal work, and each other in a heartfelt way. In a way, a different, unanticipated result emerged. The process turned into one elongated performance piece. Although no tangible visual images were created, responses did, in

fact, emerge. Stories were told, emotions were shared, and songs were hummed. Together, we dropped deep down into a tender, vulnerable space, where we conjointly unraveled our narratives of fragility and resiliency.

Figure 45. Group member holding and playing with the artwork.

I spoke to one group member who felt that the reason why the members chose not to make art was because of the extensive intimacy that was established. She surmised that there was an unspoken resistance to break this collective connection that we had all created. Creating art and moving into the splintered privacy of creative work would have fractured this intimate connection. So instead, I asked everyone to find a pot that called to them, take it back to their seat, and listen for any waiting messages. While this sounds simple, the results were profound.

We all spoke about various insights that were emerging from this interactive relationship with each other and the pots. Some of this material was quite private, and I promised not to include it. I can speak, however, about the pot that I chose (presented in Figure 38). With tears in my eyes, I thanked the clay for its patience to wait so many years for me to arrive at this particular pot. It was the defining piece, in many ways, that

allowed me to see myself in a new way. It is a phoenix piece, as the clay and charcoal work has literally risen from the ashes. This piece offered me a chance to touch and hold myself with loving tenderness as I confronted the sight of my cancer made large and visible. It was strange how it also calmed me, like a reunion with an old friend or an old favorite place where I could comfortably wander. Beneath this calming effect was a simple equation. As I embraced it, it embraced me back.

This particular pot and the resulting conversation steered the group towards a deeper opening to the theme of fragility and resiliency. Along the way, everyone did do reflective writing and also read their work out loud. Similar to the witness writing process proposed by Pat Allen (2001), this exercise spurred on other forms of response such as song and story telling. Reb Zalman, for example, told us about the Jewish folklore clay figure referred to as the Golem. He also sang to us, humming melodies that were responses to the work and the theme of surrender and reprieve. He would close his eyes, lean back in his chair, and purr these tunes into the middle of our assembled circle. Zoe also told stories about her pregnancy and a car accident she had many years ago while carrying her son. While reflecting on the theme of fragility and resiliency, she paused, became tearful, and remarked that her son had been twice given to her. First, through pregnancy, and second, by surviving a harrowing car accident that could easily have ended both of their lives. Reflecting on the miracle of this moment long ago, Zoe also told us that she emerged from this car accident, where her vehicle was literally airborne, without a scratch. We then spoke to each other about the various miracles in our lives.

Leah reflected on her own recent birth of her now 6-month-old little girl. She observed the pots in terms of the sacred space left behind when the clay is opened up and

is hollowed out. What was once there, as a solid mass of clay, is no longer there. The clay referenced for Leah thoughts about being born, time removed, death, and birth. Together, we all discussed how we could see elements of the process in any product, if we look closely enough.

This discussion then led to one concerning scars that result from surgery. Many of those attending have had surgeries and therefore have physical scars. We considered the series of pots that directly address the theme of scarring and how long I had to wait before I could fully embrace these contrails of my surgery. Leah too has a scar from her daughter's birth. From this scar, life emerged, the skin a record, like the clay, of these miracles of life.

Additionally, Leah recalled watching me over the years make many of the pots that were on display. For her, after viewing all of the pots together, they were still in motion, holding an ongoing process, even though they seemingly exist as finished products. My fingerprints can be seen in most of them. The art is visual evidence of a simultaneous process from long ago and from today. The process always lives in the product of the artifact, or art-fact.

Themes emerging from the art gathering. Several themes emerged throughout the day of the gathering as the group members viewed and interacted with the art work (Figure 46):

Figure 46. Group members viewing the artwork.

1. *Slowing time down*: We were able to be in time together without obeying a strict schedule. It was as if the group became an incubator for insights to elicit and coalesce conjoint awareness. This was definitely facilitated by not having stringent time constraints.
2. *Intimacy*: The quiet atmosphere inspired by the art helped to bring us to a place of closeness and collective vulnerability. This vulnerability was alive in both the space of the studio where the work was shown and the overall quality of interpersonal sharing. The decision to have a small group attend rather than hold a large opening was important. This calculated decision resulted in a different type of opening. Like the roundness of many of the pots, we too sat in a circle and opened to each other. This simplicity allowed for a prayerful and contemplative space to emerge. We could also see each other and hear each other, which does not usually happen in a traditional gallery opening.
3. *Receiving and offering*: Personal reflections were offered and received by everyone participating. Each offering deepened the experience of collective resonance.

4. *Resonance and attunement*: Receiving and offering naturally brought us to practices of attunement and resonance. Like five tuning forks, we echoed to each other the timbre and reverberation of our mutual experiences. The gaze of attention was sustained towards each other and the art, creating what Cozolino (2006) refers to as we-centric space. This is an intersubjective space where there is collective attunement to and with each other.
5. *Timing and making the private public*: When ready, the participants brought forth private material in various ways such as story telling. Making private information public takes time. Some unnamable quality of this event facilitated gentle disclosure.
6. *Witnessing*: People seemed to look at the work as witnesses, not as judges. A practice of careful perception took place as each member observed and studied the work. When members were ready, these private moments of witnessing were then made public.
7. *Fragility and resiliency*: This core theme followed us throughout the day. In many ways, it framed the day of seeing the work and each other in terms of personal histories and stories related to this vital subject.

Feedback from group members. These themes can be observed in the following comments made by the group members on either the day of the showing (March 21, 2010) or through follow-up communication. Everyone was asked to reflect on this question:

> Following today's group, please reflect on your overall process while either viewing the work, creating your response, or engaging with your response. Please email me your 2-page written summaries within the next two days while the overall experience is still fresh.

Reb Zalman:

March 21, 2010

My dear Michael,

When I was with you I wrote the following: Matthew Fox keeps talking about the need not only for enlightenment but also for **endarkenment**. I had the sense that crisis and healing have something to do with going into the dark. Just as the eye has rods and cones so the soul has rods and cones. Much of what you have done in your drawing was done with the rods of the soul (referring to the black and white quality of the art).

Organic shapes don't have right angles.

Rogue cells and life producing ones are close relatives.

When I think about the shapes of the molecules of water and how they are influenced by thought and then I see how compliant water is but Clay is compliant only up to a point.

The mystery of containing was first made by Clay, receiving, space taking like that Sutra of the Tao Te Ching that speaks about how 30 spokes converge to make a wheel but the usefulness of the wheel depends on the place where the spokes are not—the containing empty space.

I mused on how different sculpture is which removes from a statue of what should not be there so that the convexity becomes the piece of art. How different this is from your work in which you used clay shapes and call out: "I want to contain."

The cancer bowl leaks in all directions.

The Sun carves hollows in the snow.

Here is that Yom Kippur prayer I spoke of:

We are as clay in potter's hand
He does contract, He does expand
So we are Yours to shape at will
We yield to You —
Our passions still.

Like mason shaping rough-hewn stone
We are Your stuff in flesh and bone
You deal with us in death, in life
We yield to You —
please heal our strife.

The smith can shape a blade of steel
Shape the edge and bend the heel
So through life's furnace you temper us
We yield to You —
surrender us.

A boat is steered by helmsman's might
He turns to left, he turns to right
As long as You keep straight our keel
We yield to You —
please make us feel.

As glass is shaped by blower's pipe
And vessels made of every type
So You shape us so we may contain
We yield to You —
in us remain.

As tapestry is formed thread by thread
And color is to texture wed
Our life is woven on Your loom
We yield to You —
save us from doom.

As jewelry is wrought from gold
And silver too is poured in mold
So You our souls have crafted, built
We yield to You —
erase our guilt.

> High Holy Day Prayer Book, Rabbi Morris Silverman, Prayer Book Press, Hartford ,Connecticut, 1939, page 234 – "this beautiful piyut (prayer poem), the author of which is unknown". . . rendered in English by Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi, printed in *Hashir Vehashevach - The Song And The Praise*, Philadelphia, 1975, p. 15. [In References, see Ki hineh kahomer, 1975]

Having gone through a series of illnesses and operations I could write volumes about the fragility and resiliency of the body. It is amazing how strong and vital they are for us.

I'm grateful for the way in which you laid out your work for us to see, the way in which the black background made us appreciate each piece separately as it arose in the light.

Zoe:

The day after, March 22, 2010

I found the presentation, gathering to bear witness, very moving both personally and professionally. I know Michael well and was intimately involved with much of his healing journey, from the initiation diagnosis through the surgery and the healing journey. I had seen a small portion of the art that Michael had created over this period though I had never seen the complete collection displayed. I was honored to be part of this small group of trusted friends/colleagues to bear witness to Michael's journey both through his words and through the art he created. His work embodies the true healing capacity of the creative process, the foundation of the creative art therapies.

I was deeply moved by the art itself and by the visible fact that in a time of immense crisis, fear and vulnerability, Michael engaged in a deep relationship with his art making, with his art as teacher, guide, container and healer. At this moment, I can barely find the words to express how moving I find this. Returning to the innate healing wisdom of the creative process, of the wisdom of the unconscious and inner voice. His own journey is the living proof of the power of the work he brings to the world.

We gathered together Sunday to not only witness Michael's process but to also bear witness together to our own fragility and resiliency as human beings. Michael's compassionate and generous spirit invited such intimacy and his art embodies this human paradox.

I was drawn to the pottery, the wisdom of clay as teacher, as container and as the elemental wisdom of earth and a profound metaphor for the body. To be embodied, to be fully open to the paradox of our existence is no easy task. The body is the ultimate paradox, consciousness taking form, both finite and infinite. Sunday was an invitation to open to this truth, to open to life itself.

Susan:

March 21, 2010

I'm touched specifically in a way that is rare for me – a sense of being related to someone who is real. An invitation to be real myself. Fear, touching death with a fingertip, scar, pain – all of it held in its just-so right now moment of flare up and subsiding. Cracked open. New life emerging from an egg, leaving the landscape strewn with eggshells with life emerging, always just-now emerging. The dead shells are reminders of movement, particular moments in the dance that cannot be described at least not with satisfaction but its embodiment goes on. This moment in a stanza of this gathering today – it continues.

The real, the right now, this real is a great gift when it is shared. The dusty shells of waiting for something to happen fall away. This isn't a job interview. It's not a cocktail party or business transaction. It's not even a classroom. The life pours out of moments

like this. It's teeming with life, erupting, pouring forth with power and sweetness. Who knows what is next. Who even cares. This moment is sufficient. It is a lifetime. A discovery, this art, blew Michael open and it infects the world with its clarity and sweetness, its unadorned reality, unrelenting drive and openness. Infects and invites. If the invitation is refused, it will infect because it demands life. It demands survival. If the invitation is embraced, it dances right through you.

March 23, 2010
I have a piece of Michael's journey with me now – it's graceful, smoky, sharp, curved, and it's a miracle. It can break. It looks metallic and resilient but that's just one story you could tell about it. If you're careless with it, it could surely break. I don't want to test that hypothesis. It's too valuable. But it's already a broken piece – taken from the earth and made to sing and dance and now rest, just so, on my computer table. It speaks to me of the preciousness/fragility of a human life. It also speaks of the beauty of brokenness. The broken dancing pieces that are god's scattered remains ever coming to life and dancing again.

March 24, 2010

I'll send this writing to Michael today. I can't make a grand story or theory of it. I like leaving it alone and allowing it to dance through me, feeling the rain of emanations of sacred new life pour over me melting my capacity to form theories or even to organize any of this. It's pouring forth so fast and furious that I can't catch it or hold it or sort through it at all. Life teems forth like that.

This encounter with Michael's art and this slice of his great life has been unexpected and wonderful for me. I love the reality of it. The invitation of it. I don't have any more experience of making art than the one time I was part of a group last summer in Michael's studio. There's a sense of reverence there but it's not stifling. I worry that I'm too superficial for art. I feel superficial because I don't want to organize anything into an art form. I've tried poetry but Anne Waldman said it was awful. That was the only hope I had for being an artist of some kind. So what I'm left with is play. I love that I don't have to make anything beautiful in this process. I love that my bad poetry is fine.

It was good to be with the small intimate group in Michael's studio. I don't remember all of their names but I can remember their faces and hands holding the clay pots and their voices telling about it. It was sweet and intimate like a bunch of mothers in a childbirth class. There's a way that Michael held it that was an exquisite combination of sacredness and openness so that I didn't feel wrong ever. It wasn't too precious or too deep – those are things that trigger my feeling wrong usually. It wasn't therapy at least not in a contrived sense. I felt then and still feel now a sense of wholeness, complete and happy to belong in a universe where Michael can lay out the art pieces so beautifully on black table tops and we can spend time with them however we wanted. I love that. I love the big invitation of his work and the invitation of the time that small sweet group spent together in the middle of Sunday.

I also love that there's a graduate program that could see the value of the kind of inquiry that Michael does with psychology and art. That's brilliant. I have not had very many moments of such gratitude towards the field of psychology.

Thanks for the invitation.

Leeny (writing on post-it-notes)**:**

March 21, 2010

1. Parched
2. Linga, Yoni, Linga, Yoni, Genesh, Ganesh, Ganesh, Shiva-Shakti.
3. Water, water, after charcoal, after cancer.
4. Entrained with you pain(ed)
   I've seen that golden
   That blue
   (was it black)
   Before. Within.
   And vertical.
5. Your journey through illness, being cut.
   Life threatening art.
   Tickled mine.
   And penetrates.
   How is it I remember your prostate in between…my eyes?
6. Are you OK.
   You ask
   And ask again.
   Kabir says (maybe)
   'NO' and
   "Thank You
7. Your pot could pass in a living room.
   Mine could not.
8. Operating theatre
   What a long . . . procedure
   What a long show
9. Show me yours and I'll show you mine

March 28, 2010

To Michael –
Responses/Reflections on your Celebration Event:

I feel the presence of Chiron, the Wounded Healer, in, through, all around your work. I am quietly stunned by the transcendent energy, pain-filled beauty of it. It is a wordless experience. Words now that associate: burnt, broken, wounded, transcendent, memory, time, shadow, spirit, relic, ancient, present. Beautiful. A hushed sense in the radiant and

resonating energy field of the tables. It is so strong that your skill and talent does not come to consciousness until later, after.

It is so strong, and I am so visibly penetrated, that you ask me several times, “are you okay?” I tell you yes and no, stop asking. I am in your work, in the moment, experiencing the past of it through the present, and entrained – the energy memories in my own body, of my own illness, my own journey of healing reawakened.

The intimacy of the witnesses feels in balance, though really I feel on the deepest levels, I am there with you and Rebbe. Sitting long on chairs begins to shut down the circulation of all that’s happening – I want to move – not in any formal way - sometimes to lay on the floor. I don’t really want to write when you ask us to. Fortunately, there are post-its in my bag, and brief, immediate fortune-cookie-like responses on square stickies do not pull me out of the experience, actually further connect.

Shiva/Shakti, Shiva Lingam and Yoni, shattered pelvis, pelvic bowls, are Present. Tiny balls, clay toothpicks bring the sense of fingertips fretting and small healing medicaments. It is past body, but of body.

You say, who knows, maybe bits of body in the clay. I am shocked and soothed. Of course. I am out of body through body into spirit medicine and art that has no frame.

“It is necessary to understand the difference between symptom and disease. The symptom is not an enemy to be fought, but an ally helping us discover what may be missing, giving us the elements to overcome our afflictions.

As symptoms point out what may be missing they enable us to gain insight on our problems and to interpret them. With spiritual development, as we gain more knowledge we may begin to transform them, to change our attitudes, to increase our moral standing, to learn Love.

Instead of fighting disease we may attempt to interpret and transmute it. Healing doesn’t represent a victory over a symptom - it implies that we have become wiser. Healing always indicates that we have gained a new insight by going through the process, transmuted the affliction and have come closer to enlightenment.”

- Dr. Carlos Appel, Abadiânia, Brasil, 15th February 2006

Leah:

It was a privilege to sit with you in the presence of your work. I was deeply moved by the way in which each piece holds your process. Further, I felt what I can only describe as relief when you disclosed that this was a process 6 years in the making. Something about 6 years feels appropriate- so often I think we wish we could rush through something difficult and get to the final finished sublimated end result. To do so is to deny the process of sometimes having to be "in" the experience for much longer than we wish. In

speaking about my own recent birth experience I can say something changes for me if I were to imagine having another 5 and 1/2 years (or more) to process what happened. When you speak about art as a contemplative practice- this I think is where there is tremendous parallel. We may find ourselves fantasizing about the finished product and it is a practice to stay with the process.

It was a joy to be in a dialogue with the intimate group you invited. As I said on the phone, I believe once the interaction began between us no one wanted to break the contact that had been established. The work you presented was a tremendous presence in the room, I was quite honored to be with it. The small pot you gifted me is in my home in a special place- that too was a way of taking a bit of the experience with me. I look into the center of the pot and see your fingerprint- a literal map of your aliveness etched into the clay.

A place deep inside
there is space
exposed nerves
it takes time
the clay speaks . . . we grew up together
cracks are not for fixing
space, tiny and burnt, moving between my fingers
the shutter clicks
another chance at life
the clay invites us back
there's more to see, you can touch it
it's dark in there
the place where all life comes from
we wrestled
everything is different now
stillness, and then motion
the shutter clicks
the clay invites us back

When we were finished for the day, I invited everyone attending to choose a pot and take it home. Everyone honed in a pot that had called to them earlier in the day. There was so much appreciation expressed towards the work. After time spent with these works, it seemed fitting that they now belonged to the person admiring them. And so, it now belonged to them.

Stage III: Packing Up The Installation: Outcomes and Future Prospects

It took me 4 hours to pack everything up. It felt like I was tucking the work into the appropriate bedding and getting it ready again for sleep. Just as I had carefully unwrapped everything, I was now performing the same motions in reverse. Again, it had qualities of a mindfulness practice—being fully present for each action, each sound, and each tactile sensation—but something was different. Now there were new meanings attached to the work from each of the participants. The work had been seen, received, inhaled, and exhaled with great care by the viewers. New memories were created for each of us and the work itself. Several participants repeatedly mentioned the profound intimacy that they experienced. They addressed how the work had reconnected them with their own memories of illness, fragility, and resiliency. Like a silent witness, the clay quietly received their holding hands and unspoken projections. With great patience, the clay offered an opportunity for waiting for even forgotten stories to surface and be shared. I do believe that this was another reason why the members chose not to create artistic responses. Their inner waiting stories came upon them with sudden surprise. They were in the process of receiving these inner narratives that had to be honored first before creating responsive work. as I reflect on the overall process, I would therefore slightly adjust the schedule that we followed.

If the work were shown again under similar circumstances, I would either add more time to a one-day event or divide the showing into a 2-day experience. Sitting for 3 hours was difficult for a few participants. In fact, their bodies kept reminding them of a different version of their fragility. For some, their discomfort sitting was directly related to previous injuries. Nonetheless, 2 days would account for a day of showing and a day of

responding. I also might add that the original format that we followed was ideal in many ways since the participants are all busy people and preferred a one-day experience.

All in all, the participants' inner feeling responses to the work and the stories I told about the work occupied the space between us. From what they said, they wanted to be in this deeply intimate space as fully as possible within the parameters of the showing. For this reason that they did not move into the creation of actual artwork. It was clear, however, that images in the form of "context, mood, scene" (Hillman, 1978, p. 159), and narrative, were present, alive, moving, and generously offered to this circle of colleagues.

As I packed up, all of the events of the previous 3 hours were now being draped and safely swathed, like babies, in the appropriate wrapping. The opening was now closing. This long awaited day had finally arrived, and it was filled with an abundance of simplicity and kindness. This circle now closed, I offer my concluding remarks for the dissertation.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, this dissertation exemplifies how art and the concurrent practices of meditation and yoga helped me to navigate through the longitudinal conscious and unconscious material associated with the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer. I propose, therefore, that a similar approach to combining art with meditation can help others to access, reveal, and dissolve longitudinal unconscious material. An example of the benefits of this approach is how post-cancer artistic reflection directed towards the earlier creative work furthered my personal understanding of the embodied somatic and imaginal narratives present within my psyche. This embodied synergistic process of combining art with meditation, over time, holds promise for others seeking to contemplatively manage and understand a personal crisis.

Conclusions

Taken as a whole, this project has confirmed that contemplative practices, when combined with art, reveals a relational or collaborative perspective that is unique to imaginal work. This perspective mitigates the viewpoint that “I” am the sole creator of this painting or that pot. ABR, from an imaginal and contemplative perspective, insists on a relational equation where artist and image are co-collaborators. “I” do not heal the image, rather the image heals me. Furthermore, ABR, as it is applied in this research, is viewed as direct aesthetic engagement with stimulating imaginal experiences combined with contemplative practices that support the process of witnessing the mind. These conjoint methods inquire into the healing, and expansive spanda qualities of the

imagination. Art, as spanda, is the imagination inquiring into itself, spawning visual or symbolic offspring of itself with which to commune.

While engaged in this form of ABR, insights and awareness's emerged that offered wider application for healing opportunities uniquely inherent in the art process. The direct experience of collaborating with flexible materials, the emerging symbols, and the application of living the wisdom of this symbolic content constituted longitudinal healing results. Most important was the powerful combination of art and meditation that helps to keep pessimistic thoughts and fantasies in check. The example of combining art with meditation reveals how awareness and insight can occur through the knowledge gained from these two conjoint practices.

Overall, ABR, art therapy, and contemplative practice are concerned with remaining in uncertainty while listening carefully to the diverse stories emerging from the body, mind, and culture. As art therapists, when working with clients and our own art process, we are asked over and over again to remain open to these sources of information. Much of this information arrives and remains ambiguous. There is so much that is unknown in any therapeutic relationship or diagnosis of a life-threatening illness. Art and meditation are tried and true practices for coexisting with these uncertainties and ambiguities.

The poet John Keats was interested in this subject of artistic ambiguity. A cornerstone of his art was the capacity to remain in uncertainty regarding "the mysteries and doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (as cited in Berger, 1987, p. 85) that could limit his creative work. Keats called this quality "negative capability" (as cited in Berger, 1987, p. 85). Keats resisted subscribing to any one theory or system

that could explain the mysteries of the world. For him, poetic and aesthetic mind was like a thoroughfare for ideas and open-ended possibilities to emerge and guide. Negative capability, art, and contemplative practice involve remaining open to mystery and doubt without reaching for easy answers. Concerning this research, the ideas of negative capability were a guiding principle, like steering with a reliable rudder on wide-open, at times reckless seas.

Relevance for the Field

The challenge of sustaining disciplined focus and commitment to a creative project over time guarantees that the participant will directly encounter rich experiences. The content of a personal process is waiting for anyone willing to embrace creative and expressive methods that can help to excavate the depths of personal experience. The layers of a transformative journey, uniquely offered by art and meditation, are therefore available to anyone willing to participate in these contemplative practices.

The arts are a primary form of inquiry into subjective and cultural realms as well as a way to respond to these subjects. Created works become repositories of data as well as collaborators in the search to unfold contemplative, practice-based meaning. Research thus is a quest for information in a thoughtful manner while cultivating a discriminating perspective that is ready to respond honestly to and, if necessary, challenge that data. In essence, ABR is a methodology that utilizes the creative process to explore meaning and understand the resulting data as important narratives waiting to be uncovered. This method avoids narcissistic indulgence by demanding scholarly accountability for the material being researched.

In terms of merging meditation with art, this study examines how art processes and materials can aid in the training and cultivation of concentration and attention. This was certainly the case for me when faced with a life-threatening illness while working fulltime, managing my family life, staying engaged with my spiritual community, and beginning doctoral studies. This dissertation is firmly suggesting that contemplative practices, when combined with the visual arts, can address this rising concern of scattered attention due to the uncertainty associated with a life-threatening illness.

In terms of future research and other forms of application, working with groups would be the obvious next step. Towards this goal, consideration of the social role of the artist is most important. The practice of self-investigation does not need to take place only in a temple or retreat setting. One can come to know oneself through direct engagement with the world, especially with living creatures that require one's relational sensitivity (Feuerstein, 2003). With the fragile ecosystems of our choking planet, humans' tendencies to consume endlessly, and the increasing vulnerability of all living creatures, a great need exists for compassionate engagement with the world; however, existential barriers of self-absorption can inhibit one's potential for service and caring. One way to transcend these existential predicaments inherent throughout the life span is to discover one's own capacity for direct, altruistic engagement. The yogi involved with this path, referred to as Karma Yoga, sees every opportunity to act as a miraculous opening to be of service to the inhabitants of the animate and inanimate environment.

Although austerity, meditation, and renunciation may not be of interest to many people, service can make more sense as a practice of authentic responsiveness. As humans, we are social creatures living in a world of infinite forms that present many

opportunities to act responsibly, care, and transform the environment around us through our compassionate actions. The call to action is an opportunity to practice discrimination and discernment in one's behavioral responses. This nongrasping attitude consists of surrendering an attachment to outcomes as well as resisting apathetic neutrality.

This attitude is the essence of Karma Yoga, or the Yoga of Action, whereby all work is practiced with focused attention and seen as service. Within this yoga, all actions are viewed as a mindful, action-oriented offering to the Divine. Karma Yoga whittles away at the ego, thereby fostering a fundamental shift from self-serving behavior to altruistic selfless action. This is the basic meaning of *actionless action*, a term often used to describe Karma Yoga. Rather than possessive, impulsive urges leading and directing behavior, one aligns with compassion and wisdom before engaging in selfless action. Karma Yoga also cultivates restraint of the impulse to anticipate or control results. Every act is an opportunity to serve. When offered with unselfish intention, one's actions can become a contemplative practice. Love, duty, and behavior unify as one's daily work becomes a source of meaningful, untangled purpose.

The socially engaged karma-yogi-artist working from a Karma Yoga perspective embraces a social activist yet selfless role. Within this practice, the artist relinquishes the role and egoic identity of doer or creator. Liberated from psychological ownership of outcomes results in a very different form of participation. Rather than remain cloistered in the studio, the larger calling of social need beckons the artist to engage directly. This relational approach to art considers the importance of human need and how art can offer back to these social causes.

The art is not necessarily only in the object of creation but in the act of engagement (Gablik, 1991). There is work in the world that needs attending to, and art is one way to mindfully and compassionately attend. Gablik (1987) also addresses the need to remythologize the world by utilizing the art process in order to locate a living cosmology as a way to reduce social and spiritual alienation so prevalent in Western culture. From her point of view, and the point of view of this research, the artist is one who models how individuals may reengage the sacred in their lives. This is accomplished through an aesthetic of sacralizing the relational connections between environment, self, other, and spiritual aspirations. In this capacity, the artist serves as a figure who helps to awaken the culture to see its habits of consumerism, alienation, and oppression. Connecting artistic action with social action is key when considering connections with an engaged art-based spirituality.

The benefits of contemplative inquiry, when selflessly offered out to the larger world, can shift intractable obstacles, including those within oneself, that are seemingly immovable. This entire dissertation has been a contemplative, reflective exercise on working with an array of inner and outer obstacles. I have learned, over and over, to rely on the friendship of meditation and art as reliable strategies for navigating through uncertainty. What *is*, is how it is, and the more I am able to see this ordinary truth, the simpler my life and the more truthful my art.

Art helps me to *see* this material and meditation helps me to skillfully *observe and witness* this material. My doctoral studies and this research have helped me to clarify my beliefs regarding how art and meditation can wed together and serve anyone seeking

clarity associated with honest questions, ambiguous circumstances, or pursuit of the numinous.

APPENDIX

CONSENT FORM FOR GROUP MEMBERS

Name: Michael Franklin
Doctoral Candidate, Lesley University in Expressive Therapies

Contact Information:
Michael Franklin
Naropa University
2130 Arapahoe Ave.
Boulder, CO 80302
(303) 546-3545 or (303) 709-7509
michaelf@naropa.edu

University Affiliation of Researcher
Lesley University
Expressive Therapies
29 Everett Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Please print all of this material out, review it, and bring signed copies to the meeting.

Introduction

Michael Franklin is a PhD candidate in Expressive Therapies at Lesley University in Cambridge Massachusetts.
Mr. Franklin will be conducting a video taped showing of his artwork within a group setting with adults over the age of 18 who consent to attend and participate. This group exhibition, which also involves an invitation to engage in written and reflective art responses, is intended to elucidate the feedback loop between the viewer(s) seeing/experiencing the work and the artist. This group will last for approximately 3 hours. Following the group, Mr. Franklin will invite further communication through email in order to account for delayed responses to the overall process. He may also contact attendees in order to clarify the written and taped information and ask them to review this information for accuracy.

Purpose of the Study

It is my intention to show personal artwork based on pre and post-prostrate cancer treatment. This showing will take place in a venue where a small group of colleagues can see and interact with the artwork created during this yearlong treatment process.

The intention to show the work ultimately serves as a springboard for others to contact and articulate, through written and arts based responses (dance, song, performance, writing, stories, and art), their own accounts of body based resiliency and fragility. Therefore it is important to mention that this work is not just about my experience, for at some point, either due to the course of normal aging or a failure in health, we will all encounter challenging relationships with the mind, body, and spirit connection. My experience is only one story.

Once my work has been adequately seen and discussed, I will invite the group assembled to engage in the creation of their own art-based or spoken responses. This format of interaction is intended to draw out communal reflections of how a noteworthy life event continues to remain embodied and accessible for further analysis through art.

The group will be asked to contribute their written and art-based viewer response data, during the 3 hours, and through follow-up email, in order to complete the feedback loop of artist/viewer interaction. The result of this research section will help to deepen the literature on art based research methods concerning the viewer and the artist.

Risks or Discomforts

There are nominal risks present in this study. The primary risk is that exposure to the depth and breadth of my prostate cancer experience, catalogued through art and journaling, may stimulate unwelcomed emotional responses.

Mr. Franklin may also discover, through review of written, visual, and videotaped materials, unanticipated personal information that may be considered revealing and therefore perceived as negative to the interests or reputation of the person.

Additionally, individual group members may experience uncomfortable feelings, depending on the spontaneous emergence of topics discussed during the group process. In order to alleviate potential risks, participants can leave at any time. Or if need be, can sit outside of range from the camera. I will also make myself available immediately afterwards to discuss privately any uncomfortable emotional reactions that may arise.

If requested, Mr. Franklin will provide group members a chance to verify the accuracy of written statements attributed to them.

Confidentiality

The written information gathered during the group and post email feedback will not be published in a way that would allow a reader or audience member viewing the tape to identify individual identity of the person making those comments. **Unless instructed otherwise (see below)**, anyone directly quoted or mentioned will not be identified by name. However a participant reader of the study may be able to identify him/herself.

All participants will have prior knowledge that the group will be audio/video taped, by a videographer, and shown to audiences of professional peers. Anyone who is uncomfortable with this arrangement can attend as a viewer/witness outside of the camera's vision.

Written information gathered for this project will be kept safe and only Mr. Franklin will have access to the pass-worded text data.
Video and audiotapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may terminate your involvement at any time without consequence, including during the videotaping. You may also ignore any questions that you prefer not to answer.

If you wish to terminate participation, please inform Mr. Franklin in person as well as by phone, email or letter. There is no penalty for refusing to participate or withdrawing from the focus group.

Participants' Rights

It is your unequivocal right to ask all pertinent questions about this project before you sign this form and at any point during the study. You can contact Mr. Franklin using the information listed above and/or his research advisor, Dr. Shaun McNiff, who can be reached by phone at (617) 349-8562 or email smcniff@lesley.edu.
If desired, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Lesley University if you have any additional questions or concerns about your rights as a participant. The Lesley University IRB oversees research involving human participants. You may contact the Institutional Review Board at: Lesley University, The Dean of Faculty - Provosts Office, 29 Everett Street, Cambridge, MA, 02138

Signatures:

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS CONSENT FORM.
AS WELL, ALL OF MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED.
MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM BELOW INDICATES THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

****I wish____ do not wish____** to remain anonymous in subsequent written reports or publications. (***Important: please make an X on the correct line***)

_____	_____	_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date	Signature of Researcher	Date
_____		Michael Franklin	
Printed Name of Participant		Printed Name of Researcher	

Participant Contact Information:

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

Mailing Address: _____

CONSENT FORM FOR ANONYMITY/AUDIO/VIDEO TAPING AND TRANSCRIPTION

The study described above also involves audio/video-taping by Mr. Franklin and a videographer. If desired and prearranged, all identifying information associated with the video/audiotape and the transcript will have measures taken to safeguard your confidentiality. These measures, such as editing out your designated parts of the tape, will be discussed and agreed upon prior to taping.

Parts of the tape(s) will be transcribed and checked for precision and accuracy. Transcripts of your participation may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in professional presentations or written work that result from this study. Identifying information such as your name, if desired, will be kept confidential.

Please describe your desire for anonymity during the video/audio taping process:

❑ I wish to attend the group but not appear on video/audio tape

Additional written and agreed upon concerns and accommodations:
1.
2.
3.

By checking the box in front of each item, you are consenting to participate in that procedure.

By signing this form you are consenting to:

❑ having your full participation and contribution to the group video/audio taping;

❑ to having the video/audio tape transcribed;

❑ use of all written transcripts in presentations and written products.

By checking the box in front of each item, you are consenting to participate in that procedure.

Participant's Signature _____ Date_____

Michael Franklin's Signature _____ Date_____

3/15/10

Important Details

Location: Nalanda Campus, Naropa University (63rd and Arapahoe Ave., Boulder Colorado)
Room: 9130
Time: 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM
Date: Sunday, March 21, 2010

****We will begin promptly at 11:00 and end promptly at 2:00**

Schedule:
Welcome: 11:00
Framing of the Process: 11:10 – 11:15
Review of Work: 11:15 – 11:45
Silent Writing: 11:45-12:00
Art Making: 12:00 – 12:30/12:40
Comments, Performance, Stories: 12:40 – 1:30
Final Thoughts: 1:30-2:00

Questions for Today:

1. Write up any responses that you might have after seeing the work and consider reading your responses to the group.
2. Consider your own body-based inner narratives concerning fragility and resiliency. Please contemplate, and if moved to do so, offer to the group your own art-based response practice around these themes. This could take the form of writing, singing, movement, visual art, or performance.

Questions to Reflect on After Today:
3. Following today's group, please reflect on your overall process while either viewing the work, creating your response, or engaging with your response. Please email me your 2-page written summaries within the next two days while the overall experience is still fresh.

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