

Born Across Grey Water

By

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Abstract

I position my artistic inquiry at the edge of chaos. It is here that the dynamic space of possibilities opens up, from which a new worldview might be born. I am drawing from a sense of process; transgression of borders creates new ways of perceiving. The space between the borders, the liminal space, is constantly informed by transgressions of human thought processes and gestures toward new ways of seeing.

Human existence is increasingly liminal. Mechanistic viewing caused by specialization in all spheres of human activity, including our language, has lead to an overall sense of fragmentation, automatic functioning of our thought, and division through of fields of experience. The modern “Machine” has cauterized our attachments to the natural world and brought us to proximity with major ecological shift.

As an immigrant and mother, no stranger to liminal space, I have searched for a sense of connection to Canadian cultural and natural environment through the use of photographic and video media. My need to connect initiated the exploration of landscape and motherhood embodiment and, eventually, the scrutiny of grey water’s connective character.

My visual essay invites the reader to consider several issues for which I have used the metaphor of grey water. Grey water, just like liminal space or connectives space, holds together and separates at the same time. In a constant state of transition, it dissolves borders, mutates through time and spaces, enfolding shapes and ideas, and unfolding them back into the flow. It gestures toward wholeness and connectivity. Acceptance and sensitivity to ever changing differences and similarities emerging through the murky character of grey water can help us create a new frame of mind in which there is a common consciousness.

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Dedications

The creative research described in this thesis is dedicated to my children Jake, Mick and Dashi.

Born Across Grey Water

In the absence of adequate definition a space opens up that can be used to probe the grey areas of our discipline. (Unknown author)

1. Introduction

The transformative process we encounter when learning new knowledge concerning our environment is essentially a passage from one system or space to another. The existence of two systems gestures towards borders separating these systems and, consequentially, a space in between the borders, labeled by numerous disciplines as “liminal space”.

Anthropologist Victor Turner describes the liminal space as one which is ambivalent and ambiguous. Within this liminal space ideas and concepts are in a constant state of multiple transitions in a rhizomatic flow. There is an on-going search for answers which allows for active exchanges of ideologies and methods of working.

As an immigrant, no stranger to liminal space, I have been constantly engaged in translations of dreams and realities, systems and structures, aware of the filtering cultural mechanism controlling the flow of my perception. Growing up in communist Czechoslovakia, I dreamt of Canada in terms of long white landscapes, free of struggle under the snow and ice; I created my own visual interpretation of the space based on books I was reading. Defecting to Canada at the age of seventeen stretched my idea of geographic divisions. My first attempt to escape was intercepted by heavily armed soldiers. A brief imprisonment and other events that followed opened my mind to an abstract concept of borders. My second, more successful attempt which landed me first

in an Austrian refugee camp, and eventually in Canada, set me in a state of permanent transition. Always on the margin, I explored different geographic and cultural landscapes across North America. Acceptance into the joint degree in Zoology and Psychology at Rutgers University in New Jersey opened doors to my search for understanding. Inspired by the philosophies of Michel Foucault, Karl Gustav Jung, Sigmund Freud, Noam Chomsky, and David Bohm, I explored the process of perception formation, semiotics, and translations of both subconscious and cognitive symbols, retention and influence of visual and literal images, and how they intermix within different individuals and systems. Desire to translate the perception-forming and transformative processes into an active visual research spurred my interest in visual arts. Completing my education with a Bachelor in Fine Arts upon my re-location to British Columbia seemed to be a logical progression.

Most of my auto-ethnographic research has been carried out in the form of photographic documentation using pinhole cameras, bookwork that extended the idea of a dream journal, and video installations. The use of pinhole cameras specifically addresses the idea of liminality; my presence seems in-formed into the space that opens during long film exposure times. The cross-disciplinary academic and artistic research I have undertaken during the past two years as a Masters student at the Emily Carr Institute in Vancouver has reinforced my interest in liminality. To understand the character of liminal space I have used the metaphor of water intuitively in my praxis, and have originally formed a mental image of liminal space as a pure, clear or white liquid that mutates into vapor or solid forms in an unpredictable manner. However, the deeper I

looked into the space through the water metaphor the murkier the space became. The debris of human interactions floating in this space made me realize that the process of transformation to which we subject ourselves in liminal space creates new matter, something that we leave behind. Similar concepts are expressed in Margaret Atwood's novel *Surfacing*. The main character seems to mediate the process of transformation and experiences of liminal spaces, both physical and abstract:

I untie my feet from the shoes and walk down to the shore; the earth is damp, cold, pockmarked with raindrops. I pile the blanket on the rock and step into the water and lie down. When every part of me is wet I take off my clothes, peeling them away from my flesh like a wall paper. They sway beside me, inflated, the sleeves bladders of air. My back is on the sand, my head rests against the rock, innocent as plankton; my hair spreads out, moving and fluid in the water. The earth rotates, holding my body down to it as it holds the moon; the sun pounds in the sky, red flames and rays pulsing from it, searing away the wrong form that encases me, dry rain soaking through me, warming the blood egg I carry. I dip my head beneath the water, washing my eyes. Inshore a loon; it lowers its head, then lifts it again and calls. It sees me but ignores me, accepts me as a part of the land. When I am clean I come out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface. (Atwood 178)

My auto-ethnographic research made me aware of some of the debates about the representation of women in contemporary art. Works of artists such as Louise Bourgeois,

and critics Laura Mulvey and Julia Kristeva informed my ideas and methodology. I am influenced by these women and other cultural producers who promote the use of traditional materials to express their cultural and political concerns. Specifically, the use of material such as fabric, lace-like frozen sculptures, and layers and drapery in my work, gestures towards intuitive acceptance of material coding and gender politics. I began to understand how complexity, impurity and unpredictability of organic materials have been historically associated with female characteristics. The frozen bed sheet used in my last two installations In-Forming (Fig 12 and 13) served to highlight the underlying themes of social structure, relationships with natural environment and gender roles that have pervaded my most recent work. Subconsciously positioned within the visual and literal language of the patriarchy, the mutating bed sheet in the shape of a female figure intends to fuse the borders of socially constructed gender associations. My interest was in the sense of process; the experience of transformation, the sense of becoming something else, held a potential of a new way of seeing. Mulvey asserts in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* that woman stands in patriarchal culture as “signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (I). Louise Bourgeois displays her interest in the female body in particular - how it is constructed, dehumanised and objectified. In some of her work she uses fabric and stitching techniques to turn the female body into a landscape onto which meanings are described. Gen Doy also investigates the meanings of fabric, drapery and the draped body in visual culture. Some of the modern movements described in Doy’s book *Drapery: Classicism and Barbarism*

treat the fabric draped around female body as a “dynamic, looser new skin that moves with the body” (Doy 56). For the purpose of this thesis I will explore the multiple meanings folding and unfolding with the transformation of the melting fabric sculpture. The process of melting shifts forms and boundaries, allows for mixing and re-mixing the pure with the complex in both physical and metaphorical terms.

The concept of purity has become obsolete in my understanding of the learning process; in our search for new knowledge we are transformed by the grey water of civilization not by purity of water understood metaphorically. Grey water gets its name from its cloudy appearance and from its status as being neither fresh nor heavily polluted as in the case of black water. Unremittingly informed by human and universal disciplines, liminal space opens new insights to those who intuitively navigate through its murky flow. Grey water flows in all directions and connects us with the rest of the universe. There is no such thing as redemption through purification - we need to pay close attention to our relationship with grey current while our feet tread the water and our eyes gaze toward the utopian shore. Sensitivity to the ever changing differences and similarities emerging from the grey abyss can help us create a new frame of mind in which there is a common consciousness.

2. On the Threshold

My active visual research of spaces “in between” was prompted at first by the nature of the rural landscape I had settled in with my three children about ten years ago. Lac Le Jeune, a small British Columbia lake community, seemed to function in a different time zone than the rest of the world. The deeply quiet body of the lake grew protected by a

long range of mountains; memories of childhood imagination about my future home unfolded from the landscape. Winter, especially, connected me with a sense of coming home. Gaston Bachelard muses in *Poetics of Place*, “the winter cosmos is simplified cosmos” (Bachelard 40). Complex relationships are hidden under the blanket of snow and ice, out of sight, bound to be heaved up by spring, quiet in a dream that may last for eternity. “Dreamers like a severe winter,...every year they ask the sky to send down as much snow, hail and frost as it can contain” (Baudelaire quoted in Bachelard 39). I have identified myself with other dreamers through this temporary escape into a frozen paradise. I sensed that a retreat into the pure symbolism of dreams within the winter landscape would allow me to suspend the perplexity of cultural systems until the time I could see it clearly in my conscious mind. According to Carl Jung:

The images produced in dreams are much more picturesque and vivid than the concepts and experiences that are their waking counterparts. One of the reasons for this is that, in a dream, such concepts can express their unconscious meaning. In our conscious thoughts, we restrain ourselves within the limits of rational statements – statements that are much less colorful because we have stripped them of most of their psychic associations. (Jung 43)

Positioning myself within the dream retreat is expressed in a photomontage *Frozen White*, (fig 1), which became a part of an eight-image series. The image negotiates the space between my dreams and the material nature of the body and landscape. The body is

attempting to cross over into the frozen landscape; the white gown gestures toward the color of snow. Passing from one system into another, I was becoming pure, white. Pure qualities are, according to Giles Deleuze “reminiscences, either transcendent or floating memories or seeds of phantasy”; whiteness is the “special index of becoming solitary” (Deleuze 306). Bachelard advocates for dreamers by stating that “well determined centers of reverie are means of communication between men who dream as surely as well-defined concepts are means of communication between men who think” (Bachelard 39).

3. Water Metaphor

The product of my first exploration of liminal space was exhibited in a group show “The Homeless Mind: an Exploration through Memory Mapping” (fig 2,3,4,5) in Kamloops and Comox Valley. The theme of my work titled *The Boat from Bohemia* was based on a dream state of transition. To produce the images I utilized the cyanotype process which taps into inherent dream-like qualities. The negatives for these cyanotypes were created with a pinhole camera in an “aleatory dream-like realm accentuated by the inherent chance of the medium” (Garrett-Petts and Lawrence 16). In a state of dreaming, conditions are characterized by a different reference to time: past, present and future seem to exist simultaneously. Comparably, my perception of time shifted during intense creative activities, as I waited for the light to activate the chemistry on the film inside the plywood contraption, lying in the snow under pinhole camera. Through a crust of snow melting into my skin, I realized a chance to internalize the cultural symbolism of the landscape. *The Boat from Bohemia* images, supported by a personal narrative written in

calligraphic script, tell of the journey from one culture to another and the feeling of being frozen in a state of constant transition. The use of water in all its forms to express my perception of the nature of this transitional, liminal space, became a motif for my art practice. Snow was especially important at this stage of my search for clarity. The color white represented singularity and purity.

The images were collected over the period of three seasons: summer, fall and winter at Lac Le Jeune. The persistent occurrence of a model Old World boat in the images created for *The Boat from Bohemia* makes reference to my internalized sense of floating between “here” and “there”, as if I was the boat myself. The lake water reaching to my knees divides and purifies me from the old identity of a Czech woman. The sense of being transformed, while learning how to be Canadian, is expressed in the last image of the series where the boat model functions as an extension of my head while the mountain range runs through my semi-transparent face.

Michel Foucault (1967) in his essay *Of Other Spaces: Heterotopia* uses the boat metaphor to elucidate:

And if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not

only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development (I have not been speaking of that today), but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates. (Foucault 3)

Water as a transformative medium also permeates all works of the artists' research in which I was involved in the following year in Kamloops. The "Court House" project explored the notion of vernacular modes of artistic inquiry: the manner in which a marginal group or individual expresses localized perception within a larger political or cultural context. The participants, Panya Clark Espinal, David Hoffos, Ernie Kroeger, and Donald Lawrence responded through their installations to the "tangible presence of artists' projects in a particular space" (Lawrence, 2005). *Archipelago*, a model created by Lawrence, refers to a past that is buried below the invisible traces of a lost ocean. As Bruce Baugh describes it, "The arid present is inhabited by the watery unconscious". The installation evokes a sense of continuity of the past into the present; the stages of development continue to interact with the latest one: un-fragmented by our perception of linear time" (Baugh III).

The notion of water as a metaphor for a transitional space is explored in numerous Canadian contemporary literary works such as Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands*, or Jane Urquhart's *Away*. As Sam Solecki states in

Acqua, “water may have helped not only to determine Canadian boundaries but it also may have conditioned some of the terms on which the Canadian imagination has responded to the landscape it calls Canada” (Solecki 219). The use of a metaphor in the process of understanding systems is described in great depth in Steven Pinker’s *The Stuff of Thought*. “To think is to grasp a metaphor” (Pinker 238). Pinker expands his claim further by saying that “human intelligence, with its capacity to think an unlimited number of abstract thoughts, evolved out of primate circuitry for coping with the physical and social world, augmented by a capacity to extend these circuits to new domains by metaphorical abstractions” (238).

Metaphors work by pointing out parallels between an area we already understand and an area we don’t yet understand; parallels between a source and a target. However, as ubiquitous as metaphor seems to be in our lives, we can not think with metaphor alone. We need to handle ideas in the larger context of their meaning. The larger context of thought and language is often overlooked in our perception of everyday events. We need to think in terms of connections and relationship rather than isolated ideas and acts.

My own experience pointed to a fragmentary manner of selecting and retaining information in the process of learning; I focused on some aspects of a particular situation and disregarded others. This selective process seemed to help me explore the particular aspect without distractions of other elements. For example, I felt my Czech heritage was interfering with the assimilation of the North American system, and I actively sought purification, separation from the old culture, feeling even more fragmented as a result.

4. Fragmentation through Language

I explored this sense of fragmentation in my recently published visual essay *Translating Chicago* (fig 6). The paper was written as a response to my experience of a collaborative artistic and academic inquiry into writing artist statements titled *The Art of the Artist Statement*. My sense of the act of translating one language into another (be it written, oral, or visual language) involved a certain amount of fragmenting, peeling layers of organic tissue from the mother plant, harming the trembling closeness, and destroying the connective fiber in the process. I was aware of the fact that there can never be a complete translation across genres even if a translator considers complex incongruities of different semiotic systems with their own traditions and histories. David Bohm asserts that thought and language has, over the past several centuries, developed into a literal direction which attempts “to give a literal representation of reality as it actually is” (Bohm 114). This direction ignores residual attachments of thought to embodied experiences and perceptions, also known as symbolic functions of language. According to Bohm, the most important function of a linguistic symbol is to “engage memory, visual images, sensations and reactions”(Bohm 68). I will use an example of written language’s graphic impact on perception: to my eyes, certain fonts in the English alphabet appear to be faster or louder than others. I would avoid using these in connection to the pinhole photography’s slow, silent process. On the other hand, a fast unsettled font could be supportive of a tone set by an artist’s gesture toward the speed of his or her obsessive search for intimate connections. In addition to the images that emerge from groupings of letters and words, some being either more protuberant or pleasing to the eye than others, there is the size, weight, color and slope of the written language, each aspect telling its

own story, which in turn may trigger my memory of a first grade reading class in Czech Republic.

The question remains: just how much of that story is connected to the flow of the actual translation? How much of it will be left behind in the transitional space between the languages?

The Art of the Artist Statement exhibition took place at the Hellenic Cultural Centre in the heart of Chicago's Greek community in February 2005. Co-curated by Georgia Kotretsos and Maria Paschalidou, *The Art of the Artist Statement* contained the work of fourteen artists. I felt fortunate having the opportunity to use my camera lens as a vehicle of interpretation, helping me translate the processes and ideas behind each individual work. At the entrance to the centre, on the wall outside the main gallery space, I saw the names of the fourteen participating artists. Most of the names suggested a European connection—a visual statement of personal cultural belonging - for me, a forgotten familiarity, which in turn made me think of other forms of translation. Was I going to translate the work I was about to see through the eyes of a European or a North American? What form of literary abstraction, or translation, I wondered, would allow me to fold the concept of the images into the firmly defined shapes of the letters in the English alphabet, without, that is, bruising the body of thoughts the photographs both held and represented.

Moving closer to the artworks in the gallery, I felt a mix of excitement (about the novelty of the exhibited work) and anxiety (about the possibility of not understanding the

meaning of the works). I remember pausing in front of each piece, looking for clues that would connect me to the thought process of each artist. As I did so, I caught myself searching for some reference to the gender of the artist, as if this knowledge could assist my understanding of the intent and message communicated through the art. Intuitively, I looked for the emphasis on the body, identity or the fluidity and mobility of identity, preparing to sense some form of sorting through complexity and “messiness” in the exhibited art. The gender awareness in translation practice made me question the connections between social stereotypes and language, and about the cultural differences and the politics of language and gender, discussed in more depth later in this essay.

As I was writing the essay *Translating Chicago* I also became acutely aware of the embodied fragmentations in all disciplines of human activity. During my lifetime, science has progressed at an unparalleled pace in its technological trajectory, but in the process has partially departed from its original purpose to help us assimilate the world around us psychologically. Industrial tools have advanced beyond our capacity to comprehend their impact on our future. Specialization in all spheres of human activity, including our language, has lead to an overall sense of fragmentation, automatic functioning of our thought, and division through borders of fields of experience. In his book *On Creativity*, Bohm talks about a way of looking at fragmentation through the Implicate Order theory which indicates that everything is internally connected with everything, yet our way of looking makes the world appear broken up. Mechanistic viewing gives way to fragmentation and we perceive ourselves as divided by different professional groups, objectives and ambitions. If we give into the mechanistic view, then we see the fragments

as independent and real. Bohm uses an example of the world that is split into nations that we see as independent even though fundamentally they are all organically interrelated.

Bohm comments:

To expect that men will cease to engage in this sort of fragmentation through moral exhortation, through compulsion, through being convinced of what is right, or through a new organization of society is to try to solve the problem of fragmentation by engaging in more of fragmentary mode of thought that produces the problem. Rather, what we have to do is to give serious and sustained attention to this mode of thought itself. And this is what we are beginning to do when we see how we have been conditioned to split art, science, mathematics, and the desire for “the good” into separate compartments of life, so that we are not able to see the oneness of the deep impulse toward “fitting” that is behind all of these. (Bohm 70)

In the year 2004, I expressed the internalized sense of fragmentation in a two-person exhibit “Sen Kyori” in Kamloops. I froze transparent photographic images inside large blocks of ice and installed them inside the TRU Gallery. The act of freezing, separating a part from the flow, and imposing a shape and imagery onto the ice was conceptually parallel to my thought process of splitting parts from the whole and ascribing them meaning. Satisfaction from watching the clear and pure symbol crystallize in front of me quickly turned into an obsession to freeze hundreds of photographs collected through my

visual research. A selected number of these images were exhibited under the title “Frozen Passage” at the Cube Gallery in Kamloops. *Stretching the Moment* (fig 6) is a digital photograph of a cyanotype transparency frozen inside an ice block. One of the conscious frames used in this work was, undeniably, derived from my gender identity. An understanding of the intersections between my gendered identity and ethnic background, together with my photographic image production, was essential for a reflexive method of research of liminality.

5. Gender and Landscape Embodiment

Images such as *Ofelie and Newcomer*, (fig 7 and 8) stand for visual interpretations of my increasing awareness of gender and body politics within cultures. In particular, I was interested in portraying the female body as the borderline between the natural and the cultural, and the biological and social. Rosemary Betterton points out that traditionally, in western culture and science, the female body has been aligned with nature and myth, positions of “inferiority shared with other marginalized groups” (Betterton 13). In the historical and philosophical considerations of modernity the female figure has been declared the symbol of everything unknown, mythical, mysterious and therefore uncontrollable. In the context of these considerations, Ian Chambers describes the female symbol as a figure that “stands for that excess in feeling and being that breaks the bounds of reason and threatens its exercise of power” (Chambers 107).

Postmodernism and feminism developed strategies for creating “the conditions under which women can speak” (Betterton 17). The term “embodied perspective” (Betterton

18) seems a particularly useful way of describing certain female artists whose work deals with female embodiment. The creative expressions of artists such as Ana Mendieta have served to collapse the inside and outside borders, exposing the intrinsic uncleanness of the body. Ane Raine describes how the Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta performed a series of private rituals which were referred to as dialogues between the landscape and the human body (Raine 228). Mendieta used materials such as sand, dirt, stones, flowers, grass, human hair, blood, dirt, and her own body, and traced her silhouette onto the landscape. Through the process, Mendieta felt, she became an extension of nature and the nature extended from her body (fig 9 and 10).

The traditionally intimate domains of child birth, with all its messiness, afterbirth, menstrual blood, urine or vomit, entered the public sphere threatening established female body perceptions. Barbara Creed describes the threat and rejection of the feminine in *Horror of the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection*:

Images of blood, vomit, puss, shit, etc. are central to our culturally/socially constructed notions of the horrific. They signify a split between two orders: maternal authority and the law of the father. On the one hand these images of bodily wastes threaten a subject that is already constituted, in relation to the symbolic as “whole and proper”... On the other hand, they also point back to a time when a “fusion” between mother and nature existed; when bodily wastes, while set apart from the body, were not seen as objects of embarrassment and shame. (Creed 51)

As the abject becomes a frequent theme, Betterton poses a question of equality of all transgressions of boundaries (136). Her question has been particularly important in my search for identity in the context of the Canadian culture I was assimilating as an immigrant mother and artist. The abstract concept of the female body in terms of non-linearity, multiplicity and fluidity allowed me to see geographical, cultural, and bodily boundaries as transient permeable spaces.

At the same time, I was negotiating my position as an artist and mother, realizing my deficiencies in terms of a language and framework for my creative voice. I took the position of an observer, studying my children's adaptation to the Lac Le Jeune environment and my own interpretation of their relationship with both cultures, Canadian and Czech. This is expressed in *The Seeker and Second Tenderfoot* (fig. 11 & 12). Even though my children were born into the North American culture, I sensed their perception of this culture is partially influenced by the character traits of my Czech heritage, which in turn affects my own interpretation of the cultural perception. The state of being a child implicates "the effort to map the conflicted geography of principal adult identity" (Tobin Siebers 76). In *The Body Esthetics*, Sibers argues that children's bodies are symbolic sites for the adult "transference of conflicting anxieties about time, memory, sexuality and desire" (Siebers 76). My own desire to be purified, to experience the world without the guilt of failed attempts to create a stable home environment, was driving the process of placing my children in the images. My own filter over the landscape, coloring the children's' perception of the place, made me think about the reverse flow of seeing: am I reacting to the reflected perception of reality? Looking at the images made me

realize that the frozen space between me and my children is my own conceptual creation as well as the creation of my children looking back at me. I realized the possibility that my own imagination was blocking the children's view.

From the public critique of this particular series of works I also realized the multiple meanings these images suggested. Depending on the viewers angle and personal background, the same image may simultaneously be ascribed many different meanings, each of which is being connected to a particular cultural or individual system. The multiple potential meaning of photographs is pointed out by Sarah Pink in her book *Doing Visual Ethnography*. Pink demonstrates how visual images are given new meanings in a range of different contexts. In the same way, reality is not solely 'visible' or observable. Pink asserts that images "have no fixed or single meanings and are not capable of capturing an objective reality" (Pink 24). In her dealing with diverse photographic meaning, she further explores this view by interrogating a single photograph, concluding that any system of categorizing images should consider their "ambiguity of meaning and fickle adherence to categories" (107). Isolating an image into a single denominator overlooks its potential for communication of interconnected situations. Further exploration of the "visible" in the context of observed "reality" raises question of truthfulness. Just because an image makes a specific situation visible, it does not have to mean it is true. The relationship between the reality and the visible can be viewed from Pink's conclusion that "material objects are unavoidably visual, but visual images are not, by definition, material" (23). Pink's approach to images tests our understanding of the "real" in terms of their physical presence, which may be conceived

through the “visible”. Inferring from my own experience, we make sense of visual images through private and public interactions with the world around us. As Graeme Sullivan points out, personal biases serve as conscious frames, but the “cultural filters constructed around us also shape these interpretations” (118). These interpretations are constructed as cognitive scripts, systems and conceptions drawn from various parts of the mind; they exist in countless representations “tucked within the labyrinthine layers of the brain” (Sullivan 119). In *Living Like a Weasel*, Annie Dillard interprets her private interaction with a natural world:

Our look was as if two lovers, or deadly enemies, met unexpectedly on an overgrown path when each had been thinking of something else: a clearing blow to the gut. It was also a bright blow to the brain, or a sudden beating of the brains, with all the charge and intimate grate of rubbed balloons. It emptied our lungs. It felled the forests, moved the fields, and drained the pond; the world dismantled and tumbled into that black hole of eyes.

(Dillard 72)

6. Connectedness

My gradual acceptance of a concept of the female body that is fluid and constantly merging with other ideas made me think about the forces of interaction and connection within systems. I began to search for connections to a larger system. David Bohm’s philosophy described in *The Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, has significantly inspired the direction of my thoughts. In Bohm’s understanding of order, the foremost importance is given to the undivided whole which contains all structures, systems,

processes and abstractions. From this perspective, parts may be physical, such as atoms, but they may also be abstract entities, such as quantum states. Whatever their nature and character, according to Bohm, “these parts are considered in terms of the whole, and in such terms, they constitute relatively autonomous and independent sub-totalities” (Bohm 173). In the implicate order, time and space no longer dominate the relationships of dependence or independence of different elements. Rather, “an entirely different sort of basic connection of elements is possible, from which our ordinary notions of space and time, along with those of separately existent material particles, are abstracted as forms derived from the deeper order” (xv). Erwin Laszlo expands on the connection elements working within the implicate order in *Connectivity Hypothesis*. Laszlo suggests a fundamental coherence and universal connectivity within nature through an interconnecting field. These fields, described as a dynamic liquid continuum, are information carriers; they account for the currently anomalous forms of coherence (Laszlo 49).

Through assimilation of Laszlo’s and Bohm’s theories I have come to a personal deduction that the properties of the interconnecting field are analogous with the properties of the liminal space. The transformation of my perception has happened gradually through the research of knowledge and cultural systems. The incremental process of stretching the mind beyond the “known”, gaining a new understanding in the process, and then reaching beyond the platform of this new understanding is a form of scaffolding. The Greek word “metanoia” captures the meaning of transformative learning well. It literally means “beyond the mind.” This scaffolding conceptual process made me

realize that the pure, simple symbolism I was looking for, through splitting from the larger context, could not exist alone in a vacuum. Simplicity and complexity must co-exist in a dynamic relationship. The liminal space then must contain the intricate particles and the simple, pure elements as well. Stirring the particles and elements would in turn, change the color white into grey. This process of intermixing and contaminating can be illustrated using a pool metaphor: dropping a teardrop of impure substance into a pool of pure water will make the entire pool impure.

This shift in ways of understanding and seeing was, without a doubt, encouraged by the use of images and cameras in my auto-ethnographic method of research. This specific approach enabled me to create and represent an understanding of cultural systems, and my position within them, based on my own experience. The ambiguity of the meaning of the images tested my perception and interpretive framework; the instability of interpretation questioned my belief in “pure”, truthful way of knowing. Cecilia Lury proposes that the photograph “has taught us a way of seeing, and that this way of seeing has transformed contemporary self-understandings” (Lury 3). Furthermore, according to Pink:

Recent reassessments of the relationships between vision, observation and “truth” have influenced the ways in which the visual is approached across the disciplines, emphasizing the arbitrariness of visual meanings and the potential of the visual for the representation of ethnographic knowledge. It has been suggested that photographic and video images can act as a force

that has a transformative potential for modern thought, culture and society, self-identity and memory and social science itself. (Pink 13)

In order for me to conceive of the images in their symbolic state I had to come to negotiate the fact that they are a two-dimensional universe. In their form, as Jean Baudrillard suggests, photographs are in no way “inferior to the three dimensional universe of the real and representation” (Baudrillard 98) Baudrillard further claims that “image is a parallel universe, a depthless other scene”(98). The interpretative process of my experience was a necessary agency for reflexivity. Looking closely at the images of the Lac Le Jeune landscape, and my body within this landscape, I felt a desire to reach underneath the pictorial veneer of the photograph. Cryptic connections extended from my present body through the image and into the flow of memory enfolded into the grey space below the thin photograph’s surface. The visual content was just a starting point, a gesture towards a larger context comprising an enormous array of information systems and spaces. Using a photographic image to explain the holographic space, Bohm describes his philosophy of enfoldment in his book *On Creativity*:

The mathematics itself suggests a movement in which everything, any particular element in space, may have a field which unfolds into the whole and the whole enfolds it in it. An example of that would be a hologram. In an ordinary photograph made by a lens, you have a point-to-point correspondence. Each point in the object corresponds to a point in the image, more or less. Now, in a hologram the entire object is contained in

each region of the hologram, enfolded as a pattern of waves, which can be unfolded by shining light through it. (Bohm 105)

The pattern of enfolding and unfolding constitutes, what Bohm theorizes, as an implicate order. In this order, everything is internally connected to everything, everything embodies everything, and only “in the explicate order are things separate and relatively independent” (105). Now, even science has difficulty explaining some of the mathematical anomaly of system coherence. Here again, I imagine the liminal space playing the important role of holding the theory together. And finally, during an installation of my most recent work, *In-Forming* (fig 13 and 14), I was able to perceive the connection between the liminal space and gray water.

The Shaw cable- broadcasted *In-Forming* piece (fig 13 and 14) was installed outside the VAG gallery on March 8, 2007. The object of the installation was to explore intimate transformative processes within a public space. All of my previous research of transformations from one system into another resonated in this installation. Still attached to the process of freezing, even though Vancouver has a much warmer climate than Lac Le Jeune, I froze seven bed sheets, one at a time, over the form of my prone body using the space of a commercial cold warehouse. After two weeks of spraying the pieces with cold water to build up thin frozen layers, I transported the installation to the site in a U-haul truck filled with blocks of dry ice. The pieces were exposed to the spring temperature and morning rain when I laid them on the sidewalk into the pathway of a downtown crowd.

The space I created allowed for the memory to be activated. The wilderness landscape which I became few years ago while living in the Lac Le Jeune was now melting over the unyielding city pavement. Multiple layers representing the experienced time spilled from the embodied mountain and began to pull it down into the dirt below. Together with the bystanders, I watched the traces of my body slowly morph before my eyes; waiting for that precise moment that would let me witness the process of transformation, and, most importantly, provided a glimpse at my understanding of liminal space. It never happened, at least not through my eyes. After a period of perceiving a body imprinted into the bed sheet, I suddenly saw a white cloth folded on the ground. I was not able to actually see the space between one form and the other. While the bed sheet kept transforming in front of my eyes and promised a new revelation, I looked through the old rain that was falling on my skin. The rain ran down my hair, my hands and my shoes, into the puddles, connected me to the morning passerby, and to the edge of the bed sheet spread on the ground between us. The water stretched its membrane to pour me through the sweat, blood and semen of every human thought dissolved and suffused into the color grey - the messy color of “becoming”. At that moment I was a part of the liminal space, therefore I could not see it through my eyes.

The rest of the human race was with me in that transition. We were the global melt. At the threshold of an ecological transformation, our existence is liminal. We are the living fluid that might be of the body, of the earth, or of the air. Acceptance and understanding

of grey water, permeated with ideas, into my thoughts, daily life and perceptions of the world is, perhaps, the greatest accomplishment of my artistic inquiry.

7. Material and Sculpture

The frozen white sheet held references to several issues I had researched through my art practice. Firstly, it challenged the established patriarchal hierarchy in our society. The location I chose for my installation stands for patriarchy at its best – the Roman architectural structure of the Vancouver Art Gallery served as a court house in the past; the stone building and its entrance speak for historical establishments and impermeability. The fast morphing sculptural pieces, which could be interpreted either as a female body or a landscape, challenged the stability of the historical establishments. The date of the installation is recognized world-wide as an International Women's Day. The sculptures express a connection to female way of knowing; through my choice of a cotton fabric and water, since these organic materials have an intrinsic ability to expand, absorb, move and transform. Set in motion, the clear ice that held each sculpture's shape, bonds with the pavement, soaking the white sheet with dirt. Exposed through the fabric is the uncleanness of human interactivity with the internal and external environment. The fluid and sensual living form transgressed from one state into another, defying classification, fusing gender expectations. The hard, frozen sculpture at its first stage is compared to the hardness and masculinity of the roman structure. But at the same time, the softly draped fabric accepts feminine characteristics, which soften even more as the sculptures begin to melt.

Secondly, the installation gestured toward our deteriorating relationship with the natural world. My own interpretation of the Canadian landscape, based in childhood dreams and imagination, was of a majestic wilderness governing its cycles. This perception was something I yearned to instill into my children's perception of their homeland as well. However, despite growing up in a natural sanctuary of Lac Le Jeune, the children's part of learning has been an awareness of the world-wide exponential destruction of the environment. Especially disconcerting have been the reports on global warming and its impact on the ice-covered Northern reserves of natural life. My installation pointed out the connectedness of human agency to the natural cycles and the geographic landscapes. The fast melting sculpture, collapsing and loosing its physical presence, served as an embodiment of the disappearing natural world, and of my vanishing dream.

Thirdly, the sculpture makes a reference to our relationship with water, and grey water in particular. In recent years concerns over diminishing reserves of groundwater have generated much interest in the reuse of greywater, both domestically and in commercial spheres. Grey water comprises 50-80% of household waste water from processes such as bathing, and washing dishes or laundry. Because it contains residues of food and human interactions, it lends itself an ideal irrigation agent, since plants thrive on used water containing small bits of compost. One of the greatest accomplishments of today's green movement is the grey water reuse as a part of the plan to resolve many ecological problems. Liminal in its nature, grey water connects all areas of human agency in both, abstract and concrete terms. Cultural, social and personal acceptance of grey water in all of its applications in our efforts to reverse the ecological degradation is conceptually parallel to the acceptance of natural world in its present form. Complex, organic and

unpredictable, the natural world presents a different way of knowing from traditional technological or scientific paradigms.

The first draft of the human genome early in the year 2000 was a reminder of the human intrinsically messy agency. Scientists made public their discovery, which was a far cry from the expected clean and neat solution. To the scientists' puzzlement, the complex reality surrounding our daily modern life extends to the level of genes and building protein. Even our genetic landscape rejects purity and a two-dimensional label. The results of the first draft described the human genome as lumpy and pasted together, not unlike any breakfast porridge. Initially, the scientists made sense of this discovery by resorting to art-based metaphors, imagery and analogy. Sullivan describes the process:

A report stated that the “genetic archeologists” had uncovered the “sticky, stringy, springy, dynamic, garrulous, gorgeous, and preposterous molecule of life.” The genetic map was compared to the population distribution of urban and rural United States, as varied as neighborhood clusters and mountainous landscapes. The human genome was likened to lumpy oatmeal in the school cafeteria. This was not your usual science reporting. This was a struggle to interpret, a search for the other ways of coming to understand something. The process is a natural way humans negotiate meaning. (Sullivan 65)

I believe this struggle to find meaning is largely caused by the failure to respond to the complexity in which everything interconnects. Perhaps, traditional dichotomies with their adherence to “truth”, “reality” and purity finally have to face up to our “involvement with provisional discourses, languages and powers that constitute our present and our presence within it” (Chambers 116).

8. Eco-Feminism

The idea of multiplicity and connectedness has been at the root of eco-feminism since 1970s. People concerned with women’s rights and a preservation of the natural world began to make a connection between the abuse imposed on female minds and bodies and the physical environment. Eco-feminists such as Susan Griffith, Hazel Henderson and Elizabeth Grey have pointed out the patriarchal worldview as a main cause for today’s ecological crisis. In the *Overview of Eco-Feminism*, Annie Booth claims that from the point of treating male as superior to female, we started our social and ecological crisis, and this initial order led to other rankings. She asserts we value human life over animal life, culture over nature. The oppression of women “was the justification for the oppression of the rest of nature, as the female and the natural were linked” (Booth 331). Booth points out the movement of eco-feminists and ecologists as a growing influence on the philosophical development into the future. Women naturally experience the state of being “born across” through childbirth and menstruation. The feminine ways of knowing include subjectivity, emotion and intuition; the feminine values, according to Booth, “need to be re-evaluated and recovered as legitimate sources of knowing” (338). Personal experience and feeling lead us to caring and making ethically sound decisions. Eco-

feminists go even further to describe their relationship with nature as “love”. I recall one of my experiences from a couple of years ago during a photo shoot at the Tranquille Creek outside the town of Kamloops. As I was posing for the pinhole camera, my prone body in the snow-covered river bank seemed to extend through the water, into the roots of trembling aspens, and through the tree branches into the landscape which contained me. I folded into the humming space during the pinhole camera’s long exposure time and unfolded back when the negative exposure was completed. I was born across the physical and abstract boundaries between the body and the landscape, becoming the liminal space in the stretch of time. Before leaving the creek that day, I looked around me and felt an utter connection with the place. Being “in love” is the only term that describes the emotional experience that lingers on to this day.

Despite some critical gaps in eco-feminist philosophy, such as isolating the female body and perpetuating the gender dichotomies, the movement itself contributes to explorations of new ways of seeing. According to Barbara Starhawk, the emotion of love and caring offers “new roles for the individual including responsibility and awareness as well as justification for action” (Starhawk 421). In *Deep Ecology*, Bill Devall and George Sessions address the need for an attitude that “allows all entities, including humans, the freedom to unfold in their own way within obvious kinds of practical limits” (Devall and Sessions 67). This attitude will naturally encourage the development of an ecological consciousness. Devall and Sessions describe it this way:

This process involves becoming more aware of the actuality of rocks, wolves, trees and rivers – the cultivation of the insight that everything is connected. It is learning to be more receptive, trusting, holistic in perception, and is grounded in a vision of non exploitive science and technology. (Duvall and Sessions 8)

Along the lines of connectedness, I will return to the metaphor of water. Besides being able to follow water in its intensive physical processes and material flows, I have constructed the virtual concept of water as creating new events through becoming the flow, expanding into ice, or falling as snow. At first, these bio transitions served as scaffoldings for me to see the interconnectedness of water with all human activities. I could see how “water is “perplicated” with ideas of other natural cycles, involving all the “spheres” that contemporary geographers talk about: hydrosphere of course, but also lithosphere, atmosphere and biosphere” (Protevi 2). Protevi further claims that:

The spheres are de jure distinct, but de facto mixed. Not only are they composed of immensely complex nested sets of coupled cycles at many scales, but their intersection zones – their “zones of indiscernability” – are intermixed. For instance, the atmosphere is not a collection of gases, but is better thought of as “air,” and air has plenty of organisms [spores, microbes], minerals [dust] and water in it. Similarly, the hydrosphere is not just chemically pure H₂O but is “water,” which has plenty of

organisms, air, and minerals in it. The lithosphere in turn is not just minerals, but its top layer is “soil,” which has plenty of air, water, and organisms. Finally, the biosphere’s organisms are made of water and minerals and cycle air through them. (Protevi 3)

9. Conclusion

Our understanding of the world has changed fundamentally over the past several decades; scientific and technological progress has divided human activity into specialized professions, and ambitions. Fragmentation has permeated our way of thinking; it has become a metaphor for the post-modern society in which we live. In order to shift our perception and establish new kinds of intelligence, we need to explore the mind and engage in a kind of dialogue that allows flowing through concepts and cultures. My paper has indicated a common space which we occupy (and which occupies us) in our search for understanding. Within this ‘liminal space’ ideas and concepts are in constant states of transition and negotiation. Liminal space, just like water, dissolves the borders, mutates through time and spaces, enfolding shapes and ideas, and unfolding them back into the flow. My own transition from one cultural system into another has exposed and transformed me through the interaction with liminal space. In order to understand a new culture, I felt the need to purify myself of the old culture at first, seeing only what I expected to see in the frozen-white space around me. However, a deep scrutiny of this space stirred up the flow, and the residue of human interactions. Simplicity and

complexity coexist in all spaces. Liminal space is like grey water: it dissolves and transports traces of every human thought and interaction, flows in all directions, and connects us with the rest of the universe. In order to prevent an ecological degradation that is looming on our planet, we need to pay close attention to our relationship with grey water. Modern science and technology have served patriarchal establishments and promoted world views disconnected from the natural cycles in which we are all consciously or unconsciously participating. This has led to subjugation and destruction of the natural world. Pure water has become a commodity; purity and cleanliness is achieved through the use of harmful chemicals released back into our water cycles. Accepting and understanding grey water in its abstract and actual form, exploring its multiple meanings and applications can open new ways of seeing and learning. My art work looks for parallels; it attempts to fuse borders in order to get a sense of interconnectedness. Openness and sensitivity to the ever changing differences and similarities emerging through the murky character of grey water can help us create a new frame of mind in which there is a common consciousness.

Plates



Fig. 1
Frozen White, 2003
Photomontage, Silver Gelatin



Fig. 2
Boat From Bohemia, 2003
Pinhole Cyanotype Print



... and water ...

Fig. 3
Boat From Bohemia, 2003
Pinhole Cyanotype Print and Text

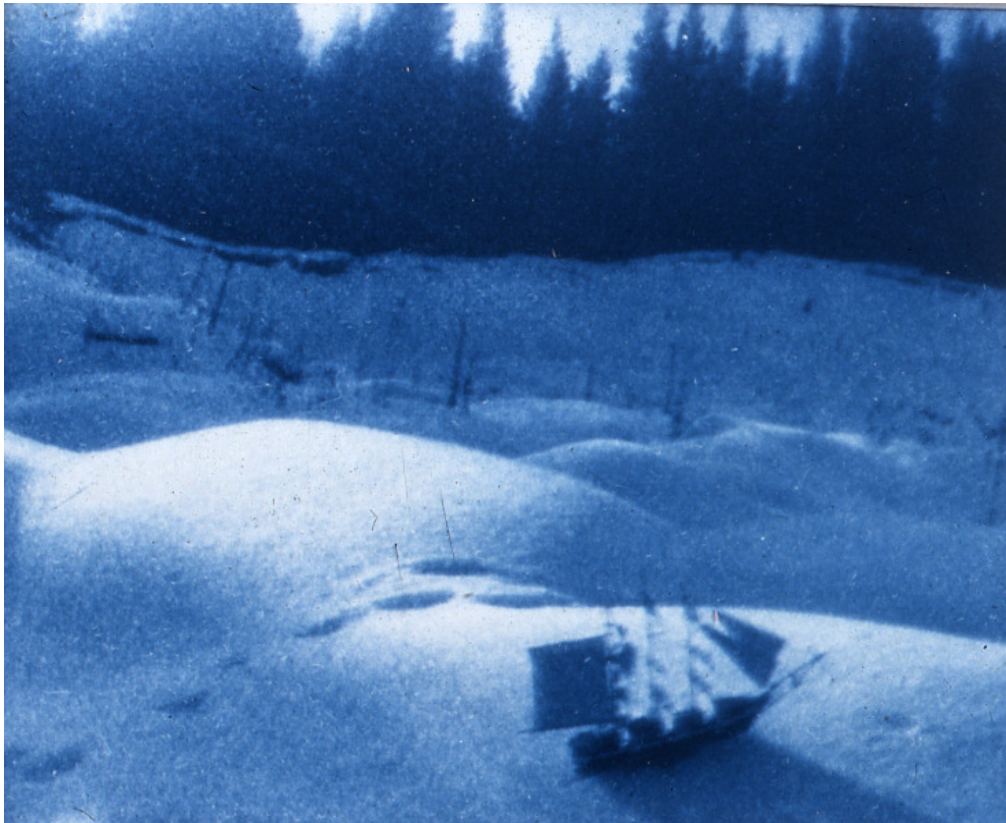


Fig. 4

Boat From Bohemia, 2003
Pinhole Cyanotype Print



Fig. 5
Boat From Bohemia, 2003
Pinhole Cyanotype Print and Text



Fig. 6
Stretching the Moment, 2004
 Digital Print



Fig. 7
Ofelie, 2006
 Silver Gelatin Photograph

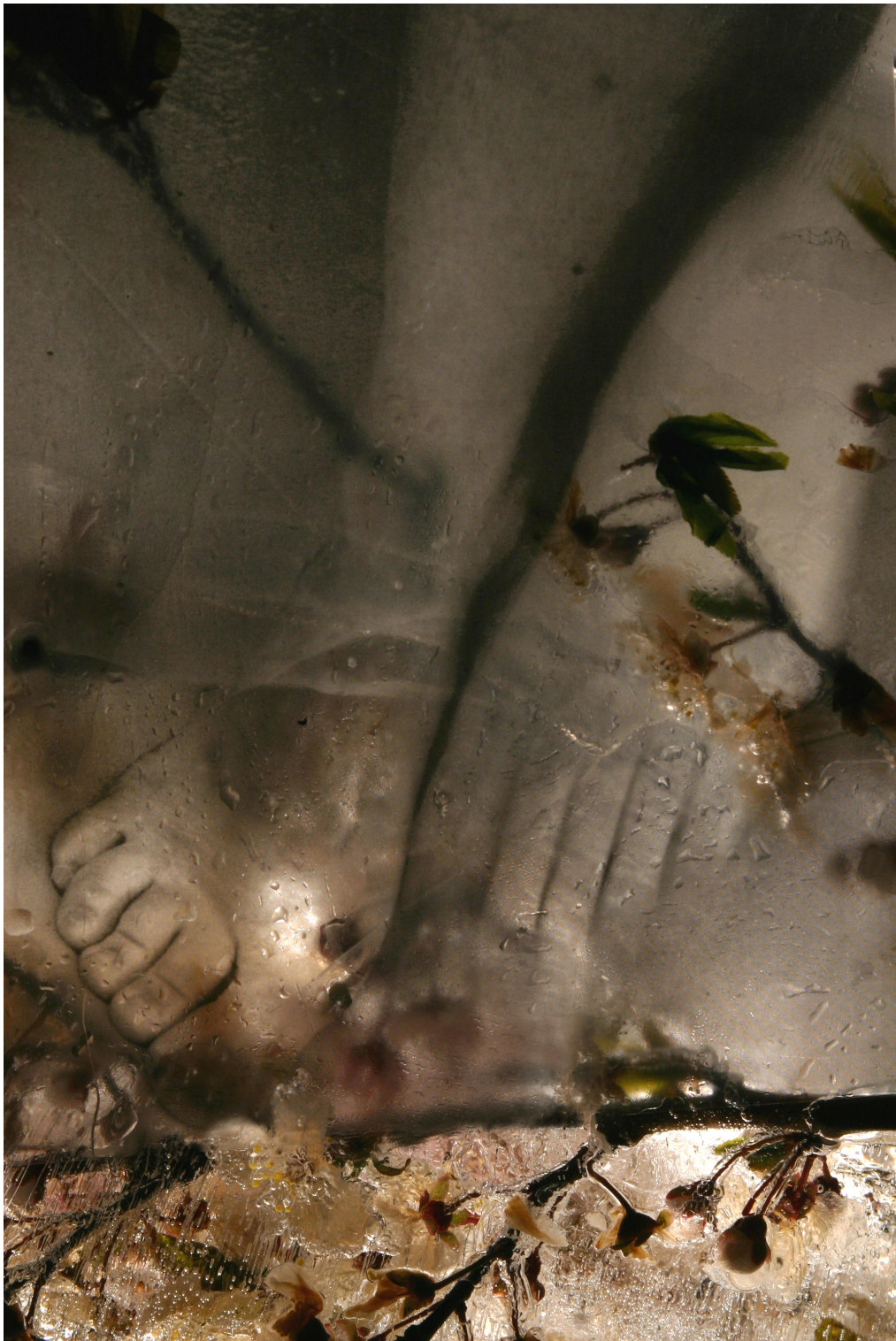


Fig. 8
Newcomer, 2006
Digital Print



Fig. 9, 10
 Ana Mendieta,
Silhouette series, 1970's
<http://www.virginiamiller.com/exhibitions/1990s/AnaMendieta.html>



Fig. 11,
Second Tenderfoot, 2006,
Digital Print



Fig. 12
The Seeker, 2005
Digital Print



Fig 13
In-Forming, 2007
 Installation, Cotton Fabric, Vancouver Art Gallery



Fig. 14
In-Forming
 Detail

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