

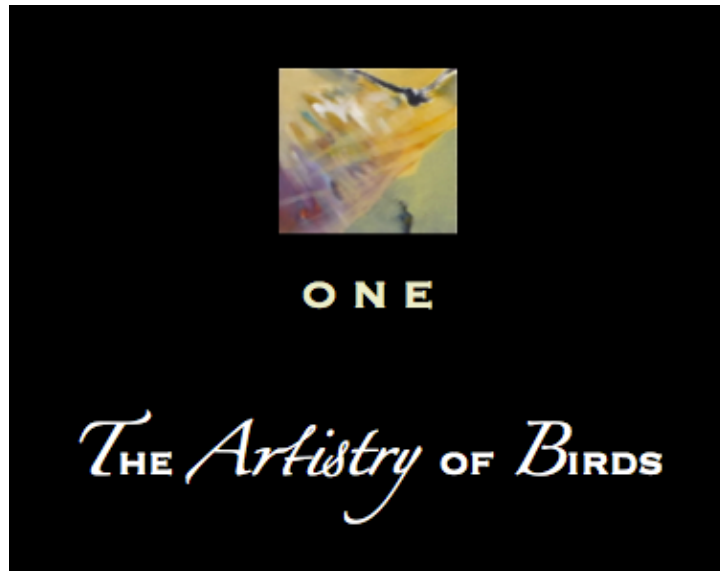
THE URGE TO CREATIVE LIFE

Claire Beynon | Phoenix, AZ | April 2013

*“Thoreau got up each morning and walked to the woods as though he had never been where he was going to, so that whatever was there came to him like liquid into an empty glass. . .
“ - John Cage*

The cornerstones and wings of every creative process are discipline and surrender - and what is each of our lives if not a dynamic creative process? We find ourselves arriving again and again in new and unexplored territory, places and states rich with challenge and potential, punctuated as much by unanticipated shocks as by delights and terrors. Our task is to turn up anew each day and to *'face the page undaunted by the endless possibilities of colour.'**

Perhaps our most urgent creative work today is that of recognizing and re-establishing right relationship: between the natural world and each other, within ourselves and with the multi-faceted expressions of the Divine. In this presentation I will speak into the subject of soul-based advocacy and the notion of 'inspiration as service'. How might we collaborate in the process of transforming our global crisis from a situation of malady to one of melody? Living creatively on behalf of each other and our planet is a necessity for personal and planetary healing, bridge-building and global unification. I will reference the artistry of birds alongside that of John Cage, Pablo Neruda and others, anchoring my discussion within the esoteric framework.



Strange as it may sound, birds have been one of my most insistent and exacting of teachers. They have arrived in various unforgettable ways at key times of my life. Though I'd not anticipated them becoming a part of today's presentation they flew in unbidden and took their place. Who am I to argue? They will, I trust, make their purpose known and their communications clear.

I asked a friend 'Why *birds*?' He replied, 'Birds brings to mind vulnerability, warmth (the way a small bird feels in the hand), joy (singing). Then there is Bird as winged imagination. As home (nest) and creative urge (egg), as instinct (migration) and freedom (flight). The creative life is like a wild bird: it feels so much a part of us from a distance, and yet is elusive to contain and can never be fully possessed. Some part of it will always have the wild, alien distance in its eye. . . '

Inspiration is often said to arrive 'on wings'. We speak of winged thoughts and of thinking 'on the wing'. Then there's Mercury – the winged messenger, planet of mind, speech and intuition. Sagittarius, well-equipped archer with his quiver of winged arrows. Then there's the vast congregation of heavenly angels, our solar angel - the devic kingdom.

We 'fly' with an idea, walk the earth on light feet. Birds occupy an in between – liminal – space; mythologically, they are understood to be mediators between earth and heaven, visiting and inhabiting both. They define, dissolve and integrate the space between our celestial and mundane realms; they propagate plant species as they fly, rubbing shoulders with mountains and grazing the pinnacles of temples.

In recent weeks, I have found myself recalling childhood stories - how at the age of five and six, my brother and I watched our father rescue a fallen tumbler pigeon and carefully position its injured wing in a splint made out ice-cream sticks and thin strips of muslin. A valuable lesson in nurture and hope, the pigeon fussed, trembled and survived. The image of a wing in a splint - of a fracture healing – became a metaphor

I have come to reference with some frequency in my work (in particular, the *'Fractured Earth'* series, begun in response to the catastrophic oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico and off the Bay of Plenty (NZ). These paintings and short films are a call to listen and to engage with the plight of our world's oceans. Similarly, work made in the aftermath of the earthquakes in Christchurch and Fukushima and, more recently, in commemoration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki contain x-ray images referencing the notion of fractures and of the ever-present potential for healing and the transformation of trauma and dis-ease, whether personal, collective or environmental.) <http://www.watersihaveknown.blogspot.co.nz>

One of my daily rhythms is to put out fruit, seeds and sugar water for resident and visiting birds. My home town, Dunedin, is 360 kms South of Christchurch; on 3 September 2010 - the night before the first major earthquake struck Christchurch - the *tuis* (NZ native birds), ordinarily quiet by dusk, would not settle. They stayed up hours beyond sunset, fidgeting and clacking noisily in the *rata* tree on the other side of my bedroom window. At around midnight, I went outside, stood on my front steps and asked them what was up – what was it they were trying to communicate? I suggested it was time we all settled down for the night. At 04.35AM, a 7.1M earthquake struck Christchurch. The birds knew. They gave me a valuable lesson in attentive listening that night.

Returning to childhood and Africa. . . The home I grew up in in South Africa was named *IZINYONI*, a Zulu word meaning *House of Many Birds*. It contains the Sanskrit word *yoni* meaning vagina, nest, spring, fountain, place of rest, receptacle, origin of life, creative force, the feminine. . . I read somewhere that *'a child is born from a yoni of stars'* and love this esoterically charged image of the constellations and planetary bodies presiding over our birth.

I remember, too, spending hours lying under the sky, watching clouds scud by during the day and observing the movement of the stars by night. I was convinced we should all be able to fly; that we simply hadn't cracked open the secret of 'how' -- at least, *not yet*. A tomboy and prone to testing my limits, I would clamber up a ladder and onto the steeply-pitched roof of our family home, knot a towel's corners around my wrists and jump. My brother was almost always at my side and game to jump, too. Time and again, we fell to the ground with a thud. Undeterred, we would shake out our 'wings', reconsider our calculations, climb back up onto the roof and try again. The inevitability of the crash was in no way a hindrance. On some level I apparently chose to see this as an instructive exercise, fool-hardy as it might have seemed at the time. And, as happens, this pattern of leaping into the unknown has become something of a metaphor for my life – one that has, for the most part, served me well.)

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When I was fourteen years old and holidaying in Lesotho with my family, I had a mountaintop experience with a pair of Lammergeier eagles, also known as the 'bearded vultures' of Lesotho. It is thought that the decline in their population in recent years is primarily the result of a shrinking habitat and food supply, as well as

due to human persecution, disturbances at nests, poisoning, and electrocution through collisions with power lines. (*Another MIDWAY ISLAND*).

Bearded vultures have reddish-yellow or white plumage on their head and breast and a grey-black tail and wings. In the adult individual the black strip over the eyes and the bristles at the base of the beak form the distinctive appearance of a beard. The white colour of the neck and under parts 'worn' by captive birds (as opposed to the reddish plumage of wild ones) remained a puzzle to ornithologists for many years, until it was discovered that the wild birds deliberately transferred iron oxide onto their plumage. Captive birds provided with iron-rich water immediately demonstrated the same instinctual behaviour, bathing in this water as they would have done in the wild. Within a short time they displayed the reddish plumage of their wild kin. The artistry of birds. . .

Lammergeirs feed on the bones of carcasses most other animals find inedible but given my memorable encounter with them, labeling these birds 'scavengers' seems somewhat absurd. One of the characteristics peculiar to these eagles is this – should one of them come across a bone too large to swallow whole, it will pick it up and carry it to a favoured rocky outcrop - an ossuary – a site that it returns to habitually each time this situation arises. It then glides downwards until it is between 70 and 16 metres above the rocks, at which point it will release the bone. In the event the bird has accurately estimated the conditions and coordinates, the bone will shatter into bite size pieces that it can then swallow and digest. This learned skill requires extensive practice by immature birds; research has shown it can take up to seven years to master.

In light of this I find myself thinking of the Seven Ages of Man, of the numerological and symbolic implications of the number seven and of how many spiritual practices it takes 7 years to master? However we look at it, the number 7 echoes around the universe.

Another characteristic I find fascinating about Lammergeier eagles is the fact they are - for the most part - silent birds. They whistle (rather shrill-y and insistently, one would have to say - as if it out of practice and having to warm up their sound box and vocal chords!) *only* around their breeding crags.

In this story, I was standing above the mist close to the private airspace ordinarily occupied 'just' by birds. I had a sense – dare I say this - of having being invited. Where I ought perhaps to have felt nervous or fearful (after all, it was getting late, I might get lost on the mountain, fall, be dive-bombed by this breeding pair?) I felt calm, awe and wonder. I entered into a dance with those birds. I do not consider myself naturally balletic, being, both then and now, more of a tree-climber than a dancer, but my encounter with those eagles opened something forever un-shut-able in me. I spread out my arm and flew, singing, into the mist.

I have no idea how long I was up there but I stayed for some time after the birds had left, at which point good sense and instinct propelled me back down the mountain to the small riverside cabin where my family - unperturbed by my absence – was

drinking tea and playing scrabble at a formica kitchen table.

The message the eagles delivered to me that day was something along these lines. . .
'You are not as earth-bound as the world will lead you to believe. You – along with
every human being on this magnificent earth - are *designed* to soar.'

BIRD

It was passed from one bird to another,
the whole gift of the day.
The day went from flute to flute,
went dressed in vegetation,
in flights which opened a tunnel
through which the wind would pass
to where birds were breaking open
the dense blue air -
and there, night came in.

When I returned from so many journeys,
I stayed suspended and green
between sun and geography -
I saw how wings worked,
how perfumes are transmitted
by feathery telegraph,
and from above I saw the path,
the springs and the roof tiles,
the fishermen at their trades,
the trousers of the foam;
I saw it all from my green sky.
I had no more alphabet
than the swallows in their courses,
the tiny, shining water
of the small bird on fire
which dances out of the pollen.

PABLO NERUDA

MIDWAY ISLAND

<https://vimeo.com/25563376>



Look what I have done.

Look what *we* are doing.

Chris Jordan's film documents the environmental devastation every one of us is participating in. May the plight of these birds break our hearts open and bring us to our knees. They show us in graphic terms what it pains us to see. The fact is, we are on a Midway Island of our own – and it is one entirely of our own making. Such destructiveness is the absolute antithesis of creativity. Creativity is by definition a generative force, a renewing energy. It is by definition vital, alive, generous and yielding. It offers itself up for the good of the group. It has little to do with Self and everything to do with Right Relationship.

We have lost contact with our natural world, ridiculed the shamans, violated the sanctity of our landscapes and the wisdom of our indigenous peoples. For all our religiosity, we have forgotten not only *how* to pray, but *to pray*. We have lost our understanding of what it means to live together, co-creatively and in community. In our ambition and self-importance, we have over-reached, and in so doing have broken the code, forfeited our integrity, forgotten what it means to kneel in service to - and in honour of - the world beyond ourselves.

As gesture, might we consider kneeling a way to (re-)establish contact with *terra firma*, with Mother Earth and our shared humanity; from a position of kneeling, we

feel the earth's heartbeat and add our heartbeat to hers. From a position of kneeling we can burrow into the rich soil, down in to the deep, quiet belly space where the fibrous web of roots support an abundance of mysterious life. Direct contact with the earth gives us a stable platform from which to turn our gaze upwards to the celestial realm, the singing cathedral skies.

But oh, how slow we have been to wake up. Change now will inevitably necessitate shocks and shocking maneuvers - we are this late in the game. The Urge to Creative Life has never been as urgent as it is today.



LIGHT FLIGHT

Let it be understood – Creativity is not the domain of the few. It is every man's home; every woman's forge; it is all of humanity's crucible and sanctuary. It is *everywhere we are*. It is presence and availability. It is courage and humility. It is knowing and not knowing. It is being grounded and it is soaring - silence and speech. It is listening *to, for, with* and *on behalf of*. It is the notes and the space between notes. It is generation and regeneration – through fire and through calm. It is grit and it is grace. Sometimes a circuitous route, it is occasionally a straight line. It is inclusive and expansive rather than exclusive and limiting.

More than merely artistic ability or active imagination, creativity is a combination of process, product, thought and action. It combines trial and error, imagination, and a kind of freedom that ultimately enables us to re-configure what used to be, into something new. Creativity, therefore, *matters* not only to dancers and painters, but to every person who longs to see something change, to experience the hope of new possibilities. It asks that we consciously cultivate rhythms of active engagement, fostering these in ourselves, in our children and within our communities.

The creative urge is not the private, exclusive territory of the artist, musician or poet. The farmer who has just ploughed his field will look back at the neat rows of furrows

with the same pride as we imagine Mark Rothko would have when completing a painting and laying down his paintbrushes. The way we stack plates on the draining board or hang the washing on the line can be infused with the same creativity and attention to detail as a biologist applies to species selection under the lens of the microscope. Connecting dots across disciplines and directions of thought, and gleaning from these connections original insight is *creative living*. Our interactions with others require consideration, creativity, intelligence, spontaneity.

Wallace Stevens wrote: *Imagination is the only genius*. Left to our own devices, imagination is a relatively 'wooden', flightless thing. It is when we make ourselves available to the Other and to the greater whole (incl., of course, the Divine) that our mundane creativity becomes infused with fire and light, enabling ideas to take wing.

Living creatively asks us to develop our capacity to stand in a place of uncertainty, mystery and doubt without, as Keats put it, *any irritable reaching after fact and reason*. . . He referred to this as 'Negative Capability', an unusual and paradoxical term since its outcome is almost unerringly positive! Keats was influenced by his studies of medicine and chemistry; it has been hypothesized that his term 'Negative Capability' refers to the negative pole of an electrical current that is at once passive and receptive. In the same way that the negative pole receives current from the positive pole, the poet (in this case) receives impulses from a world that is full of mystery and doubt, which cannot be explained but which the poet can translate into a work of art. A connection is thereby made; recognition and a comforting sense of affinity occurs.

In affirmation of this idea and in response to my invitation to her to write of her experience of the creative life, my friend Melissa Green - a Boston poet - wrote

' . . . From the deepest toiling in the heavy earth, what lifts away, rises and is taken on the breeze are the lightest, most delicately burnished seeds, the ones closest to splitting apart and regenerating on the wings of the air. . . '

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The cornerstone and wings of the creative life are discipline and surrender; that is, showing up every day, available and open to the promptings and offerings of the universe, *'undaunted by the endless possibilities of colour'*.^{*} It is *as we do this* that we learn to engage with - rather than apprehend - the dazzling and more subtle shades; those of beauty, terror, loss and love. We are invited to look life in the eye and to bring forth our questions - *"What will you reveal to us today? What new learning are you calling us to? How might we contribute? How might we participate?"* In this way, life becomes a seamless, collaborative, co-creative process.

Pablo Neruda was a master at this. In his *"Book of Questions"* - a poetry collection in which every two line stanza poses the writer and reader with a question - he probed the mysteries. . .

"Who shouted with glee
when the colour blue was born?

Do tears not yet spilled
wait in small lakes?

Is it true that the meteor
was a dove of amethyst?

From what does the hummingbird hang
its dazzling symmetry?

How do I tell the turtle
that I am slower than he?

Or tell the carnations
That I am grateful for their fragrance?

Is it true that sadness is thick
and melancholy thin?

Does the earth sing like a cricket
in the music of the heavens?

In terms of my own story, I have long explored the interface between art-making and spiritual practice recognizing early on the similarities between the discipline inherent in the process of making art and the dedication and concentration brought into focus through meditation. It follows then that not only does art have an aesthetic and communicative function but it is also valuable – might I suggest, *essential* – as an instrument of initiation, instruction, revelation and healing.

The business of turning up for work/life/relationship each day requires stamina, patience and practice. Along with everything else, it, too, is a creative process - a route punctuated by joys and discoveries as well as by trials, errors and tribulation. Contrary to popular myth, there is nothing vague, passive, retiring or soft-bellied about the creative life. How well we know this! Creative living implies engagement in a dynamic conversation, demanding - and worthy - of our full attention. We are not here to leave stones unturned: we are invited again and again to step forward, available and expectant as an open vessel. This is by no means an easy assignment.

Writer Melissa Green suggests, *"One is to ask and refrain from asking; to struggle and to refrain from struggle; to think deeply and to refrain from over-thinking in order simply to be present without fretting – in one's body and one's soul, at one's desk and chair, in one's factory or studio, feeding the birds that come to the*

table, walking beside the surf, sitting patiently beneath the apple tree knowing the fruit is ripening as it should. . . "

The Urge to Creative Life is the urge to LIFE itself, to an existence of thriving that rises above the hard materialism of mere survival - it is an urge to 'being-ness' & aspiration beyond acquisition.



WORDS ARE BIRDS

Once spoken, words have the capacity – and the tendency - to travel far. In this way, language can be an agent for change. If indeed we consider language in this way it seems important to consider also that its reach is not to be underestimated.

Place a knife in the hands of two people - one will choose to use it as a weapon, the other as an instrument with which to sculpt something beautiful. The same might be said of Language; the words we choose can devastate or heal; they can open a situation up for meaningful discussion or slam doors shut in an instant. We set violence loose on others every time we employ language that - whether through lack of attention or perhaps an avoidance to address our shadow selves – has the potential to harm or lash as deeply as any knife.

I'd like to share with you a piece of writing sent to me by a dear friend. Marylinn Kelly lives in Pasadena (<http://marylinnmlkelly.blogspot.co.nz>) and Minna – who you will meet in this story) is the child protagonist in the novel she's writing. . .

"Language was jewels to Minna, moon and stars and celestial bodies, making up a universe when put into proper place and sequence.

Words knew what and where they wanted to be. In any sentence, in any story, they KNEW which one of them was the perfect choice, which mark they

needed to land on to make the choreography appear not so much rehearsed as natural, like flowing water, like wind through trees or tall grass.

Of course, it HAD to be that way and no other. Words, when at their best, were demanding; they refused to settle for second place. Few understood it was the words themselves that balked when poorly chosen, imprecisely placed.

We have, some of us, a pact with language, made long before we understand the notion of consent. We have bound ourselves to a code, a chivalry of language in which we swore to protect and to honor it. It was, as Minna's father said of various things, a terrible swear which we could never take back. We abdicated our choice of being lazy and indifferent, of settling for what was almost right in place of what was the only word that would do. In swearing that terrible swear, we were forever bound to moments of agony when the chasm between truth expressed and idle chatter seemed unbridgeable.

Many were the times we wished for a less exacting standard, a lowered expectation, a getting by. And for those, it was an empty wish, half-hearted really, for it was an all or nothing business and always would be. Once committed to the right words, there was no other way to do it. One did not order shoddy parts from foreign manufacturers known for cutting corners, one did not send a knight into battle unprepared, one did not serve fish that had taken a turn even though it had not yet begun to reek.

One simply did not.

And so it is and was with words.

Used laxly, they spoke, they delivered a simple, unambiguous (one hoped) message and all went on their way.

Used rightly, used according to the agreement made back before words became more valuable than coins, used in the combinations one only understood after they had been set down, they became so much more than letters strung together.

They became the greatest magic of all." (Marylinn Kelly)

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So let us for a moment imagine a world in which we speak the same language – a language that transcends our differences and that has no bearing on where we come from, how long or fiercely our particular tract of land was staked, claimed and guarded? Let us imagine a world in which we mostly know the faces and stories of the people around us? A world in which it is understood that our daily activities contribute to the healing of the biosphere and the well-being not only of ourselves

but also of those with whom we share our lives? What about a world in which - living creatively - we *make* instead of *take*? A world in which we let go of the dominant – and oft-times, dubious - counsel of our rational minds and instead open our hearts to chance and change? Where we live *in time* rather than always with an eye on the clock? A world where *pace* equals *peace*; where the contentment that arises out of living in balance and in alignment replaces the crazy ill-health of our current, heavily-conditioned striving for so-called 'success'?



It seems we have reached the place in our collective story where Icarus *has* to fall. Will we apply ourselves to the important task of choosing our language with care? Will we apply ourselves to the task of distinguishing between imaginative endeavour and foolhardiness, between inventiveness and blind opportunism, between control that almost inevitably implies control *over*, an attitude of imbalance founded on fear and a wish for dominance, a paradigm long past its use-by date) and *discipline* as a mutually respectful expression of creative and flexible inner/outer expression? Can we make a shift from self-denying sacrifice to *surrender*, an inherently constructive, self- and other-respecting attitude that implies the *offering up* of our fullness and our gifts for the betterment of the Whole?

We cannot afford to be lazy with language or, for that matter, apathetic about any of the things we hold dear. The stakes are too high.

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The German philosopher Schelling conceived of the poetic imagination—that is, the artistic imagination—not as the product of individual genius, but rather as the incarnation (as in, the body and blood, the breath and spirit) of Universal Creation. Perhaps it is when we can to conceive of life as a complex consciousness mirroring and expressing an even greater consciousness (the masterwork of Divine

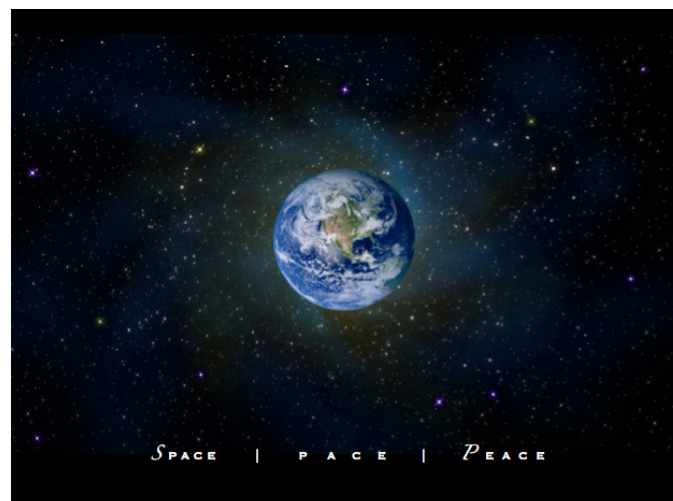
Imagination that is generative, diverse, creative and - when called for - destructive (for the purposes of evolution and transformation) that we can begin understand ourselves as both a *product* of imagination AND a *vehicle* for it?

Right relationship is immanent in such a paradigm; this ought not to be something that needs to be taught or presented as an ideal or ethic but rather something we know and understand as an instinctual impulse and imperative. There is wisdom and resonance in the simple conviction behind Einstein's statement (made famous on bumper stickers), '*Imagination is more important than knowledge*' and expressed in slightly different language in John Lennon's anthem '*Imagine*'.

We each carry a spark of light. Again, this is not something for the few; it is true for each and every one of us. In *Esoteric Psychology 2*, DK speaks of our solar system as '*a system of LOVE, of sentient response*'. It follows that correct motivation is critical for artists - and again, we are *all* artists. The type and timbre of energy we express in our lives and work has an effect not only on ourselves, but on those we come into contact with and, by proxy, the psyche of the collective.

It behoves us to contemplate deeply the energy we want to put out into the world. There is an ethical dimension to creative living that requires courage, an acceptance of ambiguity, a life defined by questions and a certain peacefulness with not knowing what will come next. So saying, inspiration is not necessarily polite, patient or logical; it can be a hard taskmaster! By way of encouragement on this subject, Goethe is know to have said –

“Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, Providence moves too. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.”



MIGRATION & WINGED EXPLORATION

There are significant advantages to looking at things from a distance – especially from ‘up in the air’. An overview gives us an entirely new perspective. Certainly, our understanding of what it means to be living on a planet that is one living, breathing organism - and, too, a planet that is ‘just’ one of an infinite number of other planetary bodies that together make up a ever-larger cosmic body - changed radically when we saw our first pictures of earth taken from space. Something in our collective psyche was forever altered by the view of us a small blue dot, suspended and in motion in a vast, largely unknowable universe. The bird's eye view became the cosmic view – or at least it showed us something more of the cosmic view.

Without flight - and birds have long been our inspiration for flight - we would not have created airplanes, kites, micro-light aircraft, or the space shuttle. We would be literally and figuratively grounded.

There are many who argue against Space Exploration considering it a waste of money. There are many who propose that money spent on space research should be spent instead addressing global poverty. ‘*Instead*’? We should be both exploring space *and* feeding our hungry.

It is true that every year in the United States, about 7 billion dollars goes towards human space flight. The US presence in Iraq has cost the country 10 billion dollars *a month*. In reality, funding for NASA draws on less than one percent of the government's annual budget. 12 times as much money is being spent on war and the mechanisms of war - its processes, its maintenance, its casualties. . . Quite aside from the money invested in war itself, there are the corresponding costs of long-lasting individual and collective trauma, violations of personal trust and safety and breakdown of community --- the absolute antithesis of peace and unity.

By contrast, NASA and international space programs promote peace, intercultural collaboration and cooperation. The international space station might be considered an a-political, unified environment, a small neutral state occupied by astronauts from several nations and the result of many nations working together. Space exploration requires the cooperation, expertise and input of several countries: space exploration is not a waste of money but rather a noble pursuit that promotes world unity and is cheaper by far than many of the activities currently supported and that serve only to tear our world apart.

Without going into this subject too much here, let it nevertheless be said that the benefits of space exploration are experienced by most people in most countries in countless different ways. it is nigh impossible to go through a day without encountering the ways in which the international space program has improved our world – the unity it promotes, the jobs it provides, the new technologies it creates, to name a few. Over above all its application-based attributes, space exploration has surely to be one of the most spectacular role models for humanity’s creativity and the power and value of active imagination put to use for the benefit of the whole.

If a fraction of the money currently invested in war - on nuclear weaponry, on arms of every description whose programmed intention is local and mass destruction - even (and we know the truth of this possibility) extinction of our species - *if a fraction of that money was spent instead* on sustainable farming practices, on Peace academies, healing centers, cooperative communities where creativity and the imagination are encouraged, poverty would diminish dramatically. So too, would a host of other abominations, many of them the direct result of war, of a fear-based need for control.

Territoriality and the drive to possess has caused our world no end of pain. We are dealing with wide-spread PTSD, people forever altered by the brutality they have witnessed; individuals and communities are traumatised, infrastructures are breaking down wherever we look, people's fundamental right to a sense of safety has been violated. War creates casualties in every possible way. War is an abysmal failure of the imagination - the absolute antithesis of creativity.

Now more than ever before the world needs our participation in its recovery.

Whilst hunting out images to do with bird migration, internet connections, flight paths, etc. . . I came across the map AVAAZ put together as a way of linking people up the world over, through story. I was struck by the similarity between these images, by what I perceived as a certain coherence.



Perhaps we are not that different to the birds whose flight mechanisms we have emulated? We have an abiding wish to to be airborne, to rise, to fly, to travel to parts of the world unfamiliar to us. Imagine if - instead of flying to 'visit' - we flew to 'see' and 'connect', conscious of our flight paths, of the web of links we are drawing in the atmosphere above our planet, lines that – yes, pollute and contaminate our air – but also show us in such visual ways an abiding wish to connect. Would we meet each other differently? I suspect so. And there may well come a time when we can no longer cross oceans and continents in airplanes, a time when we will be invited to

rely on the flight paths of memory and on the invisible cords/chords that connect us beyond the physical.

We will come eventually to a place and way of being where we can rely on our lifetimes' experiences of 'presence in absence', of *presence* per se, tuning in to each other in what may seem to be a whole new way but is in reality a kind of remembering, a recalling of the way we are designed to be?

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A growing number of people worldwide no longer believe civilization is fundamentally 'on the right track'. Even those who don't yet question its basic premises in any explicit way seem to have grown weary of it. As Jan Detrich said during her wonderful presentation on the Sacred Feminine, we are like children who have lost their connection to Mother, living largely on what we have been presented with rather than with what we intuitively understand to be true. When any story nears its end it goes through death throes, an exaggerated semblance of life. No surprise then that today domination, conquest, violence, and separation are taking on absurd extremes that hold a mirror up to dynamics that might once have been more hidden or diffuse. Last year, Harold Moses illustrated this same point when he spoke in terms of the point of sharpest dissonance as being the interval between two notes, a semitone apart, immediately before resolution.

We are at our most creative when we stand in the truth of who we are, rather than in some societally-conditioned version of who we think we're *supposed* to be. It is only as ourselves that we can be substance and light, form and spirit, grounded and airborne, connected to mother earth and released to the infinite magic and mystery of the heavenly cosmos, its potentials and realities.

Fear drives us to respond in ways that are hierarchical and control-based. As I said earlier in this piece, control has little in common with discipline since control is a thread that belongs to The Old Story - one in which man or woman assumed superiority over another, in which humanity assumed a position of entitlement and dominance over nature, giving him license to impose technology and blind reason on our so-called 'wild' world and 'uncivilized' communities. As sacred economist Charles Eisenstein laments, '*Everywhere we look, we see our efforts at control backfiring: wars to fight terrorism breed terrorism, herbicides breed super-weeds, antibiotics breed superbugs resistant to treatment. . .*' and so on, and so on. Of course, there is nothing new to any of this. We *know* this and recognize the traps. And yet how bound we are to what we know. How quickly – and how much - we forget.

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Imagine a world in which kindness, creativity and authenticity were the defining principals; where healing and restoration were both the impulse and the outcome; a

world in which frustration, disappointment, fear and bitterness are replaced by peacefulness, satisfaction, delight, wonder, success and love.

Each year I attend this conference in Phoenix, I appreciate again the fact we meet *here*, a city that carries the name of the mythological bird that must needs throw itself into the flames so as to be reduced to the very ashes out of which it will rise again, renewed, potent and vividly aflame. . .



EYE-TO-EYE

I would like to share with you two 'traditions of greetings' that I find meaningful and that have prompted a new photographic project (one I would like to invite you to participate in!). The first greeting pertains to the Samburu tribe of Northern Kenya and the second, to the Maori people of New Zealand.

The Samburu people - a nomadic pastoral tribe in Northern Kenya – uphold a tradition whereby when they encounter each other on their wanderings, they pause to face each other, silently engaging eye-to-eye for a time. . . Before continuing on their way, one says to the other '*I see you*'. Connecting through the eyes, the receiver of these words responds, '*I am here*.' The Samburu people say that in their language this greeting also means '*Until you see me I do not exist. When you see me, you bring me into existence*.'

In my home country, New Zealand, the *hongī* is a Maori greeting in which the *ha* - breath of life - is exchanged and intermingled. When Māori greet one another, pressing foreheads and noses together at the same time, this sharing of the breath of life is considered to come directly from the gods. The head is regarded by Maori as *tapu*, the most sacred part of the body: as the *hongī* process deepens those who have departed this world are remembered and grieved. With foreheads and noses

touching, two become as one bonded by their linked history. The connection to their ancestors reminds them of who they are, where they come from and whence they will return. Renewing this connection they honor each other, thereby honoring themselves and their respective family groups.

Encounters of this nature allow for a depth and timelessness of connection that facilitates and enhances *aroha* (love) and respect, and demonstrates appreciation of our own and the Other's originality, divinity and dignity.

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The song of the Divine and the sacred is everywhere expressed, weaving through our darkest hours and bleakest experiences; perhaps we hear it most clearly and insistently in the rockiest, most barren of places. My personal experiences of darkness, anguish, loss and terror certainly endorse this.

Returning again to the title of this paper - The Urge to Creative Life . . . For me, the word 'urge' implies the energy of 'surge' - an upward, forward movement that suggests an upwelling, an acceleration potential that substantiates and reinforces the initial impulse, allowing the intention to be carried further, affirming its intentions to actualize and take form. An urge is more than an incidental impulse or brief nod to a passing fancy. It suggests momentum, urgency and agency.

Creative living is an invitation to us all to be courageous in our development of self-discipline as a rhythmic, affirmative exercise of learning and assimilation and as a process it is about pattern-recognition, rhythm and practice. The word 'Discipline' contains the word 'disciple' and in this way describes both its service intention and its wider context. The Creative Life is also about surrender, which does not imply 'blind recklessness' but rather 'considered risk' - a directed, purposeful exercise underpinned by attentive listening to the instructions of the intuition - AVAILABILITY to subtle promptings.

The birds' songs that rise pure and high above of everyday/everywhere chaos call us to pay attention - to stop a while and with gratitude, listen. They are messengers. They, like us, have travelled far and still have far to go. Reminders of our interconnectedness come to us in countless - often unexpected - ways; they arrive like birdsong or birds on the wing, turning up every moment of every day. Spirit is calling us together, in whispers and in shouts, urging us to creative engagement, exhorting us to flock together, to fly alongside - wing-tip to wing-tip.



I will close with a short film titled '*Murmuration*' - an example of nature's choreography and of the extraordinary beauty that is possible when we 'live and work and have our being' *together*. The starlings' orchestrated flight group is a moving demonstration of collaboration, of nature lighting the way. This, for me, shows spirit manifest in form; evidence, if we need it, of magic, mystery and mastery of the highest order. There are no rigid outlines here. Everything is fluid, charged from the outside *in* and the *inside* out. Many individuals form a whole and yet within that whole the parts maintain their integrity. The form both dissolves and holds.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eakKfY5aHmY>



Namaste, Friends.

CLAIRE BEYNON (Dunedin, NZ) | for the SRI Conference, PHOENIX, AZ | April 2013

And - because I love it and because it synthesizes so much of what I've been saying here - this glorious passage from Walt Whitman's poem –

WHO LEARNS FROM MY LESSONS COMPLETE?

. . . It is no small matter, this round and delicious globe, moving so exactly in its orbit forever and ever, without one jolt, or the untruth of a single second;

I do not think it was made in six days, nor in ten thousand years, nor ten billions of years, Nor plann'd and built one thing after another, as an architect plans and builds a house.

I do not think seventy years is the time of a man or woman, Nor that seventy millions of years is the time of a man or woman, Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me, or any one else.

Is it wonderful that I should be immortal? as every one is immortal; I know it is wonderful, but my eyesight is *equally* wonderful, and how I was conceived in my mother's womb is equally wonderful; And pass'd from a babe, in the creeping trance of a couple of summers and winters, to articulate and walk--All this is equally wonderful.

And that my Soul embraces you this hour, and we affect each other without ever seeing each other, and never perhaps to see each other, is every bit as wonderful. And that I can think such thoughts as these, is just as wonderful; And that I can remind you, and you think them, and know them to be true, is just as wonderful.

And that the moon spins round the earth, and on with the earth, is equally wonderful, And that they balance themselves with the sun and stars, is equally wonderful.

Walt Whitman