

TRANSFORMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF ANCESTRAL MEMORY

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by
Brett Richard Joseph

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Approval of the Thesis

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This thesis by Brett Richard Joseph has been approved by the committee members below, who recommend it be accepted by the faculty of Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Psychology

Thesis Committee:

Jurgen W. Kremer, Ph.D., Chair Date _____

Jeannette Diaz-LaPlante, Ph.D., Date _____

Abstract

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Brett Richard Joseph

Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center

This study explored how a small group of adult learners experienced the phenomenon of ancestral memory as a source of immanent meaning in the context of intentional revisioning practices. An invited group of 8 European-American participants, male and female with ages ranging from mid-20s to late-40s, met on 3 occasions during the Fall of 2005. The participants utilized a cooperative inquiry method to explore transpersonal and phenomenological encounters in the realm of ancestral memory. Qualitative data were collected from reflective discussions inspired by the participants' diverse experiences. Participant reports exhibited thematic consistencies in the way the participants encountered certain perceptual objects. These included personal familiarity, pronounced energetic and affective responses to objects and places of ancestral significance, and a shared sense of the circularity of time. These participatory encounters tended to nurture a sense of relational intimacy with the ancestral "other," akin to the familiarity commonly associated with bonds of kinship or the accumulated, collective memory of a people or place. These findings elucidated ancestral memory as a quality of participatory and regenerative consciousness that might be fruitfully advanced as a topic for further research.

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This paper is dedicated to all who travel the ancient dreamways, to heal, grow, and make connections that build community within the higher Self. May your paths be illuminated by the flame of eternal hope.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Some months ago, I had a particularly memorable dream, which upon awakening I promptly dictated into my bedside voice recorder. I gave it the title, “My Ancestral Dream,” and I offer it (or rather a transcribed report of it) to the reader on the premise that a dream might communicate in ways that might not be captured in the language of academic discourse. It is an example of a type of dream I have had many times since undertaking the research that is the topic of this thesis:

There is a large building that has a lecture hall in it, or a framed picture of a hall, a particular room in that building where many things had happened in history. I have it framed up in a video reel. The whole experience is “real,” but it is also the experience of the past captured in a video reel. I “capture” a particular frame, an image of the room from a particular angle that allows me to match the picture with a picture of the same place right now. Like a series of old pictures, all these pictures turn into film, I can see movements of the people, not only movements but a plot, a story line of the people in it. I am waiting because I want to show my mother the juxtaposition of the old picture with the new picture. She is busy, but when I finally get her available I notice that the image I had “on pause” has been lost. So I have to go back and find it again. I am fast-forwarding through all these different scenes, but none exactly match the present day image. The more I reel, the more I myself become part of the scenes! I start noticing angles from the outside of the building. At first I don’t recognize them because there are so many people there. But I come to recognize them as views of the same place, with some things different. Awnings, canvass awnings are up and so forth that aren’t there today. The scene moves to other rooms, and it is like following the day of students, going from lecture to lecture, going from room to room on this virtual tour. Things are getting very intense like this dramatic build up as I am getting closer to the “main room.” I am aware that this main room is an incredibly special room of the house; one that I feel I must retain as a vivid image, viewed from a particular angle. I am following along the hallway leading to this room. As I am walking, the crowd is building. It is almost like a royal wedding that is going to consecrate this room. People are crowding outside. Pretty soon I can see people on a balcony looking down. There are so many people I can’t see in the room. Outside it, I am waiting. There is a bar or café-type area. I notice some young people, maybe college age. They are rehearsing now, as if there is a production going to happen. They are singing verses from Broadway shows. I realize they must be performers or drama students getting ready. They have all these tunes memorized.

I know my mother is still there, looking, waiting. I need to go back and find her again. She is waiting patiently in a car outside the building. So I go to retrieve her, and bring her in. The image is there, I have been holding it for the longest time. As it turns out the whole house starts to recognize the image as an entire scene with an entire story in it. I can't quite get back to the original image, but I come to the realization that there is something very, very special about that particular room: the one that I originally saw empty but that now is so crowded with people that I can not see in it.

Reflecting now on my dream, I wonder about the energy of the building and the particular room that seemed to be captured in my memory of an image, an *angle*. I wonder where I might find that energy in ordinary waking life. I have been in many lecture halls and witnessed quite a few theater productions, but I cannot say with certainty that I ever before felt the energy that seemed to be exuded by this particular dream place. The energy seemed to wrap in its embrace all that is most sacred and cherished in life, at least in my life. It seemed to carry a gift of participation and transcendent wholeness that I intuitively desired to share with none other than the person who brought me into this world, as if to complete a primeval circle and reach a certain unified consciousness that has not been attained for generations.

Presently, I am thankful for the opportunity to share what the First Peoples might have called a “strong dream.” So now I ask: What manner of disciplined inquiry would have generated this type of a dream-vision? What follows is an account of my research into the transformative dimensions of ancestral memory, told using the first-person voices of a small group of inquirers, including myself, and where appropriate in the third-person voice more commonly associated with academic discourse.

Aim and Purpose

This qualitative study explores the potential emancipatory and transformative adult learning benefits of cooperative inquiry into the subtle realms of ancestral memory.

In the company of a selected group of fellow inquirers sharing a common concern with personal and social transformation, I investigated whether ancestral memory, broadly conceived as a structural component of the human psyche linking personal consciousness with the perceived, accumulated experience of past generations, might emerge as immanent meaning with regenerative and pedagogical implications in the context of intentional revisioning practices.

For purposes of the present study, I employed flexible, interactive design principles (Maxwell, 1996; Robson, 1993/2002), and an inquiry method grounded in transpersonal theory and emancipatory human science (Ferrer, 2002; Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001; Kremer, 2002; see Methods). I explored emergent themes that integrate theories of learning, memory, personal and social transformation, and synchronicity. In formulating the theoretical basis for my thematic analysis, I drew from contemporary writings in the areas of phenomenology, humanistic, transpersonal and depth psychology, critical studies, ecofeminism, indigenous science, and mysticism (see Literature Review).

For purposes of data acquisition and analysis, I convened a small group of self-motivated inquirers who joined me in a dialogical process, involving the performance of self-selected experiential practices, reflective meaning-making, and interactive validation procedures. I initiated the inquiry group by extending invitations to persons who, like me, were involved in the early stages of intentional community building and who I believed would share a common interest in the topic of ancestral memory as a pathway to personal and social transformation. These participants brought to the task a diversity of personal backgrounds and perspectives relevant to the themes explored in this study, as well as a diversity of spiritual traditions and practices. They also shared a commitment to the

development of embodied, holistic knowledge in the active pursuit of extraordinary perceptual awareness, practical transformative skills, empathic sharing, and critical reflection.

The remainder of this thesis is organized into four chapters: (1) a theoretical and contextual background discussion, including disclosure of ontological and epistemological premises and definition of the operative constructs that influenced both the design of the study and the initial formulation of research questions; (2) a detailed report of the cooperative inquiry group's interaction and research findings, including the group's discussion of emergent themes and reflections on personal and collective meaning found in our experiences, as further informed by the relevant literature (3) a distillation and analysis of themes emerging from the group interaction and relevant to the posited research question; and (4) a concluding analysis with recommendations for further research.

Theoretical Premises and Contextual Background

The following ontological and epistemological premises and pedagogical perspective guided the study:

Ontological Premise

Human being-in-the-world is an embodied developmental process. We experience selfhood as an interior dimension of consciousness that is constructively engaged with the objects and events of an (exterior) phenomenal world, and we employ memory and imagination to construct meaning from our experiences in ways that serve the adaptive needs of the human organism and human psyche. This developmental process occurs continuously within a dynamic web of subjective-objective relatedness that may properly

be expressed as “participatory” knowing (Ferrer, 2002, p. 117), “concourse” (Kremer, 2002, p. 13), “interbeing” (Nhat Hanh, 1987, p. 8), “appropriate discourse with the other” (Heron, 1998, p. 55) or from similar terminology that describes a continuous interplay between reflective consciousness and our perception of immanent meaning within the given life-world (Buber, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Epistemological Premise

The embodied, personal, subtle, and intersubjectively validated experiences of researcher and participants alike are reliable sources of empirical knowledge and theoretical development (Braud & Anderson, 1998; Heron, 1998; Lewin, 1951). Specifically, human knowledge is viewed as a multimodal, formative process that integrates presentational, prepositional, and practical domains of meaning-making (Heron & Reason, 2001). To validate knowledge, we employ our whole selves, including our perceptual, intuitive, cognitive, mnemonic, and affective faculties, to the tasks of paying heed to, making sense of, and communicating our impressions of given phenomena. We seek primarily to describe immanent meaning and the formative processes by which meaning perspectives can change, rather than to reduce all phenomena to mechanistic causal attributions.

Pedagogical Perspective

I adopted an action-oriented approach to adult learning intended to be holistic, participatory, experiential, reflective, evocative, cocreative, communicative, empathic, egalitarian, and multiculturally sensitive. The approach is derived from *transformative learning theory* (Cranton, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; Parks Daloz, 2004) by which we understand human learning as “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a

new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 12). I also employed the concept of *restorative* learning, which posits that in human learning, as in natural systems, some stability is required to survive disorientation during times of rapid change (Lange, 2004). By reconnecting with personal ethics or otherwise circling back to sources of guidance that had become submerged because of competing cultural scripts (e.g., rituals identified with a people or place), I intended to promote a sense of continuity and connectedness that aids a process of deeper transformation.

In accordance with transformative learning theory, I anticipated that the experience of *remembering* would play a crucial role in learning by allowing for the meaningful construction of present experience against the accumulated experiences of the past. I further posited that such accumulated experience might *include the collective past experiences of a people or place*, as retained and made available to consciousness through cultural dissemination and perhaps through other pathways that are not readily explained in mechanistic terms, and that seemed to fall within the realm of mystical or transpersonal knowing.

Finally, I posited that reflective and critical deconstruction of externally imposed or dysfunctional meaning systems might allow previously forgotten meaning structures to re-emerge as accessible memory and coevolve with events and experiences. These recovered meaning structures, encountered in the cooperative inquiry process and validated as ancestral memory, were explored for their potential to generate new or revised meaning perspectives to guide the adult learner along a pathway of inquiry that is consciousness transforming, emancipatory and developmentally progressive.

These theoretical foundations, derived from a review of the relevant published literature, are discussed more fully below.

Personal and Societal Context

My interest in ancestral memory was born of intuition and incubated during a recent, sustained period of deep, personal reflection. There came a moment of reverie when I encountered an image of myself traveling along a winding pathway, through hills and valleys, coming eventually to a place of convergence. After what seemed like years of forgetting, I suddenly was visited by the recollection that I had once consciously donned a self-made mask in a very deliberate bargain with myself, forged on the belief that a mask was necessary to preserve my authentic identity, while allowing me to embark on an equally necessary journey, without fear of self-annihilation, into the *terra incognita* that I associated with the centers of power and social influence. I was motivated on this course by a sense of urgency stemming from my perception that the society of my birth was fundamentally unsustainable and on a collision course with ecological disaster.

In the autumn of 2004, at a spiritual retreat in New Mexico devoted to the study of indigenous spirituality, the term *ancestral memory* lodged itself in my mind and begged for my attention. A week later, I found myself with my family chanting the sunrise on the Delaware shore, offering pine seeds and tobacco to the foaming sea. I intuited that something very old and precious had been banished to a place just beyond the horizon of my socially and culturally mediated reality. Moments later, I was walking with my daughter on my shoulders across a parking lot, and I noticed a small flower poking up through a crack in the pavement. The life force in that small green entity

seemed immutable. At that moment, I realized I was experiencing the turning of the tide, the removal of the mask, and the discovery of meaningful synchronicities at the place between inward and outward, the frontier of expanding consciousness reflecting back on itself and reforming a world filled with hope anew. In the days, weeks, and months that followed, I received a flood of images, all seeming to carry a message of self-transformation. These images had resonance, and all seemed to pertain to the discovery of that which was new, yet at another level *most familiar*.

Like many who have embarked on a path of self-transformation, I began to consciously re-examine my social identity as a North American male of European-ancestry, and more fundamentally, my identity as an embodied human being, consciously participating in a web of interdependency and interrelatedness. I sought to understand my own formative processes within the lived and storied context of my present existence. Rather than blindly accepting an identity structure that is dictated by the language and social conventions of the dominant culture, I contemplated what it would mean if I could acquire a sense of deep relatedness with the “collective archetypal ancestral” (Bennett, 2003, p. 15); a genuine sense of ethnicity, a deep personal sense of being *of a people* and *of a place*. I understood ethnic identity, not as a social label or the supposed recovery of some indigenous past, but rather as a journey of “remembrance beyond the husks that modernity offers” (Kremer, 2002, p. 12).

To be sure, expanding consciousness to recover the presence of the ancestral as an ever-present source of deep transformative wisdom must not be construed as a wholesale rejection of modernity or return to some earlier golden era. Such romanticizing or mythologizing of the past only perpetuates alienation from the life world, planting the

seeds of ideological fundamentalism by inviting a “conversation dissociated and abstracting from the specifics of time and place” (Kremer, 2002, p. 18). I therefore embraced an intention to honor the ethnic and ancestral other, and set my intention to not appropriate things of the past, but rather to invite ancestral presences in the here and now.

In this place of turning, at the apex of the mythical hero’s journey, I came to realize that the task before the serious inquirer entails *a dual process of critical deconstruction and revisioning*. The constructed realities of consumer culture (reality TV, virtual reality, celebrities in so-called real-life settings, politicians posing with supposedly real people), have been synthesized from the decontextualized fragments of many once-intact cultural meaning systems, to the point where meaning itself, as coalesced in the very concept of self, advanced as the “predominant way of being of the culture or era” (Cushman, 1991, p. 15) is manipulated, bought, and sold as just another commodity for consumption and global trade (Murphy, 2000).

Building on this perspective, I entertained the idea that the unifying hope of humanity, if such is attainable, lies in our ability to develop practical skills that will allow us to learn in times of rapid change and in ways that preserve and enhance the meaningfulness of everyday, lived experience. According to Mezirow (1991), the process of learning in essence is a process of “making meaning” (p. 11). Beneath the symbols, images, and narratives of propositional and metaphoric language alike reside the meaning perspectives that allow us to “mak[e] sense of or giv[e] coherence to our experiences” (p. 11). Mezirow’s transformative learning theory suggests that these meaning perspectives that are central to learning are interpretations of prior experience made available in the present context by the act of *remembering*.

As I contemplated the relationship between remembering and revisioning, I perceived that the elements of *a new story* seemed to be emerging all around, and finding their way into the academic and popular literature (e.g., Berry, 1988; Cooper, 1998; Roszak, 1992; Tarnas, 2006). One version of this new story suggests that the dominant culture, with its basis in a progressive-linear conception of time and its associated neoliberal conception of material progress, is a culture that is *learning impaired* insofar as it discounts ancestral meaning perspectives and denies their relevance to the collective present (Herbai-Schlosser, 1998). Implied is a dual-faceted crisis, in which the same fabricated contextual determinants that are producing rapid change in our guiding meaning structures are also producing conditions that decontextualize and discount our shared cultural memories, depriving us of an essential source of enduring, common meaning, and cultural stability.

A further implication arises: The mainstream consumer culture in the United States, in general, has failed to acknowledge and come to terms with its *collective shadow*, the subtle but pervasive present legacies of slavery, Native American genocide, and forced separation from ancestral homelands (Kremer & Rothberg, 1999; Takaki, 1993; Zinn, 1980/1999). In Jungian terms, the collective psyche of our modern culture is burdened by our collective suppression of those painful shared memories that we find most threatening to our assumptions of privilege and moral superiority. By denying inconvenient truths, we deny ourselves the transformative potentials of synchronicity and encounters with the “collective shadow” (Jung, 1961/1963; Kremer & Rothberg, 1999).

In contrast to the living, sacred stories of the world’s indigenous cultures, the postmodern mind lacks coherent and unifying metanarratives capable of orienting and

holding present experience within coherent cultural containers expressing the collective experience of generations.

Western industrialization, particularly in the United States, was a potent force which, for its own success, depended upon deconstructing a very deep human paradigm of ancestral continuity. That shift, including the experiences of cultural rupture for many transplanted immigrants, marked a significant break in the traditional relationship between the individual, his clan, his landscape, and his elders and store of ancestral wisdom (Bellah et al., 1985; Cushman, 1995). (Bennett, 2003, p. 32)

In postmodern America, what passes for a sophisticated constructivism often amounts to the expropriation of cultural knowledge. This is knowledge severed from living memory and lacks an enduring connectedness to the traditional anchors of people and place. Meaning thus expropriated soon begins to lose its contextual grounding. In the absence of ancestral memory, the expropriated artifacts and symbols of older cultures can no longer be well understood in relation to the collective, lived experience of the peoples and places from which they emerged.

To effectuate a hope-filled turn amidst these fragmented and chaotic circumstances of postmodern life, we must navigate between the equally formidable hazards of wholesale forgetting and of romanticizing the past. We must rediscover immanent meaning that locates identity within the multigenerational patterns of spatial and temporal energy flow, while redirecting and reforming the potentially destructive energies of the collective shadow. In so doing, we must consciously reject the notion that we can ever go back. It is the central premise of this study that we must accomplish the opposite task, by *bringing the ancestors forward and engaging their memory as our own*, allowing the seeds of new meaning to germinate in the rich soil of an embodied past. To accomplish this great turning, to discover new meaning capable of reflecting wholeness

and enduring the passage of linear time, we cannot be passive. Rather, *intentionality must be joined with memory*.

In light of these considerations, I surmised that a core objective of this study should be to explore whether our society stands to recover a valuable tool for personal emancipation and social transformation by shattering a subtle but important duality: the distinction between memory as the backward-looking recollection of fixed archival images, versus memory as the “living presence of an image of things past” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 55).

Although I personally found the concept of ancestral memory intuitively compelling, I was mindful that the specific term had rarely been used in the academic literature. It seemed the term had emerged spontaneously in casual conversations with friends and acquaintances, as if we were describing a phenomenon that, prior to being given a name, was already familiar to us but rarely discussed. Only after searching the literature in connection with the present thesis research did I find that the term had, indeed, been used in ways that were relevant to my topic of interest, but that it had not (to my knowledge) been precisely defined (e.g., Bennett, 2003; Herbai-Schlosser, 1998). Desiring to minimize the potential for misunderstanding that could arise from my choice of an obscure term to name the key phenomenon of interest, I had to consider carefully my reasons for suggesting ancestral memory as a major focus of our cooperative inquiry.

First, I reasoned that the term might prove useful as a linguistic container capable of assimilating new or transformed dimensions of meaning, especially given our aim to explore embodied and transpersonal sources of meaning that may not adequately be described by more commonly used terminology.

Second, I was aware of certain phenomenological descriptions of how we tend to experience *radical memory* and *radical presence*, respectively. Both of these related constructs have been employed to describe a certain praxis and quality of experience involving the immanent presence of the ancestral. The term *radical memory*, as employed by Heron (1996), signifies the basic form of memory data that supports reflective, cooperative inquiry and is generated when we “pay . . . heed to perception and action in an extraordinary way” (p. 81). Similarly, the term *radical presence* as used by Kremer (1992) involves the practice of

making [oneself] present to the current moment *and what went before*, to present and past as revealed in the cycle of the seasons, the celestial movements, the land and its past, the plants and animals and one’s place in a human community; it is in essence a mutually nurturing, intersubjective conversation between self and other. (p. 13)

These concepts complement each other: radical memory allows one to attend to meaning structures derived from what came before as an aspect of participatory consciousness and thus may be considered a specific area of focus within the more general practice of radical presence. In turn, radical presence entails the intentional entry into conversation with the other, including the *ancestral other*, that opens one’s perceptual and enactive awareness to an indigenous consciousness: consciousness infused with regenerative meaning based on shared, *living* memory of a people and a place.

The notion that radical memory supports radical presence may seem to contradict the conventional view of memory as a kind of mental time travel. However, this notion is consistent with phenomenological descriptions of memory that reveal its complex structure and encompass everything from the conscious recollection of experiences known to have occurred in the remote past, to the precognitive, moment-to-moment

awareness of continuity and change known as “body memory” (Casey, 1987/2000, pp. 146). Although these widely varied types of memory are distinguishable in terms of the way we experience temporality and the continuity of being *in time* and *in place*, when viewed from an epistemic perspective, virtually all memory may be conceptualized as an aspect of *present* knowing.

In addition to the above reasons in support of my interest in employing the construct ancestral memory, other perspectives on the usefulness of the construct were offered by the other members of our cooperative inquiry group. As reported below, not every member of our inquiry group perceived the term *ancestral memory* as open-ended or evocative. Some members questioned the adequacy of the term for fully describing the relevant phenomena of interest. They expressed mild discomfort arising from their concern that the word *memory*, with its usual connotation of pastness, failed to adequately convey the sense of immediacy or presence they had felt in relation to certain transpersonal encounters they had had with the ancestral other (see Report below).

I had anticipated that our group would experience an initial uneasiness with the juxtaposition of the concepts of ancestry and memory. All of us were raised within a culture of individualism, reflecting a legacy of the intellectual traditions of Western Europe, whereby a considerable distance appears to separate the autonomous ego-self from the ancestral other. Under the prevailing Cartesian-positivist paradigm, the self-as-ego is isolated in an ever fleeting present and thus isolated from past and future alike by a strictly linear conception of time, incapable of entering into conversation with the ancestral or retaining that which did not first enter as personal experience. Within this worldview, the ancestors are embedded in a receding past, by definition deceased, and

therefore incapable of participating in the process of generating new memories. In other words, memory is inextricably bound up and contained within the hard shell of the Cartesian ego-self, and ancestors are egoless objects of dim memory that do not even rise to the status of other. Neither can be said to *construct* that which is presumed to be *given*, or *participate* with the other in a cocreative process of remembering. Therefore, the concept of ancestral memory, with its connotation of the *transpersonal participatory encounter* (Ferrer, 2002) and the extension of memory into the world beyond the physical bounds of the ego-self, is hopelessly problematic under the Cartesian-positivist worldview.

Because we undertook this inquiry with a shared intention to engage in transformative learning, being mindful of our immersion in a prevailing cultural context that excludes as meaningless all but linear-causal relationships in time and space, we anticipated that our conception of memory may waiver between the (conventional) vantage point of a backward look over the receding objects of a linear past and the (alternative) notion of a most intimate “presence of the past” in the here and now.

In light of these considerations, we discussed whether a term such as *ancestral presence*, rather than *ancestral memory* might better serve to capture the unconventional or transformative qualities of meaning sought by this study. It was resolved by our group that the term *ancestral memory* should be approached tentatively as an operative construct, and that it should be defined expressly, so as to distinguish it from other, similar phenomena or forms of emergent knowledge (see definition of the term *ancestral memory* following the Review of the Literature).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Transformative Learning Theory and Memory

In his 1991 work entitled *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, adult education theorist Jack Mezirow (1991) addressed what he politely described as an “apparent oversight” (p. 4) in adult learning theory. He described this oversight as “a failure to recognize the central roles played by an individual’s acquired frame of reference, through which meaning is construed and all learning takes place, and by the transformation of these habits of expectation during the learning process” (p. 4). By explicitly addressing this oversight, Mezirow set out to redeem modern education and pursue what he deemed its unrealized emancipatory promise. Mezirow denounced modern education’s narrow preoccupation with “the familiar hypothesis testing and deductive logic of the natural sciences,” while (somewhat paradoxically) construing modern pedagogy as “a more democratic and educative process,” relative to “traditional forms of cultural authority” (pp. 3-5).

Against the backdrop of today’s critical deconstructionism, Mezirow’s premise regarding the unfulfilled emancipatory potential of modernity may seem naïve; at least at first. However, his definitive statement of a “constructivist transformation theory of adult learning” places his work squarely within the deconstructionist camp, and offers a useful model of the adult learning process that is well adapted to the challenging process of facilitating “movement beyond the modernist worldview” (p. 4). Another educational theorist, Yuka Takahashi (2004) described this process as “personal transformation . . . embedded in the process of social transformation,” consisting of critical questioning of

the “modern instrumental consciousness” that underlies our current discourse, coupled with a complementary process of “reaffirming life-sustaining values and awakening our whole person” (pp. 171-172).

Recent empirical studies, conducted in the decade and a half since the publication of Mezirow’s seminal work, have substantiated the ongoing postmodern criticism of the predominantly materialistic, positivistic, and reductionistic assumptions of the mainstream culture and the scientific orthodoxy alike (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

According to Thomas Berry (1988) and others, this pronounced shift occurring at the foundation of our shared conceptions of what constitutes meaningful knowledge signals the dawn of an emerging era of ecological consciousness (see also O’Sullivan & Taylor, 2004). In psychology, this shift is evident in studies such as those reviewed by Kasser (2002) that explore the linkages between personal well-being and one’s espousal of prevailing societal values. For example, contrary to the popular notion that happiness and affluence go hand in hand, Kasser documented that the materialistic value orientation, which is strongly encouraged in countless messages delivered by the popular media, is marked at the personal level by “a fundamental alienation from what is truly meaningful” (p. 3). This culturally-sanctioned materialism has exacted an exceedingly “high price” insofar as it has engendered and perpetuated institutionalized systems of overconsumption that in turn pose a serious and imminent threat to human happiness, as well as the integrity of the Earth’s ecological systems.

In this context, transformative growth is said to occur when critical deconstruction of the normative status quo is coupled with enhanced system awareness and a deliberate intention to cultivate meaningful engagement in the world, including a sense of place,

contemplative presence and relational interdependence (Parks Daloz, 2004). Thomas Berry (1988) suggested that such alternative consciousness is rooted in the same primeval participatory vision that, for millennia, has enabled our species to “establish ourselves within a realm of consciousness of high spiritual, social and artistic development” (p. 39). Revealing a fundamental optimism equal to his radical criticism of contemporary Western culture, Berry challenges us to consider the destructive forces unleashed by modernity as occurring within the broader context of a “vast turn in human consciousness that originated deep in the origins of the human process itself” (p. 38).

It can hardly be repeated often enough that the driving force of the scientific effort is nonscientific, just as the driving force of the technological endeavor is non-technological. In both instances, a far-reaching transforming vision is sought that is not far from the spiritual vision sought by the ancient tribal cultures, as well as by the great civilizations of the past. Only such a visionary quest could have sustained the efforts made these past two centuries in both science and technology. Nor could anything less than entrancement have so obscured for scientists and technicians the devastating impasse into which they have been leading the human venture. (p. 38)

A common thread, therefore, may be found between Mezirow’s notion of an unfulfilled emancipatory potential of modernity, and Berry’s notion of awakening (from “entrancement”) and redeeming the primeval participatory vision that, in its conscious manifestations, has guided modern and premodern cultures alike along the pathways of transformative growth.

For his part, Mezirow identified, as the “central dynamic and fundamental postulate” of his transformative learning theory the “idea that uncritically assimilated habits of expectation or *meaning perspectives* serve as schemes and as perceptual and interpretive codes in the construal of meaning.” (p. 4, emphasis added). He posited further that:

These meaning schemes and meaning perspectives constitute our ‘boundary structures’ for perceiving and comprehending new data. Experience strengthens our personal meaning system by refocusing or extending our expectations about how things are supposed to be. We allow our meaning system to diminish our awareness of *how things really are* in order to avoid anxiety, creating a zone of blocked attention and self-deception. Overcoming limited, distorted, and arbitrary selective modes of perception and cognition *through reflection on assumptions that formerly have been accepted uncritically* is central to development in adulthood. (pp. 4-5, emphasis added)¹

Thus, from the perspective of educational theory, Mezirow invites us to consider carefully the transformative potential of expanded awareness of the phenomenal world and reflective engagement with memory by identifying a dynamic relationship between our acquired meaning perspectives and the boundaries of our perceptual awareness.

Similarly, from the perspective of transpersonal theory, Jorge Ferrer (2002) suggested that

participatory knowing is transformative at least in the following two senses. First, the participation in a transpersonal event brings forth the transformation of self and world. And second, *a transformation of self is usually necessary to be able to participate in transpersonal knowing* [italics added], and this knowing, in turn, draws forth the self through its transformative process in order to make possible this participation. (p. 123)

Ferrer seems to be pointing to a certain dynamic interplay between intentionality and perception, or alternatively stated, between our willingness to entertain the possibility of participatory transpersonal encounters beyond the habitual bounds of perception and the likelihood that we will be transformed by such encounters. Ferrer called for a certain

¹ A word of caution seems in order with regard to certain of Mezirow’s semantic usages. For example, Mezirow’s characterization of a structural relationship between “expectations” and “reality” seems a simplistic way of describing what, in the language of transpersonal psychology, might be described as the dynamic interplay between *memory* and *participatory presence*; or phenomenologically speaking, between the *constructed* and the *given*. Similarly, Mezirow’s reference to “how things really are,” as a counterpoint to the “self-deception” of personal meaning systems, appears to suggest that he was tilting toward a postpositivist ontology. However, when taken in the context of Mezirow’s self-proclaimed constructivism, the phrase “how things really are” is better understood to mean how things are *experienced phenomenologically*.

“subjective-objective fluidity” in the way we acquire and validate human knowledge. This entails a reflective identification between the “knower and the known” that may become the basis for a transformative “ontological shift,” away from what he calls “subtle Cartesianism” and “narcissistic experientialism,” and in the direction of a more expansive participatory vision (pp. 32-39).

Heron (1998) artfully described this dynamic as “subjective-objective” consciousness:

I do not believe we have purely subjective experience of transpersonal realities, in the sense that it is other than them and leads to knowledge *of* them. Rather, such experience is knowing by acquaintance, by participation. It is already experiential knowledge *with*. It is subjective-objective, mediated-immediacy. (pp. 12-13)

Heron’s view from the perspective of transpersonal theory appears consistent with Merleau-Ponty’s (1963) rigorous deconstruction of both Cartesian (subject-object) duality and the mentalist-materialist debate within modern psychology.

Again, consistent with the theoretical analyses provided by Mezirow and progeny (e.g., Cunningham, 1992; Lange, 2004; O’Sullivan, 1999), and taking into account the complementary insights of the current revisionary movement within transpersonal theory, certain basic pedagogical tenants, most relevant to the topic at hand, may be stated as follows:

- Our multimodal ways of knowing (presentational, propositional, and practical) are delimited by acquired meaning structures;
- In the absence of direct participatory engagement with the life world (i.e., *radical presence* as described above), these meaning structures tend to be assimilated from the prevailing social milieu; and

- In the absence of critical reflection, these meaning structures tend to be habitually applied in ways that impede or distort the acquisition of new knowledge.

To be sure, these habitual barriers to knowledge acquisition may have far-reaching, deleterious implications for the individual learner, who may become alienated from “the sociality of existence or the natural world upon which existence most fundamentally depends” (Lange, 2004. p. 123). Likewise, at the societal level, such dysconscious alienation stemming from the lack of critical reflection may undermine the very foundations of conscientious citizen involvement and critical dialectic, leaving civil society vulnerable to the unmitigated forces of socioeconomic injustice, political tyranny, and global ecological degradation.

Extending the above principals, found in the literature, to consider the transformative potential of ancestral memory, it is fruitful to consider the role that memory plays in perception and reflective consciousness alike. In the particular context of transformative learning, reflection that is *critical*, in the sense of employing knowledge gained from direct participatory engagement in the life world (radical presence) to deconstruct and revision socially acquired meaning structures, necessarily utilizes memory as its primary vehicle. Memory draws attention to pre-existing meaning structures and the meaningful perception of phenomena as experiential knowing. Moreover, of the many qualitatively discernible types of memory described in the philosophical and psychological literature, the type which Heron (1996) called “radical memory” involving “extraordinary” awareness of memory as an integral part of participatory (subjective-objective) consciousness can be considered a crucial

psychological function bearing on the human potential for growth and emancipation through transformative learning” (p. 81). In Mezirow’s (1991) words,

Transformation theory views memory as an inherent function of perception and cognition, an active process of recognizing again and reinterpreting a previously learned experience in a new context. . . . Remembering appears to involve *recognizing* an object or event that previously had meaning and either strengthened or transformed an existing meaning perspective or a specific meaning scheme or schemes. We remember symbolic models that are organized by our habits of expectation into frames with which we make interpretations of sense perceptions. We forget, not when associative bonds are attenuated or the brain’s capacity for information storage is exceeded, but when the event is *no longer recognizable*, its context has changed, or our habits of expectation have been transformed. (pp. 6-7, emphasis added)

This model affirms that memory both drives transformation of meaning structures and has implications for the durability of new meaning structures. Perhaps even more important relative to the possibility that we may be witnessing the emergence of a new era of ecological consciousness, the above model suggests that when we live through times of rapidly changing social or environmental circumstances, one consequence is a loss of the ability to recognize objects or events that previously had meaning, that is, a loss of memory. Loss of memory implies loss of meaning, and perhaps even loss of meaning-making capacity (i.e., ability to learn), not to mention an increased vulnerability to existential crisis.

This last point, distilled from the cross-disciplinary literature and implied by the above model of the role of memory in transformative learning, sets up a corollary proposition: if rapidly changing circumstances diminish the efficacy of memory as a perceptual-cognitive mediator and source of adaptive, experientially-grounded meaning, it is at least conceivable that *when sustained attention is given to the continuities of time and place, certain phenomena that individuals experience as “lost” memories might be*

*recovered, along with their transformative potentials.*² Heron (1996) spoke to this idea by suggesting that “extraordinary perceptual heed” (p. 81) from its power to generate “radical memory (p. 81) that supports reflective inquiry, may become an effective pathway for transformative learning. Although Heron did not specify the objects of extraordinary perceptual heed that form the basis of radical memory, he showed the efficacy of this approach to inquiry, when applied to the subtle realms of transpersonal knowing (Heron, 1998).

Perhaps the most readily demonstrable example of this use of radical memory is the practice of dream incubation and dream journaling. By holding a conscious intent to enter a certain dream image upon falling asleep, or to remember our dreams upon awakening, it is possible to bridge the chasm of forgetting that separates these two states of consciousness (Moss, 1996). Likewise, in relation to less sudden shifts in conscious states brought about by changing life circumstances: When intentional practices are devoted to maintaining reflective space and easing the transitions between contextual frames of reference, for example, by incorporating continuous observation and pattern recognition into any design work that would alter existing human and natural environments (Holmgren, 2002), or by engaging active dreamwork as a significant part of community decision-making processes (Moss, 1996), we nurture a sense of spatial and temporal continuity, and invite the recognition of once familiar memory objects or

² This premise may prove important in distinguishing the intentional, self-directed processes by which previously inaccessible memory (whether ancestral or personal) may be recovered, from the well-documented circumstances involving *false memories* attributable to what may commonly be called the *power of suggestion*. Given the extensive research effort that has been committed in recent years to elucidating the latter concept in relation to the empirical evidence, and the controversial nature of some of the claims made in relation to the concept of false memory, a full and fair treatment of its relationship to ancestral memory, as defined herein, would exceed the limited scope of this study and therefore must await subsequent treatment in another work. Suffice to say that the practices engaged in for purposes of this study were self-directed and presumably, therefore, less prone to such third party suggestive influence as might conceivably generate so-called false memories.

events. In this way, we are able to benefit from knowledge (meaning perspectives) gained from critical discernment of alternative meaning perspectives, informed by the place-based and collective experience of generations. We may thereby avoid the type of postmodern identity crisis that invites romanticized or dogmatic reconstructions of the past or the culture other (Kremer, 2002).

All this, however, begs an important question: whether the collective memory of a people, once lost, might yet be recovered through the practices of radical memory and radical presence. If we accept the premise of Rudolf Steiner (1919/1997; originator of Waldorf Education) that widely divergent meaning perspectives across cultures or across historical eras are akin to differences in states of consciousness, it makes sense to view our stories (shared frames of reference) as containers of living, collective memory, such that when the stories change, we are vulnerable to wholesale forgetting. One can imagine the impact of warfare, slavery, or mass migrations on the collective memory of a people! Can we suppose that in the cultivation of participatory and reflective consciousness, we may invite memory and associated meaning structures that had once been adaptive and grounded in experiences of the past, either personal or collective, but that had been driven from consciousness by rapidly changing social or environmental conditions that affected our accustomed habits of expectation?

Phenomenology of Memory

Bergson's (1911/1968) theory of pure memory consists of a series of propositions conceived to transcend simultaneously realism and idealism, including the notion that recollection consists of a pure consciousness of past being entering the present as if of its own initiative, yet never fully actualized insofar as it is subordinate to the embodied (and

therefore inherently inefficient) modalities of human perception. According to his theory of two memories, Bergson asserted that in addition to memory that “records, in the form of memory-images, all the events of our daily life as they occur in time,” a second type of memory consists of a “consciousness of a whole past of efforts *stored up in the present*” (p. 92, emphasis added). The first type of memory carries with it the “mark” of an original time and place, allowing for “recognition of a perception already experienced” (p. 92). However, the second type, “if it still deserves the name of memory, it is not because it conserves bygone images, but because it prolongs their useful effect into the present moment” (p. 93). Memory of the latter type is experienced as a predisposition toward a certain action; the possession of knowledge once learned, guiding us toward future action informed by our past, but without any conscious recall of the details or context of our original experience(s). Furthermore, this memory that *repeats* may sometimes be mistaken for the memory that *imagines*.

To call up the past in the form of an image, we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power to value the useless, we must have the will to dream. Man alone is capable of such an effort. But even in him the past to which he returns is fugitive, ever on the point of escaping him, *as though his backward turning memory were thwarted by the other, more natural, memory, of which the forward movement bears him on to action and to life.* (p. 94, emphasis added)

Bergson’s (1911/1968) theory relies on the proposition that memory, as a manifestation of reflective consciousness of the past, requires some objective image carrying the mark of a fixed temporal frame that allows us to locate the image as having occurred in the past. This view echoes Heidegger’s idea that the human experience of “lived time” is an evolutionary advancement, allowing us to experience being as a temporal continuity that exceeds the static, spatial perceptions of lower organisms.

Bergson's conception of temporally "marked" memory images imperfectly recalled by the ever-moving present, also bears a similarity to Husserl's conception "past 'retentions' of temporality" that are added to a horizon of perspectives capable of being perceived in the present (Hunt, 1995, p. 244).

Merleau-Ponty (1968/2001) criticized Bergson's theory as self-contradictory, noting that if memory-images are true representations of the past and the basis for our recognition of the familiar (albeit subject to the ever-forward moving tendencies of human perception), this implies the body, as the ultimately familiar junction of perception and recollection, is itself homogenous with the very memory images it is supposed to mediate in consciousness. Construed in this way, the embodied self loses its "ideality" (p. 91) as the perceiver and is reduced to being another object of perception among many, negating its presumed privileged functional role as the bridge between the ideal and the real; between (pure) memory as undiminished, yet unrealized consciousness of past experience, and (imperfectly actualized) memory as meaningful recollection of the past relative to the perpetual now of lived experience.

Despite this criticism, Merleau-Ponty acknowledged as "valuable intuition" (p. 91) Bergson's view of a mixed reality, whereby "we transcend the simple mixture of subject and object in order to constitute a genuine dialectic of time" (p. 91).

For Bergson, the body is the present:

It is, therefore, a moment in the dialectic of time, and all consciousness of the past has a relationship with the body. . . . [T]here is no past except in relationship to a present against the background from which it separates itself. *The problem of the past must be resolved by showing how consciousness of the present contains reference to a past.* Now this is what Bergson does at certain times, when he tries to endow the body with a function in the constituting of time: there could, then be a "bodily memory," a comprehension of time by the body. (p. 92, emphasis added)

Ricoeur (2004) adopted Bergson's basic working hypothesis that conceives of the passage from pure memory to perceived memory image, while bracketing Bergson's metaphysical thesis that asserts the self-sufficiency and immateriality of pure memory. In doing so, Ricoeur explicitly confronted the perplexing relationship between memory and imagination, a duality consisting of psychological phenomena that share a common trait in that they both enter consciousness as a certain "presence of the absent" (p. 52). From Ricoeur's phenomenological perspective, the memory-image occurs as a fusion of Bergson's two memories: those that are accessed through willful and spontaneous forms of recollection, respectively, so as to produce "an image that can be grasped in its origin" (p. 52).

We can speak of this operation only as a movement from the virtual to the actual, or again as the condensation of a cloud or as the materialization of an ethereal phenomenon. Other metaphors suggest themselves: movement from the depths to the surface, from shadows to the light, from tension to relaxation, from the heights to the lower levels of psychical life. Such is the "movement of memory at work". (p. 52, quoting Bergson)

These metaphorical descriptions of the process of memory *at work in the present* imply a certain commonality between the movements of memory as temporal awareness and the movements of consciousness in general. Husserl (1905/1964) described this commonality in terms of the phenomenological "co-giveness" of consciousness and felt duration:

[It is] indeterminate whether one could be said to originate from the other. It can be presented in either fashion: sensed duration just is the result of our awareness of the flow of consciousness; or our human ability to sense passing time as such creates the opening for what we call consciousness. (Hunt, 1995, p. 246)

In other words, a sense of the flow of the one is needed to sense the flow of the other.

When consideration is given to this indeterminacy together with the current body of

cognitive research on temporality in altered states of consciousness (e.g., the expansion or contraction of perceived time duration correlated with dream states, near death experiences, or levels of excitement or boredom, respectively) any suggestion that either consciousness or felt duration is the source of the other, in the causal sense, seems highly implausible (Hunt, 1995).

Although indispensable insights are provided by Husserl and the other continental phenomenologists mentioned above, current interdisciplinary thought regarding the formative and transformative implications of memory-as-lived-experience seems to be undergoing a slow shift away from reliance on abstract metaphysical models and toward ever-greater emphasis on the predominant role of human perception in the construction of cognitive, as well as physical, reality. For example, Gibson's (1975) characterization of the flow of the perceptual array has fostered a theoretical reconciliation between the *imaginary* and *familiar* in human perception that does not rely on speculative metaphysical assumptions regarding the origins of time awareness. Rather than treating imagination and recall as distinct qualities of experience, Hunt (1995) offered a current perspective informed by both phenomenological inquiries and behavioral/empirical studies, whereby he suggested that *the lived sense of concurrent spatial and temporal flow is precisely what gives rise to perceptual awareness in the first instance*. Moreover, in referring to Husserl's treatment of time and consciousness as the "inner" and "outer" versions of the same flow, Hunt astutely observed that "this follows for both their flows *and their pulsations*" (p. 246, emphasis added).

By extension, it can be said that the phenomenological cogiveness of consciousness and time suggests a similar, cocreative interplay between imagination and

memory. Both give rise to perceptual awareness within a space-time matrix, and both involve a mixture of intentionality and spontaneity. Moreover, both tend to be experienced as patterns of movement recognizable via the metaphor of flow. In the case of imagination, creative life energies may be experienced as an *outward* flow, moving from the center of a prereflective inner realm of pure potential into the field of reflective consciousness and immediately coalescing as perceived images that seem to be wholly original, yet that are usually capable of being understood in relation to existing meaning structures. Memory, on the other hand, may be experienced as a certain flow *into* consciousness, originating in some repository of stored experience and entering consciousness as knowledge of the familiar.

According to Casey (1987/2000), the three mnemonic modes of memory (reminding, reminiscing, and recognizing) “operate by intermediation between mind and world. Each in its own distinctive way is a mediatrix between mental and physical poles, an effective go-between connecting mind with body and body with world (including the world of others)” (p. 141). *Recognition, in particular, allows us to develop a consciousness of the interdependence of all that exists within the life world, by imbuing mnemonic experience with the dual qualities of presentness and suffusion:*

In their presentness, recognized objects become cynosures of our existence, ‘the stars of our life.’ In contrast, suffusion singles out another aspect of these same objects, i.e., their manner of combining divergent properties in a seamless whole having its own luminosity. (p. 129)

Memory, therefore, functions to constitute the dual qualities of diversity and unity, as it mediates learning and the development of human consciousness.

Memory and Imagination

The forgoing suggests that memory nurtures interdependence and satisfies our most basic relational needs by allowing us to gain meaningful knowledge of the life world. Memory that is divorced from blind habit becomes memory that is allied with numinous presence. Like straw and mud, memory and intentionality adhere to each other and together allow for the construction of new meaning that aligns expectations with experience and nurtures wholeness.

Likewise, imagination that is infused with intentionality may be viewed as a portal to memory. Although it may not be possible to disentangle fully the objects of remembrance from the objects of imagination, an inquiry following from a willful intention to summon in consciousness the presence of the past, whether personal or in the realm of the ancestral, may be sufficient to overcome the “traps that imagination lies before memories” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 55). Ricoeur made this point eloquently:

It can be affirmed that a specific search for truth is implied in the intending of the past ‘thing,’ of what was formerly seen, heard, experienced, learned. This search for truth determines memory as a cognitive issue. More precisely, in the moment of recognition, in which the effort of recollection is completed, this search for truth declares itself. We then feel and indeed know that something has happened, something has taken place, which implicated us as agents, as patients, as witnesses. Let us call this search for truth, faithfulness. From now on, we will speak of the faithfulness of memories, of memories being true to ..., in order to express this search, this demand, this claim, which constitutes the veridical-epistemic dimension of the *orthos logos* of memory. (p. 55)

From this vantage point, it is possible to pursue ancestral memory in a manner that operationalizes, at least tentatively, a means of discerning the object remembered from the object imagined, without artificially positing a bright line distinction between the two. If the literature discussed above will serve as guidance, it is evident that any such forced distinction between memory and imagination would run contrary to well-established

theory regarding the constructive processes involved in human perception, including the spontaneous formation of imagery in consciousness and the intuitive, associative and affective qualities that constitute the empirical ground upon which all valid, propositional knowledge claims must ultimately stand.

Not only would it be impractical to attempt a separation of memory from imagination, it would be an undertaking profoundly at odds with the “needs of present consciousness” (Kremer, 2003, p. 10, quoting Eakin). *Imagination facilitates remembrance as life-nurturing, radical presence*; the emancipated, indigenous self in relation to community and cosmos, deeply rooted in context that is most meaningful to the human soul—“the remembrance of storytelling that supercedes nostalgic proclamations of essentialist origins” (p. 11). Simply put, when we marry imagination and intention and bring our whole selves to the task, we discern memories in the same manner that we discern that which is most meaningful and true to our being.

Alternative Conceptions of Ancestral Memory in the Literature

Carl Gustav Jung (1954/1977), who originated the psychological concept of the *collective unconscious*, toward the end of his life expressed his opinion that between the personal and the collective, there is a continuity of psychic experience that extends from one generation to the next:

I feel very strongly that I am under the influence of things or questions which were left incomplete and unanswered by my parents and grandparents and more distant ancestors. It often seems as if there were an impersonal karma within a family, which is passed on from parents to children. It has always seemed to me that I had to answer questions which fate had posed to my forefathers, and which had not yet been answered, or as if I had to complete, or perhaps continue, things which previous ages had left unfinished. It is difficult to determine whether these questions are more of a personal or more of a general (collective) nature. It seems to me that the latter is the case. (pp. 233-234)

Picking up on this thread, post-Jungian writer James Hillman (1996) stated that we capture a glimpse of the ancestral presence through “hints, intuitions, whispers, and the sudden urges and oddities” (p. 10). According to Hillman, the “ancestors, however defined, are firmly seated in the life and lexicon of the soul, [and] the ancestral is fundamental to the creation of psychologies” (Bennett, 2003, p. 13, quoting Hillman).

Hillman’s view, which seems less tentative than Jung’s, has generated some controversy. For example, Stevens (1995) described Hillman’s conception of soul (daimon) as an “extreme” view among post-Jungian theorists concerned with the origins of archetypal dream imagery and the structural foundations of human imagination and consciousness (p. 80). This may be so, especially if one frames the question of inquiry as a search for objective truth regarding the structural origins of psychic phenomena. Certainly, proponents of the concept of soul face a formidable challenge if they intend to recast their story as a structural model of the human psyche, using the standard scientific language of material agency and causality. However, if an effort is made to deconstruct the essentialist preoccupation of modern scientific thought, so as to reveal its own storied nature and cultural biases, the ancient idea of soul (an idea that is woven through the history of Western religion and philosophy alike) becomes more palatable insofar as it fosters a resonance between certain postmodern sensibilities and long-standing cultural wisdom, captured well in the traditional image of a golden thread running through the life of each individual. This idea, according to Meade (2002), has been handed down from widely diverse sources, including Zeno, Rumi, and Blake. At the very least, the ancestral as living presence is an idea that seems to possess the quality of an archetype, a pattern that human consciousness appears predisposed to reinvent, again and again.

Bennett (2003), working inductively from her own ancestral-reverie experiences provides a very insightful, practical analysis of this complementary relationship between imagination, memory, and what she called the “embodied ancestral.” Borrowing from Hirsch’s (1999) concept of postmemory, that is, “a kind of collective memory in which the individual can take part in the experience of all others’ memories in the group’s history” (p. 33), Bennett asserted that “*the ancestral then stays very much alive in the psyche of the individual*” (p. 33). In her heuristic revisioning practice, she demonstrated how

the light of the collective archetypal ancestral in its abstract, ungraspable grandeur becomes visible and may be perceived and felt in its refraction through the prisms of personal ethnicity, the containing culture in which we live, and individual ancestral-reverie. (p. 15)

Bennett explained how imaginal storytelling and personal reveries may be understood as key pathways to distant and collective ancestral origins, while affective response may signal ancestral presence and the proximity of the ancestral numinosity. We are prompted to ask whether a “deep human paradigm of ancestral continuity” (p. 32) resides in memory, such that it might emerge on its own accord with a structural coherence capable of transforming human consciousness.

In his study of male psychology, Meade (1993) alluded to such emergent consciousness in the context of an individual life’s journey, but his description might as well pertain to emergent consciousness at the level of the collective:

A man’s radical roots tap family and ancestral sources; they contain all the repressed, compressed matters that can nourish life up above, but they also carry truly ancient fears and passions. As someone grows older, the “elder” waiting inside is nourished by these roots. The youthful branches that launch into the sky each year are being fed from the roots of the “elder” in the ground. The life below can be much more extensive than what is seen above. The tree grows downward

as well as upward, and the tree of a person grows more within and downward once the young growth stages of life are passed. (p. 389)

Satprem (1982) described the teachings of an Indian Yogi who used the name “Mother” relating the embodied experience of more than six decades of yogic practice. He posited that all matter is vibratory and that the cells of the human body are themselves capable of memory and conveying consciousness. According to these teachings, body is a form of energy largely imprisoned by habits of thought, whereas the cells remember their true substance as pure energy releasing form and with disciplined practice are capable of assuming any form-transformation.

Versluis (1992) wrote from a Native American perspective:

Although humanity *en masse* may rush headlong into its own obliteration, an individual may still turn about and walk the ancient ways. Although caught in this, the ending of an age, we may each enter still the sacred and timeless, which is never gone. The turning cycles of time wheel on, reflecting the eternal light of which they are the manifestation and in which we live, whether we know it or not. (p. 27)

Tuan (1974) described how those places and symbols that carry the most powerful and potentially transformative meaning arise out of the more profound experiences that have accumulated through time:

Profound experiences often have a sacred, other-worldly character even though they may be rooted in human biology. Insofar as symbols depend on unique events they must differ from individual to individual and from culture to culture. Insofar as they originate in experiences shared by the bulk of mankind they have a worldwide character. Natural phenomena such as sky, earth, water, rock, and vegetation are interpreted in similar ways by different peoples. Specific objects and places like pine tree, rose, spring, or grove probably have unique interpretations. (p. 145)

Walsh (2003) wrote,

A symbol which can be called “numinous” is that which reverberates for the person (or sometimes for an entire collective, a culture, a nation) with the startle of deep significance, accompanied by heightened emotion and sense of import,

wholeness despite being disturbed or uprooted, and completion despite a disruption to ordinary perceptions. (p. 45)

Devereux (1996) alluded to the concept of ancestral memory as an immanent, transpersonal presence in the land itself, capable of being experienced as an “archaic whisper” (p. 86) connecting us with the ancestors through an unbroken thread of common experience tied to the subtle essences of a place: “When a place goes, so does a quantum of consciousness. Place and mind may be an unfamiliar association for us today, but the two are nevertheless inextricably linked” (p. 86).

The environment we apprehend is a cognitive construction, built within the recesses of our brain-minds, and sacred space is therefore a division of that cognized environment. But even if sacred space is made for us within the brain-mind, that does not mean that we can assume it is illusory—at least, any more than any other aspect of what we fondly think of as reality. Indeed, if we find ourselves engaged by a sacred place, and have our consciousness provoked by it, the reason such locations seem sacred, seem to possess a *numen loci*, may be precisely that we receive *more information* from them. The very fact that there are, and have always been, sacred places demonstrates their psychological importance. They may be where we get a greater glimpse of reality. (pp. 101-102)

Speaking to the relationship between ancestral memory and revisioning practice,

Devereaux suggested that

It is healthy sometimes to make the conscious effort to explore gently other and older frames of mind, and to attempt to reintegrate our awareness of the world. It does no harm to put our automatic informational model of the world ‘on hold’ for a little while. And it is sometimes found that these old ways of looking at things can take on a curious air of familiarity. (p. 74)

Moss (1998) used the term *soul remembering* to describe the conscious dreaming experience through which we “travel . . . backward through the scenes of our present life journey, back through the womb itself, to discover where we were and what we knew before we took on physical bodies” (p. 252).

As we seek hopeful alternatives to the proliferation of dead-end, virtual realities of our postmodern global society, the insights provided by the rapidly evolving, complementary literature on transformative learning, memory, and the ancestral lend critical support to the intuitively born notion that, in some yet indeterminate way, the presence of the ancestors must be accounted for in the process of growing through our contemporary social crises. Yet none of these sources have squarely addressed whether or how ancestral memory might emerge in consciousness as a source of deep, transformative meaning among those who face the uncertain prospect of deconstructing long-standing, materialist conceptions of self and other amidst the existentially challenged culture of consumption existing in the 21st century. This study is intended for those who hope to find themselves again within a clear vision of sustainability, guided by the enduring wisdom of the long-forgotten elder.

Ancestral Memory Defined

Various closely related concepts are found in the literature that describe aspects of *ancestral memory*, as that term is used herein, albeit using different terminology and associated metaphors. Thus, the construct of ancestral memory may be elucidated with reference to: ancestral worship (e.g., Geană, 2005); the soul's calling (Hillman, 1996), the personal thread of life (Meade, 2002), the collective unconscious (Jung, 1954/1977), resonance (Walsh, 2003), synchronicity, (Hanson & Klimo, 1998; Jung, 1955/1987; Main, 2004), organic memory (Otis, 1991), ancestral mind (Jacobs, 2003), the ancestral whisper (Devereaux, 1996), and past lives (Weiss, 1988). Conceptually, these various constructs appear to overlap and may be thought of as stemming, at least in part, from a common phenomenological basis. Like the classic story of the blind men and the

elephant, each of these descriptions provides a useful perspective on the mysterious source of emergent meaning that, for present purposes, we are calling *ancestral memory*.

The area of ancestral worship, in particular, has engendered a vast body of literature reflecting its global prevalence as a core spiritual practice carried on within a diversity of contemporary cultural contexts and originating in some of the world's most ancient cultural traditions. Writing from an anthropological perspective, Geană (2005) suggested that "one of the most ancient and culturally elaborated responses to the perception of being-in-time has been the cult of the ancestors" (p. 350). Yet although the construct of ancestral memory, as broadly defined for purposes of this exploratory study, will inevitably encompass certain phenomena, qualities of experience or practices that also might be described as ancestral worship, it simply is not possible, given the limited scope of this study, to account fairly for that vast body of literature in a way that would do justice to the sacred heritage that its cultural sources represent. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that none of the participants to this study (including myself) have had significant firsthand exposure with any of the aforementioned contemporary cultures grounded in traditions of ancestral worship, and without discounting the possibility that our European tribal ancestors may well have practiced the same, it is acknowledged that the construct of ancestral memory as defined herein, represents a limited cultural perspective, and future work will need to explore the relationship between ancestral memory and ancestral worship from a crosscultural perspective.

The aim of this study, therefore, is not conceptual rigidity but an explicit emphasis on open-ended exploration. The following definitions are formulated with intent to be broadly inclusive, in the hope that any resulting conceptual inexactitude will

have been mitigated by adherence to the study's specific emphasis on the transformative dimensions of the phenomenon in question.

For purposes of this study, *ancestral memory* is understood to mean *a psychic phenomenon that consists of a meaningful personal remembrance of objects or events situated in the temporal-spatial context of the prepersonal past*. The concept also may be understood as the way past experiences of our human (or nonhuman) ancestors shape our individual or collective experiences of the present.

More specifically, ancestral memory may be understood as the presence of the ancestral, manifested through somatic, affective, imaginal, or intuitive ways of knowing that invoke a sense of shared identity between self and the ancestral collective or the ancestral other within a common structure of experientially grounded meaning. Construed in this way, the construct is approached phenomenologically and is sufficiently broad to encompass both causal and acausal explanatory perspectives, to the extent that these can coexist within the same theoretical framework.

From the perspective of transpersonal theory, ancestral memory further may be understood as a form of spiritual knowing, derived from human participation in the transpersonal realm, the "field of multilocal participatory events" (Ferrer, 2002, p. 117) as that realm has been understood by the great mystical traditions of the world (Underhill, 1999). Ancestral memory enters consciousness via symbolic associations, affect, somatic or archetypal images, or transpersonal encounters with ancestral presences, either at the precognitive level or at the level of reflective knowing.

Research Question

At the outset of this research effort, after reflecting on my own, ongoing process of personal transformation, I intuited an initial research question that expressed “where I was” at the time in my informal personal explorations. I stated this question, in its initial formulation, as follows:

What, if any, role might ancestral memory play in the intentional renewal of ethnic identity among second-plus generation Americans of mixed ancestral backgrounds?

After some preliminary discussions with my prospective coresearchers and upon reviewing the interdisciplinary literature relevant to my specific aims and purposes for this study, I decided that a rigorous investigation involving the construct of ethnic identity would require a much more expansive literature review than would be feasible within the limited scope of this thesis. Likewise, I realized that developing the concept of ethnic renewal per se was not a foremost concern in the minds of my cohorts. However, our initial discussions did reveal that each of us sought some manner of personal and cultural transformation.

Therefore, after some further discussion at our initial reflective meeting (see Cooperative Inquiry Report, below), I suggested a revised formulation of our research question that would focus on the experience of ancestral memory and its manifestations in a regenerative, colearning context while avoiding the need to grapple with the complexities of ethnic identity. As reformulated, our research question would invite but not attempt to predetermine or define the emergent personal and collective meaning perspectives that might be attributable to the phenomenon of ancestral memory.

Accordingly, the primary question that guided our investigation was reformulated as follows:

How might the members of a cooperative inquiry group, consisting of adult European-Americans sharing a common interest in intentional community building, experience and learn from ancestral memory as a source of immanent meaning in the context of intentional, self-directed revisioning practices.

In formulating this question, we entertained the hope-filled supposition that, by revisioning our personal myths and other meaning perspectives with the aid of ancestral memory, we might facilitate the emergence (or re-emergence) of a sustainable, earth-based community life capable of nurturing human potential in concert with the life-sustaining processes of the earth's ecological systems.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Study Design

Carrying forward my intent to explore a diversity of ways in which attention to ancestral memory might engender transformative growth at the level of self and community, I reviewed the literature on cooperative inquiry (discussed below) and decided that as an action-oriented, qualitative method that values epistemic participation as a pathway to human emancipatory growth, it was a method well-suited for my chosen topic.

I used the occasion of a weekend rural retreat organized by members of a prospective intentional community to inform the group of my planned research and to invite them individually to consider their interests in the topic and whether they wished to attend an initial cooperative inquiry meeting. I handed out copies of a consent form that summarized the research proposal and relevant ethical considerations, as approved by the Saybrook Institutional Review Board. I said that for any who expressed interest in participating, I would follow up via e-mail to schedule a date for our first group meeting.

I kept a verbatim record of all proceedings of the cooperative inquiry group, including individual reports of experiential practices shared in the group, as well as our reflective discussions based on those reports, using a digital voice recorder. After downloading these recordings into my laptop computer, I was able to prepare written transcripts using a combination of playback and word processing software. After each meeting, I listened to the recording once through without interruption and then proceeded with the process of transcription. I also copied the voice recordings onto compact discs,

which I subsequently distributed to the participants so that each could benefit from hearing a playback of our discussion. This manner of sharing voice data was well received by members of the group, who were able to enjoy listening to our discussions at their leisure between meetings.

For purposes of thematic analysis, I relied on two complementary processes. First, I invited members of the inquiry group to reflect on both their own experiences and those reported by others in the group, and during the course of our reflective discussions to share their views, if any, regarding perceived areas of thematic continuity or coalescence. This process of participatory thematic development occurred as an integral part of the validation procedures contemplated by the cooperative inquire method (as discussed below). Accordingly, the transcripts of our several meetings reflected, at the outset, a certain amount of spontaneous thematic development within the group that produced numerous propositional statements, and these statements were inductive in the sense of capturing individual and shared insights rendered in our multiple voices and prompted by the empathic sharing of our various experiential practices.

In addition, during the process of converting the transcriptions into the more concise meeting reports (reproduced below), I endeavored to organize the material according to major themes. I initially defined these themes by distilling and paraphrasing each discernible topic discussed during our initial meeting and prompted by my solicitation of expressions of the participant's interests and past experiences relative to the topics of ancestral memory and transformative learning. These theme statements, in turn, provided a structured basis for focusing the discussions at subsequent meetings and also served to guide my organization and presentation of scholarly material obtained in a

review of the relevant academic literature. In this way, I was able to distill and use these themes for the purpose of ascertaining what was most relevant in the literature and to provide a framework for interpreting our subsequent discussions. Thereupon, my intent was to derive a series of findings that would serve to situate the collective experiences and insights of our group within the broader theoretical and empirical context of published scholarship, consistent with the iterative, cyclical, and multimodal process of epistemic discovery contemplated by the cooperative inquiry method.

In simple, practical terms, given the exploratory objective of this research, I performed the analysis of themes and articulation of findings by reviewing the meeting transcripts and systematically identifying those meaning perspectives that attracted the greatest interest and energetic involvement by the participants. I then sought to relate those themes back to the research question and locate them within the context of the relevant literature. As a final step, I circulated the draft meeting reports, including findings, to the members of the cooperative inquiry (CI) group and asked for feedback. Based on this constructive feedback, I generated the final version of the findings and analysis.

Cooperative Inquiry Method

If done well, a cooperative inquiry can serve as an open-ended invitation to discourse regarding the epistemic and social validity of previously overlooked sources of human knowledge. A distinctive feature of this approach is its participatory, person-centered orientation to data generation and critical analysis. As stated by one of the major pioneers of this approach, cooperative inquiry “does research *with* people not *on* them or *about* them” (Heron, 1996, p. 19, emphasis in original). Its primary intended outcomes,

methodologically speaking, are the progressive development and intersubjective/intermodal validation of human knowledge arising from a cyclical and iterative sequence of experiential and reflective explorations, stemming from an initial set of premises and guiding questions.

CI has been discussed in the literature mostly as a subcategory of participatory action research. Heron (2004) described this process as human-divine cocreation. That is to say that cooperative inquiry is integral to a broader, *divine process* for cultivating the intrinsic values of meaning, relationship and creativity. One of the core attributes of this form of inquiry is the concept of *critical subjectivity*. The critical aspect arises, primarily, in the way we devote more attention to subtle impressions and insights than is customarily given and in the way we consciously explore phenomena from many angles via *multiple ways of knowing*.

In the tradition of modern science, with its heavy reliance on positivistic assumptions about the nature of scientific truth, a large proportion of our contemporaries in the social science community have fallen into a habit of thinking about valid knowledge only in terms of cognitively derived, propositional claims; whereas the cooperative inquiry approach provides a means to explore and validate subtle and embodied modalities of human knowledge and therefore allows inquiry to extend productively beyond the inherent limitations imposed by the dictates of scientific objectivity. In practice, we tend to take for granted our multiple ways of knowing (including propositional, experiential, presentational, and practical knowledge), even though we tend to rely on (and implicitly trust in the validity of) each of these ways of knowing to function in daily life.

Yet, just as errors can emerge when, for example, perception and so-called objective instrumental measurement are at odds (e.g., the pilot's sensation of being in level flight when in fact the plane's instruments indicate execution of a banked turn), the process of validation in CI succeeds only when the multiple ways of knowing are explored in an integrated fashion. Collaborative and iterative exploration that establishes "a dialectical relationship between paths of expression and paths of explanation" allow for the extension of meaningful context and critical discernment from one epistemic mode to the next (Kasl & Yorks, 2002, p. 6, citing Reason & Hawkins). This integrated process of inquiry has been described as "whole-person learning" (p. 6).

The CI approach is adaptable to a wide variety of research questions and interpersonal contexts, and particular design characteristics will vary accordingly from one study to the next. However, certain defining features distinguish CI from other research methods. To a greater or lesser extent, virtually every cooperative inquiry combines:

Consensus-based decision-making: All participants are as fully involved as possible as coresearchers in all research decisions, pertaining to both content and method;

Integration of multiple ways of knowing: The method involves an intentional and systematic interplay between reflection and making sense on the one hand and experience and action on the other;

Validity procedures: Explicit attention is given to validity of inquiry and findings, using appropriate procedures;

Radical epistemology: A wide-ranging inquiry method that can be both informative about, and transformative of, any aspect of the human condition accessible to the transparent mind-body (i.e., inquiry that encourages open, unbounded awareness);

A practice-orientation: There are a range of special skills suited to such all-purpose experiential inquiry; and

Embodied and holistic knowledge: The full range of human sensibilities is available as an instrument of inquiry (Heron, 1996).

Procedure

Cooperative inquiry follows a basic, 4-stage cyclical pattern:

Stage 1: First Reflection/Planning Phase

During this phase, the group seeks consensus on a focus or topic of inquiry, whether the intended outcome will be informative or transformative, whether the initiating researcher will be a full or partial participant, whether the experiential work will be external or internal to the group, and so on.

Stage 2: First Action Phase

The coparticipants explore the inquiry focus in experience and action, applying and integrating a range of inquiry skills and keeping records of the data generated;

Stage 3: Experiential Immersion

The participants become more deeply involved in the inquiry with intention to find the forward edge of openness to the experience and the practice; and

Stage 4: Second Reflection Phase

The participants reconvene to share the data generated and engage in reflective discussion (a process of validation or making sense) followed by a process of review and

revision of the chosen inquiry topic in light of their experiential exploration; and finally, planning for subsequent action phases.

As mentioned above, cooperative inquiry employs a radical epistemology that utilizes unbounded, extraordinary awareness with intention to acquire knowledge that is both *informative* and *transformative*. As part of the consensus-seeking process within the inquiry group, it is helpful to clarify which of these two types of knowledge will primarily be sought or whether an effort will be made to pursue both in an integrated fashion. Both epistemic modes involve the development of knowledge using *extraordinary awareness* (Heron, 1996).

A cooperative inquiry that is intended to be informative will focus on the development and validation of propositional statements regarding the meaning of individual or group experiences, and extraordinary awareness will be employed by specifically attending to the participative process of perceiving itself. As discussed in the review of the literature above, Heron (1996) used the term *extraordinary perceptual heed* (p. 116) to refer to this manner of perceiving objects or events in the world while focusing awareness on the very process of perceiving. In contrast, an inquiry that is intended to be transformative will focus on the enactment of intentions through practice, and employ extraordinary practical heed, that is, action coupled with a more visionary and inclusive level of awareness, carefully attending to what one is doing, and using negative feedback efficiently. Practical heed is a marriage of intention and action and becomes transformative when action is undertaken as a “transactional manifold of meaning, relating a person intentionally to their world” (p. 118).

In conjunction with extraordinary awareness, both of these epistemic modes take into account the central role of memory, while emphasizing perceptual memory or practical memory, respectively. Again, paying heed to objects of perception and to one's own process of perceiving is in large measure a function of memory. Simply stated, "perception and memory are born together" (Heron, 1996, p. 117). Likewise, in the case of transformative inquiry, practical memory (i.e., memory related to action) entails a dynamic process of being aware, whereas taking action, of the relationship between the action and the manifold of meaning that we associate with the action, including the motives of the action, the actual behavior, the context of the action, any beliefs about the action, and the effects of the action. Transformation occurs when we notice any incongruencies among these elements of the manifold, and adjust toward a more holistic alignment of action and meaning (i.e., practical and propositional knowing).

Finally, Heron (1996) described the all-important validity procedures employed in cooperative inquiry, a process of reconciling our multiple ways of knowing in relation to a given phenomenon, so that the reflective, propositionally oriented mind and intuitive-experientially oriented body are in accord, as follows:

A proposition about the world is well-grounded in experiential knowing when it integrates both empathic communion with the interior presence of what is there, and intuition of significant pattern in its perceptual appearing. . . . We use our imagination to retrace, recreate our unrestricted perceptual imaging from within. And so we learn more about the archetypal templates, the homological principles our imaginal mind is pouring into the perceptual process. The proposition evokes the experience, calls it forth, or, to change the metaphor, refracts it, uncovers and reveals it. It recreates the participative knowing on which it is grounded, by echoing it. It symbolizes the experience by participative resonance. (Heron, 1996, pp. 173-184)

Report of Cooperative Inquiry: Participants

As mentioned above, I recruited the participants from amongst those who were already known to each other in an ongoing process of intentional community-building in northern Ohio. In making the choice to invite members from this group, I reasoned that the participants would likely work together well in the dynamic context of a cooperative inquiry, and further, that the members of an existing, well-functioning group dedicated to regenerative culture and an ongoing process of community building would exemplify a type of social setting in which formal inquiry and practices of the type contemplated could be beneficially replicated. My invitation to participate went out to the entire community, and in informal discussion, I was able to determine that the few members who chose not to participate did so for logistical reasons but were otherwise interested in the success of the research and supportive of the process being undertaken by their fellow community members.

All of the 8 participants in this study live in northeast Ohio, with ages ranging from the mid 20s to late 40s. All of the participants are predominantly of European-American ancestry, as detailed below, and all were raised in the United States. The participants each shared additional biographical information at the initial CI meeting, along with some initial reflections relative to her or his interests in the topic of inquiry.

RB is a man in his late 40s who works as a Web-page designer and IT consultant. He also is a graphic artist, a musician who plays flute in the style of the Indian raga, and a teacher of Qi Gong meditation. RB considers himself eclectic in his spiritual practices, and draws inspiration and guidance from eastern and western spiritual traditions alike. RBs paternal grandparents immigrated from Italy, and his great grandparents on his

mother's side came from Eastern Europe. He speculated that his European ethnic background may have influenced him, perhaps "genetically" in certain small ways, such as his preferences for certain breads or other foods. Yet, in general, while growing up, he was taught to think of himself and his family as American, and little attention was given to his family's European roots.

Regarding the relationship between ancestral memory and personal transformation, RB suggested that the "intuition of ancient wisdom" grounded in the evolutionary heritage and vast collective experience of our species may facilitate positive growth past inhibiting "stereotypes" and assumptions regarding the nature of reality. He posited that such intuition, if heeded, allows the human psyche to grow and evolve in ways that are adaptive to the changing contexts of our lives. He asserted that "life is change," and therefore that which helps us to align our truth claims with the ever changing contexts of lived experience is likely to be life-enhancing.

BB is a woman in her mid 40s who works as a freelance writer and editor. She is also the administrative coordinator of a local humanistic society. She is the wife of RB and identifies with the spiritual tradition of Christianity. Her paternal ancestors were Dutch/English "squires" who came over to America before the Pilgrims with the Dutch mining company. She speculated that she may have inherited from this background a certain "upper-class affinity," but she does not know "whether that's ancestral or just something [she] picked up." While growing up, she was told that her mother's line was German/English. However, later, during her teen years, she learned that her mother had in fact been adopted. She said that prior to knowing this, she had "no affinity with Germany whatsoever" and "could not identify that part of [her]self." Later on, BB

discovered her mother's lineage actually was English, Irish, Scot, and Native American. She said that this revelation made sense to her as she had always "really identified" with the Scots, Irish, and Native Americans. However, she did not know whether this sense of identity was "just something she picked up or because it was trendy."

BB reflected that the topic of personal transformation was of great interest to her, and she was "constantly reading about it and working on it." She stated that her interest in exploring this topic systematically was the primary reason that she chose to participate in the CI group. She said that she was relatively less drawn to the concept of ancestral memory; however, she did find the latter topic interesting given that she had in the past had "flashes of visions and memories and that type of thing." She also expressed a desire to learn more about cooperative inquiry and to get to know the other people in the group.

TL is a woman in her late 20s. At the time of the study, she was expecting her first child. Her spiritual path is Wicca, and she has studied and practiced in this tradition for many years. She recalled that while in grade school, she several times asked her parents where her family came from, and the only answer she received was that she was "American." She said this answer always felt "hollow" to her as she knew from the look of her skin and other physical features that her people were not "originally" from North America. Later, she learned from a family genealogist that her ancestors were mostly from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and to a lesser extent from Scandinavia, Germany, and native America. She recalled that, upon further exploration, the Irish part of her ancestry seemed to "pop up the most." Accordingly, she decided to explore this particular cultural lineage with an intention to "see what Ireland and [her] had in common." In the course of these explorations, she started feeling a stronger and stronger

connection to the Irish. However, she also noticed that “because there appears to be no Asian in [her] genetic background, [she finds] Asian culture particularly fascinating.” So as far as ideologies and philosophies, she tends to steer toward Asian cultures. Regarding her Native American heritage, she expressed that it felt “really sticky for me.” She felt she did not belong to native American culture but still wanted to explore her connection to it. “I feel like a stranger trying to go into a circle that I am not sure if I am welcome into.” So she has been “dancing around the outer edge for awhile.”

TL shared that her primary motivation for joining the CI group was a desire for personal transformation. She recalled having had many spontaneous experiences, of the type that “hit you, bowl you over, and make you think about things.” She said she finds modern society very “hollow”; as if we are just “going through the motions” and there is “no purpose in the things that we do.” Therefore, she wanted to explore “times when people had more purpose.” She expressed her belief that in those times and places, life was more of a struggle for survival, and spiritual or transformative experiences were even more powerful. Referring to ancient peoples, she posited that “we generally look back at them as though they were children even though we come from them, and everything that has led up to who we are today is a direct result of those experiences.” She asserted that ancient sites show again and again that people had a sophistication that we still cannot fully understand. She suggested that these “ancient sites can somehow trigger events, just like your environment or a series of circumstances that lead to an epiphany of your own past existence,” or the past existence of the people you come from.

JB is a computer technician in his late 20s. He was raised in a fundamentalist Christian household, but as an adult chose to pursue a different spiritual path, following

the traditions of paganism. He knew little about his family origins, other than the fact that his mother was born in Ireland, and his father was born in West Virginia. A while back, he learned that certain of his relatives had tried to do some genealogical research and apparently ran into too many obstacles and finally gave up trying to trace his family tree. Consequently, JB “[doesn’t] really feel like [he has] much of an ancestry.” Yet, he is still quite interested in the topic, so much so that he recently traveled to Ireland and lived for six months trying to “find something that [he] could connect to.” Having grown up in a military family, JB felt that there is no place that reflects his own culture or to which he can relate as his “home.” For JB, ancestry was a bit like “searching for . . . phantoms” that which “connects [one] to something that is as great and as large as the infinite.”

JB expressed his interest in pursuing the idea of “exploring through memory,” as one way of “seeing” among many. He suggested that what we may call ancestral memory does not necessarily entail looking “into the past.” He described the universe, metaphorically, as a “wadded up cloth,” and he expressed that, he conceptualized ancestral memory as “a kind of breaking through the holes in the fabric” allowing us to see at any given time different parts of an elusive whole. JB stated that his interest in ancestral memory and self-transformation stemmed from certain meaningful experiences, specifically when he had attended certain events. For example, he went to a Rainbow Gathering in 1998 during which he had a moment when he felt that he was in a place that he had been to before, perhaps in another life. It involved drums playing in the woods and people living in small huts and cooking in small camps.

SH is a woman in her mid 20s who worked at a local bank. She was engaged to JB and a practitioner of Wicca. She is descended from many ethnicities but claimed to be

“mostly gypsy.” Her paternal grandfather was from Bulgaria/Czechoslovakia, and her paternal grandmother was Dutch. Her maternal grandmother was Italian, and her maternal grandfather was Native American (most likely Chippewa) and German. She related that often people notice her relatively dark complexion and mistakenly believe her to be Middle Eastern or Indian. The two heritages she “sticks with the most” are the Native American and the Italian. She says she tends to be very perceptive and sense everything around her in here surroundings.

SH described her interest in systematically pursuing transformative experiences. She described a deeply moving experience she had at about the age of 12 while accompanying her Native American grandmother to a Pow Wow in Florida. Something about the smell of sage and the sound of native drumming seemed to open in her a “gateway.” Suddenly, she knew there was something more to her identity than just American or Catholic. Afterward, she tried to venture into “more earth-based religions” but had great difficulty finding more about her Native American roots, a culture that had been so ravaged and seemed to be “essentially gone.” She felt there was a lack of authenticity relative to the way things had once been, given the extent to which the tribes were forcibly broken up and mixed together. Faced with these difficulties in relation to her Native American roots, she ended up gravitating toward Celtic culture, Wicca, and paganism as a way to connect with a more earth-based consciousness.

SH posited that “if you don’t know who you are or where you come from, you can not find your purpose for being here; your *true* self.” She expressed that we are all “dancing in a circle together” but that today people are so caught up in the hustle and bustle that “they do not see anymore” and miss out on the meaning of simple daily rituals

(e.g., cooking over an open fire). She said that kneading bread especially is an activity that she feels connects her with her Native American ancestry (in the way it combines the elements) as well as with her Italian ancestry. However, in the old times people would join this type of activity with a traditional song. She said that she was interested in experiences such as these that are personally transformative and “help you recover these old memories.” She said, “The further back you can remember the more in touch you are with who you truly are.”

LL is a male in his mid 20s and is the husband of TL. He is eclectic in his spiritual practice with an interest in the ancient pagan traditions of the eastern Mediterranean. LL’s father was raised on one of the northern islands of Greece by a mother who in turn was “very proudly, 100% Spartan.” LL’s mother was born in Hazard, Kentucky of a lineage consisting of French, English, Native American, and “other.” LL described his ethnic lineage as “a little bit of everything.”

LL expressed that he was interested in expanding his knowledge of life generally, that he enjoys being part of a group process where “everyone’s views are heard.” He indicated that, during the past decade or so, he had experienced many powerful encounters with what he deemed ancestral presences and that these experiences left him with “more questions than answers.” He described witnessing a voodoo ritual involving a 50-year-old woman who “had more energy than any 18-year-old [he] had seen,” dancing tirelessly through the night. When this woman “called down” the god Legba, it appeared to LL that “as her hands fell so did the clouds fall.” To LL that was the “most magical experience” he had ever seen. He recalled thinking, “The Ancestors are there, they are all around us!”

LL also shared his recollection of other times when he, too, “called to [his] ancestors.” For example, when he found he could not play a pan pipe, he called to his Greek ancestors saying, “This should be in me.” The very next day, as LL was sculpting a statue of Pan, he received a call from his father

who was trying to get me to come over because he’s got a flute for me; *and* he had bought a pan pipe too, wants to know if I want that too. I mean, call-answer! Not even 24 hours had passed before that happened.

Said LL, “I’ve touched on it, I know that I am rippling in waters, and I can feel the ripples coming back to me with their own answers.”

MJ, my wife, was raised in a Lutheran family and currently identifies with Christian spiritual tradition, although she is also interested in Celtic pagan traditions. She works for the U.S. federal government as a conservation program manager with the Department of Agriculture. Her maternal ancestors immigrated to the U.S. from England, Ireland, France, Germany, and Switzerland. Her paternal grandfather was born in England, but his parents were Irish refugees who had stopped over in England on the way to the U.S. Her paternal grandmother grew up in an orphanage in Quebec, and little is known of her other than her family was half Irish and half French Canadian. MJ said that her recent research had disclosed, to her great interest, that both her parents’ family lines were traceable ultimately to Switzerland but via differing circuitous routes.

MJ shared that her father had died when she was only three years old, and her mother died approximately 10 years ago, soon after MJ had her first child. Due to these circumstances, she felt that she had been prematurely thrust into the role of family “matriarch,” leaving her with a “truncated feeling” and a heightened awareness of the loss of remembered family history and the conspicuous “absence of elders” in her life.

These untimely losses and certain subsequent experiences had engendered in her a heightened curiosity about “what came before.” For example, she recalled that one of her first jobs had been at the same company where her father worked, and in that setting she met people who remembered her father. They would come up to her and comment that she was “just like him,” apparently referring to something in her temperament. She wondered, “How did I get my dad’s temperament when I didn’t grow up with him?” Reflecting on these experiences, she asked, “How much of the memory inside of me comes from my parents to the extent that I just don’t realize?” She expressed her hope that her participation in the CI group might provide an occasion for her to engage in a systematic exploration of this and related questions.

As a participant myself, I related to the group that I too have a family background that is mixed European. My father’s side is primarily English and Scotch, with some Irish and some German (the Lower Rhine valley region along the French-German border). Most of my paternal line has been on American soil for between seven and nine generations. In contrast, mother’s parents immigrated from southern Italy and Sicily during the early 1900s. I described what I knew about the circumstances that brought many of my ancestors to America, including some on both sides who were forcibly transplanted or fled to escape persecution or political turmoil. I also mentioned that I had recently learned of specific entanglements between my father’s pioneer ancestors and the Seneca tribe in western Pennsylvania, involving bloodshed on both sides. Today, I live in an area that historically was part of the Seneca land.

I shared that I had actually located some of the physical sites where my European and early American ancestors had located and that my interest in ancestral memory

stemmed in part from my desire to understand both the “light and the dark” aspects of my family and ethnic background, as a way of critically deconstructing within myself the psychological and spiritual legacy of “white European” culture, including the present legacy of past harms brought upon, or inflicted by, my ancestors. I speculated that by exploring the shadow of our history, we might also learn things about ourselves that can be liberating, partly because we can see how that shadow actually carries from one generation to the next.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Initial Reflective Meeting

The participants met on August 5, 2005, at an elegant private home located on the Lake Erie shoreline in Euclid, Ohio. The initial meeting of 6 participants (BB, RB, SH, JB, TL, and myself) took place on a pleasant, breezy afternoon around a table within a screened porch overlooking the sun-bathed waters of the lake. Participants LL and MJ, for reasons beyond their control, were not able to attend this first meeting, but with the consent of the group, were invited to join us at the second meeting.

After initial greetings, I handed out a meeting agenda and copies of an article by Heron and Reason (2001). I identified the article as a summary of the cooperative inquiry (CI) research philosophy and method, providing a background account of its development and applications in the fields of psychology, organizational systems, and human science. I emphasized that the CI process is distinctively democratic and participatory insofar as every member of an inquiry group is both a researcher and participant. I invited the participants to read the article at their leisure and also to ask questions at any time during my initial presentation or during the interactive discussions that would follow.

I summarized how the conduct of scientific research with human participants presents unique challenges that give rise to the need for established ethical rules and that, as required, I had obtained Institutional Review Board approval prior to the initiation of data collection activities. I asked each participant, as well as the host of our meeting venue, to sign an approved disclosure and consent form. Then, I asked for and obtained the participants' permission to record the meeting on a digital voice recorder. Finally, I

assured the participants that I would maintain the confidentiality of our group discussions and the identities of each group member, and that I would not publish any of their statements or other contributions in any form without first obtaining their consent to do so.

Following these preliminary disclosures, commitments, and clarifications, I invited the participants, each in turn, to give a brief personal introduction, including any personal background information they might wish to share and any initial reflections or anecdotes that they believed would help us understand the present context of their lives and the basis for their current interests in exploring the themes of ancestral memory and transformative learning. I invited them to suggest ways they might restate, revise, or otherwise attempt to capture a group consensus on the general topic of inquiry that would align well with their individual interests and motivation for participating.

Summary of Findings Based on Initial Reflections

As documented in paraphrases and direct quotes in the preceding discussion of participants, all of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the label *American* as a way of describing their ethnic identity and expressed a desire to connect with some deeper aspect of their lineal ancestry. During our initial reflective discussion, we found that we held in common a desire to discover and relate to a more ancient ethnic heritage, yet we expressed a shared frustration at the lack of continuity or cohesiveness emerging from our mixed cultural origins and bloodlines. This situation induced several of us to take action to seek identification with some part of our ethnic heritage, in preference over other parts. We felt that we needed to choose or discover those aspects of our family backgrounds with which to identify. We acknowledged a shared interest in the concept of

ancestral memory, and in pursuing the same via intentional revisioning practices, undertaken individually and as a group.

At a more specific level, the initial group discussion revealed that the desire to explore ancestral memory stemmed from a variety of past experiences and present circumstances related anecdotally by the individual participants. The following is a distillation of the statements made by participants in the CI group in response to being asked about the basis for their interest in the topic of ancestral memory (see Participants section above). These included:

- A search for conscious connection with our evolutionary heritage;
 - A desire to explore skills for personal transformation;
 - A perception that our ancient ancestors had developed existential wisdom that could be accessed to transform the hollowness of our modern worldview;
 - A search for alternative ways of seeing a reality that is ultimately, infinitely mysterious;
 - An intuitive attraction to earth-oriented culture, both ancient European and Native American;
 - A hunger for meaning and purpose that transcends the ephemeral life of the individual;
 - A desire to understand past experiences that had left a strong impression of ancestral presence;
 - A longing for the presence of elders and sense of being a living legacy prematurely responsible for the continuity of culture that is barely understood;
- and

- A desire to confront the shadows of the collective past.

Decisions Made at Initial Reflective Meeting

Following these introductions and individual reflections, I invited the participants to move into a group decision-making mode and together seek a consensus around any specific questions to explore during the first inquiry cycle. To provide a framework and stimulus for this group discussion, I briefly explained my thought process in choosing the title for our research, “Transformative Dimensions of Ancestral Memory.” Specifically, I described my intent, in proposing the title, to interweave the concepts of memory, ancestry, and transformative learning. I stated that I was using the term *transformative* to denote “experiences that transform ourselves and our world; how we learn and how we construct our reality and work within it.” I also said that I did not believe it was desirable to impose a fixed or “authoritative” definition of the term *ancestral memory* at the outset. Instead, I described the term as a linguistic container that might be approached from a variety of theoretical perspectives (see literature discussion above).

I suggested that, for the reasons stated above, the construct *ancestral memory* might serve well to guide our inquiry toward an open-ended conversation covering a broad range of experiences, reflections, and interpretations, and that these may either resolve into a convergence of ideas around central themes or engender a more expansive dialectic suggesting multiple alternative pathways for future inquiry. I suggested that either outcome would be desirable if pursued in a manner that is grounded in experience, critical, interactive, and committed to intersubjective validation and consensus-building. Finally, I stressed that in selecting such a broad topic, we would be assuming the risk of

losing focus due to vagueness, and to counter that, we would do well to spend some time in discussion attempting to refine our mutual understanding of the key concepts involved.

We discussed the scope of the inquiry process in terms of the range of phenomena or issues to be investigated. I invited the participants to reflect how they might respond, in terms of preferences or tolerances, to a group process that is meandering or branching off on the one hand or highly systematic and focused on the other. I suggested that it is quite normal in such a process to encounter moments when the inquiry seems chaotic and that these uncomfortable moments may well precede the emergence of a new insights or conceptual synthesis. Building on this notion, I assured them that a process such as this involving personal transformation is inherently open-ended and can at times seem disorienting. Given the variety of interests expressed, several participants indicated that we should not unduly constrain our inquiry but that we should remain sufficiently focused so as to address our core research meaningfully.

We agreed to pursue a course of action to be undertaken between group meetings whereby each member would engage in some manner of self-directed, experiential practice relevant to our topic of the inquiry. We agreed that we would each give further thought to the practices we would like to undertake and communicate these thoughts to each other via e-mail following the initial meeting.

I asked whether any members of the group already had in mind a particular practice that they would like to pursue for purposes of the self-directed phase of the inquiry cycle.

- SH expressed an intention to explore the “everyday rituals” practiced by herself and others to get a better sense of the unique meanings these rituals hold for each individual practitioner.
- I expressed an intent to engage in “revisoning the landscape” using practices including visiting sacred sites from my own cultural lineage and those of others, and engaging in centering exercises, chanting, walking meditations, spiritual orienteering, dream travel, and related practices with an intent to increase my awareness of the felt resonances and perceived subtle presences of the ancestral landscape. I said that I wanted to gain a better sense of why certain places carried for me a distinctive quality of sacredness, powerful resonance, or familiarity extending beyond the conscious recollection of specific personal experiences.
- TL expressed an intent to explore the experience of childbirth, from the “before and after” perspectives, and with reference to how this most basic of life-cycle experience may transform her sense of ancestral connectedness.
- JB indicated that he was interested in possibly pursuing a past-life regression, under the guidance of a professional person he knew, and also to investigate what practices or rituals he might pursue that had once been performed by his Celtic ancestors.
- Several members indicated they had not come to the initial meeting with a specific idea regarding the type of self-directed practices they would like to pursue but intended to spend some time following the initial meeting and perhaps follow up with their ideas via e-mail.

The group further agreed that we should plan to have at least one meeting in a natural area, ideally at twilight and around an outdoor fire, feeling that such a liminal surrounding would help open our awareness to ancestral presences as we engage in group sharing and exercises.

I invited members to consider ways to support each other as we entered the experiential phase by sharing any relevant and useful written materials and correspond so as to offer practical suggestions, feedback, or other opportunities for ongoing collaboration during the interim periods between group meetings. Several members of the group exchanged references to books that they had read that were pertinent to our topic. However, one member (TL) expressed to the group her personal intent to “steer clear” of most written material, at least during the early phases; thereby allowing her to focus more clearly on her own unique pathway of inquiry, rather than a pathway defined by others.

We agreed to meet three times over the course of the cooperative inquiry and that the interval separating group meetings should be no less than 30 days, so as to allow sufficient time for the self-directed phases of the inquiry cycle.

Finally, we agreed to reconvene a month later to share practical and experiential data, which may be presented to the group via any form of documentation or replication that can be shared within the group and provide the basis for further exploration. This sharing would set the stage for deepening reflection and validation procedures, allowing us to make findings as a group. In the course of this sharing, we agreed to circle back on our original premises regarding our chosen topic and consider whether it may be appropriate to revise these concepts to accommodate new points of consensus and any new perspectives obtained during the above-mentioned experiential phase.

Second Reflective Meeting

We held the second meeting on September 3, 2005, at an outdoor location in Madison, Ohio, during a weekend retreat at the country house of a friend. In attendance were RB, SH, JB, LL, MJ, TL, and myself. BB could not attend due to a scheduling conflict. By mutual agreement, we commenced our reflective discussion shortly after nightfall as we sat around a campfire after sharing a meal. As at the first meeting, I digitally recorded the discussion with the consent of all members of the group.

I opened by welcoming 2 additional participants, LL and MJ, who had not been present at the first meeting, but who by consensus were invited to join at this time. For their benefit, and to refresh all our memories, I provided a brief summary of the initial meeting, based on my review and transcription of the voice recording taken at that meeting. I handed out compact discs of the same voice recording and encouraged the other group members to review the recording at their leisure. In addition, BB was not able to join us at the second meeting but was able to review the recording of this second session afterward.

The 2 additional participants were invited to share their personal and family backgrounds, intentions for the inquiry and initial reflective thoughts, as the rest of us had done at the first meeting (see initial statements by LL and MJ in the Participants section).

I next reviewed the interim tasks to which we had agreed at the first meeting, after which the group engaged in a process of individual sharing and group discussion, reflecting on experiences had during the interim period between meetings, and also sharing any other relevant thoughts that they wished to express at that time.

Reflective Discussion

RB's meditations with ancestral objects. RB presented an oral and written report of his initial round of experiential practice. He explained that his idea had been influenced by Tibetan Qi Gong meditation practice and involved contemplation of various objects during sitting meditation. The practice involved a preparatory stage, “whereby he would “call [him]self out, get all [his] centers open,” after which he would pick up a selected object and meditate while paying close attention to any “impressions” he got. RB explained that this experiential practice was guided by the premise that “different things people have done would leave impressions in the objects.” RB further posited that it was very important to know the histories of inherited objects, especially those that we take into our accustomed living spaces. In his words,

You pick up something neat at a garage sale, you're picking up something more. . . . You move into a house, you are getting a bunch of stuff. I know when I had my house before [my wife's] house, I had a lot of impressions moving in there. A woman lived there her whole life—her whole 90 years was her life—so I mean you are talking before modern technology . . . into a time when she probably was behind where the world was. And it started out obviously as a big farm, and she sold off land until she had her little house and rows of neighbors, and there were a lot of impressions there! You have to say, “I'm not making this up, I'm feeling stuff here” and we've all felt stuff like that at different times and places, and I figure small objects that you can pick up and meditate with [is] a way of doing something more limited.

RB provided the group with a written report of his explorations and also posted this information on his private Web site. In summary, he first meditated on a particular Tibetan bracelet. He thought this would be a good object with which to begin because the Tibetans who created it would have been doing mantras over it. He knew that it had been created as a protection bracelet, and there probably had been rituals done with it. The second object was a rosary that belonged to RB's grandmother. The third object was a

spoon once owned by his wife's late aunt (RB said that he had very little knowledge of this particular aunt, other than his having seen a drawing of her that revealed "very intense eyes"). The fourth item was a set of five Native American arrowheads.

RB reported that, during his first meditation session with the Tibetan protection bracelet, he chanted a Tibetan mantra for a period of time and then placed the bracelet on his wrist, whereupon he "felt the compulsive quality of spiritual seekers toward attainment which is contrary to humbleness." He said, "It gave me a feeling of protection and power [and] a sense that I am somebody with achievement. I was bearing a power object to ward off demons and evil fates." He reported that when he removed the bracelet from his wrist, he felt like the "great spiritual battle for the world was lifted from [his] shoulders and again [he] became a 2-legged with the watery-airy luminous light flowing through [his] being. The mantra seemed more powerful without the additional influence of the material bracelet."

During his second session, while meditating with his grandmother's rosary, RB reported that his strongest impressions were felt at the level of the "heart chakra" and also at the level of the lower chakras, and that he had a feeling of "emotional turmoil" associated with the "fears and pains of incarnation that were assuaged by the promise of paradise." He reported that the rosary invited deep reflection on the lives of his immigrant grandparents and parents, which involved their belief in redemptive suffering, as well as on his own evolving spiritual development from childhood on. Referring to these early associations between suffering, sickness, and spirituality, he said, "This hope of the next realm and obsessive fear of not being worthy seemed infused in this holy relic." After meditating with his grandmother's rosary, RB recalled that he had an

impulse to go down and wash his hands and an impression that he had to wash “all that fear” away.

In another session, while meditating in the same fashion with a spoon that was once owned by his wife’s deceased aunt (whom he had never met), RB focused on the aunt as a child and said he “felt a sense of sexual energy and the mysteries of her body played a big part in her life” and “felt that she could not completely understand all of society’s taboos, but learned throughout her childhood to keep secret thoughts and actions that others would not approve of, considering those judgmental philosophies to be ignorance.” He said, “I feel that she considered herself free to do as she pleased, but wise enough to not let on about all her actions.”

Finally, RB had meditated with five Native arrowheads, one at a time, and he reported that each arrowhead seemed to carry a specific energy. Images flowed from these energetic impressions, mostly of landscapes, sacred places and human community, of birthing and elderhood, conveying a sense of the “generations of humanity flowing over time.” However, while holding one of the Native arrowheads, RB said that he had received a very aversive feeling, and he specifically recalled that he abbreviated the time he spent with it, relative to the other objects, because he did not want to hold it that long:

I felt a tall thin man who was a hunter. This arrowhead was for killing. I felt that he enjoyed the power of killing. I saw a dark blood red color of death. I did not want to hold it for long. On my second brief pass, I felt a mean and cruel person, who would inflict pain. When I looked at this arrowhead, the stone chosen for it had a red tinge. I felt the need to rub my hands together and then shake off the energy of this arrowhead after touching it.

RB reported that he had meditated with each object for a period of time, after which he spent time reflecting and writing about the experiences. In each instance, he

found that his experiences during the meditations had been significantly different from what he described as his “preconceptions and intentions” going into the meditations.

Upon reflection, RB said he gained a “sense of validity” pertaining to his (above mentioned) premises, *insofar as he got from the meditations impressions that were distinctly different from the types of impressions he thought he would be getting*. These findings left R with a heightened sense that the impressions were coming from “*somewhere else*,” other than from his own preconceptions. He expressed his desire to continue in the same vein, performing the same type of meditation experiments, and he offered to conduct similar “experiments” with objects provided by others in the group, or alternatively, to instruct the others on the techniques that he found were “working” (in the sense of being personally meaningful) for him.

SH reflected that this account reminded her of the “reasons why we smudge,” why Native Americans do so, and why it has become part of eclectic practices everywhere. We receive impressions of the “emotional state” that some object or place has been through, while also altering its state via “its incarnation with you.” Therefore,

any time something new is brought into our house, especially if it is something that was picked up at a garage sale. . . . Whatever it used to be is irrelevant on some level, for it [is] in our house and interacting with us now. But [smudging] keeps the impressions from spilling over and occupying your space.

SH related a story of one time when she bought a bracelet at a coffee shop, she put it on her wrist halfway home, whereupon she immediately had a strong aversive feeling that prompted her to throw it out the window. She said it made her feel “so icky!” that she “knew the source of the bracelet was emanating out” on to her.

TL’s reflections on body memory and the universal feminine experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. TL (seven months pregnant at the time) shared her

thoughts and impressions in anticipation of the process of childbirth. She said that she had heard many women tell her that

When you are giving birth, not only are you in a position where you are connected to your mother's, mother's, mother's . . . mother (and on and on), but all female creatures! It's not just limited to your own genealogy or even your own species, but it is this *universal feminine experience* that you open up to.

She shared her anticipation of childbirth as a point of “beginning” and expressed her intent to explore from there everything that comes with it, from breastfeeding to changing diapers, “everything from transcendental epiphany experiences to daily activities, and how these things make me feel connected.” She said that she was reading to get ready.

TL's sharing engendered great interest within the group. Responding to the notion of a trans-species connection, MJ related how she had recently witnessed the birth of kittens, and she found that she was “identifying deeply” with the experience of the mother cat.

TL said she had noticed, while walking in her pregnant condition among various people at work, that people exhibited a variety of responses through their body language. Specifically, she had noticed that many women who in past encounters would politely nod or not react at all, would open up to her. It seemed to her that being pregnant was like “joining some universal club.” She observed that “being pregnant has made [these female coworkers] look at me, and seeing something akin to themselves that they recognize, they are willing to share by opening dialogue where they never would before.” She said that she found that observation “quite interesting.”

I queried whether there might be a counterpart experience invoked in men, for example, some given sense of recognition by men that connects them with the universal

female experience of childbirth and the act of giving new life, albeit in different ways, in terms of their perceptions, thoughts, actions, and associated meaning structures.

TL posited that the “the *creative process* is just as valid among women who don’t bear children, and men, and children and people who have gone beyond the ability to procreate.” She reflected on how the metaphor of *birth* is commonly used in the context of artistic expression, for example, someone whose project “gives birth” to some new creation; just as a woman in the process of bearing a child is said to be in “labor.” She observed that in both circumstances,

It really means something to you, and it’s a process that you go through from beginning to some level of completion. [Childbirth] may be the most intense expression of it, but that expression is valid [for both] genders. Maybe seeing some of that will help open that doorway for those who don’t think of it [art, the creative process] as birthing, but it is.

Referring back to her sharing at the first meeting, regarding her conception of a circle of compassion linking past, present and future, TL observed how at the moment she felt that she was facing “this doorway” that she “can’t see beyond at this point;” herself as mother who has already gone through the birth process. She suggested that she is “reaching forward for some level of comfort and support from the person I am who has already done it.” Yet this future self is saying “there is only so much support I can give because you have to go through it still.”

SH reflects on her further experience with synchronicity and the familiar stranger. Returning to a discussion of how concentration on particular objects might invoke unexpected impressions of familiarity, LL said that it would be interesting to extend that process to an exploration involving people that you never met before. LL said

that when he meets someone, sometimes he has “flashes of their whole life,” it is like a “deeper form of empathy.”

LL’s comment reminded SH of a similar experience she had recently had. She was at a gathering of women for a blessing on a particular Wicca holiday. They gathered outside, down by a river. One of the attendees introduced her to woman whom she had never met. LL described this first encounter and the instant sense of familiarity she felt as follows:

When I shook her hand to tell her who I was, I held her like this [grabbing her forearm] and she automatically did the same thing. . . . I was so drawn to her, that I really felt like she was kindred. . . . She felt very tribal to me, [a] very Native American aspect. We were either from the same tribe, or we were from the same blood. We were comrades in some kind of significant time in our life, maybe as comrades in war or something like that, someone you depended on. She automatically brought that up, and to this day I still do not remember hav[ing] ever seen her, and I think about her constantly. When I think about how people relate to each other even if you didn’t know them. . . . It wasn’t like I looked at her eyes. It wasn’t that I’d seen certain features in her. It was just . . . her energy and her presence stood out so strongly that it swept me off my feet, like “Oh my gosh, I know who you are!” I think it was more of an ancestral thing.

Reflecting further on that moment of recognition, she continued,

It wasn’t a *deja vu* feeling . . . it wasn’t like that. It was an immediate recognition of sisterhood. . . . It was very feminine in the link between us, but I am just relating to her in this life that way. But it was . . . *very close!* She was like “I don’t know who you are either, but oh my gosh, I really feel like you are a sister too!” It was so weird! And we both had different features, were different people but we still felt that connection . . . immediately when I said “Hi my name is S, and she said, ‘Hi, my name is so-and-so,’ and *immediately it was a smack sound*, and immediately we were just going for [each other’s] hand. It was unreal! I get goosebumps every time I think about it. That’s got to be a past life or an ancestral memory.

SH wondered aloud whether we retain some form of “positive ions” from our experiences and whether this might be the case in relation to meaningful encounters with other people, as well as places or things.

LL said that he thinks there are multiple layers of memory; like there are many ways to construe the dimensions of infinity. LL said that “every one of an infinite number of points is itself and infinity.” I added that the concept of infinity does not lend itself to linear thought, so in trying to understand memory holistically and account for these feelings of deep connection experienced during initial encounters with certain people, places, or objects, we right away get into thinking about the image of the circle.

RB responded by referring to information theory, which suggests that the domain of the mind and reasoning is limited, and we only are able to process and analyze a small fraction of the vast volume of information that is being generated in the phenomenal world. He gave the example of how, given the infinitesimal size of atoms and numerical probabilities, we can surmise that every breath we take in includes some atoms that were once also inhaled by George Washington or Julius Ceasar. We can show this mathematically, but still we are not really able to comprehend that idea as being a part of our personal or collective reality. LL said,

A lot of times I don't think that there is such a thing as time. But I do have to fall back on that sometimes, because once again it goes back to perception. . . . The now always exists, it's how we speak to our ancestors. So in essence, time exists *but*, no, it doesn't. What I normally consider to be time, is not the ticking of the clock.

We discussed how our realities are largely constructed from all the many possible ways of perceiving the world and how social validation leaves us with the impression that we perceive the world objectively. We together reflected on how our current discussion of the incomprehensibly infinite nature of phenomenal and the limited ability of our minds to comprehend big ideas like time itself, harkened back to an idea that TL had expressed at our first meeting, that is, the notion of time wrapping around on itself in a

circular way and how our efforts to perceive and intentionally work with this circularity of time may create a kind of “portal to the past.” We then considered how memory was much more than simply “going back” and recalling stored information. Rather, memory may be experienced as a certain feeling tone, a sense of familiarity, or in many other ways besides a cognitive process of information retrieval.

Findings from Second Meeting.

Reflecting on the major theme emerging in or discussion, the concept that when we encounter experiences like RB’s or SH’s in which our sense of deep connection or familiarity in relation to a person, place, or object that seems to be coming from a place outside our linear experience of time, there are two potent ideas with which one grapples. One is memory: that which gives us a sense of recognition or understanding of meaning in the face of boundless mystery and which, in a sense, experientially is not limited to the neurological retention of data but includes the energies of a place that we find familiar or meaningful. The other is time: a concept that seems much larger than the metaphors that we use to comprehend it. So when we are talking about ancestral memory, are we really talking about *the experience of time in a different way?*

JB suggested that the word *memory* for him encompassed not just recollection of an event, that is, memory as an act, but *also the psychological and emotional responses we have to experiences that we find personally meaningful*, for example, the sense of familiarity or comfort that we experience in certain settings such as a ritual gathering.

RB extended this idea to suggest that, if we think of something as a memory because, although an experience may be new, maybe there is an innate, instinctual framework that invokes in us a sense of familiarity in relation to certain common human

experiences. We agreed that the following analogy was instructive: *that which, from a behavioral perspective, we might describe as innate knowledge or instinct, we might perceive as ancestral memory from a subjective-experiential or relational perspective.*

Also, we decided that *when we see something we do not understand, but it still “has energy” for us, in a most basic sense we are experiencing its meaning.* Yet, when such meaning is not validated by the society around us, the resonance we initially experienced, and even the memory of that initial resonance, is soon dismissed as unreal and falls out of our field of perception.

Further Questions, Findings, and Critical Evaluation

We discussed whether we humans are capable of perceiving phenomena that are wholly outside of our innate or constructed meaning structures.

LL and RB both described their experiences of perceiving unidentified flying object (UFO) phenomena that they could recall to this day, even though initially these objects had been totally unfamiliar to them. I recalled my earliest memory of seeing a grasshopper and how it seemed to have an aura, which I never again saw after I learned to name it as a category of insect.

Reflecting on these examples, we asked ourselves whether ancestral memory might operate at the prereflective level of knowing in at least two ways: First, If we understand that we can only perceive that which carries some meaning for us, then by inference, we can posit that some primitive or innate source of meaning operates that allows us to perceive objects that are wholly new to our personal (if not intergenerational or species-level experience?) Second, we recalled those instances in which an encounter with something or someone new (in terms of our personal experience) seemed to trigger

an unmistakable, yet mysterious, sense of familiarity. In these cases, ancestral memory seemed to operate at the prereflective level but in a much more powerful way that was sufficient to invoke an affective response and an accompanying sensation of transcending temporal and spatial limitations.

SH responded to this idea by suggesting that these levels may be a matter of degree, but if we consider ancestral memory to be that which allows us to perceive as well as emotionally respond to the phenomena in the first instance, then in a sense, “All that is real to us is ancestral memory.” There seems to be no bright line that would distinguish memory as a basis for perception from memory as a basis for recognition. Certainly, we cannot assume that every time we recognize something or someone as familiar, it is because we had encountered it before: at least not in the conventional sense of prior, personal experience!

On further reflection, we agreed that we cannot reasonably assume that everything that lies beyond our present field of perception is per se meaningless, any more than we can assume that extraperceptual objects are nonexistent in an absolute sense. The anecdotes shared in our discussion included numerous examples in which socially or experientially acquired meaning structures induced a kind of *perceptual forgetting* in relation to earlier meaning attributions. The aura that I once saw around a grasshopper disappeared as soon as I learned to call it a grasshopper. Several friends of RB had been with him at the time of his reported UFO encounter, and they were clearly moved by the experience at the time but later could not recall having seen anything. Why did RB remember and the others forget, when at the time, the encounter seemed to impress them equally? TL posited that, in cases such as these, socially conditioned disbelief had

suppressed, rather than extinguished, memory; albeit at the most basic level of perception. RB suggested that the boundaries of perception constructed in this way, on the basis of socialized disbelief, define for us a “shared dream that we call reality.”

As we sat around the campfire, the personal stories and reflective discussion continued into the late evening, long after the allotted meeting time and the memory of the voice recorder had been exceeded. Before closing, we agreed that I would contact the members of the group via e-mail to suggest a time and location for a third meeting.

Third Reflective Meeting/Reflective Discussion

By consensus, the third meeting was held at the same location as the first, at the lake house in Euclid, Ohio. In attendance were JB, SH, RB, and myself. On the morning of the third meeting, 2 of the 8 members (LL and MJ) who had planned to attend called on short notice to indicate they had been detained for reasons beyond their control. I offered to reschedule, but they insisted that we should proceed so as not to inconvenience the others. They confirmed that their nonattendance at the third meeting in no way should be interpreted as a lack of interest in the topic or the process. Likewise, MJ was unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict. However, the 3 absent participants were subsequently included via review of the meeting report and opportunity for feedback.

Recalling how, at the second meeting, the campfire and natural surroundings had provided an evocative setting for our discussion, I had suggested to the group via e-mail that we might wish to bring any ancestral objects, books, photos, or other items that might serve to create sacred space for this third group interaction. We created a makeshift altar and sat in a circle, in chairs and on the floor. I initiated the meeting by outlining three objectives, which reflected our prior agreements and which I offered as a general

structure within which to continue the sharing, reflection, and critical validation processes undertaken at the first two meetings. Specifically, I invited the participants to: (1) share personal reports of experiences or events that had taken place since the first meeting; (2) engage in a process of mutual reflection, while sharing impressions and thoughts triggered by the individual reports; and (3) attempt to identify any common themes and common understandings regarding the transformative implications of these experiences or events.

SH Updates the Group on her “Familiar Stranger” Story

Moving into a process of individual sharing, we began with a quick check-in by each participant, after which SH, who had undertaken to explore ancestral presences in everyday activity, recalled the story that she shared about meeting a stranger whose presence invoked in her a strangely powerful sense of familiarity.

Since the previous meeting, she learned that this person’s last name was the same as her mother’s maiden name. She saw this person again at an organized ritual event and was struck by certain aspects of her dress that seemed to complement her own. Specifically, the other woman was wearing a necklace at the time that she recognized as the “sister necklace” to her own. Soon after, when the participant dressed up for Halloween in a costume that happened to include a wig, she again saw the other woman and noticed that she, too, was wearing a wig, except of opposite color. Reflecting on these striking synchronicities and recalling the instantaneous personal connection that she (and apparently the other women) had felt at their first encounter, SH speculated that the two might share “a common bloodline.” She said she was “intrigued” by the revelation that the two shared a family name, but she hastened to add that the name they shared was

a common one and that the synchronicities that she experienced could have been a matter of simple coincidence. In any event, SH shared that she felt a connection with the other woman that was mystical and carried for her great personal meaning.

The Group Revisits the Earlier Themes and Inquiry Questions

This update by SH served as a catalyst for a lively discussion covering many of the same themes that we had discussed at the first two meetings. In the course of this discussion, I attempted to refresh the group's collective memory, summarizing my notes regarding the stories, reflections, and thematic ideas discussed during our previous two meetings, and I again handed out compact discs containing the digitized voice recording of the previous meeting.

BB Receives Group Validation of her Impressions from a Guided Shamanic Journey

At this point in the discussion, JB, who just the day before had undertaken a guided "past-life regression" with the assistance of a professional spiritual healer, indicated that the experience had made a strong impression on him that he would like to share, but it also had taken him into "unfamiliar territory" and left him feeling "ungrounded" and somewhat "disoriented." We agreed to allocate sufficient time to hear JB's account with much detail as he was comfortable sharing, after which we would return to an open-ended process of reflection and consensus-building.

BB reported her recent experience at a spiritual retreat, attended by herself and RB, entitled "Shamanism and Peacekeeping." The retreat instructor had guided her and other attendees through a series of shamanic journeying exercises. For purposes of one of the exercises, recalled BB, the attendees were asked to "find one of [their] ancestors and

ask ... if there was something that [they] could do to help heal the family past, so then that would heal [their] present and children's future."

BB recalled that during the journey, she sought out and found "the presence of [her] great grandmother," whose image she had remembered from old photos passed down through the family. While experiencing herself being accompanied by the presence of this deceased family member, she journeyed to another "place" where she noticed "an older woman" that she thought might have been her great, great grandmother. The three women "connected and bonded and did a sort of 'peace dance' together," and BB was "given the impression" that these maternal ancestors were "trying to heal the negative male energy in our family, or balance it out or something." She said she tried to convey to these ancestors that "whatever they went through, good things were coming out of their lineage, and they could still be healed now."

BB observed that even though the retreat instructor had assured her that there was no "wrong way" to perform the journeying exercise, she nonetheless doubted whether she had come away with any useful knowledge, given that none of her specific experiences seemed to "match" the various illustrative descriptions provided in advance by the instructor, leading her to believe that none of her experiences had been "the way they were supposed to be."

Several other members of our group shared thoughts in response to BB's account. SH suggested that at least BB had "made a connection" with her grandmothers, which would have been "the most important part" of the experience. SH expressed her opinion that any ritual that would have been "brought back" from the shamanic journey would have been "more of the hocus pocus part." Rather, from her perspective, the most

significant type of ritual practice in that context would have been the one performed “not on this physical plane, but more on their plane,” that is, the dance performed *within* the shamanic journey itself. BB agreed that “it would make more sense to do [the ritual] there.”

RB Recalls Lucid Dreams Involving the Absence of Time Consciousness

RB shared a couple of lucid dreams that he had a week prior to our meeting. In the first dream, he found himself looking out of a castle window. He saw a stone stairway that emerged in a walkway that was separate from the castle wall. He recalled looking through a window or “plaque” that contained writing that seemed to be “continuously changing.” Being conscious at the time that he was dreaming, he realized that he was not seeing what was “originally there,” but was seeing computer code fragments and other clearly modern images superimposed on this ancient scene. After awakening, he speculated that perhaps he had been viewing a “spot to focus on for power or for visioning.”

During the second dream, occurring later the same night, he found that he was back in the same place. He descended into a snow-covered courtyard and then ascended up a walkway into a long, narrow room (with windows) that was occupied by men sitting at a table. He felt that he had some purpose in being there and that his presence was somehow acknowledged by these men. He said, “I felt that I had some type of a mission, and that the people looked at me with some type of respect.” He also said that, while in the dream, he had a “very peculiar feeling.” He knew he was dreaming, but was “not trying to control things.” He did not specifically think of himself as being in a past life or some other ancestral place. Afterward, he was struck by the realization that while in the

dream he had not thought of his surroundings as being in any way unusual, and it did not register with him until after he awoke that the context of his dreams was of another time or place:

So both of those dreams ... had that crystal clear quality, and they seemed ancestral because they happened in a past time. . . . Were they past lives? Were they . . . whatever, I don't think I need to reflect on it in that sense, but it was just very interesting . . . these subtle aspects of how I felt within myself while I was doing that.

This report prompted me to share my recollection of having had numerous recent dreams involving stone walls or other stone structures that reminded me of being in medieval castles and that this was affirming to me to hear someone else's account of having experienced a similar type of dream space.

RB continued with his account:

I felt that I had been in those spaces before. Especially the long room was very familiar to me, and when I woke up ... or even while I was there it was like, well I've dreamed I was here before. But ... the whole time I was in the dream in this long narrow room, it was [just] a long narrow room. It wasn't until I woke up that I said well that makes sense that it would be a castle wall. At the time it . . . was above ground level. It was long and narrow . . . had the classic type stone windows in it, but at the time my mind never took a step to say it's a castle wall or anything. When I woke up and started thinking about it, [I said to myself], "Oh, well that would be that space." And so, to me that was kind of significant. It's almost like you experience something, and this is what I have noticed in past life regression . . . that when I woke up they made perfect sense, but while I was doing the regression, it wasn't like something I thought of or that would normally come to me.

Recalling another dream, he continued:

I was in a cave . . . and there were lots of bones all over. These days because of modern disposal you don't think about that, but ... if you lived in that type of a hunting environment you would end up accumulating tons of bones, and you would have to deal with them somehow and do things with them, but . . . its not something that my mind had already thought of at any time, or as being a situation that . . . you know, you can't pile them up and leave them around, you'll attract animals, but you have to do things with them. A certain number of them you would hang in the sun to dry and make into, you know, use them as raw material.

But just the sheer volume of them after the experience made a lot of sense to me, during the experience it was just purely experiential that they were there. And so those types of things are an interesting type of validation that . . . it was something that I wouldn't have previously conceived of . . . it wasn't something in my normal thought pattern. But it was something that I actually saw and experienced, like the long room made out of stone.

As a group, we discussed other examples of this apparent pattern: of lucid experiences within a dream space that were, at once, familiar yet unlike any spaces we had encountered in waking life, and involving a concurrent awareness of many physical details juxtaposed in a manner that in retrospect “made sense,” even while we could not recall having made any contemporaneous mental connection to a particular ancestral timeframe or location. Reflecting specifically on RB's accounts, we observed that his experience of familiarity, while occurring in an altered (dream) state of consciousness, seemed to arise in a manner that was independent of the cognitive-associative processes that later led him to infer a particular ancestral connection. Finally, we noted that certain images, such as the image of the stone wall, the narrow room, or the cave with bones strewn on the floor, were of the type that might carry an archetypal quality or deep resonance within the collective human psyche.

SH Recalls Sensing a Powerful Ancestral Connection at a Samhain Ceremony

SH seemed to surprise herself, at this point in the discussion, when she offered to share her account of a recent Wiccan ceremony that, in her words, involved “calling down the power of the moon, and connect[ing] with the Goddess as the crone.” In describing her experience, she seemed to be reaching for words to convey a deeper sense of connection that, to her, could not be adequately described by the term *ancestral memory*:

Not only was the veil thin for ancestrals, but it was also thin for you to connect with a raw power, a true essential . . . [sigh] it was hard to explain. It was the first time that our Samhain had ever clicked, and I really think I am going out on a limb by explaining it, sharing it with you guys, 'cause it's a personal thing, but what I have to relate . . . is that you didn't feel like you were there, but you were there in physical [form], and the way that the one person who was empowered to channel that energy said she had felt. . . . It wasn't her . . . it wasn't her because when each of us went to her and held her hands, it wasn't her. It was unreal . . . you really felt the presence of that being . . . that grandmother, that nurturer, that wise one, that teacher; you know, the one who takes you when its time to go, that whole concept of . . . of darkness, and the waning and so much emptiness, there's so many secrets, there's so much potential for new beginnings. It was just a very, very interesting, *thick* kind of thing. So I mean it's probably totally off the beaten path with the whole ancestral memory, but I can relate to . . . how you can be brought to that point and brought back out. To me . . . it was a very spiritual experience.

BB reflected that this experience, as profound as it was, seemed to fit well within the idea of the ancestral. The ceremony in her description sounded so old that it could have been done by ancestors 2000 years ago by generation after generation of women before. SH agreed with this concept, saying "maybe that's what it was, it felt old . . . ancient and wholesome." SH described her Samhain experience as "beyond ancestral memory:"

I was whisked from my present being, and put into a place outside of time, outside of space, outside of reality, outside of what was now. . . . It was just so very, very, very powerful, and I've noticed a lot lately that I've been having a lot of experience with Fei and catching things out of the corner of my eye. . . . This is very, very promising, to know that different people are having experiences like this. They may not be Wiccan, they may not be Native American, they may be, you know, Christian-based . . . everyone is coming together with this collective consciousness of reverence and knowing from the old that things are going to change, and I think the way things are going to change is through ancestral memory. It's not going to be "poof it's done" or mass destruction or chaos, it's going to be an open chain reaction of consciousness and it's going to be done, I think, through ancestral relation, like of old time tradition, of something you recall and open up to.

Inspired by SH's thought regarding the prospect of changing consciousness on a societal scale, BB posited that

If we are all one, then our memory is all one. So anything you tap into is ancestral memory because our great ancestor is our Creator, whether it's the God or the Goddess, which is eternal, there is not beginning and no end. So everything is now, so what we are saying is *the ancestral is now*, if you tap into that one mind.

RB Describes his Practical Experiences with Qi Gong and Certain Past Encounters with the Unknown

In context of Qi Gong practice, RB felt a connection with ancient healers who channeled a universal energy and held a healing, loving intent. He posited that from many different traditions, ancient healing practices are being rediscovered: "I'm just amazed at all the places in our society that I'm seeing spiritual healing returning as modern healing either fails people or leads people down the wrong path."

The group reflected on how everywhere we look, there seems to be evidence of the return of ancient knowledge. SH observed that often when people are exposed to the healing energies, there is a kind of awakening and shift of consciousness toward the "spiritual, medicinal practices." BB suggested that throughout history, however, many, upon exposure to mystical energies they cannot control, have responded with fear. JB observed, recalling RB's story of the UFO encounter, that when faced with the unknown, people may respond in starkly different ways. RB agreed, recalling another story from his brother:

He had a really significant, miraculous thing happen with a few friends of his. Ten, fifteen years later he is talking to these [same] friends, and [although] the night that it happened they had all talked about it and it was so significant, 15 years later they had no recollection of it. Their daily lives had washed over it, it was gone from them.

JB Shares his Past Life Regression

JB reported that the day before our meeting, he had engaged in a facilitated past-life regression, undertaken with an intent to experience his most recent past life. He

clarified that his conception of “past lives” did not necessarily entail a progression through linear time, as in general, he did not imagine the universe as linear. Therefore, in deciding to focus on his “most recent” past life, what he was really seeking was to something beyond conventional temporal bounds but still proximate to his current life experience in the sense of continuity of his personal soul or spirit.

JB described the experience of a guided meditation in which he moved through a series of progressions, including movement through the color chakras, carefully observing the unique feeling tones of each. He described the points of transition metaphorically as “switches” that he could control with his intentions. On reflection, JB observed that it was in “releasing” each chakra, just as in releasing each past life, that he was able to gain most clearly a meaningful perspective on where he had just been. In other words, his most vivid memories from the experience had to do with the contrasts between visualized scenes and associated states of consciousness.

The members of the group sat enthralled with JB’s account of his past-life regression, which was so detailed and lucid as to draw us all in, as if we were sharing a novel with many layers of plots and subplots. The imagery was vivid and compelling and occupied us for the better part of the afternoon of the third meeting. The energy in the room following JB’s sharing was intense and uplifting, and we were satisfied to relish in the telling, rather than to analyze the theoretical merit of the concept of past lives from an objective point of view. JB, in particular, was still “processing” the experience, and we decided to honor his intentions by letting the story speak for itself.

Summary of Findings and Definition of Themes

Guided by our research question, we set out to explore, in an open-ended (Dionysian) manner, a diversity of individual perspectives regarding the experiential and enactive pathways through which ancestral memory may enter consciousness and bestow new or renewed meaning perspectives. We intended that these explorations would expand and transform our ways of knowing; allowing new meaning structures to constellate and guide us through in-depth, systematic, and critical reflection, toward validated, empirical support for our preliminary findings regarding the emancipatory and transformative implications of community-level discourse with the ancestral other.

Given our chosen focus on the transformative dimensions of ancestral memory, our inquiry group set out to engage mindfully in the practice of *radical memory* and to employ other transformative inquiry skills, while specifically attending to the often neglected realms of embodied, presentational, and intuitive ways of knowing (see Methods section above). We brought our common intent to bear on a variety of personal experiences and transpersonal encounters. We then shared our individual accounts of these experiences and events in the realm of ancestral memory within the group setting.

After our third meeting, I listened again to our recorded discussions and transcribed and condensed the material, after which I prepared draft reports and findings. These I circulated to the members of the CI group for review, who in turn responded by e-mail with a few minor editorial corrections and points of clarification. Over all, the group members confirmed that I had captured the major themes that had emerged from our discussions. In the months that followed, we continued our community-building efforts, and the topic of ancestral memory came up often as a routine part of our informal sharing as we gathered on occasion for meals, community projects, and weekend retreats.

Due to a series of significant life events affecting members of the group (e.g., the purchase of a farm, a marriage, two births, changes of employment, a decision to return to school), we decided to hold off on having further meetings, but I was gratified to receive feedback from each member expressing a desire to continue the exploration individually and, if possible, again as a group at some point in the future.

Our findings, consisting of phenomenological descriptions, intersubjectively validated propositional statements, and enacted practical skills, are summarized below, followed by a thematic analysis as illuminated by the relevant literature.

Without purporting to make objective causal attributions, and without attempting to generalize beyond the limited contextual circumstances of our cooperative inquiry, we found as a matter of intersubjective validation that:

- In diverse experiences and practices, undertaken with intention to remain attentive to subtle, emergent meaning perspectives at the perceptual and enactive levels of knowing, we encountered certain presences and events that entered our awareness infused with a mysterious quality remembrance;
- These experiences and events were at times disorienting and presented a challenge to our conventional ways of reflecting memory in the construction of meaning;
- The distinctive qualities of givenness, intimacy, and familiarity (intimacy as felt interiority extending beyond the accustomed bounds of the ego-self, fused with an impression of spatial or temporal continuity) exhibited by these participatory events suggested to us that they could not readily be dismissed as objects of pure imagination;

- These events were consistently energizing and emotionally/somatically evocative in ways that we found deeply meaningful and real.
- These events evoked in us a shared desire to engage in further inquiry in the enactment of revisioning practices that align our multiple ways of knowing. We agreed that such further inquiry, perhaps reconstituted to deepen our experiences beyond what was attainable during our preliminary investigations, would be a desirable course of action;
- Our various experiences aligned comfortably with a common impression that ancestral memory (defined above) functions as a deeply intimate source of meaning, emerging organically (and sometimes quite unexpectedly) within the fissures created by intentional deconstructive and revisioning practices; and
- Practiced attention to, and enactment of, a common intent to pay heed to the presence of the ancestral other in the interpretation of experiences and events, seemed to alleviate our sense of disorientation, alienation and fragmentation, while nurturing a deep empathy and sense of relational intimacy with the ancestral other, akin to the type of familiarity that we generally associate with bonds of kinship or the accumulated, collective memory of a people or place.

Thematic Analysis of Group Reflective Discussions

Over the course of three reflective meetings, the members of our CI group shared personal reflections on both past and current experiences that were found meaningful and relevant to their evolving understanding of ancestral memory and its transformative implications. As our discussion proceeded, numerous themes emerged as alternative or

complementary perspectives on the nature and meaning of ancestral memory. These are summarized below, together with related discussion points generated by the group:

Theme 1: Experience of a Sense of the Circularity of Time, Accompanied by Compassionate Relating with Past and Future Selves

This theme emerged from TL's sharing of her spiritual perspective of deep reference for the cycles of a woman's life (maiden, mother, crone). At the time of our discussion, TL was pregnant and expressed that the contemplation of bringing a new life into the world had elevated her concerns about the future of humanity. Reflecting on an earlier time in her life, when she was a teenager going through a particularly difficult period of distress accompanied by feelings of profound uncertainty and loss, she "stumbled upon" an important insight. She recalled a sense of being suddenly overtaken by feelings of compassion towards her former self. She experienced a deeply empathic connection extended from her present self towards her former self. Both selves, past and present, seemed to coexist within a single identity in the same temporal moment. She described how this experience seemed to "open a door" whereby she simultaneously felt the compassionate presence of her *future self*. She posited that "once you open a door, you open the whole cycle, [and] if I can remember to open up and extend reassurance and compassion to my past, I will receive it from my future." She speculated that her discovery, as a practical matter, might be expanded beyond the personal or even a single lifetime into touching the past of all humanity: by extending compassion toward our *collective* past, we might somehow invite a return of compassion from the future; allowing us to "live in a now that is more real than this ego now."

Certain related questions were voiced in the course of this discussion: Are there certain repeating patterns of events or personality traits within a particular family

lineage? If so, can we change those patterns that are negative? If we are able to detect and change recurring patterns, are we in essence changing our ancestral paths; who we are in relation to our collective history?

Theme 2: Attention and Attunement to Repeating or Cyclical Patterns that Connect us to our Primordial Past

This theme arose in the context of RB's sharing of his recent visit to the Allegheny mountains in Pennsylvania, when he recalled while walking in the woods and staying in a cabin along a creek in the woods when he realized that these were activities he had done many times before as a child, and indeed, these were the same activities his mother had done when she was growing up. This realization got him to thinking "some things about me have remained constant through life [and] it seemed important to be aware of these and know what they are."

SH asked RB whether his perceptions of the place in the mountains had changed relative to his childhood perceptions of the same place. RB responded that there were certain differences but also the basic feeling of enjoyment and sense of being at one with the mountains was the same, unchanging.

I stated that for me, that this brought up the issue of how we feel resonance with certain ancestral places or objects, that is, certain constants, that seem to form "essential parts of our psychic world." I speculated that these experiential constants may pertain to certain "original patterns" that seem to linger in the unconscious, and that in our field of perception they may take on symbolic or metaphoric (i.e., archetypal) forms, such as the parent archetype. We discussed whether the ancestral may be a way of conceptualizing our emergence from a certain "primordial landscape," or of a certain people.

TL mentioned that she experienced a sense of ancestral continuity in relation to a feeling she gets when immersed in activities ties to the cyclical changing of the seasons. SH observed that there had been studies done regarding “repeating patterns” of behaviors or events that seemed to carry down through generations in a particular family or tribe, even amongst those who were unaware of their historical antecedents, and she asked whether we were, individually and collectively, able to change our repeating life patterns so that we are not bound to learn the same lessons over and over again. This idea can be metaphorically expressed by the image of a spiral. Each time we “circle back” on a certain repeating pattern, we have an opportunity to change the pattern in ways that may foster our growth and movement along a particular life path.

Theme 3: Intuitive-Reflective Contemplation of Archetypal Symbols, Objects, or Places that Elicit Encounters with Ancestral Presences

RB expressed his belief that at the personal level, we can access memory of our “past lives,” and at the collective level, we have a certain “psychic connection to everyone who has lived before,” allowing us in some instances to intuit psychically things of the past. Finally, he expressed his view that material objects including the Earth itself, store memory “to a certain extent,” and that this type of transpersonal memory, likewise, may be accessible to the human psyche. TL observed that when thinking about the concept of repeating cycles or patterns across the generations, it made her in turn think of “symbols that had been around for a very long, long time” and that it had been an intensive period of reflecting on symbols that had led her to her present understanding of the relationship of continuity between maiden, mother, and crone. She asked whether the very act of concentrating on various primitive or primordial symbols (e.g., the circle or

the spiral) might, in fact, lead us into having experiences that are the essentially same as the experiences of our ancestors.

Theme 4: The Experience of Immanent Personal Connection to the “Old Ways” from Participation in Traditional Daily Activities

We reflected on how the activities of kneading bread, sitting on a beach with a fire, or weeding a garden may induce a state of reverie that is accompanied by a sense of being in the presence of all those ancestors who engaged in similar activities across the generations. SH observed that, with automation that allow us to “control everything with the touch of a button,” we seem to have “convenienced ourselves into being programmed not to feel the ancestral” lost much of that feeling of connection to the past and the old ways.

Theme 5: Experience of a Profound Sense of Familiarity Triggered by a First-Time Encounter with a Person, Place or Thing

SH described a profound experience she had while encountering a “familiar stranger” (see Reports of 2nd and 3rd CI meetings above). The experience was similar to *déjà vu* (“I know you, but I have never met you before”). Also, RB shared how he experienced an inexplicable sense of familiarity the first time he read the *Baghivad Gita*, and also while he was learning calculus for the first time and finding it completely familiar. These reflections engendered an ongoing discussion within the group regarding the predominant way that we experienced the presence of the ancestral, that is, via a profound sense of familiarity in connection with a first time encounter with a person, place, or thing.

Theme 6: A Sense of Existential Continuity Unbounded by the Temporal/Spatial Limitations We Associate with Incarnate Life

JB articulated this theme in relation to his sense of his feeling of “having been there before” at a pagan ritual and in relation to his interest in exploring the practice of “past-life regression.” RB shared with the group a tape that he had recorded of himself giving his impressions during a self-guided past life regression.

Theme 7: Experience of an Alternative Way of Seeing and Being in the World that Encompasses Both the Seen and the Unseen

We discussed various pathways through which we had begun to embody an alternative way of seeing and being in the world that seems to carry the collective psychic imprint of our long tribal past. This alternative consciousness (described as radical presence in the literature) was manifested in the way we walked across the landscape; taking in a broader perceptual field, as well as the way we performed certain daily activities, for example, preparing food, attended to our dreams, and undertook to revision our language using storied-metaphoric speech; all of which expressed in embodied form our deep connections with the Earth; all sentient beings (human and nonhuman), and the very rocks that contain the memory of those who came before us.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Analysis and Recommendations for Further Research

Our cooperative journey into the realm of ancestral memory set in motion, for each of us in ways that are still unfolding, a deeply meaningful countercurrent to the death march of linear time, capable of reweaving the tapestry of our embodied experiences, personal mythology, participatory relatedness, and mutually nurturing presence in the spatial and temporal realms of conscious existence.

From the first meeting, it was evident that our group inquiry would yield a diversity of perspectives regarding ancestral memory as transformative knowing, both in the ways we perceived ancestral appearances or qualities of experience in our individual investigations, and in the ways we attempted to formulate propositional and practical/transformative findings based on that knowledge. Heron (1996) clarified that in the context of cooperative inquiry (CI), the participants' findings may well exhibit both diversity and a commonality of perspectives, and this outcome is quite consistent with the core assumption of a subjective-objective reality.

The agreement sought and reached about the findings—whether presentational, propositional or practical—by the co-researchers is not an agreement of identical representations or practices. It is one of varied perspectives or behaviours, which illumine a common area of inquiry. . . . Their corporate truth about this reality is enriched both by significant differences and significant identities in their personal versions. (Heron, 1996, pp. 174-175)

With this premise in mind, our group sought to identify areas of both divergence and convergence in our findings within the descriptive and enactive domains of knowledge, respectively. We attempted, using our reflective discussions and experiential practices, to arrive at a holistic alignment of action and meaning in accordance with our overall

intention to evoke ancestral memory as an authentic source of deep, resonant meaning with restorative and transformative potentials.

At our second meeting, our chosen topic elicited great interest and brought us together within a common energy field of enthusiastic mutual sharing and learning. In the course of our discussion, our shared conceptions of the ancestral and memory broadened significantly beyond the concepts of ethnic identity and discussed at our first meeting and extended well beyond our interests in family origins or the desire to explore specific revisioning practices. Much of what we shared before the group in hopes of validation consisted of anecdotes from earlier life experiences that, years later, continued to move us and tug at the boundaries of our currently accepted meaning perspectives.

By the end of our second meeting, we had opened a treasure trove of stories and ideas, and the feedback on the process was overwhelmingly positive. None of the participants expressed discomfort or anxiety, and all seemed to be deriving some benefit from the interaction. We explored the nebulous construct of ancestral memory and achieved remarkable clarity and insight at a conceptual level, yet even preliminary findings on the above-stated pedagogical and process related questions would have been premature.

During our third discussion, we were able to identify certain common themes emerging from our shared memories and reflections. Specifically, we observed that nearly all of our individual accounts involved a *powerful sense of familiarity*, similar to déjà vu, triggered by a first-time encounter with a person, place, object, or smell, and nearly all had involved some form of *synchronicity*. We noted, also, that these encounters differed from the common experience of déjà vu in certain noteworthy ways.

For example, in the case of SH's "familiar stranger" story, the experience of familiarity seemed to be very *spontaneous* and involve a "2-way" *connection* between the individuals involved. SH stressed that the familiarity she felt was more than just a general feeling, and further, that it seemed to involve something more than "just memory." What seemed most significant to her was *the sense of an immediate, present connection that seemed to have been triggered by her noticing specific, observable features of the other person*. More generally, we noted that these cases of perceived familiarity involved the perception of something *given* and coming to us from the other. The encounters, thus, carried a distinctive transpersonal quality.

Also, during the third meeting, each of the group members expressed, in their own words, a common sentiment: that participation in the CI process, including their sharing in the group's intention for systematic, collaborative inquiry into the subtle realms of memory, had been transformative in the sense that it facilitated their opening to new experiences, and it had validated their sense of authenticity and raised further questions with regard to those experiences. For example, the social validation of BB's account of shamanic journeying within our group seemed to assuage, to some extent, BB's concerns about the authenticity of that experience; stemming from her perception that she was not following exactly the instructions given to her by her outside instructor.

Similarly, the sharing of lucid dream experiences served to validate for RB, myself, and the rest of the group, a common experience of having discovered knowledge in unexpected dream imagery that, try as we might, we could not attribute to personal experience but that in retrospect made sense after we imagined the kinds of experiences that could have been had by our ancestors. In other words, these dreams seemed as much

real as imagined and seemed to come to us from a place beyond the strictly personal, subjective realm.

The third meeting ended on a very positive note, with an impromptu, hope-filled, discussion of what we perceived to be an emerging alternative consciousness within the society at large. We all agreed that further research, including an opportunity for group experiential practice, and a further opportunity to explore the societal significance of our findings, would be a worthwhile undertaking.

In the end, we arrived at a shared sense that these thematic commonalities were significant and deserving of further investigation. We concluded that our intentional encounters and group reflections in the realm of ancestral memory had opened an exciting new pathway for discovery, enlivened our senses and energetic centers, deepened our awareness of meaningful synchronicities and subtle qualities of experience, provided social affirmation that allowed us to more comfortably assimilate these experiences within our evolving life narratives, gave us new cause to be hopeful for the future of our troubled land and people, and in other important ways facilitated a shared journey of personal and collective transformation.

However, despite our general consensus that the process has been mutually beneficial in the ways described above, we encountered certain limiting circumstances that prevented us from more fully exploring the topic at hand. A foremost limitation arose from the fact that the meeting attendance, if not the meeting participation, was uneven. Due to unexpected scheduling conflicts, not all participants were able to attend all three meetings, despite my best efforts to poll the participants to determine a mutually convenient time. Only 4 participants, RB, SH, JB and myself, were able to attend all three

meetings. Although a minimum of two weeks notice was given for each meeting date, earlier scheduling for all three meetings might have avoided some or all of these scheduling conflicts.

Regarding participation at the meetings, all participants consistently expressed a high level of interest in the topic of inquiry and the group process, and our discussions during the meetings were fairly evenly balanced in terms of level of participation. However, less consistency was achieved with regard to levels of participation using alternative means of e-mail communication, apparently reflecting differing degrees of comfort with this latter mode of communication. In my role as facilitator, I sought to monitor the group dynamic and process of discussion and to make sure that all participants felt comfortable that their voices were being heard.

Also, although I was able to produce and distribute digitally recorded copies of our meeting discussions, I did not provide these copies to the participants in advance of the two subsequent meetings. Therefore, the participants were not given an advance opportunity to review our earlier discussions, which might have enhanced the thematic continuity from one meeting to the next. In future research, it would be beneficial to arrange for prompt transcription, and even preliminary extraction of themes, immediately after each meeting so that such review material would be available as a catalyst for more focused discussions, building from one meeting to the next.

Another limitation surfaced with regard to the process of extracting themes from the transcribed material. This process might have benefited from the use of a second or alternative rater, who could have been one or more of the other group members. Although every participant was provided with an opportunity to review the findings, extracted

themes, and preliminary analysis, only 3 participants (BB, RB, and MJ) provided detailed comments. In future research, it would be beneficial to collaborate more fully in both the extraction and review of themes from the meeting transcriptions.

Finally, although our original intent was to conduct the inquiry as a multimodal exploration of ancestral memory and its transformative implications, the data we ended up generating was almost exclusively verbal. This occurred despite my effort, in introducing the process, to encourage other forms of data gathering and sharing, such as the use of visual arts, re-enactment of experiences, or physical movement. Future research likely would benefit from a more concerted effort to employ multimodal forms of data generation. In retrospect, it appears that three meetings provided, at best, an opportunity for preliminary experiential exploration and verbal discussion, and therefore a more in-depth, multimodal exploration likely would have required a more cohesive and consistent group process, which in turn would have required more meetings over a longer period of time.

Together with my cohorts, I had set out to explore how the phenomena we were calling *ancestral memory* might foster transformative and restorative learning of a type that would guide us, individually and in community, along a path of self-emancipation and regenerative growth, even in the midst of a society possessed by rampant fear, alienation, and ecological decline.

Discussion of Themes

Building on the themes identified in Chapter 4 with reference to the group reflections on the nature of ancestral memory, as informed by the participants' personal experiences prior to and during the cooperative inquiry process, I will briefly expound on

those same themes in relation to the same or similar concepts found in the relevant literature. In view of the wide breadth of experiential manifestations that participants attributed to the phenomenon of ancestral memory, the following discussion relating back to the published literature is necessarily limited to a few exemplary works, consistent with the exploratory purposes of this study. It should be recognized, therefore, that a significant amount of additional research in the context of a future study would need to be undertaken to provide comprehensive treatment of any of these themes relative to the applicable literature.

Theme 1: Experience of a Sense of the Circularity of Time, Accompanied by Compassionate Relating with Past and Future Selves

By expanding our conception of the ancestral to view time in a more circular way, certain questions arise: How does individual experience relate to collective experience, past, present, and future? What are the pathways through which the collective experience manifests in our individual lives? How do we perceive the passage of time? What insight might be gained by viewing ourselves as ancestors of the future?

When we engage in a certain activity as children and then years later engage in the same activity as adults, we come to perceive certain continuities in the way we experience life (e.g., the kind of enjoyment we derive from a walk in the mountains that seem to remain constant through life). It seems important to be aware of those continuities and know what they are. Also, we feel resonance with certain events that are recurring within our personal or collective background (e.g., TL described how in considering her mixed blood lineage, “the Celtic popped up”).

Theme 2: Attention and Attunement to Repeating or Cyclical Patterns that Connect us to our Primordial Past

Versluis (1992) used the metaphor and pattern of the spiral in describing the re-emergence of sacred traditions and corresponding transformations of human consciousness, as akin to the changing of the seasons: “The turning cycles of time wheel on, reflecting the eternal light of which they are the manifestation and in which we live, whether we know it or not” (p. 27).

Ferrer, Albareda, and Romera (2004) addressed the idea of accumulated, primordial energies in the following passage:

The Dark Energy is the source of our vitality and natural wisdom, as well as the organizing principle of our embodiment, sexuality, and instinctive life. We can distinguish between two states of the Dark Energy: One contains both the creative wisdom of the primordial order of life and historically accumulated human tendencies aligned with that primordial order, and the other stores historically accumulated human tendencies that are in tension with such primordial order. In this context, we can say that the physical body and its vital energies enable human beings not only to creatively participate in the immanent dimensions of the Mystery but also to filter and purify conflictive energetic tendencies stored therein. (pp. 10-11)

Theme 3: Intuitive-Reflective Contemplation of Archetypal Symbols, Objects, or Places that Elicit Encounters with Ancestral Presences

Evelyn Underhill (1999) described as one form of mystical consciousness, involving:

This act of perfect concentration, the passionate focusing of the self upon one point, when it is applied . . . to real and transcendental things, constitutes in the technical language of mysticism *the state of recollection*. (pp. 48-49, emphasis added)

Theme 4: The Experience of Immanent Personal Connection to the Old Ways from Participation in Traditional Daily Activities

Casey (1987/2000) suggested that “body memory . . . is a privileged point of view from which other memorial points of view can be regarded and by which they can be

illuminated” (p 148). We discussed the implications of knowing that for millions of years we lived in tribal cultures and have only recently departed from this embodied way of seeing and being in the world. Thus, even though our modern push-button conveniences have certainly distanced us from these most based types of ancestral experiences, we considered whether our long tribal history may have left some kind of imprint on our collective psyche? “The depth approach helps us to imagine into the life of the soul as a many-layered, many-faceted, unbounded entity, a repository of experience and memory of tribe, of clan, of race and specie” (Bennett, 2003, p. 10)

Theme 5: Experience of a Profound Sense of Familiarity Triggered by a First-time Encounter with a Person, Place, or Thing

Synchronicity seems to fit within this description, insofar as it is experienced as a distinct prereflective and unanticipated impression of a meaningful, albeit atemporal and acausal, relationship between persons, places, or things (Jung, 1955/1987; Main, 2004).

Theme 6: A Sense of Existential Continuity Unbounded by the Temporal/Spatial Limitations We Associate with Incarnate Life

This theme can be metaphorically expressed as the “thread of life” (Meade, 2002) that locates our incarnate existence along a continuum of personal/subjective self-awareness and meaning extending from before we were born to after we die (see also Hillman, 1996; Weiss, 1988; and discussion of the concept of “soul” in Chapter 2).

Theme 7: Experience of an Alternative Way of Seeing and Being in the World that Encompasses Both the Seen and the Unseen

In his comprehensive recording of the oral traditions of Italian folktales, Calvino (1956/1980) provided a compelling account of the old stories that spread throughout the lands of present-day Europe. These stories record the indigenous voices of the people who passed them on from generation to generation, in countless and diverse settings. The

compilation reveals how “regardless of its origin, [each story] tends to absorb something of the place where it is narrated—a landscape, a custom, a moral outlook, or else merely a very faint accent or flavor of that locality” (p. xxi).

Contemporary native voices provide explicit insight into the alternative vision provided by indigenous consciousness. Versluis (1992) stated that “original peoples live their lives in the light of the eternal” (p. 26). Cajete (2000) described how

a new synthesis is coming from very deep within the collective consciousness of human beings. Metaphorically, this is like the process that created our world and landmasses, a result of continual activity deep within the Earth. Such activity eventually reaches the point where it erupts, and new terrain, waterways, plants and animals result. (p. 208)

Finally, Bennett (2003), from the perspective of one actively engaged in the recovery of indigenous consciousness, expressed that “the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of a people transmitted from generation to generation may be remembered as ancestral history not only in the human experience but in the earth-experience of the landscape as well” (p. 25).

Further Implications of the Findings

Building on the themes derived above in relation to our CI group’s findings regarding the *experience and meaning* of ancestral memory, our discursive group process yielded certain additional findings in relation to our core research question. We set out to explore not only the experience but the *practical and pedagogical implications* of ancestral memory as manifested in the limited context of a small European-American group dedicated to social transformation through intentional community building. Thus, whereas this exploratory study was not designed to provide the kind of comprehensive theoretical and empirical support that would be needed to sustain a comprehensive

analysis of the role of ancestral memory in transformative learning, it did fulfill its intended purpose of providing cooperatively validated experiential support for a set of tentative propositions regarding the practical and pedagogical implications of ancestral memory within our delimited group context, as follows:

- By maintaining for a time a shared intent to pay extraordinary perceptual heed to the subtle qualities of phenomena that we associated with the concept of ancestral memory, certain noticeable changes were elicited in our habitual patterns of attention and awareness.

Consistent with the above-described literature on radical memory and radical presence, this finding underscored for us the very practical value of articulating and mutually affirming the transformative power of shared intention, particularly when, as in this instance, our intent was to pursue a conception of ancestral memory as *living presence*. In this way, we opened exciting new pathways for the emergence of a collective consciousness that frees us from the ingrained, decontextualized habits of thought and perception found within our postmodern consumer culture.

- Each of us, albeit in different ways and under different contextual circumstances, reported having encountered certain perceptual objects with a pronounced quality of familiarity that could not readily be attributed to personal/incorporeal past experience.

This finding converges with the theoretical view, mentioned above in relation to the literature on transformative learning and the phenomenology of memory, respectively, that sustained attention to the ways that we, as embodied beings, register a sense of the familiar in relation to objects or events appearing along the boundaries of our perceptual

awareness facilitates a shift in meaning perspectives that is not merely deconstructive, but tends to nurture the growth of participatory consciousness. Recall that a core principal of Mezirow's (1991) learning model suggests that remembering involves recognizing an object or event that previously had meaning and either strengthened or transformed an existing meaning perspective or scheme. Further research might beneficially explore this apparent relationship between the quality of familiarity, within the subjective-objective realm of participatory consciousness and other qualities of evolved, transpersonal consciousness that we might associate with personal and societal well-being.

- Each of these encounters with the strangely familiar other were unexpected, and thus imbued with a quality of givenness, and often tended to elicit a very pronounced emotional affect.

Another way to state this finding, in relation to the above literature suggesting a dynamic interplay between imagination and memory, is that a certain vital energy is released at the moment the inquirer encounters what may be described as a boundary between these two modes of consciousness. Indeed, it is this energetic response on the frontiers between imagination and memory that signals the encounter with immanent meaning; the body seems to know before the mind that the person has emerged into a state of awareness in which conventional-habitual ways of perceiving space and time are supplanted by a deep, healing sense of continuity and connectedness.

- Upon reflection, it appeared to us that these changes in awareness and perception coincided with a shift in our individual meaning perspectives (or possibly a reawakening of long-dormant meaning perspectives), at a level of subjectivity that was surprisingly immediate and personal.

Recalling that what brought us together was a shared, intuitively motivated interest in reconnecting with the ancestral, whether we understood the concept to mean something distant and removed in time, or something found deep within ourselves, this finding serves as affirmation that the transformative potential of ancestral memory lies in its capacity to bring alternative meaning perspective (whether new or recovered) into the light of present consciousness. Our finding that the sense of immediacy was *surprising* seems to underscore the notion that our experiences facilitated a shift in consciousness away from the conventional notion the ancestral as bound to a receding, prepersonal past, and toward a more participatory relationship with the ancestral other.

- The sometimes strong emotions we experienced during these encounters with the ancestral other tended to register in consciousness as either an attraction (e.g., sense of identity, kinship, or compassionate presence) or repulsion (e.g., certain objects seemed energetically heavy and unpleasant to hold or contaminated, warranting a cleansing smudge).

This finding begs some intriguing questions for further research. If, for example, we carry forward the above-mentioned idea that energy (associated with affective responses) is released upon encountering a boundary area between imagination and memory, then the instances of strongly attractive or aversive responses encountered in relation to other-than-personal objects of remembrance by members of our CI group should invite further inquiry into the transpersonal dimensions of these energetic responses. This finding represents a profound challenge to our conventional, causally oriented epistemology and invites us to explore whether ancestral memory as a transpersonal phenomenon requires us to think and perceive in terms of the *accumulated experiences* of the ancestral other!

- These encounters and associated perceptual and affective responses, engendered a shared sense of self-in-participatory-relationship, and in several instances the reported experience of connection seemed to have been intersubjectively shared and validated by the same ancestral other.

This finding speaks to Ferrer's (2002) provocative claim that "participation in a transpersonal event brings forth the transformation of self and world" (p. 123). Thus, we gained firsthand familiarity with the meaning of participatory consciousness. The other is viewed intersubjectively, opening the way for empathic response and relationship.

Whether we reach out compassionately to our own past or future selves, engage in the shamanic journey of "cultural soul retrieval" (Moss, 2005), or seek to illuminate and transform the collective shadow of our post-modern society, we stand to benefit from this revelation that we are *not alone* when we reflectively engage memory so as to invite the presence of the ancestral.

Next Steps

This research constituted a preliminary exploration of themes and practices intended to guide the development of a subsequent, participatory action research project. The contemplated project will involve a community-based program of therapeutic intervention, transformative and restorative learning, and ethnic/cultural revisioning. It will be designed to benefit individuals undergoing life transitions; especially those who seek healing, emancipatory, and ecologically sustainable alternatives to the dominant materialistic value system and globalizing consumer culture of our time. Relative to the fulfillment of human psychological needs (e.g., security, relationship, self-worth), this mainstream value system has been described as a deeply ingrained *pathology* manifested

at the societal level. (Cushman, 1991; Fromm, 1955; Kanner & Soule, 2004; Kasser, 2002; Metzner, 1995; Roszak, 1992).

The prospective learning program will engage the human faculties of imagination and memory in a systematic, critical, and multimodal investigation. Situated within the peaceful sanctuary of an agriculturally based, intentional learning community, participants will find opportunities to illuminate and enact restorative potentials of the human psyche while deconstructing and transforming self-limiting patterns of thought and action. Particular attention will be given to therapeutic encounters with the collective shadow of postmodern, Western society (the legacies of imperialism, patriarchy, slavery, and native genocide), and to the mindful use of dreams, stories, and rituals to overcome the harmful legacies of multigenerational alienation and trauma (Early, 1993; Jung, 1977/1954; Kremer & Rothberg, 1999).

Final Thoughts

Michael Meade (2002), founder of the Seattle-based, Mosaic Multicultural Foundation, offered a mythological perspective on this very journey. Meade stated that in contrast to the *less and less* quality of modern life, occasioned by a profound loss of contextually grounded, cultural memory and meaning premodern cultures on every continent, in one way or another, have held to a basic view that “real knowledge is always a remembering” (transcribed from CD, no. 2) and that humans, rather than being arbitrary accidents in a chaotic universe, are in fact “here to keep this whole thing going” (transcribed from CD, no. 2).

In the memory of the souls of our ancestors, we are here to exchange with nature . . . to be a micro version of the whole thing. And if we fail at what we are doing, the whole thing could collapse. . . . It is a bold idea that gives us *a* proper sense of how to live in these threatening times. Something is threaded all the way through

from before our birth until after our death. And the one thing we must do is learn to find and live with that thread. (transcribed from CD, no 2)

It seems these days that the archaic concept of soul has regained a foothold in the modern psyche. Scientists, theologians, and artists of all stripes are scrambling to explain what appears to be a broad-based resurgence of soul-consciousness and soul-talk along the edges, if not the heart, of Western materialist culture. This exploratory study was less concerned with the validation of propositional claims regarding the nature of soul or ancestral traces perceived to exist within the phenomenal field than with the pragmatic question of *how* the individual (alone or as part of a collective) might regain access to the transformative potential of archaic consciousness.

A key premise going forward lies in the notion that the past 400 plus years of human progress, guided by the radically materialistic predispositions of the modern worldview, have brought about, at best, mixed results in terms of the quality of individual lives (especially when one views human needs in other than material terms) and at worst, have obscured (and in far too many cases destroyed) the collective/ancestral connections of mutual nurturance between human communities and their respective natural environments. On a global scale, human civilization now faces the dire prospect of environmental and cultural annihilation, a story of unraveling that is hard to escape and hard to swallow. It is the story of an unrelenting, all-out assault on natural ecosystems and cultural diversity brought about by the hegemonic and expropriating propensities of the emerging global monoculture.

However, viewed from an alternative perspective outside of modernity's hallmark notion of linear/evolutionary progress, the forces of destruction at play in the collective/physical realm may be inviting a renewal of the creative impulse in the

individual/psychic realm, on the borderlands between human potential and emergent consciousness. Here, nature supplies a wealth of useful metaphors, as when a forest fire clears the way for new growth and stimulates germination of seeds that for generations have laid dormant in the womb of the earth, or when a hurricane sends organic nutrients into the upper reaches of the flood plane, fostering rich growth in marginal areas that had previously been eroded by the slow march of time.

Ancestral memory, in this metaphorical sense, may be understood as the seed of the soul, the latent potentialities that lie patiently under the surface forms of everyday life. Like other types of memory, the living presence of the ancestral is rarely revealed in forced situations but may emerge on its own accord when the right opening is given amidst the fissures of deconstructed worldviews. Such memory informs individual consciousness with the cumulative wisdom of remembered collective experience. In the context of today's culture of forgetting, ancestral memory emerges as a revelation of the indigenous mind, a participatory vision of self in relation to the transpersonal other, inviting noncolonizing, nonpatriarchal conversation that promises to renew life for a society wounded by the collective traumas of the past.

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