

**ARTIST'S BLOCK: THE CREATION OF A WORKSHOP TO RE-
ENGAGE VISUAL ARTISTS WITH THEIR CREATIVE PROCESS BY
USING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AS A FACILITATOR.**

BY

SARAH P. RICHARDS

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author, and are not
necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation. I declare that this dissertation is my own
work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other institution.

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Abstract:

The aim of this thesis is to research and create a workshop which will assist artists to engage with their creative process. I explore the possibility that by being in a natural environment the blocked artist can reengage with their creative process and unblock the debilitating effects of artist's block. I chose to complete this study through the Durban University of Technology, to engage myself in the focused task of reengaging myself with my creative process, to create a workshop through experience and related yet varied data that could assist others through my experience and reflections.

The term 'artist's block', also known as 'creative block' or 'writer's block', is used to describe a visual artist's or a writer's inability to engage with their creative process. I refer to a variety of literary resources as well as the observations made through interviews, by a selection of South African artists about this debilitating and frustrating situation. I also examine what is meant by being engaged in a creative process, and examine various theories and suggestions from a broad selection of literature.

I explore a selection of literary recourses and reflect on personal experiences to ascertain whether the notion that the natural environment can assist an artist in finding the necessary inspiration to reengage them with their creative process and is therefore a suitable environment to facilitate a workshop. To assist with this study I facilitated two workshop, one for Students of the Durban University of Technology and the other for a diverse group of artists. The facilitation of a workshop needs to be a creative process and I use the analogy of an alchemical process to highlight the unfolding of a workshop experience. This study also takes a look at the skills required by a facilitator, the role of the participant and how a workshop may unfold as a creative process.

I observe that Artist's block is part of the creative process, that a workshop can be facilitated to assist artists with 'artist's block' and reengage them with their creative process, and that the natural environment is a suitable facilitator for the creative process. Although not quantifiable, it was established that students could benefit from workshops which gave them a better understanding of their creative process and how to move past artist's block.

This thesis reflects briefly on my paralleled experiences over this four year period as I reengaged with my creative process and created a body of work to be exhibited as partial requirement for the Master's qualification.

Table of contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1	
Artist's Block	
Section 1: What is artists block?	4
Section 2: Reports on interviews with artists about artists block.	21
CHAPTER 2:	
The Creative Process	25
CHAPTER 3	
Nature as a Facilitator	48
CHAPTER 4:	
The Workshop	
Section 1: The creation of a workshop.	70
Section 2: Report on the interviews with facilitators.	94
CHAPTER 5:	
Workshop Tools	99
CHAPTER 6:	
Workshop Reports	121
CHAPTER 7:	
Further Reflections	
Section 1: The Process Wheel	136
Section 2: My creative Journey	143
CONCLUSION.....	148
APPENDIX A	
Informed Consent Form and Information letter	150
APPENDIX B	
Documentary on Student Workshop	152

APPENDIX C
Interviews with Artists153

APPENDIX D
Interviews with Facilitators159

APPENDIX E
List of Student and Artists' workshop participants.....168

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....169

List of illustrations:

Figure 1: <u>Warm-up experience - Artist's workshop</u> , November 2007, KZN Midlands, Sarah Richards.....	134
Figure 2: <u>Material tables - Artist's workshop</u> , November 2007, KZN Midlands, Sarah Richards.....	134
Figure 3: <u>Centre piece - Artist's workshop</u> , November 2007 KZN Midlands, Sarah Richards.....	134
Figure 4: <u>Participants gathering inspiration from nature-Artist's workshop</u> , November 2007, KZN Midlands, Sarah Richards	134
Figure 5: <u>The Venue from the outside- Artist's workshop</u> , November 2007, KZN Midlands, Sarah Richards.....	135
Figure 6: <u>Inside the venue -Artist's workshop</u> , November 2007, KZN Midlands, Sarah Richards.....	135
Figure 7: <u>Participants inspired by nature- Artist's workshop</u> , November 2007, KZN Midlands, Sarah Richards	135
Figure 8: <u>Installation in natural environment- Artist's workshop</u> , November 2007, KZN Midlands, Sarah Richards	135
Figure 9: <u>Closing ceremony- Artist's workshop</u> , November 2007, KZN Midlands, Sarah Richards	135
Figure 10: <u>Process wheel</u> , created by Sarah Richards.....	137
Figure 11: Sarah Richards, <u>Path Reflected 1</u> , Digital photograph, 210 x 250mm, Collection of the artist.....	146
Figure 12: Sarah Richards, <u>Path Reflected 2</u> , Digital photograph, 210 x 250mm, Collection of the artist	146
Figure 13: Sarah Richards, <u>Fragment 1</u> , Oil on Canvas, 90mm x 157mm, Collection of the artist	146
Figure 14: Sarah Richards, <u>Fragment 2</u> , Oil on Canvas, 230mm x 127mm, Collection of the artist.....	146
Figure 15: Sarah Richards, <u>Chaos – A dance of discovery</u> , Oil on canvas, 690mm x 690mm, Collection of the artist.....	146
Figure 16: Sarah Richards, <u>Looking back</u> , Oil on canvas, 1360mm x 830mm, Collection of the artist	146
Figure 17: Sarah Richards, <u>Kick start:</u> , Oil on canvas, 1140mm x 480mm, Collection of the artist	146
Figure 18: Sarah Richards, <u>Going with the flow: Surrender</u> , Oil on board, 500mm x 1300mm, Collection of John Room.....	147
Figure 19: Sarah Richards, <u>Going with the flow: Engagement</u> , Oil on board, 500mm x 1300mm, Collection of the artist.....	147
Figure 20: Sarah Richards, <u>Going with the flow: Fear</u> , Oil on board, 500mm x 1300mm, Collection of the artist.....	147
Figure 21: Sarah Richards, <u>Forging a path</u> , Oil on Board, 750mm x 1400mm, Collection of the artist.....	147
Figure 22: Sarah Richards, <u>Forward 1</u> , Oil on Board, 600mm x 600mm, Collection of the artist.....	147

Introduction

This thesis reflects a creative process that has taken place over a four-year period. It is made up of many different facets that interlink into the creation of a workshop for artists, and a body of work for an exhibition.

In 1989, I completed my Higher Diploma qualification at Natal Technikon. I then started teaching sculpture and painting to adults and children, as a way of survival. This also meant that I could be immersed in the arts, while I gently pursued a career as an artist. My biggest challenge during the 15 years after my studies was long periods of feeling unable to engage energetically with creating works that were not commission-inspired. I realised that something was blocking my process, and I felt determined to get the bottom of it. I observed and discussed several of these issues with other artists who were also struggling to find their place as artists in the world, or to engage comfortably with their creative processes. I wanted to understand what this affliction might be caused by, and why it affected me and others. So I began asking what 'artist's block' or 'creative block' was, and what causes it.

Prior to this study, I had many positive personal experiences with the natural environment as a rejuvenating and inspiring location in many areas of my life. I began to ask whether the natural environment could be beneficial to artists and their creative processes. I wondered: Could a natural environment be used to facilitate a variety of artists back on to their individual creative paths? This idea is not new, and has been substantiated by artists (past and present), nature-based cultures, a variety of spiritual practices, and psychologists, amongst others. I look at the possibility that the creative energy found in nature will have a healing effect on artists, and could re-stimulate an artist who is creatively blocked.

I, like many artists, have greatly missed the study period at an institution for degree purposes. The sense of community, and the stimulation of working every day solely on creative ventures, seemed to help creative engagement. Coupled with my natural instinct for teaching, and my desire to help and share skills with others, I then asked the question: Can a workshop be created which could help artists establish their own methods of unleashing creativity during 'stuck' moments? I have many years of experience teaching painting and sculpture, but realised that my methods were predominantly prescriptive. I felt that to run a workshop using the natural environment as the key facilitator of a creative process would require a new approach to teaching. I was inspired to create such a workshop because of my positive experience with reading and applying the exercises in Julia Cameron's book *The Artist's Way*. Although it was very beneficial, I found aspects of it frustrating, since it was predominately a 'written' process. It was very cerebral in its approach, and did not offer visual artists experientially practical solutions. My next

question was: Might the extremely debilitating effect of artist's block have been prevented by a better understanding of my creative process while studying? I then wondered whether a workshop held during their study years could help students understand their own creative processes and blocks once they left the institution.

I chose to conduct this research through a University of Technology, as the creation of a workshop has many practical and technological implications. I felt that the DUT would be better able to support this process rather than an institution which comes from a purely theoretical stance. My intention was to create a document based on my experiences and reflections which would ultimately have value for teachers, facilitators as well as artists and art students who are interested in one or more of the issues I raise. The thesis is by no means conclusive but rather is intended to open doors to new perspectives and further research.

Research approach to this study

My approach to this thesis is to investigate the phenomenon of 'artist's block' using a qualitative method which integrates and assimilates data from a combination of primary (interviews and facilitating workshops) and secondary (literature) sources. I therefore start in *Chapter 1*, Section 1 by considering the phenomenon of artist's block, and investigating what it is and what causes it to occur. To assist in the understanding of these issues from a contemporary South African perspective, I held semi-formal interviews with several local artists to find out more about their experiences with artist's block (Section 2). In *Chapter 2* I explore what it means to be engaged in a creative process through examining a variety of literary sources.

In *Chapter 3*, I investigate the value of the natural environment to effectively heal the affliction of artist's block. In *Chapter 4* Section 1, I explore methods and theories of facilitation skills. The thesis explores concepts that will ultimately result in the creation and facilitation of a workshop for artists who are creatively blocked and would like to re-engage with their creative process. To acquire skills and a better understanding about the process of facilitating workshops I attended a facilitator training workshop and gave semi-formal interviews (Section 2) with facilitators to acquire different perspectives on facilitation.

Chapter 5 shows a variety of 'tools' I use to facilitate the workshops. This includes questionnaires, programs, a list of experiences used to facilitate creative process for participants and a material list. Putting theory into action I facilitated two workshops which I have reported on in *Chapter 6*. The first workshop I facilitated took place over three days for thirteen second year Fine Art students from DUT. This workshop was documented, and a short DVD (Appendix B: 152) is viewable as a reference of this

process. After further research I then facilitated a weekend workshop attended by fourteen artists. To assist with this study, post-workshop questionnaires were evaluated to establish the effectiveness of the workshops.

The Appendices contain the transcribed interviews with the artists (Appendix C: 153), facilitators (Appendix D: 159) which forms the primary aspects of this study.

I conclude the thesis by consolidating the ideas expressed in the six chapters. I also summarise my personal creative process over this four-year experience, which culminated in an exhibition of oil-on-board paintings.

The following conventions have been applied to this Thesis:

The Harvard system of referencing has been used.

- Double indentations and single spacing indicate direct quotations.
- “...” are used for direct quotations.
- ‘...’ are used for quotations within quotations.
- Titles of publications are in Italics.
- Titles of art works are underlined.

Chapter 1: Artist's Block

The meaning and causes of artist's block are explored in this chapter. In *Section 1* I primarily refer to a variety of literary sources to help clarify and understand certain important aspects of this issue. In *Section 2* I give a report on the interviews I conducted with a variety of artists about their experiences with artists block.

Section 1: What is Artist Block?

The terms 'artist's block' or 'creative block' are synonymous with the better-known term 'writer's block'. All of these terms are used to describe a writer's or visual artist's inability to engage with the creative process. If one is creatively blocked, then it could be concluded that one is not engaging in the creative process. In essence, the creative process is stopped or blocked by some force or attitude. It is therefore important that this study also explores what is meant by 'creative process'. Although artist's block and the creative process are symbiotically tied together, I will discuss creative process as a separate issue in Chapter 2.

Looking at my reference list, it becomes apparent that I have used a variety of authors who have used their personal experiences, including their observations of clients, patients, and workshop participants, to substantiate their research. Although there is much literature written about artist's or creative block, I sometimes refer to literature from a writer's perspective, which seems to be similar to the visual artist's problems. Dorian Haarhoff, the author of a workbook to help and inspire writers of Africa, runs workshops to inspire people to realise their gifts by teaching them skills that they may not have developed in school. Haarhoff describes writers block as:

the struggle writers have to find words or the panic we feel when confronted by a blank page. We have run out of ideas and we have run out of writing energy (Haarhoff, 1998: 233).

From my own experience, artist's block is an almost tangible experience. It has been hard to actively disengage from its hold, as it is not always clear what has caused the block or how to get rid of it. There is usually a desire to be creative. There are great imaginings of what one could or would do, followed by the excuses or the despair. Some of the observations made by artists I have interviewed have been similar. Michelle Penfold (Appendix C: 154) describes it as a little barrier, like a wall, that she can't see past. Virginia McKenny (Appendix C: 156) states that artist's block is the incapacity to make art, yet with a feeling that one should be doing so. She says there is a difference between not "getting around" to making work and not being 'able' to make it. This feeling of inability can lead to desperation. Clinton De Menezes (Appendix C: 154) describes the feeling of being blocked as one of numbness and apathy, mixed

with frustration. Why do people with talents and skills get “stuck”? Why are they unable to create when it is, very often, what they claim is most important to them? It doesn't seem rational, and, obviously, it is not.

The literature and the interviews, as well as my personal exploration, have given me a better understanding of the meaning and cause of artist's block. I have also augmented my understanding of my own creative process through this study. Shaun McNiff (1998) indicates how important it is for teachers or facilitators to engage with their own process, so that they can meet the students or participants from a standpoint of empathy. They need to learn about their own fears, methods, and patterns of creativity:

Personal immersion in the creative process helps teachers establish empathy with what their students are experiencing. In my work I am constantly involving experienced teachers in art experiences for the first time, and they repeatedly say, 'Now I understand what the children are feeling' (McNiff, 1998: 26).

I refer to several authors in this chapter, but the two key influences are Shaun McNiff (1992 and 1998) and Julia Cameron (1995). Their approaches are each quite different, and yet each has valuable information about both artist's block and the creative process. Cameron's approach to unblocking artist's block is to challenge readers to look deeply into their personal history to find the key to their block. She states categorically that:

Artist's block is a very literal expression. Blocks must be acknowledged and dislodged (Cameron, 1995:24).

Whereas McNiff states:

The intense desire to 'break through' to the core of creativity is often the cause of 'paralysis', yet another condition of arrested movement. Within this state, expression is characteristically tight, stiff, forced and overworked rather than fluid, effortless, and graceful (McNiff, 1992:60).

McNiff's approach is to allow the process to unfold, and he sees many of the problems as being part of the process, whereas Cameron follows a more structured approach, and systematically takes the reader through a process to uncover the specific causes of the blocks.

Cameron has worked extensively in this area. Her book *The Artist's Way* (1995), a best seller, has inspired artists and non-artists to get in touch with their creative selves. This is a workbook manual that takes the reader through a 12-week process which looks into the reasons why creativity may be blocked or stumped, and how to get started again. It contains insightful quotes, and interesting debates. I know many blocked artists who have enjoyed working through the book, either in a group or alone. Being in a group, such as a workshop or a creative support group, can be valuable. The student workshop I

facilitated in April 2006 is a good example of this. The students, in the questionnaire they completed after it, indicate that the most valuable discussion held during the workshop was the one on artist's block. They said that it was comforting to know that this state is normal, and that it was interesting to know how others felt about this (Chapter 6: 122).

Essentially, Cameron's (1995) book is a guide to unblocking creativity. She directs her suggestions to all types of creatives; visual artists, writers, and performers. The exercises and tasks encourage the reader to explore hidden aspects of self through past and present experiences. Some of the tasks are to be repeated daily or weekly, others are one-offs. One self-discovery leads to the next. For the daily tasks, she insists that the participant write every morning on waking. She calls these "morning pages". This allows for the negative mind to release its babblings before the day begins. This is very useful, and I know of several people who continue with this task even after finishing the course. An important weekly experience is what she calls "artist's dates"(Cameron, 1995: 18), explained in more detail on page 19 of this chapter.

Cameron's (1995) approach is to get readers to explore in depth their personal histories, and to look for clues that could originally have caused the block. For example, a psychological reason, caused by situations from childhood could have had a negative impact on their creativity, either directly or indirectly.

In order to work freely on a project, an artist must be at least functionally free of resentment (anger) and resistance (fear). What do we mean by that? We mean that any buried barriers must be aired before work can proceed. The same holds true for any buried payoffs to not working. Blocks are seldom mysterious. They are, instead, recognisable artistic defences against what is perceived (rightly or wrongly) as a hostile environment (Cameron, 1995: 158).

Shaun McNiff, an artist, art therapist, teacher and academic, explores the idea of 'process', not only for himself but also with his patients and students. His first book, titled *Art as Medicine* (1992), was written as an art-therapy guide-book, based on his own experience, and on methods he uses in his practice. He demonstrates the creative process through examples of his own work. His second book, *Trust the Process: a guide to letting go* (1998), explores creativity exactly as the title implies. In this book, he ventures more deeply into understanding the creative process and writes from his own experiences and observations. This book is not formally structured, although he does give suggestions for the reader to try, or reflect on. McNiff's (1992) approach is primarily about engaging with the creative process. He sees what he calls creative block to be an aspect of the process, and dedicates a chapter to this issue. He pinpoints artist's block in the creative process as occurring usually at the beginning, before the project happens, or at a break or pause before a new phase. McNiff does not limit his experiences of creative

process to just the visual arts. Dance, movement, mime, and drumming are included as additional forms of experience for inspiration.

The following points describe and highlight the causes of artist's block. There may be others that I have over-looked, but these are described in the literature I studied. Although I have separated the aspects, there is often a merging of the issues. The issue of 'fear' seems to underlie many of the causes for artist's block.

FEAR

This quote summarises the basic hold that fear can have:

Fear seems to be an epidemic in our society. We fear beginnings: we fear endings. We fear changing: we fear 'staying stuck.' We fear success: we fear failure. We fear living; we fear dying (Jeffers, 1991: 3).

Susan Jeffers' (1991) book explores the notion that fear is part of our lives in many different ways. Her general suggestion is that we notice the fear but do 'it' anyway. Although Jeffers, in the above quote, is not discussing fear specifically from the perspective of an artist, she highlights the way in which the creative process is directly related to our attitudes to life, and to some of the key issues that I have found in relation to artist's block. She also points out that some of the feelings that go with fear are pain, paralysis, and depression. Certainly, artists can experience these when feeling blocked.

Cameron (1995) feels that we have misnamed the cause of the blocks. Rather than regarding blocked artists as 'lazy', we should see their condition as "fear".

Fear is what blocks an artist. The fear of not being good enough. The fear of not finishing. The fear of failure and success. The fear of beginning at all (Cameron, 1995:152).

She states simply that there is one cure for fear, and that is love. One needs to learn to love oneself as an artist and to give oneself permission to take small steps first, rewarding oneself at each milestone, no matter how small. It is the setting of impossible goals that creates the fear, and this leads to procrastination. We then label procrastination as laziness.

Peggy Hadden, in her book *The Artist's Quest for Inspiration* indicates that fear is part of the artist's experience, and is quite normal. She states:

Whether they admit it or not, almost all artists have some fears. These come from many sources—some real, some imagined. We have fears based on our beliefs about the world. Often times, we see the established world as a solid wall, which we alone must conquer (Hadden, 2004:68).

Cameron (1995) says that the reason we are blocked is to alleviate that fear. We turn to our blocks, because of our anxiety over our inner emptiness.

Blocking is essentially an issue of faith. Rather than trust our intuition, our talent, our skill, our desire, we fear where our creator is taking us with creativity. Rather than paint, write, dance, audition, and see where it takes us, we pick up a block. Blocked, we know who and what we are: unhappy people. Unblocked, we may be something much more threatening - happy. For most of us, happy is terrifying, unfamiliar, out of control, too risky! (Cameron, 1995:165).

We need, she says, to be courageous, to accept and surrender to what she terms our 'blocking devices'.

Bill Plotkin's book *Soulcraft* (2003) considers the use of the natural environment as a challenging environment in which people can explore their deeper selves and overcome issues that may be hindering their personal growth and happiness. His book does not specifically refer to the issue of artist's block, but it does explore aspects of general human nature which also affect artists. In this situation, it is the issue of fear. He quotes Marianne Williamson in saying that:

'Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure' (Plotkin, 2003:174).

Reflecting on our fears of the wild and its animals, Plotkin points out that we could be fearful of our own inner animal, and our powerful wild, dark, selves. I discuss how the natural environment may be useful in helping release artist's block in Chapter 3.

These observations about fear blocking creativity have been key ones for me. I found not only that I am frightened to commit to the making of a work lest it be 'bad', but that I am generally frightened of a variety of life-situations as well. Shyness, I believe, is the fear of 'putting oneself on the line' in case one makes a fool of oneself. The issues are definitely related, so, as Cameron suggests, I have had to do extensive inner work on myself, and this has aided my creative process. My practical work, which forms part of my Master's qualification, is a visual documentation of self-discovery (view samples of the work on pages 146– 147)

LACK OF CONFIDENCE

I have experienced the effect of fear as a lack of confidence, in both aspects of my life and as an artist. To clarify the meaning of confidence, I refer to the Oxford English Dictionary:

Firm trust; assured expectation; self-reliance; boldness (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1979: 212).

One would certainly need these attributes when creating an artwork, especially if one intended to exhibit. Confidence also seems to be something one cannot fake. An artwork expresses the intent of the artist without words. Therefore, the artist needs to be confident from the core of his/her being. For McNiff, lack of self-confidence is one of the major blocks people experience. He states simply:

Depression and low self-confidence are the most debilitating blocks (McNiff, 1998: 77).

At some level, artists know that if they engage fully with this spontaneous process something could happen that their internal censors will have no control over, and this could make them look foolish and feel vulnerable. To a fragile ego, the risk may not be worth it.

During the student workshop that I facilitated in April 2006 (report in Chapter 6: 121) the group discussed artist's block and creative process. The discussion revealed that the students were concerned with their lack of confidence with regard to making artworks. I remember one student asking 'How does one get to be confident?' A good question, and not easily answered. This could be because the problem is different for every sufferer, and therefore needs to be addressed individually. This seems to be Cameron's approach: for individuals to discover what their personal reasons are for being blocked.

Hadden's (2004) suggestion is that we need to make a conscious effort to regain self-esteem by noting and addressing any experiences from childhood which could have placed stumbling blocks in our paths. She borrows the word "creativity killer" from the authors of *The Creative Spirit*, which accompanies a PBS series by Daniel Goleman, Paul Kaufman, and Michael Ray. According to these authors:

these 'creativity killers' may include competition (like constantly being compared to a sibling), limited choices, interruption (a lack of open ended creativity time) and rewards (when they are given so often that they have no real value) (Hadden, 2004: 48-49).

To help overcome low self-esteem, she suggests we identify the strong, positive things we believe and have experienced about ourselves. For example, remembering positive feedback given by peers or teachers about past artworks, and remembering artworks that we have sold. She also suggests that the artist keeps trying new things.

When I look at large, detailed artworks, I wonder at the time and patience the artist must have needed to paint or sculpt them. On reflection, I realise that the artist must have engaged in the process of creation with some level of confidence and patience. When I have to be accurate (for example, when the artwork has been commissioned, there is a deadline, and clear parameters have been drawn up with the client), I

can find the patience, commitment and confidence to complete the work. But I have noticed a kind of impatience that goes with creating some works. I become slapdash, hasty, and often inaccurate. I know I have the skill to render almost anything I want, but I don't take the time to follow through because I fear that the work may not be effective. So I hurry, so as not to waste time. This essentially has a sabotaging effect, and the result is that the work looks unfinished and without observable integrity. This has been especially true of the early works done in the first three years of my Master's programme. Only on reflection do I realise why the lecturers responded to my work with confusion and frustrating suggestions. I worked on unstretched canvas, with acrylic and oil paint, layering paint and layering ideas, showing no sense of clarity of intent, either through the subject matter or the way I rendered it (Figures 13 - 17: 146). Those first three years did serve an important purpose, and they have been an integral part of the process. From this vantage point, I do not view the works or the time spent on them as wasted. The works do not show confidence and clarity, simply because that was not how I was feeling at the time.

EDUCATIONAL BLOCK

Perhaps our issue with lack of self-confidence goes back to the way we were educated and to the attitudes within our educational systems. Malcolm Christian from the Caversham Press in the KwaZulu/Natal Midlands, in an interview in 2007, points out that one could say that creativity is inherent in everyone, but that "education systems are developed to educate the creative spirit out of one" (Christian, Appendix D: 162).

Much like art, writing is considered by many to be a skill you either have or don't have, according to Haarhoff (1998). This can lead people to feel that they cannot write or paint, even if they have a longing. He feels that teaching methods in Southern Africa contribute to lack of confidence:

If we have been educated in Southern Africa, the chances are that teaching methods have contributed to our feelings of inadequacy. Our belief in our creative abilities and in the possibilities of our imaginations has been eroded in the classrooms. Our self-confidence has been undermined. The message many of us have received has left us feeling like a barren land. Few teachers have affirmed that we each contain deep communal wells inside us (Haarhoff, 1998:11).

McNiff (1998) agrees that there are problems with the educational systems (and I will assume he is speaking about his experience of the North American systems). He says that they do not educate the imagination, which needs, as he puts it "sustained encounters with uncertainty" (McNiff, 1998: 23). He suggests that this is because the educational system is focused on training the "literal mind" (McNiff, 1998: 23) and that learning follows a logical and predictable way of gaining knowledge. So educators must prepare lesson plans in advance and structure the classes so as to have measurable outcomes. The students are then tested to see if they are up to "standard" (McNiff, 1998: 23). This is how some art

teachers conduct their lessons. Even the teachers who participate in his workshops, McNiff says are “resistant to free and imaginative expression” (McNiff, 1998: 23). He does not blame the educational system entirely, but points out that past traumas are often self-inflicted, and not necessarily the fault of parents and teachers.

Even the best teachers of creativity encounter a common resistance to self-expression in their classes. The cocoon is spun partly from fears of self-disclosure. We all know intuitively that our spontaneous creative expressions elude the habitual monitoring of our inner censors, revealing things to others that are out of our control (McNiff, 1998: 22).

Jeffers (1991) looks at this issue completely differently. She says that, although at first one would think that one’s inability to deal with fear may look and feel like a psychological problem, it is not.

I believe it is primarily an educational problem, and that by re-educating the mind, you can accept fear as simply a fact of life rather than a barrier to success (Jeffers, 1991:4).

EGO AS BLOCK

If we lack confidence, then surely it is our ego self that feels threatened, challenged or exposed. This aspect of self can be fearful of experimenting, or showing work. It could even stop the artist from starting, simply because of the fear of criticism. De Menezes (Appendix C: 154) says that his block is due to the dichotomy between having to find ways to work which are contemporary and which he personally can be happy with. Those not directly involved with what is considered contemporary, such as installation and video art, are not considered “one of us” (De Menezes, Appendix C: 154). He implies that this pressure can be debilitating, and needs to be managed. A balance has to be found between making work as a living and being part of the contemporary academic perspective.

Based on his experiences as an artist, academic and art teacher, Peter London writes about his creative experiences in the natural world in his book *Drawing Closer to Nature* (2003). His experience as a facilitator of creative groups and his experience of nature as inspiration and a place of healing for blocked artists has been valuable to this study and to the creating of workshops. He observes that:

One of the most ferocious forces that weaken and distort artistic expression is the fear of making a mistake. No one enjoys making a mistake, and some mistakes lead to real jeopardy. But in the arts, more often the fear is one of seeming inept, unprepared, an amateur, a fool. This harm to the psyche is no less real and damaging than a bodily injury. As a consequence, uncertain of our actual level of capability and potential, we stay far away from exercising the full range of our capability and potential. (London, 2003: 146).

Ellis Pearson (Appendix D, 160) met John Ellis, song writer with the South African band Tree 63, on a plane, and recalls a conversation about the process of writing music. The statement by Ellis that stood out

most, for Pearson, was that you should “allow yourself to be bad” (2007) when creating. This fear of changing or taking risks, according to Hadden (2004: 54), limits the artist, and their work often echoes this. McNiff’s (1998) observations of his Master’s students, workshop participants, and his own process has shown him that where the ego is always in control it is difficult for artists to have new, or even unusual, insights. Control, in organisations as well as individuals, leaves little room for innovation. By setting aside the control aspect of self, we allow creativity to take its course.

This fear of judgment, from self or others, can greatly hinder the creative process. Cameron (1995) suggests that at the root of creative blocks is competition. Artists start to define their own creativity in relation to someone else’s, and by competing, and focusing on the market place, we start jostling with other artists. The ego wants to be first and best, and demands that one should be totally original. She reminds the viewer to be careful of judging a work too soon, as often interesting creative options come out of the ‘bad’ work. The ego frequently wants instant gratification, and longs for gratification from a win. Cameron also sees perfectionism as a hindrance to the creative process. The need for a work of art to be perfect, so that the ego can feel justified, means that the art work is not completed, and may, in some cases, not even get started. The perfectionist aspect of self is not happy with drafts, or rough sketches: it wants every piece of work to be final and perfect. The perfectionist, therefore, does not enjoy the process because of being so focused on the end product.

Perfectionism is not a quest for the best. It is a pursuit of the worst in ourselves, the part that tells us that nothing we ever do will be good enough – that we should try again (Cameron, 1995: 120).

Egocentrism, according to Plotkin (2003), is what leads a person to suppress individual depth and passion. He has had extensive experience leading ‘vision quests or vision fasts¹’ in the wilderness, and other nature-related workshops. Although he is not writing about creativity directly, he does have interesting insights into the human ego, and how it affects a person’s life. He feels that our:

egocentric societies are societies that ignore, discourage, or obstruct the individual’s soul-level encounter with nature, meaning and creative self-definition, and instead promote ego aggrandizement, profits, and a shallow sense of self and security as the primary agenda of their

¹ Vision Fast or Vision Quest is practised to this day in many traditional cultures, in a variety of forms. The natural environment or the wilderness is a place in which individuals re-engage with inner wisdom. Spending anything up to four days and nights alone in the wilderness, fasting (only drinking water), allows the body to be starved of its everyday thoughts and doings, emptying the cup, so the voice of God or the clearer inner voice can be heard, and guidance found. This process can be used as a rite of passage. The experience for each individual is unique, and there is no telling what exactly each will get from the experience. Nature-based cultures in various parts of the world usually enact a form of ‘Vision Quest’ in which individuals go through an important change or turning point in life, such as when an adolescent becomes an adult. European anthropologists coined the term ‘Vision Quest’ with reference to the practices of the Native American cultures. Plotkin also indicated that these ‘wilderness sojourns’ were experienced by Jesus and Moses, among those from the Judeo-Christian cultures, and from others of faiths such as Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. Plotkin describes the Vision Quest as ‘a rite of initiation, the quest is a ceremonial descent to find our soul image and derive greater clarity regarding the purpose and meaning of our soul life. The initiation is not into any social, religious, or spiritual group but into our own soul path and deeper levels of authentic adulthood’ (Plotkin, 2003:214).

citizens. Egocentrism leads to the suppression of individual depth and passion, which in turn leads to a grief too horrible to bear (Plotkin, 2003: 202).

Plotkin (2003) says that instead of using our egos to help us give concrete form to our soul expression, we allow it to hinder our growth and achievement. A healthy ego can help us to be balanced and productive. Thus, a radical shift in awareness needs to take place, and Plotkin uses the term “ego-destructuring” (Plotkin, 2003) to describe it. This shift could take place in even a short workshop, if it had the correct intentions, environment and process. So care is needed in setting this up, and facilitation skills are needed to ensure the participant continues through the process. Plotkin indicates that this destructuring can be experienced as a form of dying for the ego. The fear caused makes the ego want to stop the process, even though the ego chose to engage in it. It can be a roller-coaster ride, with a risk of changing one’s whole perspective on life.

When I reflect on these observations, I recognise that my ego is linked to my intellect and mind, and therefore is an aspect of myself. It is always controlling, and worrying about outcomes, goals and achievements. The soul, and that part of me that is calm, connected to nature, and to my creative self, is over-ridden by it. If I see the ego as bad or wrong, it only fights the more, and in a negative way, becoming more demanding of perfection. In discussions with friends, I realised that the ego is needed and can be put to use. If the mind consciously asks for help in connecting to the heart, this can open a channel to the soul. I need to take a conscious decision to connect to the unconscious, and then consciously to seek out places and situations that I know to be important for personal creative expression.

PREMEDITATION BLOCK

Perhaps the ego’s need to be in control is what leads one to premeditate an outcome. Instead of trusting the process, one wants to have a fixed idea in the mind and then to act on it. My wanting to create the perfect work, which will sell, or get favourable reviews, is debilitating. It often stops me from creating anything at all, or else I start creating with a half-hearted intention, and give up when it does not look good. I spend my time visualising the work, recreating it over and over in my head, hoping that I might come up with the perfect solution. Or else I hurry through the picture to see the final results, rather than enjoying the process which meanders along its own path. Realising this now, I try just to start with an idea, reminding myself repeatedly that the process will reveal the final artwork, and that I need to trust the process.

This is an issue that Cameron (1995) discusses. One of the reasons that artists do not engage with the creative process, she says, is that they want to have the end product. They should rather enjoy the process,

taking small steps that are enjoyable, and eventually arriving at the end. She suggests that one focuses on the process, giving the artwork a sense of adventure.

'I am writing a screenplay' is infinitely more interesting to the soul than 'I have written a screen play', which pleases the ego (Cameron, 1995: 139).

McNiff (1998) also suggests that artist's block results from the struggle to let go of premeditation. He feels that creative expression does not come from planning what will happen next, and it cannot be programmed. Unplanned expression is akin to, and unites, both spiritual and creative occurrences. The blank paper is an open stage on which anything can happen, and the energy of creativity is always moving and changing.

'Creative blocks' usually result from expectations that take us away from our immediate experiences. When art therapists ask me how I deal with blocks to expression, I talk to them about how important it is to engage the context of our present life and let art flow from that source. I create from where I am and not from where I think I should be (McNiff, 1992: 35).

Bruce L. Moon's (1990) solution is similar to McNiff's. As an Existential Art therapist, Moon believes that the struggles of life can fuel artworks and empower change in the individual through realisations made via the process of creating, and the metaphoric images or metaphors found within the process.

Art brings meaning to life by utilizing conflict and honoring painful struggles. The existentialist art therapist understands the essential nature of struggle and tension: how the collision of forces brings about the creative actions of art (Moon, 1990: 54).

Although Moon's approach is owing to his experiences with his art therapy patients, this approach could help artists to feed their images from their personal experience. My own experience of choosing to explore my creative process through painting (my practical work concept for this Master's qualification), has helped me work through, and therefore understand, many of my issues around creativity. Each artwork leads me on to the next aspect that needs exploring. My history, both personal and chronological, is recorded in the layering of paint and texture: it is the river, the metaphoric force which keeps me 'going with the flow'.

Pat B Allen (1995) has a different perspective on what might cause artist's block. She attributes it to the use of, and the expectations, connected with, the words "artist", "fine art" and "art". These words imply that some type of acceptable, or sellable, object must be made. This expectation creates pressure on the artist to perform. Allen prefers to use the words, "image", "image making" and "artwork" instead of the word 'art', since that word is loaded with value judgments, such as good, bad, or fine, which, she feels, can become for some a barrier to the creative process. Art can be seen as needing an end product, such as a painting or sculpture. The word 'images' has a more universal connotation, such as, dream images;

images that come into one's mind while listening to music, reading or even inhaling a scent. There is also the association of images of self and others, of places we have never visited but imagine, or images in our memories. Allen (1995) sees creativity as a way of giving these images form. They need not be judged by any outside criteria, but rather from an inside sense of what is true to us. Image making is not always done to break barriers, to create beauty or comfort. Therefore, they can be exhilarating, raw, mysterious, provocative and dangerous.

FREEDOM VS. LIMITATION

When creating art works there is a general consensus amongst the writers I have referred to that although one does not want to put too much emphasis on the end product, there is a need for boundaries, or some parameters that the work should be contained within. These can be set by the artist. They can be an issue, boundaries of colour choice or subject matter, within which experimentation, innovation and exploration can take place.

Christian (Appendix D: 161) stated that artist's block can be owing to our reactions to the constraints that are placed on us: the demands of acquiring a qualification, or because of one's already established status as an artist within the community or gallery structures. Alternatively, the artist might be blocked because there are no constraints:

I firmly believe that you have got to have defined parameters in some ways, for creativity to kick in. The boundaries need to be related to meaning and to the relevance of what we actually do (Christian, Appendix D: 161).

Moon (1990) looks at the paradox of freedom and limitation, to be free to create whatever one wants as an artist, or to choose to do nothing. When I came across this thought in Moon's book, I began to question the notion that art should have no boundaries. He feels that this is the most difficult barrier to cross, and that it is only by deciding to structure, and thereby limit the possibilities, that there will be the freedom of action for any work of art.

Every decision- medium, technique, theme – paradoxically binds and liberates. Writers complain of 'writer's block', that feeling of being stuck, unable to type the first word. Artists experience the frustration of wanting to paint but being at a loss as to what or how to paint. In either case, it is the inability to limit oneself that paralyses the creative flow, once the boundaries have been established the freedom has begun (Moon, 1990: 50).

He suggests the key is in understanding that it is in our power to choose; it doesn't matter what I choose, only that I choose. This decision is both limiting and liberating. It could be simply that the setting of intention could be the limiting aspect of the creative process. Making time to know what these limitations

are --- what is the environment you have to be creative in, time restraints, and what the available materials are ---creates the awareness of the boundaries imposed on the process.

I personally have found this to be effective. In trying to free myself from all boundaries, open my mind, change my mindset by force, and repel any notion that I needed limitations, I caused confusion. With too much choice, I did not know where to start, so often this is where I found myself stuck or blocked. I realised that by setting some clear boundaries for myself, I could be free to explore deeply within those parameters. The important thing for me was that 'I' set the boundary. I am free to choose; the limitation is self-created. I am not saying that the free expression and chaos was not helpful; I think it was. But it is also important to make a choice and focus on it. The setting of boundaries can be explored during a workshop, by simply limiting the space in which the artist can work, for example, or limiting the use of colour or medium.

JEALOUSY BLOCK

Cameron (1995) suggests that in feelings of jealousy towards other artists lies a clue to being blocked. She sees jealousy as a "mask for our fears" (Cameron, 1995: 123), indicating what it is we actually want to be doing yet are not brave enough to do. She said it made her a harsh critic, until she finally managed to write her own screen play. She then had feelings of camaraderie with the very writers she had been previously jealous of.

Jealousy is always a mask for fear: fear that we aren't able to get what we want: frustration that somebody else seems to be getting what is rightfully ours even if we are too frightened to reach for it....Perversely, jealousy strips us of our will to act when action holds the key to our freedom (Cameron, 1995: 123-124).

This acknowledgement of our jealous self gives an important insight into what it is we really want. Mark Bryan, author of *The Artist's Way at Work*, states that:

In creative emergence jealousy can be useful. It clarifies our dreams and points us in the direction we would like to go. It also, paradoxically, starts us toward camaraderie with the object of our envy (Bryan: 1998, 133).

I have, since reading Cameron's observations, considered my reactions to other artists' work in galleries and exhibitions, and have realised that I indeed have been very jealous of them. When I am most jealous, I react by being uninterested, and unwilling to try to understand their work. I either say to others or think to myself that the work is terrible, that it has no point, that I could do better. I also find it difficult to give the artist any form of praise or acknowledgement of their effort. This observation about myself, although

difficult to accept in the beginning, has liberated me, opening me to new ideas and outlooks on contemporary art and creativity.

PHYSICAL BLOCK

Another cause of artist's block, suggests McNiff, comes from the body. The artists' inability to use their full expression emanates from the physical.

We have grown so accustomed to the creation myth of an individual intelligence acting alone that we find it difficult to see the deeper ecology of creation (McNiff, 1998: 20).

He says that one should rather see creativity as an interaction of different elements all helping to shape the future. Creativity is a complex interplay, and is not isolated from the immediate environment.

Therefore, the outside needs to interact with the internal, and the artist must use the mind and the whole body to help think together. He suggests that when the mind is stuck, so is the whole body. In dealing with artist's block, McNiff's first suggestion is to take "action" (McNiff, 1998). He recommends that the artist imagine the whole body being the powerhouse of the creative action, rather than just the head.

Drumming a rhythm, for instance, helps people forget themselves, immersing themselves in the rhythmic, natural movement with its trance-like effect. This loosens and relaxes the body. Actors preparing for a performance, he says, prepare for spontaneity through physical exercise, free movement and vocal improvisation. So too can artists prepare themselves for painting, and writing.

McNiff (1998) uses Picasso as an example of an artist who uses his whole body to generate images. This he observed from video footage, noticing that the fluid lines that Picasso produces seem to be in direct relation to the movement of his entire body, which gives the work total expression.

The gestures on paper and canvas extended from his stance and lower body motions as much as his hand and arm. We don't realise how our expressiveness of our paintings and drawings correspond completely to the way in which we move our bodies. Art is close to dance, and our paintings will benefit as we expand our abilities to move with materials (McNiff, 1998: 19).

Gabrielle Roth (1998) developed a method of self-realisation and healing through dance and rhythm. A sequence of five rhythms (flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, and stillness) found in nature are explored and danced to music. These rhythms are the foundation for body and emotional release, self-realisation and healing. She describes the body to be:

the ground metaphor of your life, the expression of your existence. It is your Bible, your encyclopaedia, your life story. Everything that happens to you is stored and reflected in your body. Your body knows: your body tells. The relationship of your self to your body is indivisible, inescapable, unavoidable (Roth, 1998: 31).

Roth holds that if one is stuck, everything in one's life is stuck, "constipated" (1999). The spirit is a catalyst, keeping everything moving. She describes the body as the "begging bowl for the spirit" (1999), without it, the body becomes inert, and emotions, thoughts and muscles don't move fluidly. The body can feel separate from the heart, the heart feel separate from the mind, and the mind from the body. I have included a more detailed description of the method of Roth's five rhythms in Chapter 5, page 113..

Having established that the physical body is an important aspect of creativity, it then seems relevant to observe how the body is taken care of. Hadden reminds the reader to have good ventilation in the studio, to remember to stop for snacks to keep the "physical engine" (Hadden, 2004: 216) going.

On the other hand, Cameron (1995) has observed that for some people the apparently harmless over-use of such things as food, work and sex, as well as harder forms of drugs and alcohol (as she found from personal experience with alcohol) can be a key reason for being blocked. For example, for some people over-eating some kinds of carbohydrates or sugar can cause the body to feel lethargic and dull, a good excuse not to be creative. She feels that it is important as artists to recognise which of these creates the block. In her view, we do this on purpose, because we know our potential and are fearful of the wide range of success available to us. She suggests that the physical block we claim as our right is more than likely the very block we defend -- we create the block, thinking it reduces fear, fear of growth and the wide range of possibilities and responsibilities that could await us. To help shift artists during a workshop I propose a few experiences that could help them become more aware of, and connect to, their bodies. Drumming, walking, and dancing are listed as possible experiences for groups on page 114, Chapter 5..

LACK OF INSPIRATION BLOCK

Roz Cryer (Appendix C, 158), in my interview with her, understands artist's block as a lack of inspiration or motivation. To expand on this, I turn to Hadden (2004), who primarily explores the issue of inspiration in her book. She says that, of all the career issues artists face, a common problem is finding their own inspiration and making it stay for as long as it is needed. Although she recognises that creativity is unique to each individual, she feels that her book can help artists learn about their individual methods. She uses Natalie Goldberg's idea from her book *Writing down the Bones*, in which she describes the word 'inspiration' to mean literally "breathing in" (Hadden, 2004: 21). Therefore, she says, it is as if one is breathing in energy and taking into consideration everything around one.

Cameron describes the process of becoming alert and conscious of replenishing one's creative resources as "filling the well".

Filling the well involves the active pursuit of images to refresh our artistic reservoirs. Art is born in attention. Its midwife is detail (Cameron, 1995:21).

Cameron insists that regular, repetitive action is the way to replenish the reservoir. For example, going for brisk 20-minute walks can help alter consciousness. She also stresses the importance of what she calls an "artist's date" (Cameron, 1995:18) at least once a week --- something fun, unusual, special, that one does alone and which can be inspiring and uplifting.

She says we need to treat ourselves, to do special things for ourselves. We so often believe that we do not deserve treats, or shouldn't indulge ourselves. McKenny mentions that she finds artist's dates helpful in re-engaging her with her creative process (Appendix C: 156).

Hadden also refers to Anne Lamott's book *Bird by Bird*. In this, Lamott says that when writers experience writer's block they are not blocked but "empty" (Hadden, 2004: 29) Hadden suggests this is so for artists as well: that they become so wrapped up in the misery of the situation that they stop allowing anything else to come into their minds. Lamott's solution for her writing students is to fill them back up again with "observations, flavours, ideas, visions, memories" (Hadden, 2004: 29). They are required to admit they are in a non-creative period, and then to write at least 300 words a day, even if it is about how much they hate writing. Hadden thinks this would work for visual artists as well, and suggests they go to the studio for at least an hour each day and work on some small artistic project so as to feel as if they are still making art. She says it is important to be there ready, and actively awaiting inspiration.

Nita Leland (1990), who wrote a guide to expanding creativity, has a similar suggestion:

The best way to deal with blocks is to do something art-related every day, no matter how small, to keep in touch with your creative self (Leland, 1990:20).

During this period of the study, I tried out Hadden's and Leland's suggestion. I created a ritual, working for about an hour at dawn, every day. This meant that my creative time came first, before the demands of everyday life started. This rhythm was very satisfactory for me, and I started to feel a connection to the process for the first time since studying. It then became easier to see the creative process as part of my life. Visiting the studio at other times of the day started to seem normal and easier to do, because I had a sense of my creative process already developing.

On page 112, Chapter 5 I give suggestion that could help the workshop participant with inspiration. Techniques such as brainstorming or simply drawing nature are listed in this section.

RESENTMENT AND ANGER

Discussing the possible causes of artist's block, a friend suggested anger. I could not find many authors who even spoke about anger in this context. Cameron (1996) suggests that if one is feeling resentment it is because one is stalling: one essentially is blaming someone or something else. It is this resentment and blame that causes the block. The resentment could be deeply embedded in the past, from comments made by people to personal experiences; these can become negative and destructive to a creative process, and may be the cause of many of the previously discussed reasons why artists are blocked. It could be that through frustration, and then anger, the situation can change. Cameron indicates that:

Sloth, apathy, and despair are the enemy. Anger is not. Anger is our friend... It will always tell us when we have betrayed ourselves. It will always tell us that it is time to act in our own best interests (Cameron, 1995:62).

Essentially Cameron sees anger as a tool to fuel the creative process. It is when one denies and hides it that it can be a problem. She feels that anger should be listened to. Anger gives rise to adrenalin and the adrenalin gives strength. This strength can instigate enough change to shift artist's block.

FINANCIAL BLOCK

In my experience, not having sufficient money can cause artist's block. Artists often expend all their energy on a job that pays the bills. Even if it is an enjoyable, fulfilling job, it can drain the artist of energy, allowing all forms of excuses to filter in and stop the creative process. Alternatively, even if the artist has time and energy but there is no spare cash for art materials, artist's block can result. If the artist is already suffering from low self-esteem or fear, then having no money can be the exact excuse needed to stop their creative process. It may also seem pointless to do a series of art works and yet not have enough money to exhibit the work at a gallery.

RESPONSIBILITY BLOCK

Responsibility as a block I discovered after facilitating the artist's workshop in November 2007 (Chapter 6,: 128). Many artists find it difficult to be creative because of their responsibilities to family and home. Lack of time and energy cause an inability to continue with their work. Most of the participants experienced this responsibility as a primary concern, and they discussed this issue with the group as well as amongst themselves. The artists realised that they did not have their own space to create in and invariably put everyone else's needs first. Several participants said they became incredibly grumpy with

their families if they could not engage with their process on a regular basis. There was a general sense of relief and camaraderie in their discovery that they were not alone in struggling with this issue.

Section 2: Report on interviews with Artists about Artist's Block

I have chosen a cross section of artists to interview. Some artists have long established careers, some have only been painting professionally for a few months, and others have not engaged in their own personal expressions since they completed their studies. The reasons for choosing each artist and the précised accounts of the recorded interviews are transcribed in Appendix C, page 153. I am aware that there are hundreds of artists who I could have interviewed and that this is only a very small selection. The interviews were conducted in a semi-formal manner, with a list of possible questions, and lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. In this section, I will outline some of the important points that the artists brought up during the interview/discussion.

I have several reasons for interviewing artists for the purpose of this study. The first was to acquire a contemporary South African perspective on creative process and artist's block. Most of my literary research, with the exception of Dorian Haarhoff, is based in Europe or the USA. The second reason was to establish whether the natural environment is beneficial to the artist for their creative process and if it could help re-engage the blocked artist. This could help establish if running a workshop with a natural environment in the vicinity could be beneficial to the participants. The third reason was to engage in conversations with fellow artists, to hear their stories about their difficulties (or not) with these issues. I found these interviews encouraging, and helped me gain a new perspective on the overall nature of creativity and variations on ways to work as an artist. Lastly, the discussions with the artists helped me realise that there is no one correct way of working and that each individual essentially needs to find their own path. Comparison to others is often the short fall of stuck artists as discussed in Chapter 1.

The artists I interviewed indicated a variety of different explanations for what this phenomenon means to them. A general consensus is that Artist's block means that little or no progress is made with regard to making art works. As one artist mentions, there is a block when there is no inspiration or motivation to be creative. Several artists indicated that there was invariably a 'feeling' of being stuck which gives them this impression or that there is something else stopping the creative process. There is the urge to create but for some reason the artist can't proceed. This can be caused by several situations. One reason given was that the artist feels disconnected from their emotional self, and that this connection is important to their process. Another reason for artists block highlights the mental battle for the artist between what work could be accepted from an academic or cutting edge contemporary perspective, which would satisfy

the artists high achieving aspect of self, and the making of art works that may have a general sale appeal to the public at large, because of a need to make a viable living. There is also the mental battle between what is alright for the artist on a personal level and what is acceptable as a contemporary language. There is often a struggle to retain the balance.

An element of artist's block is experienced between art works, giving rise to uncertainty about how to move forward after completing an art work or a body of work. One artist mentions that the block can also occur even when there is a clear idea, but it just can't be channeled through into action. This is often due to lack of time, and pressure to complete the work. Whereas, one artist mentioned that he experiences artist's block very seldom because there is so much to do. There may be times between artworks where time is required for deep thought before proceeding, but due to the production line pressure, he must proceed as soon as possible. Ultimately, he does not use the label 'artist's block', but rather sees it as something which needs to be solved. Another artist accepts that there are times of being blocked but tends to not get upset by it. When the time comes to move on, "blasting through" (Paton, 2005: 138) the block may be necessary.

When asked what happens when blocked, several artists mentioned that they have feelings of frustration. Some of the other descriptions that were given were; numbness, lethargy, apathy, panic, desperation and aspects of mental conflict between what to paint or not to paint. One artist says that she often "grasps at straws" (McKenny, 2005: 141) or alternatively, procrastinates when blocked.

Many artists shared their methods for re-engagement with the creative process. Several mention that some kind of discipline is required when reengaging with the process. There needs to be regular work times, which helps with production. As an artist points out, it is important to not lose touch with the process for long periods of time. Even doing something as simple as putting a 'glaze' (thin layer of transparent paint) on a painting keeps the process going. Another artist mentions that there are rhythms within rhythms in a creative process. Therefore, to prevent getting blocked and to retain the rhythm, one needs to move immediately from one creative project on to the next. One artist says that she works on several paintings at a time to maintain a creative balance. An artist mentions that he does not put any boundaries on himself. Sometimes he goes back to old themes, as creating is not a linear process. Drawing, sketching, doodling, playing, carving small things, working in clay and even writing are given as many methods that artists use to reengage their process. It is also mentioned that 'artist dates' are especially helpful by visiting toyshops, walking, flying a kite, and engaging in some kind of play. Even cleaning the studio can be helpful.

For one artist being in the creative process means that an idea is processed into reality through making it physical and tactile. Often starting as an intellectual idea, it then moves into something playful which

helps connect her with “gut-feelings”(Gainer, 2005:141). This then helps her move beyond the need for an end product.

It was also indicated by an artist that it is essential to let the process flow and wait to see what happens rather than focusing on the end product. It is also helpful to be less judging of self and to be less self-conscious.

When asked what the artists felt about nature or the natural environment all of the artists indicated that some connection is required. Getting out of the city and into a natural environment helps with inspiration; both its visual beauty as well as the energy of the environment. The cycles of nature are mentioned as helpful as a reflective tool in understanding our own lives and the cycles we go through. During low times the seeking out of a quiet natural environment helps invigorate. An artist also mentions that the natural environment helps reconnect her to her body, and that there can even be a religious-type experience and feelings of bliss. This she correlates to the experience of the making of artworks, so there is a strong relationship between the natural environment and creativity. One artist also mentions that if there is no connection to nature then there is a sense of panic and this creates the block.

Many of the artists either use natural materials as the key element of the work, or are inspired by the visual elements of the natural environment by using them in art works. One artist describes nature to be a “lexicon” (Roberts, 2007:142), with useful symbols which can help put across universal ideas to the viewer.

Another artist specifically mentions that when stuck, she goes back to nature, as she needs a sense of wildness to help reengage her with the magic of creativity. It was also mentioned by an artist that being in the nature can help her get back in touch with her emotions, as the “noise of people” (Kotze, 2005: 141) can interfere with this. She finds that in nature, emotions, textures and tones seep in without being noticed. She becomes more “aware” (Kotze, 2005: 141), and that insights that come from this connection to nature help with the way the artist paints.

I conclude this section by pointing out the specific contributions these individual artists made to this study. Paton reflects that the creatively demanding responsibilities of her everyday work meant that there was little energy for new creative tasks. This point refers to one of the last blocks mentioned in section 1 – Responsibility block. Gainer, Kotze and de Menezes emphasised how important discipline was to the creative process, to keep the creative energy flowing. This point pre-empted the important discussions to come in the next chapter about the creative process and how to re-engage with it. Penfold uses playful methods to re-access her creative process. Playful qualities are important to the creative process as discussed in chapter 2 and to the creation of a workshop in Chapter 4. Roberts helped me realise that by not labelling his non-creative periods as blocks that they become important times for reflection and the

gathering of new inspiration. They are therefore experienced as essential to the creative process. This is important to my overall conclusion about artist's block, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. McKenny and Cryer both emphasise the importance of being in nature for periods of time, as inspiration and connection to creative process. I discuss this further in Chapter 3 which examines the effectiveness of the natural environment on the creative process.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the complexity of the term artist's block, but it also has shown a multitude of solutions and ways of embracing the problem. The foreword in Roth's book titled Maps to Ecstasy is written by author and cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien, Ph.D. She says that in many shamanic societies, those consulting a medicine person or shaman for help with feelings of disheartenment or depression will be asked one of four questions:

When did you stop dancing? When did you stop singing? When did you stop being enchanted by stories? When did you stop finding comfort in the sweet territory of silence? (Roth, 1998: XV).

The next chapter expands on some of the ideas raised in this chapter, and provides a more in-depth discussion of the creative process.

Chapter 2: The creative process

This chapter takes an in-depth look at the meaning of ‘creative process’, and some of the key situations that an artist may connect with when creating. I will be exploring different theories concerning the creative process; what it is, and how different artists think about and engage with it. Understanding what a creative process is can help the artist know what it would be like to be in a creative flow. A better understanding of the creative process helped me to formulate exercises or creative experiences for the workshop. This subject has, of course, been previously discussed and researched by many different researchers and artists; and from the extensive literature available on the creative process, I have elected to focus on those aspects that relate directly or indirectly to the creating and facilitating of workshops artists. Chapter 5 on page 108, contains several experiences that could facilitate different aspects of the creative process discussed below. The idea is that these experiences could help artists in a workshop to re-engage with their process.

To start with, I look at McNiff (1998), who defines the creative process through the idea of trusting it as a way of navigating one’s way through solutions, by embracing the unknown, and the sometimes uncontrollable and unforeseeable aspects of creativity.

We can define the process of creation as a force and a direction that take shape over a period of time. ‘Process’ suggests a series of actions, changes, and fluctuations. There is an incremental quality to process, and creative results are achieved by making connections between previously unrelated areas (McNiff, 1998: 3).

McKenny adds to this observation by describing the creative process as being full of possibilities, of “juicy opportunities” (Appendix C: 156), which take one from one thing to the next. There is an aspect here of play, which is not product driven.

Allen (1995) describes the creative process as:

multifaceted, sometimes straightforward, sometimes not, and it can only be learned by doing (Allen, 1995: x).

To describe the creative process involved in making an artwork, Leland (1990) divides it into five steps. She suggests that, whether one gets instant results or whether a creative project happens over a long period of time, these steps will almost always be the same.

1. *Identification* – The process begins by deciding what the task will be, what kind of materials will be used, or choosing explorable subject matter.

2. *Preparation* – One then evaluates how the project shall proceed, based on previous knowledge, both from personal experience or that of other artists. It can also involve practical applications, such as making thumbnail sketches and colour planning. She describes this as the thinking part of the project.
3. *Incubation* – At this point, one takes a break, which could be anything from a quick cup of tea to a few days. This allows the subconscious to assimilate the decisions and ideas.
4. *Break through* – What one needs to do now becomes obvious. She says it may seem like a flash of inspiration, but it is not, since it is directly related to the process of the earlier stages.
5. *Resolution* – This completes the process: one is ready to try the solution and see how it works.

To define the stages that will show an artist's development over a period of time, Leland (1990) summarises I. A. Taylor's ("The Nature of the Creative Process" P. Smith, ed. Creativity. New York: Hastings House, 1959) five levels of creativity.

- i. *Primitive and intuitive* expression, which is found in children who have not been trained. This art has a primitive and innocent quality, which is both direct and sensitive; a state of joy.
- ii. *Academic and technical*, where skills and techniques add proficiency to the creative expression, giving the artwork an element of power.
- iii. *Invention* starts when the artist experiments with now-familiar tools and mediums, breaking rules and creating new boundaries.
- iv. *Innovation* is the level of originality, at which new materials and methods are introduced, and boundaries are broken; where the academic foundations remain a substructure of the unconscious.
- v. *Genius* is a state that defies explanation. It is perhaps something one is born with, and is not attainable by all.

Taylor's (Leland, 1990) first stage links with literature that I found during my research. So, my first point is the notion that the artist needs to "play", or that play is an essential part of the creative process. Therefore, as a first step towards healing artist's block, one perhaps needs to re-engage with the 'child' aspect of self.

PLAY

To adults, the notion of play may seem absurd, or beyond them, as it is usually associated with children. Much is written on psychological practices that encourage the patient to return consciously to a child-like state. Thomas Moore (2004), author and psychotherapist, describes a situation that C. G. Jung experienced during a difficult time in his late thirties, and which influenced his theories on the human psyche. He played children's games that came from his memories of childhood to help heal and process this time in his life. Moore sees Jung's story as exemplifying the idea that one might stay closely in touch

with one's childhood as a way of connecting with its 'spirit'. Artist Wassily Kandinsky (1977) touched on this when he talked of the need to get in touch with the soul essence of making art. He reflects that society's interest in the material divides our souls from those of "primitive" (Kandinsky, 1977: 1) artists, who expressed their internal truths instead of worrying about what the external form looked like. Our contemporary materialistic society is:

infected with despair of unbelief, of lack of purpose and ideals. The nightmare of materialism, which has turned the life of the universe into an evil, useless game, is not yet past; it holds the awakening soul still in its grip (Kandinsky, 1977: 2).

Kandinsky questions the need to make valuable art, and holds that the constant evaluating and qualifying of artworks stops them from showing "stimmung" (Kandinsky, 1977: 2) or feeling. Perhaps it is a lack of play and the need to value everything as a material commodity that breaks the creative flow. Play, or the attitude of play, could be the key that opens the doors of our creative blocks, and this is certainly suggested by Taylor, as mentioned above. Sasi Paton in the interview (Appendix C: 153) says that to overcome any blocks, she doesn't get too precious about what she creates. Michelle Penfold (Appendix C: 154) says she is usually playful with something physical such as clay or whittling, or she sketches and doodles.

Ellen Dissanayake (1988) explores the notion of play in depth, and looks at the relationship of art and play through human history and in a variety of different cultures. She describes play as being spontaneous, unpredictable, indefinable, haphazard, and frivolous. There is no goal, and it finds reward in itself. Therefore, it is often considered as something extra, enjoyable, or pleasurable. A playful environment is a no-risk space in which the new can be explored or experimented with, reflecting a desire for change. But play can be more serious, and structured with order, form, or rules. Playfulness can be either a solitary or shared experience.

Dissanayake suggests that the terms "art" and "play" (Dissanayake, 1988:74) are ambiguous: one can resemble the other. Importantly, neither of them, from an economic and Western perspective, has any survival value, neither is considered serious adult behaviour. Societies that are unmodernised by our Western definition very rarely distinguish between play, art, and everyday life. Her research shows that "making special" (Dissanayake, 1988: 74) is integrated effortlessly in unmodernised societies. As she puts it:

the sacred and profane coexist, the spiritual suffuses the secular (Dissanayake, 1988: 98).

This highlights how separated art is from our everyday life in Western society. Art is understood to be something different and free, something done for its own reasons, and not seen as essential. Ironically, artists often take it all very seriously, forgetting the playful, exploratory possibilities of the creative process.

Like Dissanayake, Moon (1990) points out that our society has become very goal- and achievement-orientated, and play is not often seen as important or beneficial. Moon sees play as a dynamic source of energy for both the individual and society. He feels that those who don't see themselves as artists often have the most fun with art, and experience the pleasures of play by identifying themselves with the unskilled child. As an instructor at the Columbus College of Art and Design, Moon observes students feeling a loss of joy while conforming to the demands for production made on them. Although there is value in discipline, he still hopes that they might once again be free to experience playfulness in art-making when they have left the institution. In my own experience, it becomes harder to experience creativity as fun and playful, having left the institution. From the perspective of an artist attempting to make a living, study days were fun and playful. Making money as a responsible adult means creativity is a serious business.

Outsider art (also known as Art Brut, an idea which was formulated by Jean Dubuffet in the 1940s) (Rhodes, 2000:23) is understood to be a group of artists who are non-professional and untrained, for example children and psychiatric patients. Colin Rhodes (2000) points out that these, although unexposed to each other or to 'insider' artists, cohere as a group because they allow the artwork to emerge from their inner selves, unpremeditated and raw. This usually changes once the artist is exposed to the public: as soon as they are recognised, they stop playing, and take it more seriously, thus affecting the images. Rhodes quotes Kandinsky in the Blue Rider Almanac:

'the child is indifferent to practical meaning since he looks at everything with fresh eyes, and he still has the natural ability to absorb the thing as such', whereas the academically trained artist 'produces a correct' drawing that is dead' (Rhodes, 2000:27).

I include the observations on Outsider art because it illustrates the possibility that, when art is not too premeditated and is without expectations, coming from a child-like playfulness, there is a better chance of the artist re-engaging with the creative process. In my experience, it is not easy to return to this sense of play. The expectations of an exhibiting artist seem entrenched in the mind. Confidence is often lacking as one enters the 'real world'. Ellis Pearson (Appendix D, 159), during my interview with him says that there is a great need for playfulness, and that it is the nature of the universe to be playful and interactive. As a way of engaging a workshop group in a non-goal-orientated approach, one should start by engaging the group in play. He suggests simple ball games. I agree that it is important to include playful

experiences in workshops, to help the group re-engage with their child-selves. Experiences I included in the student workshop were: painting to music, swap painting with music, spontaneous clay, and five-rhythms dance (Chapter 5: 109). These seemed to be very successful. The students relaxed, had fun, and seemed more animated, whereas during the time alone working on their own projects, they appeared uninspired and often distracted (Chapter 6: 121). For myself, I have realised that this earnest desire to be a professional artist, which seems so admirable in our society, is in fact preventing that happening. I started my process with the Masters programme by playing with the paint on unstretched canvas. Later I cut out sections of these large works and found there to be a series of interesting fragments. (Figure: 13- 14: 146). These playful experiments, I can see with hindsight, prefigured the works that came later.

IMAGINATION

Next I look at the importance of the imagination in understanding and engaging with the creative process. Ellen Handler Spitz, in her book titled *Art and Psyche* (1985), looks in depth at Freud's reflection on art. Freud links children's imaginative play (fantasy and daydreaming) with the work of artists. Spitz quotes directly from Freud:

Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, re-arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him?The opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real...The unreality of the writer's imaginative world, however, has very important consequences for the technique of his art; for many things which, if they were real, could give no enjoyment, can do so in the play of phantasy, and many excitements which, in themselves, are actually distressing, can become a source of pleasure for the hearers and spectators at the performance of a writer's work. (Spitz, 1985: 14).

Plotkin (2003) indicates that our Western culture, especially in education, plays down the importance of the imagination. He sees the power of the imagination as valuable for the journey of the soul. Plotkin differentiates "guided imagery" (Plotkin, 2003: 145) from "deep imagery" (Plotkin, 2003: 145) or "active imagination" (Plotkin, 2003:145) as known by the Jungians. Guided imagination is when someone guides the listener, through a simple story or describes a beautiful place, as a way to help relax because of beautiful imagined images. Cultivating "deep imagery" (Plotkin, 2003:147) involves one coming from the depths of one's subconscious. The most effective method involves the use of power animals as metaphorical images or experiences. Plotkin points out that throughout the world children learn to imitate animals through play, imagination, and through feelings.

For many westerners, use of the imagination is an unfamiliar skill. Some people have great difficulty, at first, accessing their deep images: they may have spent too much of their lives relying on thinking, or perhaps were taught as children that imagination was dangerous, bad, foolish (Plotkin: 2003: 149).

Levi and Smith (1991), who write on the necessity of art in the education system, quote an extract from van Gogh's letters to Emile Bernard in 1888:

The imagination, is certainly a faculty which we must develop, one which alone can lead us to the creation of a more exalting and consoling nature than the single brief glance at reality – which in our sight is ever changing, passing like a flash of lightening -- can let us perceive (Levi and Smith, 1991:52).

Levi and Smith (1991) indicate that van Gogh's ideas were prophetic. At the end of the nineteenth century a new movement began which rejected the dominant, naturalistic concept of art that preceded it. Artists turned from the external world for creative inspiration, to look inwards at their own feelings and imagination. The movement was started by French poets such as Mallarmé and Baudelaire, who were known as Symbolists. Later artists such as Edvard Munch said that a work of art could come only from within. Odilon Redon felt that the imagination could help artists overcome worries they might have in the outside world.

Rod Taylor, who writes about the visual arts in education, says that:

the continuous and rigorous study of the visual world can and should be one of the most fundamental means whereby the imagination is stimulated and nurtured (Rod Taylor, 1996: 126).

Danto quotes Matta (Danto,2001:25 -27) who describes a method of Leonardo da Vinci, highlighting the importance of the ability to see and remember natural objects through observation and walking in nature. However, he also highlights the importance of the imagination, which is fed by the external world. As an exercise to help the imagination, da Vinci suggests looking at stains on a wall, at clouds, fire, or a collection of coloured stones, until one starts to see images -- a landscape with various elements, or people in interesting positions. The artist Robert Motherwell, in seeking what he describes as 'the original Creative principle'(Danto,2001: 22), uses a similar method to simulate the imagination and create original, non-style-specific and entirely personal artworks. These essentially emerge from a doodle or as, Motherwell called it, "artful scribbling" (Danto, 2001:15).

McNiff (1992) has a similar view, and points out that thinking too much about the final product will put a distance between artists and their artworks: their thoughts and controlling minds take them beyond the present moment rather than letting their intuition respond to what is in front of them. Thus, McNiff continues, "heroic expectations" (1992) hinder the artists' ability to use their imagination, or as McNiff puts it, obstruct:

the spontaneous response to what arrives independently of my intent (McNiff, 1992: 60) .

The imagination can also be a valuable tool to help one imagine oneself beyond being blocked. For example, John Kehoe (1992), who is known for his “mind power” techniques, suggests that visualisation can help “seed” (Kehoe, 1992: 33), or give authentic feeling, to new ways of being. He suggests, and I put his suggestions in the context of an artist, that one could visualise or imagine engaging in the process of painting and being prolific: imagining the smell of the paint and the feelings of elation while painting; imagining the feeling one would have if one’s beautiful artworks had a successful exhibition where everything sold. One would try to feel the joy or thrill that would go with this experience. It is not wishing, but rather claiming with one’s mind the experience as a fact. This technique needs to be repeated every day for its potential to be realised. Several experiences are listed in Chapter 5 page 118 as options which could help stimulate the imagination of the participants in a workshop. These are based on some of the points mentioned above.

ENTHUSIASM VERSUS DISCIPLINE

The need for the artist to play, to have an experimental, explorative approach to art-making, to connect to soul, brings me to the question: ‘Does the artist need to be disciplined?’ As we move from childhood into adulthood, we are disciplined by society. As children we are often told that to achieve anything important we must be serious, organised, and self-disciplined. In many cases this works successfully; we become productive, and organise our thoughts into coherent arguments. But this can also be restrictive, and itself block the creative process.

Cameron (1992) says that, from our Western perspective, artistic production with an almost military discipline is something to boast about, and has its basis in the ego’s need for self-admiration. However, she says, this disciplined approach will have value for only a period of time, and artists need to be enthusiastic about what they do.

Enthusiasm is not an emotional state. It is a spiritual commitment, a loving surrender to our creative process, a loving recognition of all the creativity around us. Enthusiasm (from the Greek, ‘filled with God’) is an ongoing energy supply tapped into the flow of life itself. Enthusiasm is grounded in play, not work. Far from being a brain-numbed soldier, our artist is actually our child within, our inner playmate. As with all playmates, it is joy, not duty that makes for a lasting bond (Cameron, 1992: 153).

Therefore, although the artist may go to the studio early every day, it should be more to do with enthusiasm and a deep desire to be there, than with ego-filled discipline. Perhaps our need to be disciplined is because of our societal perspective. Hadden (2004) makes the point that our society generally views linear thinking as superior to holistic thinking. Most of the artists I know were educated in this system that encouraged and rewarded linear thinking.

We are taught in school that linear thinking is logical and that any other process is both illogical and no good (Hadden, 2004: 39).

There are many valid uses for linear thinking, and Hadden explains Dr Ealy's perspective from her book *The Woman's Book of Creativity*. Linear thinking is helpful in keeping financial records or giving understandable directions. Holistic thinking allows for all possibilities to exist simultaneously, which is important for a creative process. This approach allows one to gather a variety of samples and to decide later which is most important. Hadden puts forward this idea:

Many of us who were taught from early childhood to think linearly may actually think that inspiration should present itself to us linearly – but it just doesn't (Hadden, 2004: 42).

Essentially, it comes down to a perspective of reality and appearances. Seeing the artist as regularly playing or engaging with the creative process, rather than forcing creativity with a sense of 'must' or a materialistic goal, can seem ideal, especially when one looks at the creative process in more depth. But it is not always easy to be enthusiastic when one is feeling lost or the ego-self is going through a dark moment, which can happen at any point in the flow of the creative process. In that situation it may be important to be disciplined. This could help one through difficult patches, or maybe understanding one's own process better will gently nudge one to continue exploring or playing. Could having a true connection to soul mean that one would not need to be disciplined, and that this could in itself be the proper judge of one's productivity, rather than a forced working schedule?

Clinton de Menezes (Appendix C, 154) explains in an interview that, to get working again when he is blocked, he must engage creativity in any way possible. Pushing too hard can cause burn-out, so it is better to engage gentle discipline and to work regularly. Grace Kotze (Appendix C: 155) says that the more time she spends on her own work (rather than commercial work), the more she finds there is to produce. If she stops, for whatever reason, it is hard to get going again. She needs to be disciplined in doing her own work; even if all the time she has available allows her to put a glaze on a painting, this just keeps the process going. In my own experience, I found it essential to use discipline at first to over-ride fear, procrastination, and apathy. Once I found myself engaging with the process, the enthusiasm for what was beginning to happen outweighed the need to be disciplined. Now I often feel eager to get into the studio; I feel something important is missing if I don't engage creatively, in however small a way, every day. This connection to my creative self, however, can reverse if I feel uncertain about what I am doing or if the engagement with the process has been broken for some reason. Then I need to exercise discipline again, for re-engagement.

CREATING FROM SOUL:

I found the words 'connecting to soul', or something similar, mentioned by a number of authors, especially in the case of re-engaging artists with their creative processes. Several books refer to the value of the soul, connection with the mind, and the effect of the ego. Many describe these phenomena differently, using words such as 'feeling', 'passion' and 'soul' to describe responses to successful work. In work on the creation of the workshop for this thesis, it became clearer that some level of soul connection was important if the artist was to overcome artist's block, or create work that could produce something special. Cameron states categorically that:

The heart of creativity is an experience of the mystical union: the heart of the mystical union is an experience of creativity. Those who speak in spiritual terms routinely refer to God as the creator but seldom see *creator* as the literal term for *artist*. I am suggesting you take the term *creator* quite literally. You are seeking to forge a creative alliance, artist-to-artist, with the Great Creator. Accepting this concept can greatly expand your creative possibilities (Cameron, 1995: 2).

She goes on to say that creativity is a spiritual experience, and she makes no distinction between the two. She feels that spiritual principles are the basis of creative recovery from artist's block. McKenny says that her experiences of artist's block are due to her feeling cut-off from a "life source" (Appendix C: 156).

Kandinsky (1977: 55) also describes art as a way to strengthen the human soul, and discusses the value and importance of the connection to soul for the artist. When the soul gains in strength, he says, the artworks will grow in power. He describes the artist as a 'servant of a nobler purpose', and suggests artists actively seek out their connection to soul, otherwise their art will lack something deeper. Even the viewer will notice this, and will disregard the artwork or judge the artist to be a fool. He touches on the idea that art could exist for its own sake. In explaining Kandinsky's approach, his translator, Sadler, calls the term 'art for art's sake' the best ideal that a culture could aspire to. It is an unconscious desire to reject materialism, which wants everything to have some use or practical function. Art and the human soul, he says, cannot be destroyed, only temporarily smothered.

I have a particular meaning for 'soul' and 'spirit' or 'spiritual', arising from my social background; and I am aware that these will have different meanings for different groups of people. The study of soul is a broad subject, and could constitute a whole thesis in itself, so for the purpose of this thesis I will base the meaning of soul and spirit on Plotkin's definition:

By soul I mean the vital, mysterious, and wild core of our individual selves, an essence unique to each person, qualities found in layers of the self much deeper than our personalities. By spirit I mean the singular, great, and eternal mystery that permeates and animates everything in the

universe and yet transcends all. Ultimately, each soul exists as an agent for spirit (Plotkin, 2003: 25).

For some, the concept of soul has no meaning whatsoever. For this reason, one could exchange the word 'soul' with 'heart', to describe that aspect of self that is 'deeper within'. By this, I mean using one's intuition or that part of self that can express feelings about a subject, which subsequently, subconsciously, evolve into an artwork. Plotkin (2003) suggests that we are all artists. Nature-based cultures have no word for art because it is seen as something humans all do instinctively. He feels that true art has nothing to do with impressing or entertaining people. It is about creating something from the soul as a gift to others. Perhaps this is one of the reasons artists suffer from artist's block. We want fame, and recognition. We have forgotten how to make from our souls.

McNiff realises that one cannot speak about the soul being lost in a literal way, as it is always present, but says that we can lose touch with its movements during our everyday life, thus resulting in:

bodily and mental illness, rigidification, the absence of passion, and the estrangement from nature. It is the nature of soul to be lost to that aspect of mind that strives to control it. Mind has to dissolve, to let go of its control, in order to experience what is not itself. Soul is a constant yet ephemeral motion that passes through us without containment (McNiff, 1992: 21).

If we haven't connected to soul, then to what part of us are we connected? Betty Edwards (1988) in her well known and respected book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, which contains techniques that teach a beginner how to draw, clarifies this distinction. Edwards (1988) points out that Western culture is very "left brained", and therefore needs to connect with the "right brain" for a more balanced approach to creative living. We all have both aspects, it is just that our right brain has not always been exercised sufficiently. She bases her theories on relatively new scientific explorations into the left- and right-brain activities, and uses these discoveries to explain and simplify an understanding of how the brain works in relation to creativity. Through these experiments, scientists have found logical ways of describing what many spiritual groups have already understood, as exemplified in the well known Chinese Taoist's yin/yang symbol. Aspects such as feminine/masculine, negative/positive, darkness/light, warm/cold, emotion/reason, right brain/ left brain show that essentially humans are faced with dual ways of expression. The different hemispheres of the brain receive the same data, but they process the information differently. The scientist J. E. Bogen, according to Edwards (1988: 29 – 32), describes something similar in parallel ways of knowing: intuition/intellect, divergent/convergent, analogic/digital, free/directed, imaginative/ proposition and non-linear/linear.

Edwards (1988) created a simple way to remember the duality. She describes the right brain (which apparently governs the left part of the body) as curvy –R, showing this aspect of self to be

playful/flexible, non-verbal, non-rational, intuitive, analogic (can make metaphoric associations), holistic and concrete (things seen as they really are). The left mode (affecting the right-side of the body) is represented by a sturdy – L, showing the character of this aspect of self to be upright, sensible, direct, hard-edged, verbal, analytical, rational, symbolic, digital, logical, and linear. She points out that our Western educational system is predominantly left-mode based; in it, this aspect of self is better instructed and practised, is revered and praised. The right-mode is often undervalued, and therefore not encouraged or trained. So the system creates unbalanced people, often unconnected to their creative selves. Edwards's views concur with the discussion on page 31.

Similarly, Levi and Smith (1991), in a chapter titled *The creation of art*, describe two main philosophical thought patterns that have moved down through our culture, and which are based on the theories of Plato and Aristotle. The Aristotelian perspective suggests “the imposition of form upon matter”, and the Platonic view the ‘expression of emotion through inspiration’ (Levi and Smith, 1991: 42 –43). Aristotle had a more ‘head-like’ approach based on the intellect: the artist starts with an *idea* and the materials are controlled to produce the desired outcome. Losing control of the artwork might allow it to become merely an expression of sensuality and confusion. Therefore, although artists have feelings while creating, in that there is a need to love what they are doing, their work is based on order, an order that they imposed on matter, and which shows artistic knowledge. This description is similar to the reaction to our educational system that I have mentioned. Levi and Smith (1991) feel that the Aristotelian view has become our established doctrine. Herbert Read, in his book titled *Education Through Art*, also argues that much of our education is based on Aristotelian logic. This way of thinking, he says, lays down the methods and foundations from which a child will acquire knowledge, and therefore stipulates how we should conceptually see the world. Read's own view is different. The best way for a child to learn, he says, would be through the way a child thinks. He likens this to an artistic approach, and feels that this would not stop the child from learning to think logically, as it is an aspect of art practice anyway. He puts forward Plato's description of education:

He said, as the modern psychologist says, that all grace of movement and harmony of living – the moral disposition of the soul itself – are determined by aesthetic feeling: by the recognition of rhythm and harmony. The same qualities, he said, enter largely into painting and all similar workmanship, into weaving and embroidery, into architecture, as well as the whole manufacture of utensils in general; nay, into the constitution of living bodies, and of all plants: for all these things, gracefulness or ungracefulness finds place. And an absence of grace, and rhythm, and harmony, is closely allied to an evil style and an evil character: whereas their presence is allied to, and expressive of, the opposite character, which is brave and sober minded (Read, 1970: 62).

Essentially the artistic approach from Plato's perspective is more heart-like, ‘inspired and possessed’ (Levi and Smith, 1991:42), and based on feelings rather than knowledge. Levi and Smith (1991) point out that this Platonic view re-emerged only at selected moments during the nineteen and twentieth centuries.

The Aristotelian approach -- art as the imposition of form upon matter -- is termed the classic position. Art as inspiration is still considered as something for incurable romantics. It becomes a method where creation occurs through emotion, and Levi and Smith (1991) describe Plato's approach as advocating artistic improvisation and spontaneity. They point out that the Impressionists imbibed Plato's methods, not through knowledge of the theories, but through their romantic notions and passion for nature, leaving the confines of the studio to paint outdoors. Abstract Expressionists such as de Kooning and Pollock approached their blank canvases with no prior decision of the image they would create. They essentially take Plato's approach to the extreme. Levi and Smith are neither condemning nor advocating either way of creating. They recognise that it is important for the artist to use structure, and that organisation is part of creativity. The educational systems are being re-evaluated today, but many artists educated in the previous systems are hard-wired to that way of thinking. I believe conscious action will help them re-train their approach to their creative process.

All this suggests that, in creating the workshop, the facilitator may need to help the participant get in touch with another aspect of self, which, because of their education or social expectations, has been suppressed or invalidated. Not all artists need to come from soul to create successful works of art, but the blocked artist could benefit from that new approach. When creating, one should attempt to transcend the ego and the desire for materialistic benefits, as these intentions can be 'read' or felt by the viewer. The artist may start to give up on their creative process; there is no soul connection, so why go on? In a world where one needs to show outcomes and effectiveness, it becomes harder to access the soul self and to validate its non-definable, non-controllable and non-tangible meandering ways. To restore balance of expression, the artist could benefit from soul or heart connection. The question now is how does one do this, or, more importantly, how does one help participants in a workshop do it? In Chapter page 117, I have presented a couple of experiences that may be used in the workshop to help connect artists with their soul.

Cameron's book *The Artist's Way* (1995) is a workbook for those who recognise this imbalance and want to get in touch with their creative selves. Her approach is to de-construct the beliefs people have had about creativity or being an artist, and then to help them create a new perspective which comes from a deeper understanding of self, and a connection to soul or spirit. McNiff (1998) suggests that what could help artists connect with their soul is to choose a theme that comes from their own resource and knowledge, therefore building confidence, but also allowing the artist to tap into the source from which the creative expression emanates. Sticking to another's 'stock themes' can hinder the artist's connection to soul. Like Kandinsky (1997), McNiff (1998) goes further, suggesting that creating can be a spiritual act, especially if practised everyday. Allen reverses this, and suggests that it is through art that one can restore and reclaim a connection to soul:

art making is a way of bringing soul back into my life. Soul is the place where the messiness of life, where stories exist. Soul is the place where I am replenished and can experience both gardens and graveyards. Art is my way of knowing who I am (Allen, 1995: IX).

The premise for my thesis and the creating of this workshop is that it is in nature that one can reconnect to this deeper aspect of self. Perhaps this is a romantic idea. Yet in nature we can bypass the intellect and start focusing on inner feelings and simple observations. In Chapter 3, I go into more detail about this. It seems that creating is a cycle: to get in touch with one's creative vigour one needs to get in touch with one's soul, and therefore to know one's self better. And this can be done through being creative. If we put the natural environment into this equation, then nature becomes the catalyst, where before there was none.

CREATIVITY AS A LABYRINTH

To further explore the ideas of duality, and to continue to illustrate other ways of viewing creativity, I look at the principles and ideologies of the symbol of the labyrinth. This also illustrates how our society disregards our right-mode aspect of self in favour of the left. Again, it is a subject in itself, but for this thesis I will put it forward as a reflective idea.

McNiff (1998) points out that, when venturing into the unknown, it is important to have positive faith in what could come out of creative expression. There is an intelligence inherent in the creative process that seems to know what to do and where to go next. Very often one cannot decide where one is going in advance. He recognises that the creative spirit has labyrinthine ways, which are unpredictable. Creative flow is about inspiration and affirmation rather than a clear direction. The joy of the labyrinth is the journey, and so too with the creative process. It is not the end, but rather the process, that is engaging and important. Once at the end one can only reflect on the journey.

McNiff's (1998) view is also illustrated by Jacques Attali, a French intellectual, economist theorist, author and scholar in human history. Attali (1998) traces the history of the labyrinth to nomadic cultures dating back thousands of years and occurring all over the world. In Egypt, the symbol represented the journey of the soul, and in the Mediterranean it was a template for ritual dances. In later cultures of China and America, it served to show the inner quest for one's own truth. In the Christian Crusades, it was a graceful and economical symbolic pilgrimage: the faithful moved along a stone pathway, and the centre symbolised Jerusalem. Thus:

the labyrinth was a generic, implicit indicator of profundity, complexity, and the riddle of human destiny (Attali, 1998: XXIII).

Attali also describes labyrinths as

opaque places of paths whose routes need obey no prior law. It may be ruled by chance or improbability, signalling the defeat of pure Reason (Attali, 1998: XXVI).

Attali also points out that labyrinths have their basis in nature, from galaxies to shells. Our very make up as humans, from our nervous systems to our fingerprints, show a multitude of different patterns that illustrate these paths. He suggests that we need the labyrinth today to explain and understand ourselves. As initially the Christian movement incorporated the symbols of the previous cults, the labyrinth was put on the floors of churches and cathedrals. Chartres Cathedral is one of the few that still have this on public view. But the symbol of life's meandering journey suddenly became redundant in our Western culture. With the Renaissance, the Age of Reason dawned. In contrast to the labyrinth, the straight line became the symbol of the West. It showed efficiency, and linear movement which was straightforward, saved time, and was visible and predictable.

Beginning with the Renaissance, the labyrinth begins to be erased. Reason defeats it in the prevailing style of discourse on faith, science triumphs over the ruse, mathematics over practical knowledge, realistic life over eternal life, transparency over obscurity, and the straight line over the convolution (Attali, 1998: 31-32).

With philosophy came Descartes, who validated the notion of staying on a straight path so as not to become lost or stay in one place. An individual will then arrive at an end place, and it is better to be somewhere rather than nowhere, or lost. Attali (1998) says that during the end of the Middle Ages, theology followed philosophy, and the labyrinth was no longer a wonderful metaphor for human destiny. The labyrinth becomes:

becomes the prison of the Good and the lair of the Evil. The Church now enjoins the faithful to refuse to enter into the winding and inextricable meanders of paganism, to choose the straight and narrow path which leads to the perfection intended by God. Human nature is denounced as naturally labyrinthine and evil. Hell itself is depicted as a labyrinth: as punishment, sinners risk eternal imprisonment in a maze from which only grace can liberate them (Attali, 1998: 35).

The history of the labyrinth effectively illustrates the shift of the Western cultures from a free-flowing, meandering, intuitional, right-brain way of viewing existence, to a logical, goal-driven, and expectation-filled straight-path approach of the left-brain view of life. Observing this linear perspective on education and creativity can show the blocked artist how attitudes to life can inhibit the natural flow of creativity. Perhaps, too, it encourages the artist to realise that overcoming a block is not a logical, intellectual, step-by-step process. The healing journey meanders, and the outcome is unpredictable. All artists will find their own creative solutions to the problem.

BEING LOST

If the labyrinth is a metaphorical way of describing human nature and the creative process, then it could actually be important for the artist to experience being lost, not knowing the outcome, or being unable to plot a process with surety. In this section, I discuss being lost, not in a physical sense, but intellectually, emotionally or spiritually. Plotkin (2003) suggests that the Western world encourages us to know exactly where we are going, by setting goals, or knowing where we are at all times. Yet, Plotkin states, being lost is not all bad, and can be both desirable and beneficial. Wandering can be very valuable; and often the wanderer actually seeks to be lost, since that is how one might ultimately find oneself. Surrendering fully to this state allows the inner soul or voice to be heard more clearly, when the mind has relaxed.

By trusting your unknowing, your standards of progress dissolve and you become eligible to be chosen by new, larger standards, those that come not from your mind or old story or other people, but from the depths of your soul. This means that expectation of previous goals could fall away and makes way for a way that comes from the depth of soul, and not from the mind or someone else's beliefs (Plotkin, 2003: 249).

He lists four components necessary to this 'art' of being lost:

- One must in fact be lost
- One must know one is lost and accept this
- There must be adequate survival knowledge, skills, and spiritual tools
- Last and most important, the wanderer must give up any attachment to being found at a certain time or even at all. To surrender completely into this condition, relax in it, and be fully present.

(Plotkin, 2003: 247 – 251)

McNiff (1998) holds that the experience of creative flow is sometimes preceded by times of despair and unworthiness. This is a necessary part of the process; we need both angels and demons. People often don't realise that conflict and uneasiness are part of the process, and could even be necessary. In losing our way and then finding another way to get back, transformation occurs.

Thomas Moore (2004), an ex-Christian monk, psychologist, theologian and author, speaks at length about connection to soul, creativity, and what is often termed the "dark night of the soul". This state can occur when trying to be creative, in times of anger, when we feel we have "lost it", or in sickness and old age. His premise is that this time of darkness is necessary and part of human nature; that to deny it could cause even more anxiety.

The dark night of the soul provides a rest from the hyperactivity of the good times and the strenuous attempts to understand yourself and to get it right. During the dark night there is no

choice but to surrender control, give in to unknowing, and stop and listen to whatever signals of wisdom might come along (Moore, 2004: XVIII).

I suggest that if we link the experience of artist's block with this knowledge of the dark night of the soul, then it could be important and natural for the artist to embrace these moments. In terms of creating a workshop, it could be important for the participants to acknowledge and discuss this aspect of creativity, so as to give them a new perspective, and show that it is normal, even important. The experience that I propose, incorporates wandering in a natural environment, as if wandering in a labyrinth, and perhaps feeling lost because there is no clear direction (Chapter 5:118).

CHAOS

From the above arguments, I deduced that not being in control, organised, or clear may be considered a state of creative chaos. As with being lost, chaos is also experienced as uncomfortable by the educated Western person. As Haarhoff points out, traditionally:

we think of chaos as anarchy and the opposite or enemy of creativity (Haarhoff, 1998: 51).

Yet creativity is a basic phenomenon and principle of the universe. Haarhoff (1998) cites Henri Poincaré, a French mathematician, physicist and philosopher who discovered that the patterns the solar system makes are irregular, fluctuating and unpredictable. Haarhoff's research also shows that the classical science experimenters and observers wanted to bring order from chaos. However, there is also research that sees chaos as part of a dynamic system, but this chaos cannot be defined as disorder because it consists of repeated irregular patterns such as heartbeats, the weather system, and waves. Haarhoff (1998) finds that recent scientific and theological discoveries contradict the conventional belief that chaos is an enemy of creativity. There is both disorder and order in the universe, and within uncertainty one finds mystery.

Fritjof Capra (1992) points out that many ancient spiritual teachings indicate that learning to let life flow is essential for peaceful creativity. In Hinduism, the dancing god Shiva represents the cosmic dance. Hindus believe that all aspects of life are affected by the great rhythms of creation and destruction, cycles of death and re-birth, which are the basis for all existence, in the view of Indian mystics. Shiva's dance represents these eternal rhythmic cycles.

The dance of Shiva is the dancing universe: the ceaseless flow of energy going through an infinite variety of patterns that melt into one another (Capra, 1992:271).

Scientists have caught up with this wisdom. In his chapter called "The Cosmic Dance", Capra explains the sub-atomic world as explored in the twentieth century. This exploration shows the dynamic nature of matter.

The constituents of atoms, the subatomic particles, are dynamic patterns which do not exist as isolated entities, but as integral parts of an inseparable network of interactions. These interactions involve a ceaseless flow of energy manifesting itself as the exchange of particles: a dynamic interplay in which particles are created and destroyed without end in a continual variation of energy patterns (Capra, 1992: 249).

Capra's (1992) description shows us that science sees the whole universe as engaged in this cosmic dance, this endlessly moving rhythm of creation and destruction. Modern physics also shows, according to Capra, that:

every subatomic particle not only performs an energy dance, but also *is* an energy dance; a pulsating process of creation and destruction (Capra, 1992: 271).

Haarhoff (1998) feels that it is important that writers understand chaos theory as a metaphor for writing, and says that:

We are in process and that the chaotic process throws up continual changes and new directions...we find order in apparent disorder and meaning in chaos (Haarhoff, 1998: 55).

On page 119 of Chapter 5, I have included experiences which could be used in a workshop to show the artist that from chaos all sorts of imaginative and creative discoveries can arise. I find Gabrielle Roth's (1998 and 1999) five-rhythm dance to be useful in a workshop, both as a playful experience as well as a way for participants to engage directly with the rhythms of nature and creativity. The chaotic rhythm is the merging of the masculine staccato rhythm, assertive and clear, with the feminine rhythm, flowing and circular (Chapter 5: 119).

TRUSTING THE PROCESS:

I have borrowed the title of this section from that of McNiff's (1998) book. I feel it describes the aspect of self which is most needed when engaging in any process, including life itself. This has been especially true in my own experience, for I realised, when reading his book, that I did not trust the process of my creative journey, neither did I trust the process of my life and its creative journey. The writing of this thesis, and my parallel creative process, has been a fundamental journey of healing and relearning. McNiff (1998) says that though the title of his book could be seen as trite, the statement aptly sums up what is essential when being creative.

The notion of 'process' suggests a multiplicity of components with independent ways. But the word also carries within itself a sense of unity, a faith that all of our experiences gather together in a creative process that ultimately knows where it needs to go (McNiff, 1998: 4).

McNiff (1998) suggests that we allow mistakes to happen, and perhaps even to be of use; that we should be flexible and open to new things that happen during the creative process. Improvisation is also important, to allow one thing to lead on to the next. Group dynamics and interaction with other artists can help; and so can the interplay between different materials. McNiff (1998) sees trusting the process and engaging with the creative energies as a discipline, like meditation, for which regular practice is required over a period of time. The meditator has to practise staying focused and not letting the mind wander; so too the artist needs to stay connected to the process and integrate what happens into the act of creating. Moving from one picture to the next, a series will emerge, each one built from the one before. All images can be relevant to the process, so McNiff (1998) suggests not throwing anything away -- even if at first it looks like a disaster, it might be important to the overall process. This process is personal; what works for one person may not work for another. Only through individual experimentation over a period of time -- hours, weeks, days or years -- will the artist create successful new work. McNiff (1998) likens the creative process to a long-term relationship, where one gets to know what one likes and doesn't like. All aspects of the relationship, good and bad, help shape the artworks.

If we persist in our creative efforts, surprising resolutions will appear when they are least expected. The creative discipline involves the ability to keep the field of activity open and responsive to what arises (McNiff, 1998: 21).

Trusting in the process means believing that something beneficial will emerge from the unknown. One needs to surrender or let go, to be able to change direction, be flexible, rather than giving up or feeling defeated. The ego can then let go of expectations so as to be able to open to spontaneous results which are not expected or contrived. When experienced creators know this, they tend to work with the process, stepping aside to advance, encouraging the unexpected though surrendering the initiative, or gentle nudging, respecting whatever happens. McNiff suggests the artist paint without any judgement or pre-planned ideas, and should do this with a positive attitude, making the gestures simple. The simplest or least expected thing could ultimately become the most profound. We use a lot of energy when we try to protect ourselves from failing or from new experiences. By trusting the process we are better able to turn 'mistakes' into useful or ingenious creations. For Kotze (Appendix C: 155), being in a creative process is about becoming less self-conscious, and stopping judgement of herself. Carol Gainer (Appendix C: 157) says that creative process for her starts as an intellectual idea, and then takes the idea into reality, making it physical and tactile. She says it is about moving beyond concern for the end product.

For McNiff (1998), successful expression allows the unplanned gesture and materials to lead the way. So from the beginning one does not know where one is going. He feels that those who try to control the work from the outset go against the natural flow of creativity. This can create feelings of inhibition and emptiness. He does feel that some limits or structure can be helpful in the creative process, by giving focus and fostering improvisation and imagination, as mentioned on page 29. But in general one needs to take the plunge rather than know exactly what will happen. The purpose of the work comes from the act of doing. McNiff discusses C. G. Jung's observations about the creative process, observing that:

events and relationships often take shape according to 'accasual' patterns. If we persist in our creative efforts, surprising resolutions will appear when they are least expected. The creative discipline involves the ability to keep the field of activity open and responsive to what arrives (McNiff, 1998, 21).

McNiff goes on to say that the:

'process' has an intelligence that can be trusted, and the gift of creation is the ability to work with it (McNiff, 1998, 21).

I find Picasso to be an inspiration. Having seen his work in galleries around the world, I have been struck by its diversity. It is apparent to me that Picasso trusted his creative process and opened himself to possibility without restriction. This is confirmed in the writing of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (1981), a friend and frequent visitor of Picasso until his death. Kahnweiler wrote of him as an artist who worked from his own "Erlebnis", depending exclusively on himself; he describes his work as "fanatically autobiographical". The quality that most stood out, for him, was the sense of freedom in Picasso's work. Picasso confided in Kahnweiler, stating:

'When you start a painting, you need to have an idea, but it should be a vague one' (Kahnweiler, 1981: 1).

Kahnweiler saw that Picasso's paintings changed completely through the course of their execution, and writes that:

Several different pictures sometimes appeared and disappeared before a painting arrived at its definitive form. Picasso rarely made sketches with a future work in view: each picture was an end, a universe in itself. He gave his creative urge free rein, and lived only in the present. His observation 'painting makes me do what it wants' is well known. A work was finished when it seemed to him that there was nothing more to add to it. In this way one was always confronted with new solutions when one looked at his pictures. And yet these new solutions carried on the tradition, by virtue of inventing it afresh each time (Kahnweiler, 1981: 1).

To further understand the idea of trusting the process, I took a brief look at the philosophy of Taoism as described by Capra, a physicist, who writes research papers and books about the philosophical

implications of modern science. Taoism dates back to the sixth century B.C., and is one of the major philosophical schools in China. It is primarily concerned with the observation of nature and the discovery of its way.

The Tao is the cosmic process in which all things are involved: the world is seen as a continuous flow and change (Capra, 1992: 117).

Human happiness, according to the Taoists, is achieved when one follows the natural order, acting spontaneously and trusting one's intuitive knowledge. "Tao" means "the way" (Capra, 1992), as: the way, the process, and the order of nature and the universe. This is a dynamic process in which all things are involved, and of which flow and change are essential aspects. There are constant patterns in these changes, which humans can observe. By conforming to "the way", following the natural rhythms, one can find it easier to live in this world and succeed. These changes occur because of a tendency which is innate in all things and situations. For the Taoists, spontaneity is their principle of action:

Acting in harmony with nature thus means for the Taoists acting spontaneously and according to one's true nature. It means trusting one's intuitive intelligence, which is innate in the human mind just as the laws of change are innate in all things around us (Capra, 1992: 129).

This pattern has been observed from the rhythms of the sun and the moon, and the changes of the seasons. There are limits in this cycle of change, and too much of one thing will eventually be balanced by more of the opposite. The yin/yang symbol represents this cyclical notion, and also as has been mentioned previously, human duality. Yang is the strong, male, creative power, associated with heaven, brightness and a clear, rational, male intellect. Yin represents the female: the intuitive, dark, reproductive, and maternal element. Yin is quiet and contemplative.

I have realised that trusting in the creative process also means trusting in and observing the natural order of the world. This idea is expanded on in Chapter 3, where I consider the natural environment as a starting point for the creative process. As artists, by observing the cyclical patterns of nature we can, as the Taoists suggest, learn more about the creative journey of our lives, and about creativity itself. There is a constant interrelationship between contrasting elements in human nature, as I have mentioned previously, -- light/dark, soft/hard, left brain/right brain and life/death. From an artist's perspective, there is also knowing/not knowing and success/failure. These dichotomies are the creative engine in nature, in human lives, and in the creative process.

On page 114 of Chapter 5 I have listed a few experiences usable in a workshop to help participants experience their creative process more consciously.

ARTIST'S BLOCK AS AN ALLY

One could suppose artist's block to be a completely negative experience, but since I started exploring the creative process in more depth, I have come to realise that one could change this perspective by viewing artist's block as part of the process. By changing the way it is viewed, and seeing it instead as an ally, one disempowers the negative effect it has on the artist. Thus, a block can be seen as important to the creative process, rather than something to fear.

McNiff (1998) suggests one views obstacles not as a hindrance but rather as a necessary part of being creative. He also observes that for each person this experience can be different, but, whatever one's style, the hurdles may be part of the creative process. Carl Roberts was reluctant to label as artist's block the time when he sits, sometimes for a week, looking at a piece of wood and unclear about where to start. He doesn't see this experience as a problem, but rather "a thing to be solved" (Appendix C: 157), a challenge. Cameron (1995) describes the times of non-creativity as a drought. She too feels that these dry times are necessary. She likens it to being in a desert, a time that brings "clarity and charity". Cameron (1995) suggests writing throughout this time, continuing with morning pages. Then, although one stumbles and doubts, at least one does not sink into despair.

A path will emerge. An insight will be a landmark that shows the way out of the wilderness. Dancer, sculptor, actor, painter, playwright, poet, performance artist, potter, artists all - the morning pages are both our wilderness and our trail (Cameron, 1995: 171).

To illustrate the idea that blocks in the creative process can be part of the process and intrinsic to human nature, I briefly introduce Buddhism, which has a slightly different perspective. Capra (1992: 107) discusses how Buddha spoke of the four noble truths. The *first* states that suffering or frustration is part of every human's life experiences. We find it difficult to face the fact that nothing remains fixed or permanent, forgetting that the basic features of nature are flow and change. The *second* noble truth states that when suffering occurs, we resist this flow, and try to cling to things, ideas, and people. We try to divide the perceived world into separate and individual things, and so try to confine "the fluid forms of reality into fixed categories created by the mind" (Capra, 1992: 107). The *third* noble truth states that one can end this suffering and frustration by constantly feeling oneself to be at one with all life, so there is no more sensation of the 'separate self'. The *fourth* noble truth is Buddha's prescription for ending suffering, the eightfold path that brings one to the state of liberation, called nirvana. Although as a doctrine it can seem defining, Buddha's principle is not one of dictatorship. Rather, he insists that this journey is an individual one; that one must find one's own path to nirvana. He indicates the importance of recognizing the impermanence of things.

I mention Buddhism here for two reasons. Artists talk of frustration when they are stuck, but I wonder whether if we, like Buddhists, understand better that things are not permanent, we will understand that being stuck is also temporary. The second reason follows on from Buddha's teaching that all he has given is guidelines, and that it is up to individuals to find their own path. The workshop created for this thesis was prepared with these ideas in mind: that the participant will be attending the workshop to receive guidelines with the help of a facilitator, and the natural environment. Through discussions, it can be established that artist's block will not be a permanent affliction, any more than things in nature are permanent.

I list below some of the ways McNiff (1998) suggests of viewing difficulties differently, so that they become an ally instead of a hindrance:

Mistakes: He sees 'mistakes' as allies in the creative process. They can help the artist move forward into new territory, and can show new avenues allowing for improvisation and spontaneity of expression.

Waiting: Periods of inactivity are essential to the process. Giving oneself space to not create is also important. Compulsively pushing the work along could make it contrived and lacking authenticity. (But he does suggest not waiting too long, or nothing might emerge.)

Doubt: The interplay between doubt and confidence is what McNiff sees as part of the creative process. Doubt is natural and healthy; keeping us humble.

Frustration and discontentment: This state, he says, is an eternal "wellspring for artistic expression" (McNiff, 1998:78). Impatience with being stuck could result in shifting one into a new period of creativity through a burst of emotion. Cameron also suggests "blasting through blocks" (1995: 158) and Leland (1990) says that to make shifts, one should "smash creative blocks" by changing direction or by trying something new.

In Chapter 1, I listed fear as the predominant cause of artist's block. In this section, it has been noted that experiencing being blocked is part of the creative process. Jeffers' (1987) premise is that instead of trying to rid ourselves of fear, we should embrace it and learn to find ways of working with it. Fear then becomes an ally.

We can't escape fear. We can only transform it into a companion that accompanies us in all our exciting adventures: it is not an anchor holding us transfixed in one spot (Jeffers, 1987:29).

Jeffers suggests that one can shift the way one perceives fear by changing the way it is handled. Holding it in a position of pain gives one the feeling of 'helplessness, depression and paralysis'. Rather, one should transmute these feelings into those of power, which would be "choice, energy and action" (Jeffers,

1987:33). When she mentions “power”, she means a power that comes from within, the power to view the world differently, and to react to situations by creating joy and satisfaction. Therefore, we could say that fear, like artist’s block itself, can, with a change of attitude, be seen as an ally.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored many different aspects of the creative process: such as play, imagination, discipline or enthusiasm, creating from soul, labyrinths, being lost, chaos, trusting the process, block as ally. Chapter 2 has shown the creative process as a journey, ultimately concluding that what may seem like negative aspects are part of the process, often necessary, and can benefit the creative outcomes. Human nature and the creative process mirror the way of the chaotic universe, and inherent in this is the understanding of duality in everything, which can help artists comprehend their processes, and not judge negatively times of being stuck. Essentially, as Hadden (2004) quotes from her meeting with Jerry Mundis, a writer who helps writers overcome writer’s block.

It is not an inability to work, but a choice (Hadden, 2004:219).

I have shown how in our Western way of thinking, straight-path thinking predominates; as left-brain dominance. Right-brain thinking is the meandering, unpredictable way of the creative process. Creative block, taking a straight-path perspective, can be seen as a terrible obstruction to creativity. But from the meandering or cyclical viewpoint, artist’s block is just part of the process, and may even be essential to it. As the ally, it pinpoints moments of change. The creative process is a playful journey, where one gets lost occasionally, where there are barriers and difficult situations to overcome, but all of which lead the artist to change direction and explore new avenues.

This journey to understand the creative process has empowered me to engage more comfortably and accept ‘the process’ without guilt. I began to see the process as sometimes having hardships, but mostly as fun adventures. Moments of not doing become as important to me as the constructive doing. Waiting to discover what might emerge is a time full of anticipation instead of despair. The ‘mess’ on the canvas has potential, and I look forward to what will emerge. It is my intention that the ideas explored in this thesis will effectively facilitate the workshops created for artists, allowing gentle understanding and encouragement for those going through difficult moments.

Chapter 3: Nature as a facilitator

This chapter looks closely at the reasons why I suggest that nature can be a facilitator of the creative process. I will look at a variety of research to help articulate what I have observed and personally encountered in workshops or other experiences of which being in nature was a key aspect. I refer to the previous chapters to help substantiate ways in which this could be relevant to the artist who is blocked, or as an aspect of creative process in general.

The word 'nature' has several meanings, referring to both human characteristics, and those aspects of the world that are not human or man-made. Read suggests:

by nature we mean the whole organic process of life and movement which goes on in the universe, a process which includes man, but which is indifferent to his generic idiosyncrasies, his subjective reactions, and temperamental variations (Read, 1970:16).

The Concise Oxford Dictionary has several definitions of nature, some of which are:

Thing's essential qualities, person or animal's innate qualities or character... general characteristics and feelings of mankind...inherent impulses determining character or action...vital force or functions or needs...Physical power causing phenomena of material world (1979: 726).

By these definitions, it seems that the word 'nature' refers to the innate aspects of all that is created in the universe, and also to character and a deeper unseen essence. For the purposes of this study, when I mention 'nature' or the natural world, I am talking about that part of the world which is not human, not man-made, and ideally not tampered with by humans. Nature is 'the wild' part of the world, both plant and animal kingdoms, places beyond the control of humans. Humans are a part of the universe, we are natural. However, we often forget this connection, or overlook it. We also destroy it through neglect and the belief that we are superior to it. We separate ourselves from the earth, the natural world, and we separate ourselves from our inner instinctive natures. The premise of this thesis is that the natural world, because of its innate power, can help us to recall our true natures, and perhaps find our wild, untamed, creative souls. If blocked artists can reconnect with this aspect, with their heart and soul, then they can connect once again to their creative enthusiasm. As Thomas Berry (1990), a cultural and religious scholar and an important revolutionary for the plight of the earth, says:

We cannot discover ourselves without first discovering the universe, the earth, and the imperatives of our own being. Each of these has a creative power and a vision far beyond any rational thought or cultural creation of which we are capable. Nor should we think of these as isolated from our own individual being or from the human community. We have no existence except within the earth and within the universe (Berry, 1990:195).

This is why I propose nature as a good and reliable facilitator, and especially for purposes of the workshop, to help artists re-engage with their creative process. Ideally I would consider a wild environment, preferably unaffected by humans if possible, for the workshops to be facilitated in. But this is not always possible. Due to funding restrictions, and availability of suitable venues, I chose to facilitate the workshops on farms away from the city, where there were areas of natural and man-planted vegetation. Regardless of this, the participants found these environments stimulating and peaceful. I suspect that even Botanical gardens in an urban environment could also be beneficial.

If the natural environment is to help facilitate the workshop, it is imperative to understand what this may entail. In Chapter 4, I explore facilitation in more detail, but for nature I have kept the definitions and role simple. The dictionary meaning for 'facilitate' is to:

Make easy, promote, help forward (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1979: 371).

Essentially the role of a facilitator is to help the participant move forward more easily. It is not to control, manipulate or prescribe, but rather to guide the participants towards experiencing growth for themselves, and finding their own truth. Nature has this ability. Not having a human ego that wants to show cleverness and boast success, nature does not manipulate for its own gain. It will, through reflection, visual stimulus and spiritual guidance, lead willing participants on their own healing journey. As modern humans, we don't always know how to surrender to this process of self-discovery. Through my observations and readings, I have seen transformation, however seemingly small, in those who spend time in natural places. An example of this is the student workshop I facilitated for this study, the report on which can be found in Chapter 6 on page 121. On reflection, and after discussions with the students, I realised that most of the students had no prior knowledge of nature, having spent most of their lives in the city. With hindsight, I see that I should have given them more guidance, given them a chance to practise being in nature, to learn how to 'be'.

Modern mankind has moved away from the natural world as its power source, place of mystery, and place to connect with spirit. We pollute the earth, control, and manipulate it. Photographer David T. Hanson is quoted by Gablik (1991) as saying that there is a Cartesian separation between mind and matter, and in consequence a separation between man and nature.

'The resulting loss of a holistic consciousness has created a lack of awareness of the interrelationships between man and nature and the world around him. Thus we have a dialectical view of man as separate from, even opposed to, nature and, the subsequent exploiting and ravaging of nature...' (Gablik, 1991:81).

The Wilderness Charter, written for the Wilderness Leadership School based in Durban, suggests that:

Wilderness is the landscape which contains only the plants and animals native to it. Where man is alone with the living earth. Where there is neither fixed nor mechanical artefact. Once this environment was everywhere, now only relics remain. Yet in these places are the original bonds between man and the earth. In these are the roots of all religion, history, art and science. In renewing these links lies the enduring value of wilderness to man... J. M. Feely: Date???

This Charter indicates that nature, our original source, would be the place to go if one needed healing, and to be reminded of self and one's connection to spirit. Thus it seems obvious that to help heal artist's block an artist should venture into the wilderness, or at least a natural place, for help. Several artists I interviewed said nature was important for inspiration or peace of mind. For Penfold (Appendix C: 154), getting out of the city and into the natural environment is important, as it energises her. De Menezes (Appendix C: 154) says that most of his work deals with the natural environment to some extent. For him, it helps make sense of the way we live our lives, and the cycles that we go through. When he feels low, he goes to a quiet beach where the stillness is invigorating. Similarly, when in a natural environment, away from the noise of other people, Kotze (Appendix C: 155) says she gets in touch with her emotions, becomes more aware. Gainer (Appendix C: 157) said that without a connection with nature, from which she primarily draws her inspiration, she feels panicked and blocked. Most of the students from the workshop (Chapter 5:121) mentioned that after the workshop they consciously sought out time in nature to connect with their creative-selves. One student declared that being in nature afforded "a shift in life where you question everything about yourself" (Chapter 6: 125); another said that, "It clears my thoughts and helps me relax as well as energise. It is where I can be free." (Chapter 6: 125)

Thomas Berry (1990) refers to the native cultures of the world, now few, but still present, as people we can learn from. Their connection to, and respect for, all of nature is, perhaps our last hope of saving the planet and changing the attitude of people towards the environment. If we were to destroy the various living forms on our planet, he says, a consequence would be that we would lose our connection to the divine presence. Through nature's "awesome magnificence" (Berry,1990: 6 - 12) we can know the divine; we refine our emotions and sensitivities through the songs, music, and rhythms we find around us; we grow in vigour because of the earth's challenging community. Thus, we feel the thrill of being alive. Berry holds that our creativity comes from the natural environment, that our words and images are inspired essentially by this environment, and the various beings in it.

Thomas Cumes (1998), a medical doctor, leader of trails in the wilderness and author, dedicates a chapter in his book to the energising aspect of nature, by observing, and gaining understanding from, several

different spiritual practices. His premise is that the many spiritual doctrines and teachings all essentially have the same principle: that spirit, or God, is in everything.

The Kundalini energy is said to pervade the entire cosmos, be present in every particle, and operate at every level. By understanding this power, we can gain understanding not only of ourselves but also of the cosmic energy of the planet and the whole universe... (Cumes, 1998:124).

While I was an undergraduate student, I spent hours outdoors struggling with the depiction of changing light on a natural object, and the difficulty of rendering texture on a two-dimensional surface. This meant that I did not always notice the other aspect of nature. Perhaps, also, it was not brought to my attention. However, I do remember feeling excited by the prospect of getting out of the building, getting away from the constraints of routine, and having a new first-hand experience. These experiences even now remain highlights when I am reminiscing with peers. The lessons I learned outdoors were often the most powerful -- for example, the realisation that there is light in shadow areas, which was pointed out to me by a lecturer while I was drawing a tree in a park. Since I finished studying, I have consciously made more effort to spend time in nature. This has helped me connect with the deeper power which rejuvenates, inspires, and helps me find inner peace. This has been beneficial to my general well being, and at times even directly influenced an artwork.

The purpose of the workshops is to help artists heal their artist's block, and I propose that the most obvious way to do this is to call on the wild, natural world for help: visually, spiritually, metaphorically and psychologically. I attempt to show that, for a non-formal education experience workshop that allows for individual expression and process, an appropriate place to start is the natural environment. First, it is a visual inspiration: just using the eyes, one is inspired by shapes, textures, and colours. Then, by bringing the powerful energy of nature to mind, one can connect with God or spirit, to speak to that deeper aspect of self, and to help give the artwork a sense of heart or soul. Nature can mirror for us aspects of self, and the natural creative rhythms that are important to the creative process, such as playfulness, chaos and contrast. Nature can provide powerful metaphoric signs, and reveal suggestions to be used as starting points for our creative journey. Nature is a healer, nurturing and soothing psychological wounds from our past, clearing the way for creative energy to rebuild itself

VISUAL

In Chapter 1, I looked at the possibility that an artist could be blocked because of a lack of inspiration. Schools and art institutions refer to nature as a good point of departure for teaching: for example, the study of natural laws gives a basic understanding of form, colour, tonal values, and design principles. It is

important for the student, in the early stages, to grasp and reflect on these. Often their work is judged by the skill they show in rendering nature accurately. So, nature can simply inspire artists visually, with colour, form, texture and light. Roz Cryer (Appendix C: 158) asks: "How can you feel uninspired when looking at a beautiful piece of nature?". There is always something lovely to capture and paint.

i. Seeing

Betty Edwards (1988:2) says that it is the ability of artists to see what is in front of them that enables them to draw representationally. They are essentially copying what is there, including things that are man-made. Read (1970) points out that that which is man-made more than likely originated from the natural laws of form, even if it is interpreted or changed through imagination. He suggests that man is essentially influenced and inspired by nature -- although one could argue that not all artists are inspired visually by it. Like Read, Taylor (1996) thinks that even abstract artworks have some connection to nature. He indicates the importance of bringing together the worlds of art and nature through 'heightened environmental awareness', and suggests that the visual arts, more than other forms of art, have had a very close relationship with nature through the ages. He gives as an example the paintings in the Lascaux caves, which show how before scribally recorded history, man recorded, imitated, and interpreted nature and the movement and characteristics of animals:

Even the artist who consciously chooses the path of non-figuration does so in the certain knowledge that a majority of those viewing the resulting works will still seek to find associations with nature, discovering the horizon in the main horizontal – as the word suggests – for example. The artist, by virtue of being steeped in the study, form and colours, will likewise draw upon this stored reservoir of memories and sensations – however subconsciously (Taylor, 1996: 125).

Le Corbusier, the architect, drew inspiration from nature, finding harmony and balance in the proportions of a shell. Taylor quotes him as saying:

There is nothing more beautiful than a shell – it is pure harmony: it is the law of harmony. The concept is simple, singular. Its development is the sunburst or the spiral, inside and outside; it is quite amazing. (Taylor, 1996: 129).

Read (1970: 23) acknowledges two main aspects of art: the *objective*, coming from the observations made directly from nature or from the understanding of universal laws; and the *subjective*, which would vary according to the spectators' or makers' interpretation, response or imagination. Read points out our dualistic nature by highlighting two main aspects of art.

The principle of form is derived from the natural world. Form is also a function of perception. He suggests that there are two *objective* elements present in all artworks:

Form – the natural laws that govern the universe.

Colour –the external aspects of all physical forms which emphasise their material nature and texture. From these aspects, secondary properties arise which are a combination of the two, and he lists these: balance, symmetry, and rhythm. He says that individual artists seek to find a benchmark outside themselves to help create artwork with good ‘form’. By form, he means the shape of something. He suggests that it is from nature that artists seek the conditions that will give them the most pleasure, through their senses and mind. Nature being so vast and multiform, it could seem impossible to choose any one, general feature from which to make a benchmark. However, he says that artists generally sense this, and find their benchmarks instinctively. Read (1970) goes on to say that the basic forms that artists sense are the same as those found in nature. Mathematicians and scientists have created formulas and equations based on observations made in nature, finding laws that govern most natural things.

The principle of origination is a specific aspect of the human mind which pushes us to create, and value the creation of, symbols, fantasies, and myths. Origination is a function of imagination. This is the *subjective* aspect of creating, which imbues the artwork with personality, so that it does not become a bland copy of nature.

There is about such art purity, a severity and a discipline which corresponds only to one side of our nature – to the conscious desire to imitate and unconsciously to emulate the structural perfection of the physical universe. But we are endowed with a mind that is not satisfied with such a circumscribed activity - a mind that desires to create and adventure beyond the given. We are endowed, that is to say, with free will, and in virtue of this freedom we strive rather to avoid the fixed and regular features of the laws of nature, and to express instead a world of our own – a world which is a reflection of our feelings and emotions, of that complex of instincts and thoughts which we call the personality (Read, 1970:29-30).

ii. Imagination

In Chapter 2, on page 29, I discussed the importance of the imagination to the creative process, highlighting the way in which it helps with the connection to the soul and to the, playful child-like self. It was also established that observing nature can help inspire the imagination, and aid in the creation of original artworks. The natural environment, the way it functions, its minute details, and wondrous shapes and mechanisms, have fed the imagination of children, and inspired mythological stories throughout the ages. Unicorns or monsters almost all have some resemblance to the natural elements. The science-fiction movie-makers, of *The Matrix* trilogy, for example, used images of insects and the laws of creation in designing creatures and fantasy buildings (*The Matrix Revolutions*, CG Revolution).

To continue with the ideas mentioned by Read, I quote Berry (1990), who thinks that nature and the imagination have an important connection. What he says here summarizes the role of nature in helping to expand the imagination towards creativity, and to enrich human lives.

If we have powers of imagination, these are activated by the magic display of colour and sound, of form and movement, such as we observe in the clouds of the sky, the trees and bushes and flowers, the waters and the wind, the singing birds, and the movement of the great blue whale through the sea. If we have words with which to speak and think and commune, words for the inner experience of the divine, words for telling stories to our children, words with which we can sing, it is again because of the impressions we have received from the variety of beings around us (Berry, 1990:11).

For Read (1970), as we have seen above, the value of the natural world is as inspiration for both the eye and the imagination. But it is also inspiration for the spirit. We established in the previous chapter the importance of the engagement with the inner soul or spirit in an artwork. Read suggests that nature can help viewers tap into their imagination, and can also drive artists forward, through deep connection, perhaps giving a sense of purpose and passion.

SPIRITUAL

In Chapter 2, on page 33, I discussed what is, or could be, meant by soul, and its importance in the creating of powerful artwork, or sustaining the creative process. In this section, I show the correlation between the soul and nature. Discussions around various aspects of this often reflect the idea that soul, or connection to the powerful essence fundamental, to the natural world, is not only important to humankind, but essential. Because of our soul connection with the spirit of nature, the natural environment can facilitate healing in artists, or re-immersion in their creative processes. If an artist is not directly inspired by the visual aspect of nature, there is, as was discussed in the previous chapter, always the soul or heart connection to the artwork which is important to the creative process. For facilitators who work in the natural environment, the relationship between the human soul and nature's 'soul' is an inseparable one.

In this section, I briefly discuss how nature could be important in helping artists connect with their soul, heart or inner self.

i. First-hand vs. second-hand experiences

London (2003), author, artist, art teacher and workshop facilitator, talks passionately about the importance of connecting to nature. He facilitates workshops in the natural environment because he believes strongly that through drawing closer to nature, or connecting to the "Great Reality" (London,

2003), the artist can find inspiration. This comes through both in the ability to see, and also through a deeper, soul connection. He suggests this needs to be done through direct encounters with the wild, alive world. Nature's soul gift can only be received when meeting nature first-hand, not, via other people's perceptions, and especially not the world as it comes to us through the media, a virtual world of images, sounds, and pictures. We often perceive this virtual world to be real, but it lacks the vital first-hand experience of nature, as seen not only through the eyes but also through the:

complex body sensations and associated thoughts...Like the denizens of the cave described in Plato's *Republic*, we have taken the shadows while the actual world glides unobtrusively by. In art, imagery generated from experiences that refer to the world but are not themselves the stuff referred to can hardly be compelling (London, 2003:60).

London feels that it is essential for a person to experience nature first hand, and asks:

If we have never fundamentally met and conversed with Nature, what original sources for our creativity could we possibly draw from? (London, 2003:64).

He goes on to state that:

Much of what is taken for creativity is really the juggling of secondhand material, which itself consists of shadows and rumors of some remote original observation. Art becomes fascinated with art: literature with syntax: dialog with rhetoric. Spiritual appetites are appeased by religious dogmas: the gifts of imagination and dexterity are turned into privileged commodities for sale to the highest bidder (2003:64).

Seeing nature for the first time, we go past a world of second-hand news to experience personally the pulse of an alive and wild universe, one that is not hiding, but is mysterious. London (2003) suggests that by opening ourselves, body, mind and spirit, to the stream of information and events the universe offers, we open ourselves to creative possibilities. Nature is happening around us; it is the limitations we place on our minds that obscure nature and block our access to the here and now. We domesticate nature, and then assume that this reduced, tamed environment is all there is. By doing this, we in turn tame ourselves. We live by the clock; we control our lives through routines, and we also "control" (London, 2003) nature.

London's perspective may be a harsh one, but he clearly advocates nature as a place in which to connect to soul. An exercise that can be used in a workshop to help the participants directly experience nature, is to have one participant lead through the natural environment another, who has closed eyes (Chapter 5: 112)

For over 20 years, Bill Plotkin PhD, a Depth Psychologist, ecotherapist and wilderness guide, has been guiding people into the wilderness -- not as he says, to see just the grand mountains and canyons, but to

have reflected to them the wilds of their own souls. He holds that the most effective way of connecting to soul is nature-based, and he calls this “Soulcraft”.

The individual human soul is one element of the fabric of nature. You are not in anyway separate from nature. The wild world reflects your essence back to you just like a still lake reflects your image. Is that reflection in you or the lake? Neither. Both you and the lake are in the world, and the lake reflects that fact back to you. In the same way, your soul, your essence, is in the world, and nature mirrors that fact back to you (Plotkin, 2003:216).

Plotkin refers to soul as one’s “true self”; it is who you truly are. Your soul is you. He refers to Thomas Berry, who considers the word “nature”: it comes from the Latin word *natus* which means “to be born” (Plotkin, 2003:16). Plotkin suggests that nature and soul are intimately connected:

the soul holds our individuality together and gives us our identity. Soul and nature are only slightly different ways of talking about the essence of a thing, whether a stone, a blossom, or a person. The soul of the blossom is its essential nature. Our human souls consist of those aspects of self that are most natural, that are most of *nature* – the aspects of self to which nature herself gave birth (Plotkin, 2003:16).

Therefore, to connect to the soul one needs to go deep into the wilds of self.

ii. Connection to ‘wild self’

Ian McCallum (2006), a medical doctor, psychiatrist, naturalist and writer, explores the relationship between human beings and nature. He describes his notion of what ‘wildness’ is. Many of his suggestions, such as dance and play, have been discussed in the previous chapters, and established as essential to the creative process.

To be wild is to be alert to the needs of the flesh and the warning calls of distress. It is to be spontaneous – to live one’s earthliness and one’s notions of God independent of outside approval. It is to dance, to work and to play with passion and, when called upon, to act dispassionately, swiftly and without personal feeling or bias. It is to wait as patient as a heron – to be able to wait for hours at the edge of hunger. It is to understand the double meaning of the word outrageous – to act *without* rage, to do something out of character, to cross-dress, to stilt walk to a disciplinary hearing, to use a shoe as a basket ball and to make a fool of yourself without being stupid. Its other meaning is to act *out of* rage. It is to be aware of the fury at the edge of an ‘inner’ hurricane and to know your way back to the calmness at its eye (McCallum, 2006:105 -106).

We humans, he says, are the only animals that can turn our backs on our animal nature, and this is when we imprison ourselves. This cage, or “stuckness” (McCallum, 2006), is a way of describing the loss of creativity. Reflected in the natural environment is this wild-self, so where better to explore its energy and potential than there? Christian (Appendix D: 162) has a similar message, establishing that as an artist what one really wants to do is to wake up, and to engage in life with a survival mentality that provides

more than food for the mouth -- rather food for the soul. He says that when one puts people into a natural environment one is getting them to engage with this survival element. Survival, he says, is heightened awareness; in which one cannot rely on any pre-existing knowledge or experience. This is where the notion of "newness" comes in, and it is more easily experienced in nature than in an urban environment. By taking art students into the natural environment, he says, you give them an experience which "flips them on their heads" (Christian, Appendix D: 164). He has had in his workshops youngsters who have not seen rows of trees before! When I facilitated a student workshop, I found that, for many of the students, being on a farm in Kokstad was itself a new experience, and spending time alone in nature was extreme. It took them some time to get used to it, but many indicated that they learned to appreciate it.

iii. Meditation

Meditation, or even having a quiet moment in nature, can help engage one with 'wildness', and with the creative spontaneous, outrageous inner self, as McCallum puts it in the previous quote. Being quiet, or using techniques of meditation, we can connect to the essence of nature. Cumes (1998) points out that, if focusing on a single natural object, such as a flower, can have a profound meditative effect, then how much more can being immersed in a natural place, preferably the wilderness, be? Plotkin (2003:109) shows that many different religious or spiritual practices teach their followers meditation skills -- Buddhism, Taoism, and yoga among them -- in a variety of styles. But, generally, the meditations are fundamentally similar. When meditating, one is quiet, alone or with a like-minded group, sitting up with spine straight, focusing on something such as a breath, a candle, chanting, or watching without judgement what passes through the mind. Mentioned in Chapter 5 page 112, are ways of spending solo time in a natural environment.

The result of these different meditation techniques is a reduction in the brain waves to a slower 'alpha' state. This state is similar to the right-brain activities of creativity mentioned in Chapter 2 page 34. The brain waves slow down, and can be measured by a machine, which shows the characteristic alpha brain patterns. Being in an alpha state allows the less dominant right brain a chance to perform better. To reduce migraines, Zdenek (1989) learned relaxation techniques from Dr. M Werbach. In this relaxed state, she felt herself making a shift from her left brain to her right brain. She found her creative abilities were heightened, and she experienced a richness of imagery in her mind's eye. She then researched techniques to help her reach this state of awareness more regularly.

iv. Ecstasy

Suzi Gablik suggests that, in this Western culture with its luxurious, man-made mechanised environment, we have lost our ability to have ecstatic experiences. Yet it seems to be a fundamental human need to seek these out.

Ecstatic experience puts us in touch with the soul of the world and deepens our sense that we live in the midst of a cosmic mystery. (Gablik, 1993:84)

Gablik sees a need for Western culture to connect once again with the earth. She quotes Bill Devall, an ecologist and author of *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends*, whose hypothesis is that humans cannot wait for the 'perfect intellectual theory' to solve their problems:

When a poet opens the door and takes a step outside the house of intellect – the house of concepts and abstractions and quantification taught in schools and demanded in environmental impact statements – he or she may spontaneously have intercourse with rivers and mountains. (Gablik, 1993: 84).

Zdenek (1989) thinks these feelings of ecstasy are a rare gift from the right brain. Ecstasy is a very powerful experience, such as the inner tremble that comes from being on the top of a mountain.

According to Cumes, 'ecstasy' is Greek for 'standing outside of oneself' (Cumes, 1998:126). He describes it as:

a change in consciousness implying transcendence or at least partial transcendence of the ego, and is associated with bliss. It is accompanied by emotional rapture, mental exaltation, vision of another world, a great mystical event, illumination, revelation, insight, or awareness of becoming different (Cumes, 1998: 126).

"Wilderness rapture" is a phrase devised by Cumes which describes the effect of nature on the psyche.

"Transcendental" is another term he uses; it defines as a state beyond ordinary limits and the boundaries of experience, where there is a connection with the supernatural, promoting feelings of "awe, wonder, at oneness, harmony, and inner peace." (Cumes, 1998: 125)

Cumes also mentions Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of human needs" (Cumes, 1998:126), where the ultimate experience is called a 'peak experience'. Maslow's description is usually shown in a triangular-shaped diagram that illustrates what is needed for a person to be happy and healthy. On the lower levels of the diagram are the essential aspects of survival: finding food, shelter, and security. In Chapter 1, on page 20, I mentioned that the lack of financial stability could affect an artist and cause artist's block. A "self-actualised" (Heylighen, 1992) person has achieved most of these essentials, and especially has developed self-esteem. In other words, there is a confidence that who and what one is is

sufficient. Self-actualised people tend to be very creative, in all aspects of life. They are generally unconcerned with what people think. As mentioned in Chapter I (page 8), low self-esteem is particularly damaging to the creative process; it is also important that one is not concerned with what other people think. Maslow, according to Cumes, indicates that the peak experiences are 'pure': they occur for their own sake, with no ego-related ulterior motive. The stimuli for this state are classical music, dance, rhythm such as drumming, love, sex, reverence, and body awareness. Many of these have been mentioned in the previous chapters as being stimuli for the creative process. Cumes suggests that Maslow probably did not study people who were wilderness enthusiasts, because these peak experiences are common for those venturing into the wild.

McKenny (Appendix C: 156) says that when in she is surrounded by nature, she finds she begins to feel reconnected to her body, and then to deeper levels of herself. She has experiences that she likens to religious ones – of "bliss". This is similar to her experience when making artworks. Therefore she sees a strong connection between the two.

METAPHORICAL

Symbolism, metaphors and archetypes are more often than not the language of the visual arts. Much literature is dedicated purely to this subject. Carl Roberts (Appendix C: 157) says that nature is a "lexicon", and that many symbolic meanings attached to animals, or parts of the natural environment, are similar throughout the world, or within communities. These symbols can be used to express ideas, and through their commonality of interpretation function as an alphabet.

If artists open their eyes, mind and soul, they can find ideas reflected in nature: visual, emotional and sensory. These can benefit and encourage their creative process. Many of the causes of artist's block reflect aspects in the artist's life which need healing, understanding or resolving. The visual or sensory experiences in nature can serve to show artists the way forward. Guiding and mirroring are two important ways in which the natural world can influence them. This suggestion may seem outlandish. Yet the idea has been used for hundreds of years, indicating that there must be something in it that can have a profound effect on people. Moore (2004:75) suggests one should use these clues as 'keys' to help one tap into deeper, sometimes darker, aspects of self. This will help understand, and transform them into the lighter self. Cumes describes the clues as signs:

This sign, be it a metaphor, archetype, or something else, can offer a solution to one's problem and become a guide to the perplexed seeker of wisdom...Frequently the sign takes the form of an animal, which brings a message to the psyche at that moment in time (1998: 99-100).

Simpson (2000), a research scientist for 20 years and now a Jungian psychotherapist, explains ideas that academia finds difficult to articulate, basing his argument on Jung's findings. Jung, as far back as 1916, was exploring and experimenting with ideas concerning the human psyche and its interrelationship with the environment. Jung is often an important voice in literature or academia when explaining sometimes outlandish ideas. His research helps validate the experiences of the authors, and helps articulate the ideas into a quantifiable and accessible form. It seems to me that Jung's explanations and research have become a safe container for these unusual ideas, especially if they are difficult to communicate and to prove.

i. Symbol

Jung (Simpson, 2000) suggests, through his research on transformations in the psyche, that the spirit can find its way past blockages by using the symbols found in the I-Ching, or shamanic symbols found in nature by nature-based cultures. A divinatory system can help us get in contact with the unseen world; it uses an element of chance, a gap, through which the spirit can communicate by picking out a symbol.

Divination gives a voice to what the ego has rejected. It brings up the hidden complement or shadow of the situation in order to link you with the myths and spirits behind it. This changes the way you see yourself, your situation and the world around you... divination is not an ideology or a belief but a creative way of contacting spirit. It is imagination perceiving forces and inventing ways to deal with them... Using a divinatory system is an exploration of the subconscious side of a situation. The symbols evoked adjust the balance between you and the unknown forces behind it (I Ching: 10-11)

Simpson finds consulting the I Ching invaluable:

I use the I Ching to illustrate how, when we feel stuck beyond reason, magic or science, the symbolic function can connect us with the objective psyche, suggesting that the very 'impossibility' of the method can engender in us a creative openness to the movement of spirit (Simpson, 2000:154).

Being part of the unconscious, the sign will speak to one in the language of the unconscious. It arises out of the analogical right-brain rather than the cognitive left-brain activity. Jung uses the term "objective psyche" as another word for "unconscious" or "not this thing or that: it is the unknown as it immediately affects us" (Simpson,2000:141). This description implies that there is more to the unconscious than can be found in one's accessible memory. It extends into the 'collective psyche', some of whose components come from somewhere else. Therefore, the objective viewpoint is "independent of and outside the viewpoint of the viewer" (Simpson,2000: 141).

These signs, according to Cumes (1998:100), are known as "power animals" by shamans, but they are also referred to as "medicine" by other Native American cultures, as Ted Andrews (2002) points out.

The animal becomes a symbol of a specific force of the invisible, spiritual realm manifesting within our own life. The characteristics and activities of these totems will reveal much about our own innate powers and abilities (2002:2).

The observation of these symbols (animals, plants, weather) in nature can help the artist find a new journey forward, the symbols showing the way, if observed and understood. It is a type of divination using animal and plant images. If allowed to do so, they can guide the creative process, and stimulate the imagination.

ii. Archetypes

The archetype can be used in a similar way to the sign. Cumes describes an archetype, with reference to Jung: Archetypes are universal ideas or themes that are the key elements of fables, myths, fairy stories, legends, and sagas. Plotkin refers to archetypes as “enduring themes and patterns” (Plotkin, 2003: 30). They are found in all societies, and are a potential within all humans. Some of the examples he gives are: the Hero, the Trickster, the Fool, the Sage, and the Magician. Tarot cards use these patterns in much the same way as the I Ching, as visual pointers or keys that show the archetypes of human experience.

Not only do our archetypal forms exist in the human psyche, but they are also found in nature, in elements such as wind, water, animals and mountains. Plotkin asks:

Why do different individuals get drawn to different elements of nature? Why those? Possibly these are the earth archetypes to which our (unconscious) psyches already attribute meaning, that resonate with the deepest possibilities within us (Plotkin, 2003: 238-239).

iii. Metaphor

The metaphor is the essential healing power for both the shaman and the art therapist. The two have similar roles, and Moon likens them to one another:

The shaman starts his special life by going on his own painful journey... The power of his healing is formed in his willingness to go with those who come to him for help as they make their own internal pilgrimage. In this way the shaman embodies valuing and ownership of the difficult, potent inner world of those who seek his wisdom (Moon, 1990: 9).

I understand this to mean that artists can find in nature reflective metaphors that can help them to re-engage with their creative journey. The art therapists' and shamans' role is to push seekers into finding their personal path by exploring all aspects of the mysterious self, and deciding for themselves the meaning of their journeys. They understand that the seekers, or patients, often lack the belief that they

already hold the power to heal themselves. The use of metaphors makes this exploration easier. Artists are encouraged to use their imagination to create their own solutions, thereby giving their lives meaning.

I experienced an example of this profound use of metaphor. During the student workshop I ran in April 2005, one of the students drew a tree whose roots couldn't be seen. He reflected that this represented his life, and that although he couldn't see or know all his 'roots', they were in fact there, hidden, yet supportive and essential to who he is (Appendix B, DVD: 152).

Art therapists know that the artworks of their patients reflect the deeper workings of their minds and emotions, through the use of colour, shape and images. The patient uses the image to help articulate issues, sometimes talking to or about the image.

Art psychotherapists are by nature metaphoreticians. It is our role to see, listen and interact with the symbolic graphic language and actions of our patients (Moon, 1990:11).

Moon feels that it is imperative that the therapist and facilitator acts as a receptor first, and then responds as a reflector, using the metaphorical images as visual communicators. He also suggests that one should go beyond the verbal meaning of metaphor, into deepened and expanded thinking, so that the patients get to the point of what they are experiencing. He proposes the use of ritual or symbolic action to help widen the interpretation, and gives as an example the Christian parable of breaking of bread:

The metaphor lends itself to multiple interpretations and understanding of the actions, ranging from re-enactment of an actual event, to recapitulation of a miraculous transubstantiation, to dramatization of existential poetry regarding human brokenness (Moon, 1990:11).

I have looked at art therapy to indicate the power of metaphor to help heal artist's block. Art has power to heal and transform, because of the metaphors inherent in the process. A facilitator should not interfere with that process, but should listen and notice, helping by interacting with the symbolic role the metaphors present. The artwork, through the visual images, can mirror what is relevant and in need of further exploration. So, too, can nature mirror what is relevant to the artist at that time.

iv. Synchronicity

To help explain how these signs may appear at just the appropriate time to help the artist, I once again refer to Jung's ideas. He points to the possibility that the universe is both intelligent and responsive, making things happen for our benefit. He dubbed this notion "synchronicity":

Jung describes synchronicity as a meaningful coincidence where two events occur simultaneously, linking the inner psyche with the outer event (Cumes, 1998:115).

Cameron (1995:62) likens this experience to asking for help and having one's prayers answered. The answer may be anything from a cryptic image or animal, or a happening that may need processing and reflecting on, to a clearly usable image. It may be subtle or extreme, depending on the individual's interpretation and desire.

London (2003:153) suggests that one's ability to notice these synchronistic events is that of "a good listener". If one wishes to have good and relevant conversations with nature, so that it can help one in art-making, then one needs to be open and sensitive to the nuances around one. Practice and intention, coupled with awareness, can keep one open to signs that may have symbolic and archetypal meaning. These are given at a precise, synchronistic moments, giving significance to one's life and art-making.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

My understanding of the skills that a psychotherapists may use is the ability to reflect, as if using a mirror, what the clients have said, perhaps rephrasing it so that the clients can experience themselves objectively. The idea is not to tell them what to do or how to do it, since learning from experience and personal insights is far more powerful. I understand that dream therapists help the client to understand the deeper workings of the mind reflected through their dreams. Whereas the existentialist art therapist uses the canvas to reflect visually what is going on in the client's heart and mind. There is also the fairly new field, known as Ecotherapy, which I understand encourages the client to seek healing through being in nature.

Opening the heart to what is seen and felt in the natural world allows the intellect and the imagination to find helpful stories and images that guide the creative process forward. Nature can mirror aspects of our self back to us. I was given this quote while on a facilitation course I attended. It is from the Wilderness Guides Ethics:

Wilderness ethics arises from the establishment between the human and the living earth. As members of the Wilderness Guides Council, we believe that Nature, in all its forms, is our wisest teacher, the mirror of the soul (VQ workshop notes).

As Plotkin (2003:237) mentions, by merging with the earth, and knowing that we are part of her forms and forces, we can regain our souls.

Earth so effectively mirrors our soul powers simply because our souls are elements of earth's soul (Plotkin, 2003: 238).

Kehoe expounds on this idea by making use of the hologram.

A hologram is a process in which 'the whole' is contained in each and every one of its parts... It now appears that the nature of reality itself is holographic and that the brain operates holographically, as well. Our thinking processes seem to be identical to the primary state of the universe, made up of all the same 'stuff'. The brain is a hologram interpreting the holographic universe (Kehoe, 1992: 15 -16).

Kehoe points out that we live simultaneously in two worlds, that of the inner reality (our thoughts, emotions and attitudes) and the outer reality (people, places, and events).

i. Ecopsychology

As far back as 1997, Theodore Roszak started putting together ideas that are now called "Ecopsychology". It has its roots in Buddhism, other mystical and oral traditions, the Romantic movement in Europe, the Transcendental movement, psychology, and ecology. Ecopsychology aims to give experiential opportunities to help people form spiritual and emotional connections to the ecological system they are part of. Ecopsychologists hold that human health and well-being cannot be separated from the whole, and that there must be a bridge between humans and the earth. (www.lila.info/document_view). The term ecopsychology seems also to be interchangeable with the term Organic Psychology. Both are based largely on Michael J. Cohen's books. This summary of what Organic Psychology is comes from the internet:

An example of Organic Psychology is deciding to take a walk in the park in order to think or feel better. You benefit from the refreshing mind-set that results from choosing to visit a natural area and enjoy nature's grace balance and restorative powers there. Organic Psychology is a nature-connecting science that helps you obtain similar, stronger benefits when you want them, backyard or backcountry:

It enables your thinking to interlace with nature. You benefit from composting into fertile thoughts the garbage that destructive aspects of society have dumped into your psyche.

It helps you to recycle how you think and feel; your renewed psyche and resilience more effectively repair the damage inflicted on yourself, society and nature.

It gives you the power to make sensible changes and refute detrimental relationships.

Our destiny depends upon us using Organic Psychology as a tool to expand our consciousness and strengthen our love for the whole of life (www.OrganicPsychology.com).

Cohen points out that nature is "non-verbal" (1989: 1), and therefore we need ways to help us interact non-verbally with it. He has several books and courses which help with this. He has devised more than a hundred connecting experiences to help open humans to their senses (he suggests that there are 53 natural survival senses), and believes that these will help one connect to nature within and nature without. Since the visual arts are in their essence non-verbal, many of Cohen's exercises can be useful in the creation of the workshop. In Chapter 5, on page 118, I have modified some of Cohen's nature-connecting exercises for this purpose.

ii. Dichotomies

Plotkin points out that we live with dichotomies:

There is desire and despair – the desire to commune with the soul, the despair born of soul estrangement. There is attraction and repulsion – attraction to the rich realm of the dark, repulsion from monsters and demons. There is danger and seduction, the threat of death and the allure of a new life. There is knowing and not knowing. There is hope for a new and joyous way of living, and grief for years in emptiness (Plotkin, 2003: 217).

Existential art therapists have a

clear acceptance of the belief that suffering and struggle are essential elements of life and are universally experienced.... For the existentialist the primary value of life is to live it to the fullest, as demonstrated in the actions of free choice, assertion, love and creative work. Accordingly, these manifestations of intensity are not possible without pain, struggle and risk (Moon, 1990:6).

This quote highlights the human experiences of life, and the rhythm that moves them from high to low, from creativity to non-creativity, with emotional opposites often swirling together. Moon knows from his experience that it is important to pay homage to his patients' pain, rather than trying to make them feel better. In the previous chapter (page 44), I referred to the duality that is intrinsically a part of human experience: feminine/masculine, negative/positive, darkness/light, warm/cold, and emotion/reason. So I take this to mean that artist's block is part of the lows of creativity from which the highs are derived. Death and darkness are part of the creative process and can therefore be seen as its allies. (Chapter 2, page 44).

These dichotomies in humans are found in nature also. Getty (1990) points out that the earliest civilizations worshipped the earth, calling her Mother Earth, Gaia, Great Mother, among other names. The Goddess as Nature was an integral part of life. They understood her dichotomy as both the bearer of life and the one who could take life away. The patriarchal societies which followed these cultures revered the masculine, symbolised by the Sun: that which is up above, intellectual, light, seen as superior to the earth, with strong egos that need to dominate, finding power and strength through knowledge of right and wrong. Mother Earth's creative intuition became one of foreboding, darkness, and associated with death. Women with earthly healing powers were often labeled "witches"(Getty, 1990:28), and put to death.

Jung's archetype for this dark aspect of self he called the "shadow" (Plotkin, 2003:268).. The parts of self which are often rejected are seen as perverse, or socially unacceptable. Plotkin describes the shadow as being the converse of the ego, and as having some attributes that could be considered positive, such as generosity and spontaneous creative expression that the societal approving ego would never consider. Mostly the negative aspects of the shadow-self can be seen as disagreeable to the ego, and as terrifying because they surface when not always appropriate or wanted. We project our negative shadow on to other

people, and there find rage, weakness, arrogance and cruelty. We also project this on to nature, and find dark, hairy monsters, forests, bats, hurricanes and the like. But to find balance and to manifest our inner creative gifts, we must befriend our shadow. Plotkin (2003) sees these dark aspects as important if we are to mature, because without them our characters will be unbalanced, fragmented, and incomplete. This links with the Taoists, who say that to find harmony it is necessary to acknowledge the need for both. Plotkin (2003) suggests that if we plumb the depth of these dichotomies, we will find they lead to “paradox”. We are not either /or, but rather both /and. We are both light and dark, both knowing and not knowing.

In nature we see the acceptance and power of the dualities. Plotkin (2003:253) understands the importance of the dark as a place where the wanderers are likely to discover their soul, and says that those who sink deeper into ‘more fertile, darker soil’ find wilder possibilities. He says that the greatest gift in this dark space is not what you find, but rather how it may change you; that we need to have “faith in the night”. Because there is darkness, we can see or experience light, as it creates the contrast. Artists often use and understand this as tonal values, which create form and dramatic effects in their artworks. Through death, we are given life. Nutrients are reabsorbed and dead matter is processed by earthworms and other creatures in the dark realms of the undergrowth of the forest, giving new life and creative power to the trees that reach towards the light. Nature thus shows us that the fuelling for creative enterprises comes from the ‘dark’. Humans, if they choose, can find their creative fuelling in the depths of their psyche, the places of fear and the unknown self. Art therapists use art to help reveal to patients their darker selves. Through accepting and understanding these feared experiences, they can be inverted so as to strengthen and heal. In Chapter 2, on page 44, it was established that artist’s block can be viewed as an ally in the creative process. Plotkin (2003:267) looks at the teachings of Don Juan, a Yaqui sorcerer, who was Carlos Castaneda’s teacher, and indicates his understandings of the teachings by saying:

ask death to be your ally, to remind you, especially at times of difficult choices, what is important in the face of your mortality. Imagine death as ever present, accompanying you everywhere just out of sight behind your left shoulder (Plotkin, 2003:267).

Plotkin suggests we look for where death lives within us. It can be at the point of a big change at someone’s actual death, or just at the end of some experience. One needs to surrender into this change and to the feelings and emotions that may arise, so that one can let go of the need to cling to what one knows, and allow change to happen. Reiterating this point, Williams (1981), who analyses Castaneda’s experience and teachings of Don Juan, explains the ally to be:

an autonomous spirit or complex that may appear in any conceivable form... Ultimately the allies are the masks of God... The ally is an aspect of God that forces itself upon us in dreams, visions, symptoms, and uncanny synchronistic events (Williams, 1981:99-100).

This ally may at times present us with frightening situations, such as being lost or in the dark; it may show aspects of self that do not seem nice or kind, such as death. But these moments can be incredibly important to the process, by allowing change. It could be the very discomfort that shifts artists out of their block.

iii. Dialogue with nature

Dialoguing with nature can be likened to dialoguing with a trained psychologist. Throughout his book, London (2003) emphasises that as humans we can dialogue with nature, and that, this can help us, as artists, get to know ourselves better, and can be supportive and inspirational. He thinks that artists who see themselves as “alone”, creating only from within themselves, are pompous, and that they inflict a heavy burden on themselves.

if you withdraw from the arena of discourse, if you fail to listen, then for you Nature becomes silent. And you are left alone. Deaf, you think that the world is not speaking, not singing day and night, not bringing news about everything that ever was and is (London, 2003:78).

By drawing closer to nature, by engaging in a “sacred conversation” (London, 2003) with nature, by listening and looking, we can learn to speak nature’s language. London suggests that a:

quieted mind within a body at peace prepares us for perceiving that portion of the talking universe that speaks softly and at a pace beneath and beyond that of ordinary consciousness... Nature is always engaged in a complex conversation with absolutely every entity in the universe. The way of Nature can be said to be the sum total of this universal conversation (London, 2003:79).

He points out that both our bodies and the entire atmosphere are all giving off information. We only need think of radio and television waves --- these are around us all the time, but unless we have the correct receiver, we can’t pick up the signals. London believes that everyone can learn, if determined, to pick up and read the signals of the world. If quiet, with a patient and calm mind, one can hear nature’s voice. This won’t happen through our “normal cognitive channels” (London, 2003:80). London has noticed that artists take their sensory and their imaginative capacities seriously. To get closer to nature, we must employ an array of mental imaginative capabilities: dreaming, fantasizing, intuiting, wondering, visualizing. If we believe that nature is wise, articulate, always speaking, and never lying, then, in an unhurried and attentive frame of mind, we can allow nature to guide our exploration of the image. London goes so far as to suggest that one could converse with nature. Sitting quietly, and opening oneself to the possibilities, one should allow nature to make the “first move” (London, 2003). Hints of this conversation can be evident in the body: a flutter in the heart, the quiver of the lip, a shiver down the spine. These suggestions by London may sound strange, but he recommends that one should not be too literal in one’s

interpretation of the signs. He points out that history records many people who have had such conversations with nature. For example Moses and the burning bush, and Muhammad, who indicated a kind of “disturbance in the field” (London, 2003:121). Listen to the outer world and inner imagination. That which is created becomes a visual representation of the inner dialogue. Monet repainted his subject over and over because there was so much to say about the infinite facets, the exquisite details, and the subtle and complex voices of nature.

iv. Wandering in nature

Plotkin (2003) concurs with London (2003), and suggests that “wandering in nature” is the most essential activity for the contemporary ‘Westerner’ who has strayed so far from nature. This harks back to the discussions on ‘trusting the process’ and enjoying the meandering journey of the labyrinth in Chapter 2. Plotkin (2003:243-244) says nature can complement the noisy intensity of the cities with all its news and social chatter. We need nature’s news to save our souls. Within nature, we can find the seeds for dreams, storytelling, symbolic artwork and soul poetry. He suggests wanderers should take time to roam around in the natural environment, perhaps starting out on a trail and then wandering off it. This way the wanderers can discover that they will have to use hunches, intuition, and mysterious interests to guide them on this now ‘unpathed’ journey. They must tune into something deeper, and listen to find indications as to whether to go either left or right, to sit or stand or follow an animal track. Sometimes the intention is to find something, and other times there are no set intentions. This adventure brings forth a sense of wonder and surprise.

In Chapter 5 page 118, I have put together an experience that could help an artist on a workshop engage with their creative process as a journey by wandering in the natural environment. Wandering in nature is an experience that mirrors the creative process. Only by taking a chance, and doing something other than the accepted and already understood and perhaps perfected, can one find new ways of continuing on a creative journey. In Chapter 2 on page 39 I discuss briefly the value of being lost. Wandering off the path and feeling unsure of what the next steps in the process is often an essential aspect of the creative process.

v. Solitude

Plotkin indicates that there is a lot to be learned from truly being alone.

Although true solitude – alert aloneness without diversions – can be challenging, it is often the necessary gateway to our deepest passions, and the discovery of what we must do to live them (Plotkin, 2003:234).

One can rediscover ease, inspiration, belonging and wisdom in one's own company. Plotkin indicates that, as a wanderer, one must develop a relationship with one's "aleness" (Plotkin, 2003), since this teaches one about oneself in relation to the world, and how to comfort oneself. Although one can make art in groups, Moon (1990:143) has found the process of creating to be solitary, and this aleness is reflected in his blank canvas mirror. By being quiet in nature, using relaxation skills, or focusing on a single object, it is possible to relax the brain into an alpha state, thus increasing the chances of creative ideas and imagery that could galvanise the creative process for the blocked artist.

In the workshops I have facilitated for this study, I encourage the participants to spend some time alone. On the student workshop (Chapter 6: 125), many indicated that spending time alone was unusual, and spending time alone in nature even more so. One student explained that in her culture people never spent time alone, and considered being alone a form of punishment, rather than something precious. I realised with hindsight that I could have given more guidance as to how to be in nature, and discussed further how the students felt about it.

CONCLUSION

In this section, I have shown how nature can be a facilitator for creativity and healing. This can happen in several ways. The natural environment can stimulate the artist visually through textures, forms and colours, and by enticing the imagination. Spiritual connection, re-connecting the heart and soul of the artist to the creative process, can arise from first-hand experience while in nature; by connecting the artist to the wild, playful self through meditation and time spent alone. Healing or stimulation can be experienced through the mirrored symbols or archetypal stories encountered in nature, which can inspire metaphorical images for the creation of artworks; these archetypes can function almost as a tool for divination. Lastly, I considered the use of the natural environment for psychological healing, using our dark moments as part of the creative process, and valuable to our personal development. This metaphor is again useful in highlighting the conclusion of Chapter 2: that artist's block is not only part of the creative process but can also be viewed as an ally. By experiencing and observing nature, a deeper understanding of the creative process and artist's block can be obtained.

In evaluating the student workshop, I established that although it was difficult to conclude that the natural environment assisted everyone with their creative processes, there was a general agreement that there was some benefit, both at the time and for the future. The next chapter looks at ways of incorporating knowledge of artist's block, creative process, and the effects of nature into a workshop format.

Chapter 4: The workshop

Section 1 of this chapter considers the creation of a workshop, and incorporates information from the previous chapters, with my research into, and experience of, facilitating workshops. The aim of the workshop is to make it suitable for artists who are creatively blocked, and who could benefit from an experience with other artists within a natural environment. The research, setting-up, and facilitation of a workshop is as much a creative process as the making of an artwork. In *Section 2* I give a report on the important points raised during the two interviews with experienced facilitators of workshops. These interviews helped my understanding that facilitating a workshop is a creative process.

Section 1: The Creation of a Workshop

In the previous chapters, I have discussed different theories and experiences concerning artist's block, what is meant by a creative process, and how nature can be supportive of that process. Many artists find that working through their artist's block, whether in or out of a natural environment, is sufficient. Others may need human guidance through their process, and a supportive group to encourage, listen, and share ideas and experiences. A workshop environment can take artists away from their daily routines to gain new perspectives and inspiration. McNiff (1998: 24) indicates the importance of working creatively in a group. He maintains that it can help some people activate their creative expression, as creativity is a spirit that flies between people and things, and does not come purely from self. He indicates how, in a group situation, the momentum of the group will draw people in, even those who are less than enthusiastic, or who question the validity of the experience. He talks of a "group mind" or "collective intelligence" at work. Moon (1990:38) says that professional, amateur, or patient artists feel a deep urge to have their artworks viewed and embraced by others. In his experience, he says, the creative act is not enough in itself. There has to be a witness to the process, to understand and care.

As preparation for the creation and facilitation of the Student and Artists workshops I created and facilitated a workshop called The Creative Spirit Workshop. I ran these workshops periodically from November 2004 to March 2005. Although not forming an official part of this research it formed an important step towards the creation of the final Artist's workshop. The groups were usually small, ranging from four to twelve people. Most of the attendants were not artists but wanted to discover and engage with their creative essence. The workshops ran for a day, stopping for a short lunch break. I used the method of 'desire, ask, believe, receive', discussed in detail on page 79 of this chapter, for the first time in a workshop setting. The statement became the foundation for the day's experience and once explained, gave the participants a place to start and a simple technique to grasp.

The participants were encouraged to spend time alone in nature. This was a time, about an hour, to gather data, feelings, 'bits' of nature, drawings and rubbings. They were encouraged to write if this was a preferred medium of expression. Once back together in the group, they were asked to make an image that would represent the face of nature using their gatherings. In the second half of the workshop, the participants were asked to transform these 'faces' into wearable masks. Some would pose interesting challenges, but we always found creative solutions. The participants would put on the masks and look at themselves in the mirror. There they would see the creative spirit of nature reflected as their own faces. They then danced to music, moved, and engaged with the other creative spirits (participants) and with the natural environment if they chose to. At the end, we had time to talk and reflect on the participant's experiences. The aim of the workshop was to show the participants that their creative spirit is already within them, and that nature could help entice it out. Generally, I had good responses to the process. It was wonderful to see the eagerness and fun most people had with the process. Only one person out of thirty-one seemed a bit put-out by the experience and refused to participate. Mostly the participants expressed enthusiasm with their day's experience, and especially about spending time in the natural environment.

This workshop helped me realize how much I was lacking in confidence. I received many compliments for the workshop but I was not convinced. This led me to enrol in a facilitators workshop (mentioned in more detail on page 80 of this chapter) to gain more understanding about facilitation and the notion that the natural environment could be helpful with engagement in a creative process.

To help illustrate how a workshop might help willing participants engage with their creative processes, I use the metaphor of alchemy. This idea is not new, and is briefly mentioned by several authors whose research was often based on Carl Jung's in-depth explorations. McNiff (1992:35) relates the process of alchemy – which was originally the turning of base metals into gold, and later came to mean also a search for inner purification, for spiritual 'gold' -- to his experiences in transforming a difficult situation in life into a positive experience through creating art. Mindell (17:1990) uses the analogy of alchemy to describe a transformation of the psyche, where the person seeking healing may find a different 'gold' from the one they were expecting. Getty mentions several scientists, amongst them Isaac Newton, who found:

inspiration in nature and constructed their reasoning through the old traditions of nature-magic and alchemy (Getty, 1990:28).

Haarhoff (1998:132) suggests that the metaphor of alchemy is important to the writing process: searching for 'gold' is risky, but in playing safe one risks being a mediocre writer. Plotkin (2003:291) emphasises the alchemical union of opposites as being important to an individual's finding inner peace and acceptance. In this chapter, and often borrowed from Jung (1993), I show that, by taking what we have in

this moment (artist's block), we can transmute what seems like a poisonous situation into something of value and importance. Alchemy is a quite magical notion, and encourages the idea that when creativity and nature are together there is mystery and power.

I include alchemy in this thesis for several reasons. The first is that it seems to verify many of the pointers about the creative process and nature's power to transform. Second, it is an interesting and complex metaphor that ties the various components of this study together. The writings on alchemy are rich in imagery. They are not often seen directly by the general public, but, according to Alexander Roob, alchemy has "etched itself into the memory of modern man" (2005: 8). The obscurity of the texts and the complexity of ideas seem to me to be a perfect metaphor for both life and the creative process. The writings are apparently convoluted and contradictory -- and this offers a perfect opportunity for me to use the ideas presented by alchemists as a basis for, and guide to, my study, interpreting and using them in my own way. This I understand to be the way an alchemist might work.

Jakob Böhme, a German religious mystic writing in the 17th century, is cited as the key writer who helped shift alchemy away from chemistry and towards Hermetic philosophy. Böhme, according to Roob, had a profound effect on the writings of Romantic authors such as Blake, and, in modern times, on writers such as Yeats, Joyce, and Breton. What makes alchemy so difficult to grasp absolutely is understood to be an aspect of alchemy. Roob uses a quote from the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (1990).

Wherever we have spoken openly we have (actually) said nothing. But where we have written something in code and in pictures we have concealed the truth (Roob, 2005, 9).

There are two major directions in alchemy. The first and possibly the most commonly known is described by Haarhoff:

The medieval alchemists searched for a formula to turn base metals such as iron, lead and copper into gold. The sciences of chemistry, metallurgy and pharmacy grew out of their search for knowledge (Haarhoff, 1998: 132).

The second direction is considered by Jung to be superior. It is the pursuit of "inner purification" (Roob, 2005:10) where the 'gold' is a spiritual gold. Both directions seem to use a similar language, rich in imagery and symbols, to help describe the process. Jung points out that no two authors have the same opinions about the exact sequence of the stages of the process, although most do agree on the principal points that have been recorded from the earliest times. Jung's description defines the differences in another way:

from its earliest days alchemy had a double face: on the one hand the practical alchemical work in the laboratory, on the other a psychological process, in part consciously psychic, in part unconsciously projected and seen in the various transformation of matter (Jung, 1993: 270).

The Hermetic philosophical aspects of alchemy can be likened to the creative process in an artist. Many of the qualities Jung mentions in connection with alchemy are similar to the points made in Chapter 2 about allowing the creative process to emerge out of a state of feeling lost, or of chaos. The alchemist needs to trust the process, because, although he knows that he is seeking gold or the philosopher's stone, he does not know what form it will take. There is an understanding that he may get more than he had hoped for, which could be invaluable to his work or life. The "imagiatio" (Jung, 1993) or imagination of the alchemist needs to be activated, as this helps direct the process and achieve the gold; so too the artists need to connect with their soul to achieve artworks with essential power. Turning lead into gold is a metaphor for freeing the soul from a dead, leaden state of mind, into its own light nature, which is derived from pure spirit. The artist, like the alchemist, usually works alone, and engages in a process which, in its essence, may have commonalities with other artists, though the artists may not agree on the specifics of the process, nor on the specifics of the gold they seek.

The facilitator can also be likened to an alchemist. As the organiser and co-ordinator of the workshop process, and the guide to the participants, he or she may follow a recipe or a basic programme, but must be open to possibilities as they emerge during the workshop. The facilitator, according to Clarke, Blackman and Carter (2004) in their workbook on facilitation skills, works with the knowledge of the group, gathering this information through group discussion and activities. The premise is that every person has valuable knowledge and can make a contribution to the group, so the facilitator encourages sharing. A teacher is described as one who works from a set curriculum and a knowledge base that has to be imparted to the student. Information usually flows in one direction, from teacher to student, mostly because the teacher brings extensive knowledge to the group. But a facilitator allows the information to flow in many directions among the group members and the facilitator, and draws out and builds on the knowledge of the group, encouraging and valuing different views. A teacher is considered to be the leader, and the role is usually considered to be a formal one, based on respect for knowledge and status. The facilitator is considered an equal, and the relationship with the group is based on trust and respect. Christian (Appendix D: 166) expanded on this idea, and challenged my notion of the facilitator. He points out that the relationship between the participants and the facilitator can be complementary and collaborative, where the responsibilities are shared so that each person is engaging to their full potential. I understand him to mean that if I relinquished my role as facilitator, there would be more opportunity for creative, peer-based interaction, where the group will guide the process of the workshop. The workshop would then become more of a support group for artists.

Dee Hock (2002), who created the VISA organization, and who has written several books on leadership skills and principles, has an interesting perspective on the role of a leader. He says the idea of a leader as 'downward-looking' is a mistake often made by people he has interviewed.

Leader presumes follower. Follower presumes choice. One who is coerced to the purposes, objectives, or preferences of another is not a follower in any true sense of the word, but an object of manipulation. Nor is the relationship materially altered if both parties voluntarily accept the dominance of one by the other. A true leader cannot be bound to lead. A true follower cannot be bound to follow. The moment they are bound they are no longer leader or follower. If the behavior of either is compelled, whether by force, economic necessity, or contractual arrangement, the relationship is altered to one of superior/subordinate, manager/employee, master/servant, or owner/slave. All such relationships are materially different from leader/follower... To be precise, one cannot speak of leaders who cause organizations to achieve superlative performance, for no one can cause it to happen. Leaders can only recognize and modify conditions which prevent it; perceive and articulate a sense of community, a vision of the future, a body of principle to which people can become passionately committed, then encourage and enable them to discover and bring forth the extraordinary capabilities that lie trapped in everyone struggling to get out." (Hock, 2000: 2)

Hock's perspective is that the first responsibility of leaders is to manage themselves. This means being responsible for:

one's own integrity, character, ethics, knowledge, wisdom, temperament, words, and acts. It is a complex, unending, incredibly difficult, oft-shunned task (Hock, 2000: 2).

Hock coined the term "chaordic" (Hock, 2000: 1) because of the interrelationship between chaos and order. Its values are based on the basic principles of evolution and nature.

By *chaord*, I mean any self-organizing, self-governing, adaptive, nonlinear, complex organism, organization, community or system, whether physical, biological or social, the behavior of which harmoniously blends characteristics of both chaos and order. Loosely translated to business, it can be thought of as an organization that harmoniously blends characteristics of competition and cooperation; or from the perspective of education, an organization that seamlessly blends theoretical and experiential learning (Hock, 2000: 1).

Hock's understanding is that an organisation or group will, in accordance with his observations of universal principles, need to be a free-flowing, interactive process. This perspective correlates with discussions in previous chapters. Chaos is part of the creative process. There is a flow or an interrelationship between the left and right brain, between light and dark, and other contrasting attributes found in nature or the human experience. In a workshop situation, this knowledge is essential in understanding that a group cannot be controlled by a leader, but that the group itself will govern the direction in which it needs to go. As a leader of a group, one would need to trust the process as much as artists need to trust in their creative journey.

According to Clark, Blackman and Carter (2004), certain characteristics are required of a facilitator: acceptance of, and sensitivity to, the individuals in the group; the ability to listen well and encourage individuals; confidence, yet humility within the process; and the ability to be a dynamic motivator, helping to enable the participants through understanding and encouragement. The facilitator is a witness, and holds the group together, gently and patiently nudging the participants along their paths, changing direction when it seems necessary, or putting forward new ideas when the group is stuck. Like the alchemist, the facilitator does not try to control the group nor the direction in which it should go. This, I find, is perhaps the most difficult aspect of group facilitation. An element of trust is required, whereas having control seems easier. Moon describes this from his personal experience as a facilitator of art-therapy groups.

If all I do is tell them the way or give them *my* truth and stand back and watch, it is doubtful that the necessary work would be one to ease their suffering. No journey would begin. Rather, I must make myself available to go along, to be attentive to the patients as they explore the images that emerge from the depths. I do not fear this journey, nor do I fear their feelings, for they are only variations on the same themes I carry within myself (Moon, 1990: 26).

So the facilitator functions like an alchemist, mixing, heating, adding to the vessel a creative mix of ingredients, allowing what is necessary to bubble to the surface. Sometimes there is chaos; at other times a clear direction is visible, or becomes necessary.

Unlike the alchemist who generally worked in isolation, the facilitator can decide whether working with a co-facilitator is more beneficial than working alone. Liebmann (1997:23), an experienced facilitator for art-therapy groups, suggests that a co-leader can give valuable support before, during and after the workshop. He or she is someone to bounce ideas off, to talk to about difficult or positive aspects that may have occurred, or as an extra pair of ears, especially if someone leaves the group unexpectedly and needs individual support. I have run workshops both alone and with an assistant. The support of a co-leader helped relieve pressure and ease the responsibility, so that I found I enjoyed facilitating those workshops more. I did once have a situation where someone ran out of the group, upset. The assistant could go to help them, while I continued with the group. At other times, the assistant joined in with group activities, as an example to those unsure of what to do, and helped with the group dynamics, while I observed what was going on. This helps with the dilemma of whether or not the facilitator should join in with a group activity. Liebmann has two perspectives on this issue. She says that many therapists join in because they feel that they should lead by example. However, not joining in means that the facilitator is free to observe what is going on, or to be available to help individuals, or to sort out any logistics. Malcolm Christian's suggestion, as mentioned above, in which the workshop becomes a collaborative experience, meant that facilitating it alone did not feel like a burden to me. The participants guided the process, and supported

me in my role as well as each other. I chose not to participate by engaging with my personal creative process. The workshop required my full attention, which is a creative process in itself.

To help illustrate how alchemy can be used as a metaphor to describe the facilitation of a workshop, I have extrapolated from Jung five commonly used components of the alchemical process. They are the Opus, the Prima Materia, the Hermetic Vessel, Amplification, and the Philosopher's Stone.

THE OPUS

This is 'the work'. It incorporates all the components needed for the alchemical experiment. It is often symbolised by a circle, a wheel, or a dragon eating its tail, showing how the alchemists considered the work to proceed from, and return to, the one. The dragon devours itself, dies, and then rises again as 'lapis' (stone) or gold. All we need, this implies, is already contained within, and yet we need some process to reveal its true beauty or magnificence. The dragon represents one of the key aspects of alchemy, namely that opposites are present in the whole: matter yet spirit, poison yet healing potion, metallic yet liquid.

i. Intentions

I understand the Opus to start with an alchemist's conscious pursuit of the philosopher's stone. This is the goal, but it should not be controlled by expectations. Alchemists know that they will probably receive more than they expect, but also that the journey needs a containing theme to give direction and a place to start. This is also relevant to a workshop, and to artists engaging with their process.

Before planning or attending a workshop, the intentions of both the facilitator and the participants need to be considered and clarified. Christian (Appendix D: 165) challenged me about why I was intending to facilitate workshops. Was it because I felt others needed something I could give them? Was it that I wanted to create an environment that would allow for a collaborative experience, and to help bring to the surface, through a group dynamic, what individuals needed in order to be creative? He pointed out that "You are not here for yourself." That means that I should be concerned about how to grow others. Through this, I will grow also.

Several activities can be required of the participants before they join the group: filling in a questionnaire, reading information about the workshop, or finding and bringing a significant object along with them can all help establish clarity before the workshop begins. The facilitator, reading through the questionnaire's answers, can learn about the needs, fears, and intentions of the participants before starting. The workshop can then be designed with the group's needs in mind. I sent out a questionnaire (Chapter 5: 106) to all the

participants before the artists' workshop, asking their reasons for attending and their experiences with artist's block. Most of the participants responded to this, and revealed, in so doing, what they intended to get from the workshop. The report back at the end of the workshop showed that many had received insights, and had engaged with their process in ways that they had not expected

Intentions can also be clarified early on in the workshop, by, for example, asking the participants to write down their intentions. The papers are then folded and put it in a basket in the centre of the circle. The intention or desire thus holds a physical presence throughout the workshop, be it for a day or longer.

Clarifying intentions is not quite the same as setting a specific goal or expectation. In Chapter 1, on page 13, I mentioned this as a cause for artist's block, and said that the artist needs to be careful to avoid this. A discussion about the difference between a 'goal' as opposed to an 'intention' came about spontaneously during the Artist's workshop I facilitated. Though the meaning of the words can depend on the user's interpretation, there was a general consensus that an 'intention' was something 'soft', and internal, whereas a goal involved a specific outcome that was external. The participants observed that often something happens between the intention and the goal -- a negative thought-pattern or behaviour-pattern that distorts the path to the goal. This often leads to feelings of disappointment and frustration. This observation seemed to help the participants lean more gently on their expectations, prior to the creative process.

Breathing or focusing on being present are other ways in which to help participants, at the start, focus on their aims for the workshop, and bring their attention to the here and now. The group can sit still, upright and comfortable, taking a few long deep breaths in and out, settling their minds on the present moment and the breath. London (2003:203) advocates this as a good way to set the intention when starting any process. Plotkin (2003: 208) suggests that breathing techniques can inspire us. Changing the rhythm of our breathing can alter our biochemistry so we can join with the basic essence of the world, and change the way we relate to it, and to ourselves. Breathing when stuck, or unsure of where to proceed next, seemed to help the participants in the workshop, by bringing their centre back to their bodies, and thus removing them from their heads, and negative thought-patterns.

ii. Four stages

Jung (1993:228) reveals four stages of the alchemical process, and gives them corresponding colours: Xanthosis (yellowing), Melanosis (blackening), Leukosis (whitening), and Iosis (reddening). There are also four elements: earth, water, fire and air; and four qualities: hot, cold, dry and moist. Roob (2005:175) shows illustrations which represent the four humours, Melancholic, Choleric, Sanguine and Phlegmatic.

Visual symbols such as dragons and serpents, crosses, wheels, and mandalas, and analogies of light and dark, all describe aspects of the alchemical process. The symbols used may seem simple, but each has many layers of meaning.

As well as the alchemical elements mentioned above, colours, seasons, human characteristics and human development are represented in a wheel or circle divided into quadrants, which is found in various cultures world-wide. This shows a continuously evolving yet repetitious process that has no beginning or end. The Native American cultures know it as the ‘medicine wheel’, which is held in an illustration depicting the four cardinal points of the compass, north, south, east and west. Symbolically, each point holds meaning, and highlights important aspects of the human’s developmental process. Angeles Arrien has used this wheel to illustrate her research into native cultures all around the world.

My research has demonstrated that virtually all shamanic traditions draw on the power of four archetypes in order to live in harmony and balance with our environment and with in our own inner nature: the Warrior, The Healer , the Visionary, and the Teacher (Arrien, 1992: 7).

She calls this the “Fourfold Way” and draws its analogies from ancient wisdom. Her book is a guide to those who would like to explore more deeply each archetype as an aspect of self. She points out that there are many interpretations of these points, in different directions and seasons; her book represents the majority view. Some of these archetypes reflect discussions in my previous chapters concerning understanding the creative process, or drawing lessons from nature.

Steven Foster with Meredith Little (1998), author of several books, and responsible for bringing the Native American rite-of-passage experiences to the West, in the form of Vision Quests, adapts his research on the Native American cultures to produce a valuable tool by which individuals can learn to understand their cycle of development: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. It can also be understood as the smaller cycles that occur within our daily lives. He calls this the “The four shields of human nature”.

iii. Choosing a recipe

According to Jung, many alchemists wrote down their experiments in the form of recipes; mapping out some of the basic processes and materials they used. Similarly, I have chosen a simple process to help artists to engage with their creative process during and after a workshop.

While I was reading *The Artist’s Way* (Cameron, 1995) many years ago, I came across a quote by the author Stella Terrill Mann:

Desire, ask, believe, receive (Cameron, 1995: 66).

This struck me as simple yet profound; so I wrote it out and stuck it on my studio wall as a positive reminder. It was not until I was reading London's book, though, that I realised the relevance of these four words to the creative process. His descriptions are slightly different from Mann's, but they have a similar theme. I have used this quote as a 'recipe' and a guide for workshop participants, and it helped shape workshops that I facilitated before starting this thesis. It maps out simple stages that artists can follow when engaging in their process, but are at a loss as to how or where to start. In the early stages of a workshop, I suggest they find a quiet place, in nature if possible, then close their eyes, and take themselves through this four-step process before starting a work.

Desire

Long for, want earnestly (ed. Sykes, 1976: 279).

The importance of clarifying intentions was discussed on page 76. When starting a process, desire and intention can be seen as similar requirements. Whether alchemist or artist, it is important to be clear at the outset what one aims to achieve, otherwise energy may be too dissipated to allow any clear results.

Cameron (1995) requires her readers to explore repeatedly hidden desires that have been forgotten, but which could give clues to something essentially important to the artists' engagement with their creative process. She says we must 'clarify the vision of what it is we want' (Cameron, 1995:92). London describes this stage as "setting sights", and at several points in his book refers to the importance of being clear about what one desires:

A profound flaw in the very foundation of a work of art, which often dooms the enterprise before it even has an opportunity to prove itself, is that at the outset the artist might simply have not proposed an issue or set out a problem in the first place (London, 2003: 116).

London continues at a later stage to say:

Desiring to become something you are not introduces a formative structure in your mindfulness that biases behaviour over time and warps it in a corresponding direction. Desiring something not yet in hand disposes our mental acuity and senses accordingly, shifting our abilities of perception and valuing around the nexus of those desires (London, 2003: 114).

Wayne Dyer (1998) on an audio recording called *How to Get What you Really, Really, Really, Really Want*, mentions four steps towards manifesting what one wants. His key words are defined slightly differently from Mann's, but they have the same rhythm. His first "really" stands for "I wish", where one states or decides what it is one wants. London (2003:144) says that "wishing" doesn't help one get what one wants, although he doesn't explain why, except to imply that desiring is more serious than wishing.

Dyer's use of the word in his description of the process makes it apparent it has for him the same meaning as "desire" has for London.

Ask

Call for an answer to or about, or seek to obtain from another (ed. Sykes, 1976: 55).

Dyer's (1998) next "really" stands for 'ask'. At this point one may wonder who one is supposed to ask. Dyer himself quotes Jesus Christ's statement, 'Ask and you shall receive', and says that these are not just empty words from a spiritual text. He suggests asking out loud or asking 'God', then watching what happens. Previous chapters explore the idea of connecting to soul or God, or perhaps the creative forces of nature, asking for help and guidance with the search for the 'gold'. Cameron (1995:85) suggests asking 'God' or the Creator for help; an ever-present source of unlimited abundance.

Attending a workshop, attending a course, or finding a mentor, is another way of asking for help. I attended a facilitation course to help me increase my ability and confidence about facilitating workshops in the natural environment. As part of this, I attended a workshop entitled Vision Fast – Wilderness facilitation and deep listening skills workshop. The facilitators Judy Bekker and Valerie Morris are experienced trainers, and facilitate a variety of workshops in the corporate as well as private sectors. During the training, I witnessed the participants on the Vision Fast (also known as Vision Quest, and explained in Chapter 1 on page 12), clarifying what they wanted to discover or heal. They learned to ask for help or guidance.

When I share this technique during a workshop, I suggest the participants close their eyes and imagine some force or entity, be it God or nature, guiding them. London (2003:144) suggests that, when initiating the creative process, it is good to be quiet and at peace in the presence of nature.

Believe

Have faith in, put trust in truth... make believe, pretend (ed. Sykes, 1976: 88).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, 'trusting the process' is important. It means believing that the 'gold' will be found and the journey will reveal what is required. Dyer (1998) describes this third "really" as "intention or will" as one needs to have no doubt that what one wants will 'show up'. Belief is often difficult to visualise as it is a concept or a feeling held within. I suggest the participants imagine a door opening, letting in or revealing possibilities. Visualisation or imagination is important to the realisation of artworks, as was explored in Chapter 2. London (2003:144) suggests that one waits, is present, patient

and quiet in nature. Cameron (1995:2) says that in order to allow something to happen, it is important to believe in it. She says we must recognise that there is an unlimited supply, and that everyone has access to it.

Receive

Accept delivery of, consent to hear, greet, welcome, acquire, get, be given, be provided with (ed. Sykes, 1976: 932).

Often receiving is difficult. The gift may not be exactly in the form we had imagined, so perhaps we do not recognise it. Previous expectations can hinder the ability to receive. For Dyer (1998), the last “really” is labelled “passion”. He describes this as the hardening of the will, keeping the focus, and ignoring any negative viewpoints that may interfere or give rise to doubt. He says that this comes from the world of the spiritual and not the practical.

I suggest the participants gather inspiration from the things that they see, or from what attracts their attention, when they first open their eyes. In Chapter 2, on page 41, I mention McNiff’s suggestion that a creative process can start from where one is, with what is available at the present moment. London’s suggests “listening” (London, 2003:144, 154) in the presence of nature, as if tuning into hidden radio or television signals. One can then enter carefully into the discourse that nature is already engaged in. Only after listening can one have one’s say, for example in the form of an artwork. He says that the insights may be sited in the imagination, so taking seriously our imaginative capacities such as dreaming, fantasising, intuiting, wondering, and visualising. Begin to listen, be prepared to engage in a dialogue. Cameron also suggests listening. Writing her ‘morning pages’, as explained in Chapter 1, on page 6, can reveal important insights as to how to proceed, or about what may need to be changed in order to continue with the creative process.

This simple statement "Desire, ask, believe, receive' clarifies a complex concept. If explored with the participants before they go off alone to engage with their process, it gives them a structure to work with that is not dictatorial. As with alchemy, one can't tell people how to engage with their process: they need to work this out for themselves. But I believe the statement can give direction, while also allowing for creative possibilities in interpretation. The participants on the artist's workshop seemed to find it useful. Many of them said that they felt stuck on one or two of the points. Some found it hard to believe that they deserved creative fulfilment, and this meant they never received it. Others didn't want to accept that which was given. Some, though 'desiring' to be recognised as an artist, and have their artworks admired, rebuffed compliments on even the smallest aspect of the work with a negative comments such as: 'It's unfinished.'

PRIMA MATERIA

I understand the Prima Materia to be the base elements from which alchemists sought to extract the gold. The gold is, therefore, already present at the beginning of the process, although mostly unrecognisable as such. In other words, the treasure we seek is already within us, and may already be known to us, but without being recognised. Some sort of process is required to extract it from the Prima Materia. The alchemists refer to the Prima Materia by different names, or use different symbols for it, such as lead, water, fire, earth, lapis, poison, shadow, stone, dragon and Venus. They often refer to it as 'chaos', or the work of all-wise nature, which is to be transformed with the help of the 'celestial and glowing spirit' (Jung, 1993: 340) into the life- giving essence of heaven. I have used this term to describe what materials and skills are needed for a workshop to take place.

The alchemist and facilitator need to gather important skills to be able to begin their respective processes. The facilitation workshop, facilitated by Bekker and Morris, consisted of different components, and were instrumental in guiding me in the creation of the workshop designed for this study. The first seven days of the 18-day workshop concentrated on the workshop-facilitation. Although this workshop was not art-based, I chose to do it because it addressed most of the other important aspects I wanted to include in my workshop. For example, it gave in-depth information about the technical aspects of running a workshop with nature as an important factor in the process. We looked at how to design workshops, the giving and receiving of feedback, managing group dynamics, and the creation of a workshop environment. The last 11 days gave an opportunity to watch and participate in the day-to-day workings of a workshop, practising listening and mirroring skills, and observing how nature helped create the stories that gave meaning to the participants' experiences. The information and practical advice were beneficial, and increased my confidence with regard to workshop facilitation. Throughout this section, I mention points that highlight some of the main aspects of the information I gathered.

i. Self awareness

Bekker and Morris introduced several exercises and techniques to help the group of trainee facilitators become more aware of 'self'. They suggested we, as facilitators, ask ourselves several questions to help establish motivation and self-awareness. What do I want, and what am I here to teach? What am I best at? What is my creative fire? In other words, become aware of your true identity; and of the two aspects of self -- soul and physical body. Knowing that one is 'soul' makes it easier to link into higher aspects of self and to trust one's intuition. To be able to meet the group soul to soul, one needs to know one's own soul first, and to see beauty in oneself. As a facilitator, one is responsible for bringing spirit into the room.

It is also important to learn to be fully present in the 'now', to have stillness within, and not to panic in difficult situations.

ii. Trust and intuition

'Trust' is mentioned in Chapter 2, on page 41, as an important aspect of the artist's creative process. Bekker and Morris consider this also to be true for the facilitator. A facilitator must make sure that the boundaries set by the group are upheld for the benefit of all. Then a sense of safety will help the participants trust the group, and open themselves to the process with more ease. Facilitators also need to trust the group dynamics, and not let personal expectations get in the way of the participants' process. They must trust that what happens for the participants is what needs to be experienced at that time.

It is important that the participants can feel trusting of the natural environment during the workshop. Therefore facilitators must be able to share information about how to be in nature, so as to help participants reduce their fear and be open to the signs that maybe presented. When I ran the daylong Creative Spirit workshops (Page 70), I was surprised to see how few people felt comfortable being in nature. They found the thought of being entirely alone there, frightening and daunting. I usually suggest that these people need not go too far away from the others, or that they keep the main studio in sight. I also realised, too late, during the student workshop (Chapter 6: 124), that most of the students had not spent much time, if any at all, in such a wild environment. I did not show them ways of being in nature, what to look for, or how to be quiet and attentive.

During the facilitation workshop, Bekker and Morris spoke at length about a particular element of trust: intuition. Intuition is one's 'inner knowing' and 'sense of' a given situation. It is important not to engage in the workshop from the head or intellect, but to do so from the heart, or deeper self. In a creative workshop, I feel that it is important to allow creativity to happen all around. Trusting one's intuition allows this to happen at the appropriate time. In Chapter 1, on page 7, I said that the artist's fear of the creative process can inhibit heartfelt sensing, and can block the process. This also applies to the facilitator. It is, therefore, important to develop trust in one's intuition, as lack of this brings stress and fear, and fear blocks intuition.

Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl (1998), who write about co-active coaching, say that another way of thinking about intuition is to see it as a kind of intelligence. Everyone has it in some measure, they say, but one needs to develop it in the same way that artists and musicians develop their talents. They warn that what you express out of your intuition is your interpretation or observation. It is not a judgment. In other words, it is important that you do not get attached to your interpretation as being right. Intuition is

elusive, sitting just below the level of direct observation. The paradox of intuition is that it is more easily held in an open hand; a closed fist lets it through. Intuition can take the form of words, shapes, sounds, or body tingles; of a mood-change or an ache. It seldom lasts long, so if you are fearful or hesitant, the powerful moment could pass you by.

Intuition is like a small flash of light that is already beginning to fade as soon as it happens (Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl, 1998:55).

Christian on several occasions writes of the importance of trusting oneself and one's own life experiences when facilitating a workshop.

That is why I say to you 'trust', use your life as the basis for developing the prototypes that you will actually use, because it then has authenticity. It is not only authenticity in terms of projection but also in terms of self understanding. It is that affirmation, that there is something which goes between the gaps of institutions and one's life (Appendix D: 162).

I understand Christian to be saying that the workshop which one creates is an extension of one's self, and one must therefore trust one's heart and integrity. People will come to the workshop because of who the facilitator is and because of how one puts the workshop together. These words by Christian helped me feel confident while facilitating the artist's workshop; and I experienced there a level of calmness that I had not felt in previous workshops that I facilitated. I was able to trust in my own self; to trust that my knowledge and experience were sufficient for the task. I realised, too, that I did not have to know everything, that the participants would, through discussions and their own insights, find solutions, that the experience could be a collaborative one.

iii. Inquiry, listening and mirroring

Judy Brown (April 2005, Issue 9, *Fieldnotes: A Newsletter of the Shambhala Institute*) referred to by Morris and Bekker. One of the most important points made was that, if one is unsure of what is going on in the group or with an individual, one should ask. To enable facilitators to ask appropriate questions, Morris and Bekker recommend that they listen without judgement. The listeners should have a composure that is dynamic and mindful; their bodies should be at ease, they should show calmness, and focus on the speaker, not letting their minds wander. Listeners need to ask themselves: 'What can I do to keep the speaker thinking for him or herself?' Rarely do people want or respect advice given by others. They find their own advice more helpful and empowering. Through a field created between speaker and listener, an alchemical process happens.

Inquiry is important when difficult or unforeseen moments occur during a workshop. Brown suggests that during such challenging times one should not give advice or try to solve the problem immediately. It is

more appropriate to inquire, to switch from knowing the solution to wondering about it, from stating what you think to questioning. Clarke, Blackman, Carter (2004) also suggest that facilitators need to think and act creatively in difficult situations, to be sensitive to issues and group dynamics, and manage people's feelings. If one participant needs to move on from something, check with the group and make sure everyone has closure on that particular issue; make sure also that it is the wish of more than one person. If uncertain about where or how to proceed, then ask the group. Morris and Bekker also refer to Margaret J. Wheatley and her book about leadership titled *A Simpler Way* (1996), in which she suggests facilitators always question their own assumptions about people or situations, which are often based on their own imagination. Questions can deepen the conversation.

I find it difficult always to remember to question someone who is asking for help. But I recognise how important it is to perfect that skill, having personally experienced, on many occasions, how helpful and empowering it is to come to a conclusion about an issue for myself, reached through thoughtful and intuitive inquiry by another.

Another important aspect of the facilitator's task is 'mirroring' skills. The technique requires the facilitator first to listen, to take notes if appropriate, and ask questions if something is not clear (though preferably one should not interrupt). Uninterrupted by comments and interjections, as so often happens in conversation, the participants can tell their story comfortably, expressing what is important to them in their own unhurried manner. The facilitator then mirrors back the story to the participant, restating the key points and the essence of the content in the listener's own words, so that the participant can hear what they have said, in a slightly different form. This is a powerful technique. It helps the storyteller to understand themselves or their process, and to find their own solutions, while feeling deeply 'heard'. I see this as essential in facilitating these workshops, so that the artists can understand their processes and learn to heal their own blocks. At several points during the discussions, I was able to summarise what had been said; and often this helped the individual realise something, which was then shared with the group.

Plotkin (2003) sees telling our stories as one of the most empowering things we can do; but says it is also a great gift to really listen, and embrace a story told.

Mirroring is receiving, embracing and honouring people's stories of journeys into the inner/outer wilderness. In mirroring, you neither project nor interpret, but rather celebrate the enchantment of the story and the gift and giftedness of the one offering the tale (Plotkin, 2003:206).

Essentially, the "canvas becomes a mirror" (Moon, 1990:37) and reflects who the participant is on the inside. As a therapist, Moon sees his role as supporting patients on their journey by sharing their story

through a visual medium. In terms of my workshops, the participants tell stories about their process of creativity during the workshop, and achieve insights into that process.

iv. Flexibility

Clarke, Blackman and Carter (2004) suggest that a facilitator, though needing to be well prepared, also needs to remain flexible. It may be necessary to change the programme or to change direction, for the good of the group, using intuition, observation, and trust in the process. As I have said already, asking the group can help with the decision.

During the student workshop in April 2006 (Chapter 6: 121), I should have trusted the process and the group dynamics to guide me in structuring the workshop. I doggedly stuck to my programme, and did not inquire about, or intuit, the need for a different direction, based on the individuals' and group's requirements. I realise with hindsight that this was largely due to lack of confidence on my part, and lack of the courage needed to change what felt like a safe and logically structured programme. I have previously mentioned Christian's suggestion, of facilitating workshops that are collaborative. Encouraged by this suggestion, I created a very simple programme for the Artists workshop in 2007, with only meal times and suggested experiences outlined. (I explain below the use of the term 'experience', which here is used in the sense of 'exercise'). As an introduction, I offered several experiences for the participants to undertake; then, as they became more comfortable, I left them to continue unguided. Regular check-ins allowed me to establish whether anyone was uncertain of how to proceed, and if so, to give them a short experience, which usually helped get them going again.

THE HERMETIC VESSEL

The vessel used by the alchemists was usually round or egg-shaped - a strong shape that will withstand all that may happen within its walls, and allow the stone, or gold, to be born. It is not considered to be a mere apparatus but is directly related to the Prima Materia. As with the alchemical vessel, the workshop experience needs a containing environment, a physical and emotionally safe place in which the alchemical process can take place. For the workshop relevant to this study, the natural environment could be considered the vessel in which the workshop took place (as well as a dry warm indoor environment nearby). The reasons for this were discussed throughout Chapter 3: it had visual appeal for the artists; it was stimulating to the imagination; it allowed spiritual connection to a creative force greater than self; it was useful for metaphorical or symbolic reflection; and it functioned as a therapeutic environment in which to spend time alone.

A safe container, according to Bekker and Morris, is a nurturing, safe, environment not just in the physical sense but also in the emotional sense. It is the circle of people in which the 'work' will be done. In a safe container, there are people one knows, one feels welcome, and can trust in the integrity of the individuals to keep what is experienced in the workshop sacred. Equality is another feature: everyone has a turn, people listen to others respectfully, and all appreciate individuals in the group, and their contributions. Liebmann summarises the importance of this by saying:

Before starting on some of the practicalities of running a group, it is worth remembering that the whole purpose of the group is to provide a warm, trusting environment in which people can feel at ease in revealing personal matters. Caring and respect for other people, and for their feelings and points of view, are a priority (Liebmann, 1997: 17).

Moon (1990) says his first task is to make sure that things start on time, that a selection of materials is on offer, and that the studio space is available, clean and organised. His second task, as a "culture builder", is to make sure that the groups help shape, and then adheres to, the expectations they have set down. As the facilitator, he sees himself as partly responsible for creating the safe environment.

The culture is built and reinforced by my modelling. My investment in the art process, my belief that life has meaning, my punctuality and my openness have tremendous effect on the tone of the session (Moon, 1990: 132).

I realised after the student workshop that the documentation process that I used to record the workshop was very invasive. The environment was essentially not 'safe' enough to allow the participants to feel free to communicate without a sense of being watched. Although no one complained about the recording, nor the final DVD (Appendix B: 152) my intuition tells me that it hindered, and did not contribute to, the process. I chose not to record the artist's workshop in any way, other than writing notes as important points were made, making observations, and using the comments made in the questionnaires.

Moon also creates a ritual for the start of each session. It can be as simple as closing the door of the studio and sitting down. He has a warm-up session for each group, then a primary exercise, and lastly a closure process. This process is important, as it helps the participants wind down and get themselves together before going back to the outside world. His third important task, Moon says, is to keep the group in the here and now. From an art-psychotherapy perspective, everything that is made is, in effect, a self portrait. The artwork the participant makes represents what is significant in the now, even if it appears to be about a past experience.

As part of the start of the workshop, and to help with 'container building', introductions need to be made, especially if the people in the group don't know each other. In Chapter 5 page 108, I give a few suggestions of introductions which can be used at the beginning of a workshop. London (2003) believes it

to be important to get people acquainted with each other, and to establish simple conventions of listening and speaking, thus creating a safe, judgement-free space. It may be important for facilitators to introduce the workshop by giving background information about themselves and their intentions for running the workshop. This brings a personal element to the facilitator, and sets an example of sharing, openness and trust. It may also be important to set aside time for participants to voice their requirements about rules or boundaries before starting. If it is a day workshop, this may simply be a brief conversation. For a longer workshop, especially if participants are away from home for a few days, it may mean writing down ideas. If the workshop is more than one day long, it may be important during intervals throughout the workshop to ask participants to say how they are feeling. On the Bekker and Morris workshop, we started each morning with a brief check on how everyone was feeling that day. As a participant, I found that it helped me consider how I was, whether there were any issues I wanted to bring to the group, and gave me a chance to hear how others were doing. It helped me stay in touch with the here and now, the group, and the intentions of the workshop.

Jack Zimmerman, in his book *The Way of Council* (16 – 26), discusses at length the ideas and practices used by Native Americans. They call this grouping a “council”. For most council situations, Zimmerman suggests holding the group meetings outside, as the place becomes an integral part of being in council. He talks about the ‘ceremonial environment’ as both the place and the manner in which it has been laid out. For example, it should be clean and should have some aesthetic appeal, such as flowers put in the centre, or a candle which can be ceremonially lit at the start of the council. The participants can be asked to bring something with them to contribute to creating the space. Zimmerman refers to the teachings of the Cheyenne Medicine Chief, Hyemeyohsts Storm, from the Ojai Foundation in the USA. He suggests that the Native Americans used the fire in the centre of their dwellings as a nurturing source of warmth, as well as using the symbol of fire to represent transformational power. In all the workshops I have facilitated, I have a simple centrepiece with a candle, the bowl with the intentions, flowers, and maybe a few art materials. One of the participants of the artist’s workshop said in his report-back questionnaire that he found useful the idea of creating a sacred centre when he is making artworks. Another said in his report-back that the participants of the artist’s workshop were inspired by the large barn-like building surrounded by trees and a view, and that it was important to feeling ‘at home’ (Chapter 6: 128).

AMPLIFICATION

The vessel now has its appropriate outer walls established. The elements are placed in the container: a prepared facilitator, willing participants, goals, and a selection of skills. There is a warm, sacred centre around which the workshop will commence. It is time to apply heat, to amplify, to engage the participants in ‘the work’ or Opus.

i Participation skills:

To help amplify, or extend the individual, I look at Zimmerman's (1996: 29 -37) suggestions on how a participant can take part effectively in the group. The first requires him or her to *Speak from the heart*. They should visualise speaking from the mid-chest region rather than from the mouth. Zimmerman says that when one speaks from the heart there is a:

tangible feeling of expansion and sense of greater connectedness to others in the circle. We are more likely to feel non-attached to personal positions, non-defensive, and committed to recognizing the truth of the circle as a whole (Zimmerman, 1996: 29).

The participants also need to *listen from the heart*. It is suggested that a 'talking stick' or other symbolic object is used to indicate who is speaking. Only the person with the stick can talk, and there should be no interruption. This allows a greater chance of attentive listening. Listeners should also listen from the mid-chest area rather than the ears. The speaker with the stick needs to be brief, or at least to choose what is said carefully so as not to drag out their story. Each person will get a turn as the stick is passed around, and each will be listened to by the rest of the circle. The talking piece helps call forth the creative power of story. Next, *being of 'lean expression'* is important. When others are talking it often happens that a listener thinks of something it could be important to say, and starts to rehearse what will be said when the time comes. This means that the listener is no longer listening attentively to the speaker. Rehearsing also limits speaking from the heart. Zimmerman (1996) suggests trusting that one will know what to say when the time comes, and therefore allowing for *spontaneity*. Taking a moment to be silent with the stick, letting the presence of the circle and the moment guide the speaker to say what is appropriate.

ii Ritual

A ritual, however simple, may greatly benefit the amplifying of the creative process. I have already said that the ritual of checking-in at the beginning of a workshop can help create safe containers for the individuals, and help bond the group. The use of the central 'fire' or candle can also be considered a ritual, and serve as a reminder of the purpose of the workshop (Figure 3: 134). Rituals such as dance or drumming can have powerful effects; and are often advocated by ancient and current cultures.

A ritual can be some simple way to embrace the beginning of the day. Many people advocate meditation, which can be done while walking, lying, sitting or standing. It becomes a quiet time in which to connect with self or God.

The idea of ritual reinforces simplicity, ordinariness, sanctity, heightened concentration, and the sense that something important is happening. Within a ritual every object and action has a purpose and every person is capable of playing a significant role. It is the rite more than the person doing it

that carries significance. This attitude helps us become less self-conscious and more focused on our actions as meaningful expressions (McNiff, 1998: 67).

A ritual could also be simply taking regular breaks. Christian mentions in the interview (Appendix D: 172) that stopping for tea or other meals, at appointed times during his 'Residential fellowships', gave workshop participants time and space. At those times, people become less self-conscious, and less self-focused. This is where, he says, the heart of what happens in a workshop occurs.

Ellen Dissanayake (1988:80) explains how our modern culture has separated art and ritual, so that we can't see that they may be linked, except accidentally. Art is seen as saying new and different, or individual, things, showing the diversity of the world, giving us an opportunity to interpret the other for ourselves. Ritual, on the other hand, reinforces common practices and beliefs, and is generally repetitive, predictable, and can be sterile. But Dissanayake makes a connection between art and ritual, showing them to be deeply alike and to have a symbiotic relationship. Both practices are concerned with the use of metaphor and symbolism, and art objects are often important elements in ritual. They both communicate some meaning to the viewer, a meaning usually expressed beyond words, through gesture and images. A form is created in which the diffused expressions and emotions can be contained, therefore giving structure or shape to allow the emotional meaning to be shown. Both ritual and art make use of out-of-context elements, or take ordinary objects and place them in such a way that they become extraordinary or symbolically meaningful.

iii Experiences

I use the term 'experience' to describe what one might normally call an 'exercise'. This is to encourage the participant to experience something new and perhaps original to them, whereas the term 'exercise' has some negative connotations, such as 'right or wrong' school exercises. Michael J. Cohen (1989), an environmental psychologist, guide and teacher, has written several books to help people develop their "nature-connecting skills". He uses the term 'connector' to describe the various exercises in his experiential field guide, but he also refers to these connectors as experiences.

Experience is the best teacher because an experience consists of many ways of knowing (Cohen, 1989:3).

In Chapter 5 on page 108, I list three possible types of experiences. First are the introduction experiences as discussed earlier; second are the warm-up experiences, as suggested by Liebmann, which could be physical or art-related. Liebmann (1997:25) says that the intention behind the warm-up experiences is to introduce the participants to the available materials and the possibilities that can be explored using them. They are also intended to stimulate playfulness, and spontaneity. I feel that these are important to help artists relax and not worry about the end product. Liebmann suggests the participants might give each

other shoulder rubs, might shake hands, or even dance, so as to get the energy going in the group. I found this happened during the student workshop at the beginning of the day. The students looked very dreary and half asleep. I took them outside and we did simple stretching exercises to get their energy up. The warm-up experiences can also introduce the ideas that will be discussed in the group, or act as a precursor to a subsequent experience. The third type of experience would form the main components of the workshop. They can amplify the progress of the participant, entice them into experiencing something new, and challenge the way they normally create artworks or think about creativity.

All these points are mentioned in Chapter 2 as being important to the creative process. It may be necessary to give participants different exercises to satisfy individual needs. These can be assessed from the conversations and questions asked, and from warm-up experiences and responses to them. An example of this can be seen in the Vision Quest experience with Bekker and Morris, where each person was given a task designed to help them engage with their personal issue. But an experience may be used only if the participant is stuck in a certain area, so as to challenge the individual or the group to explore new ground. During the artist's workshop, one of the participants was unclear about how to pull the elements of her work together. I suggested the ink-blot experience (Chapter 5: 117), which helped her get a new perspective on her work, and to move forward.

PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Philosopher's Stone has been given many names by alchemists, some of which are: lapis, philosopher's gold, gold, or stone. It is often seen as the goal, defined as such before the process begins -- and yet it is always present within the Prima Materia. In this quote, Jung extrapolates from the 15th-century English alchemist Sir George Ripley to help illustrate this idea:

The Philosophers tell the inquirer that birds and fishes bring us lapis, every man has it, it is in every place, in you, in me in everything, in time and space. It offers itself in lowly form. From it there springs our eternal water (Jung, 1993: 323-4).

The Philosopher's Stone therefore could precede the Opus, as it is both the goal and the outcome. For the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen to make the stone the accomplished goal at the end of the workshop. As regards finding or recognising the 'gold', the facilitator's role is particularly important. The alchemists were aware, as mentioned earlier, that they might get more than they asked for, or that the 'gold' might look different from what they expected. Facilitators, observing the participants' progress over the course of the workshop, may need to ask careful questions, which may guide participants in discovering answers, or realising what the gold might look like. It could take the form of insights about self, the creative process, subject matter, use of materials -- or something quite unexpected. On a Creative Spirit workshop (page 70) which I ran in the early days of this study, one of the participants, a medical doctor, had a

profound insight which she shared with the group. She realised that her inability to take even a leaf from the ground to add to her artwork, showed her that, though she was able to give to others, she found it difficult to receive gifts from them. This, as she recognized, had consequences she had not previously thought about.

If the facilitator's role in the workshop is that of guide, the end of the workshop is the next step in the process. The facilitator needs to round off the workshop by drawing out of the participants what their next step in the process could be. The workshop itself may not be the place where the gold is actually found, but finishing correctly may lead the participant to interesting or insightful realisations that could help them in the future.

Bekker and Morris completed their workshops by reviewing and simplifying all that had occurred there for each individual. The participants were given a chance to tell their stories, however they wanted, including what seemed important or significant to them at the time. Using their skills in mirroring, Bekker and Morris reflected the stories back to the participants in their own words. This has a powerful effect, and this mirroring usually made the gold evident to each of the participants.

The workshop I ran for the students ended by my asking them to bring all their artworks to the final group meeting. They explained them and showed them to the group. I then reflected back to them what I understood them to be saying about their process. I find this part of the workshop somewhat intimidating, possibly, because I know it to be important, but mostly because I realise that I need to trust my inner knowing, based on my observation during the workshop, and my past experiences. I cannot rely entirely on intellect and learning. My experience at the end of the artist's workshop was different, however. As a group, we had watched and discussed the gradual process of each participant. Insights and observations were made continuously throughout the two days, so the conclusion was simply a summary. The gold came in various forms. A few artists decided that they were ready to work together towards an exhibition. One realised that working on a larger scale would be important for their creative fervour. Discussions around how the participants could take their new insights and make use of them in their everyday life can help the individuals assimilate the workshop experience.

Cameron (1994: 202) suggests the participants sign a contract on completing their course. This creates a commitment to continue with the creative journey, through such activities as morning pages, artist's dates, and building a supportive group. Cameron believes strongly that it is vital to have a supportive group in the journey of creativity. She suggests forming a group to share experiences and to support each other through difficult moments. The participants of the artist's workshop requested more workshops, having found this one beneficial. A reunion workshop was also requested, for the same time next year.

Bekker and Morris round-off the workshop with words of gratitude, simple ritualistic gestures that signify completion and new beginnings. Gratitude should be expressed by both the facilitator and the participants, for taking part in the workshop and for what they contributed to the group. Gratitude can also be expressed to the natural environment in which the workshop takes place. Individuals can take a moment alone just saying thanks. This serves as a private time in which to consider all that has taken place in the workshop, and it also serves as a chance to give back to nature gratitude for its generosity. At the end of the artist's workshop, in a place in the woods, around a 'carpet' made from natural elements that were part of a participant's creative process, the group gathered. Here they wrote their intentions for their creative process for the future on a piece of paper. These were burned, one by one, in a ceramic bowl passed around the group -- a symbolic release of the intentions into the ether.

Section 2: Report on the interviews with Facilitators

I interviewed these facilitators only after I had facilitated the student workshop. I realised that the methods I was using when facilitating the student workshop were not coming from a place of trust. I made contact with these experienced facilitators to get different approaches to facilitating and for additional information.

Ellis Pearson:

Ellis Pearson, artist, actor and facilitator of creative and theatrical workshops, shared his perspective on the value of the natural environment, after I explained the general theory that I was exploring for this study. His perspective was that nature and man are connected, and that the Universe is all one, all interconnected. Therefore to be in nature is, for Pearson, all about “connection” (Appendix D: 159).

Pearson asks himself before he starts a workshop – “What are we really doing here?” (Appendix D: 159). This is to engage his participants to look at the bigger picture, and to help understand the flow of life. It is not about making good actors from a workshop, but rather starting something bigger that will grow and expand. To help his participants understand this he puts forward the observations that the nature of the Universe is expansion, that we see only one galaxy, that it is the way God works. He illustrates his point to the students by saying that the essence of life is process and that the essence of creativity is process. To be part of the process is very native to us. Therefore his workshops facilitate the start of a process-starting a process that will never end.

He talks about “creation, the creator and God, the intelligence called Love” (Pearson, Appendix D: 159). Pearson points out that intuition and insight, being in touch with our feelings and psyche is more useful than thinking. But thinking and being in a state of consciousness are useful when making choices.

The most important message I received from Pearson, is that there is a big need for play, that the very nature of the Universe is playful and interactive. Yet play is viewed as being useless because it is not “goal orientated”. I have personally experienced being on several workshops Pearson facilitated where he engaged our group with some of the prominent archetypal human aspects, for example, the Warrior and the Shaman. We explored these archetypes through several playful experiences. This helped us feel grounded in our understanding of these qualities within ourselves and helped us to ultimately embody and understand these qualities in our lives.

Malcolm Christian:

Malcolm Christian is the founder of Caversham Press studios in the KwaZulu/Natal midlands. He works with a core team, Jabu and Gaby and himself, within a fine art printing studio. The studio has been running successfully for the past 22 years, with groups of artists from all around the world, attending from three day to three week long workshops. This interview challenged, and inspired me to rethink the way I was facilitating workshops, or teaching art classes up to this point in time. While interviewing I did not fully understand the essence of what Christian was putting forward, it was only when I was transcribing this interview did I understand that Christian was really challenging me to re-evaluate why and how I was teaching and facilitating.

Christian spoke at length about how Caversham went from a traditional workshop with a facilitator, to being a “collaborative” (Christian, Appendix D: 167) workshop experience. By collaboration I understand him to mean that the group of participants on each workshop allows the process to unfold, the flow of the workshop is not controlled by anyone like a facilitator or teacher.

Collaboration is about adding value, adding rituals, and sharing responsibilities (Christian, Appendix D:162).

Christian talked about complementary or collaborative leadership, saying that it is not hierarchical, but is rather about moving people in a particular direction by being aware of how one might facilitate growth, and how to add value through the role of leader or facilitator. But he says that it is not about getting from A to B, because of your vision for that person. He seems to prefer the word “mentorship” because this implies a position of being behind someone rather than leading from the front.

call it mentorship, because you are mentoring people, and that is what collaboration really is, it is asking questions. Asking pertinent questions at a particular time. ...so you have to understand where someone is coming from, to actually phrase the right question, to know when to time that, for the maximum impact, not from you own intention, but for their growth (Christian, Appendix D:167).

Christian has used his personal journey in the creation and expansion of the Caversham Press as it is today, as a way of illustrating different perspectives. He out rightly questioned my motivations for the teaching methods I used. For example I mentioned that I find it difficult to change the boundaries of perception that students (adults) from my art classes experience. They generally prefer to paint very traditional type paintings, such as pretty landscapes or flowers and do not want to be challenged with conceptual ideas or other technical challenges. His question to me was, why would I want to change them, and pointed out that perhaps they are not the people I should be teaching? He lives in an old cemetery, and used this as a pointer to illustrate how little time we have on this planet. He suggests that

we should constantly be asking ourselves what our intentions are. That if it is my intention to make a contribution to society then I should not be wasting time, but rather I should put myself in the “midst of a group of highly creative people” (Christian, Appendix D: 166) who will push me beyond my boundaries, as I will push them beyond theirs. Therefore he said that the idea would be for me to share responsibly with this group and for me not to be the facilitator. Therefore I would be sharing the responsibility with this group to assist in engaging in my full potential as well as theirs. He suggested I gather a group of artists to experiment with, and to not charge a fee for it, so that the group understands that the workshop is ‘collaboration’ and not a formally facilitated experience. Essentially it would be a supportive group of people.

I chose not to run a workshop in this way for this thesis, but I did soften my approach, and this is observable in the difference between the student workshop, and the artist’s workshop. With the student workshop I controlled and structured it; I clung to my program. The artist’s workshop was more informal, with only a simple program as a guide. I did however ‘facilitate’ the workshop and did not participate by being creative myself, but remained slightly aloof. I find it difficult to be in a position of responsibility and be creative. With future workshops, I would like to experiment with ‘letting go’ even more and engaging in the creative process by working on my work with the participants, to be part of the workshop and not so aloof creatively.

Christian’s perspective on artist’s block is that it is about a “moral block” (Christian, Appendix D: 161) rather than a technical block. It is due to a belief structure. He does not mean beliefs in religion, or any particular doctrine, but rather that artist’s block is “a reaction to the constraints that are placed on us” (Christian, Appendix D:161). It is often a subliminal reaction caused by the demands from the need for qualifications, recognition, or status as an artist in communities and galleries. He does mention the “dichotomy that creativity only happens within constraints” (Christian, Appendix D:161), but that these boundaries must be related to some meaning or relevance to the artist.

Christian believes that the natural environment is important. When one steps out of one’s personal stresses into a natural place then one can connect on a different level. Being in nature is about understanding that we are only on this planet for a certain time frame, and that it is just the memories left behind. He indicated to the sixty graves in his garden as a constant reminder to him about this time limit. Being in nature is about survival, and the heightening of awareness, and is also food for the soul.

Christian questions the role of the University and Technikon, and wonders if the institutions help facilitate growth and add value to the students. He feels that many people after 4 – 5 years of study don’t actually do anything with what they learn, and he wonders if there is anything one can do about this.

Therefore at Caversham their aim is “to add value rather than to repeat, regurgitate or over throw a particular system” (Christian, Appendix D:163). He does acknowledge that there are positive aspects to an educational institution, but feels that the lecturers need to learn how to engage with creativity. He says that his set up at Caversham looks similar to that of an institution, except that at Caversham they are completely focused, and the participants are there to engage and make. Creativity, he says, is about making, with aspects of technique and nature, not the other way around. He says that it is the “making that binds faith and builds belief” (Christian, Appendix D:163).

Another point that Christian highlights is “trust” (Appendix D:164). He says that one needs to trust in oneself and consciously remove oneself from any “formal information systems” (Appendix D:164). For authenticity he suggests trusting those feelings or inner senses of knowing that did not come from a book. He said that after all the years of working with people from all around the world the thing that he has been most surprised by is not their differences, but their similarities.

No matter whether they come from Mexico, or Ireland, it is the commonality, not the diversity, not the differences; that is staggering (Christian, Appendix D:165).

It is about a journey of discovering spirit, no matter what it is called. Alchemy, religion or creativity, are all linking us with something that goes beyond our mortality. He also points out that creativity is dynamic, and yet we constantly seek balance. Balance he says is actually a state of “stasis” (Christian, Appendix D:165).

I conclude this section by reflecting how both Pearson and Christian influenced my perspectives on the facilitation of the artist’s workshop and workshops I hope to facilitate in the future. I have found Pearson’s emphasis of play and playfulness in workshops to get creative process flowing, very influential and inspiring. Christian had many important points that I have reflected on and experimented with since I transcribed the interview. For example, trust in that inner knowing as a guide to authenticity, collaborative mentorship and working with the group of participants rather than as the controlling leader. To observe the importance of nature for changing perspectives and reminding one of our limited time so it is important not to waste time but to get on and do what is important. He challenged my reasons for teaching or facilitating the way I was, and this has consequently encouraged a process of self-reflection and evaluation about what my intentions are for teaching art groups and facilitating workshops.

CONCLUSION:

This section has shown, through the metaphor of the alchemical process, how a workshop may be developed, run and concluded. *The Opus* constitutes the overall workshop. I chose a basic 'recipe' from which the essence of the workshop was structured: 'desire, ask, believe, receive'. This was also an important guide to the individual's creative process: The *Prima Materia* consists of the skills that are required by the facilitator, especially that of trust in self and process, as well as practical skills such as mirroring. The *Hermetic Vessel* is about 'container building', the creating of an emotionally safe space as well as the choosing of the environment in which the workshop will take place. *Amplification* is the fire which gets the creative process in motion; this is done through experiences set up specifically for this group, through ritual and the participants' involvement. Finally, the workshop is completed; the *Philosopher's Stone* is identified and discussed, the creative process is reviewed, and insights are shared. I also learned from experienced facilitators how they conduct their workshops and the different approaches they had. This helped me be more relaxed and confident when I facilitated the Artist's workshop.

Chapter 5: Workshop Tools

This chapter shows the tools used in the creation of the two workshops facilitated as part of this study. The first workshop was for a group of students at DUT, the second workshop was with a group of volunteer artists. My hope with this information is to help the reader who may be interested in facilitating similar types of workshops. I list questions I asked the participants prior to starting the workshops, show the programs as I used them during the workshops, and I describe Experiences that could be useful when facilitating these types of workshops. Lastly I show the list of materials that I collect for the workshops.

THE STUDENT WORKSHOP

Questionnaire

These questions I asked the group of students prior to the workshop. There were two reasons for this. The first was to get the participants to establish clarity about what they would like to acquire from the workshop. This is important and I discussed this at length in Chapter 4 on page 79 – clarifying what one's desires are, to help focus their energy for clear results. The second reason was for myself, as the facilitator, to be able to establish the general understanding of artist's block and creative process from the group prior to the workshop. This helped me decide what would be the best course of action for the workshop program.

1. Describe what you understand the creative process to be?
2. Do you have a clear idea of how your creative process moves, please explain your process?
3. What would you describe 'artists block' or 'creative block' to be?
4. Have you experienced this? Please explain.
5. Have you found ways to get yourself 'unstuck' – please describe?
6. Do you find the DUT has helped you understand creative process and have given you skills to move past creative blocks? Please explain.

Program

I wrote out this program in detail before starting the workshop because I was nervous that I would forget important issues to raise with the group. I went through my research up to this point and put in all the important aspects that I could find and felt were important around the issue of artist's block and creative process. In hindsight I realised that I perhaps tried to fit in too much in such a short period of time. In

hindsight I now realise that I was not trusting of the process which would naturally emanate from the group. I discuss my findings in detail in Chapter 6.

WEDNESDAY	
12.30	Get into bus
1.00	Leave Durban
3.30	Arrive in Kokstad
3.30 - 5	Free time
5 – 6pm	<p>Creating safe container</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <u>Introductions.</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Myself, participants. - To give name, where from and briefly what hoping to get out of doing Fine art at DUT - Why this workshop? - Community living (creation of rules) - Clean up after selves, inventory of materials, don't leave in nature - No drugs or alcohol ◦ <u>Discuss confidentiality of group:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask group what this would mean to them - Make suggestions or highlight important points ◦ <u>Creating ritual:</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sitting in circle <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Speak from the heart. ii) Listening from the heart iii) Being of 'lean expression' iv) Spontaneity <p>(Zimmerman and Coyle)</p> 2. Centre piece i.e. candle and objects that represent creativity for individuals – put down brought objects from home that represent creativity. 3. Retreat time – sacred time – away from our normal world, gives new perspective.
6 – 7.30	Supper
7.30 – 8.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <u>Discuss artists block:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask group for own ideas - Give suggestions (could write up on large paper) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Impatience ii) Confidence (self doubt) iii) Jealousy iv) Premeditation (thinking about end product) v) Stubbornness (staying with same images or perspective) vi) Fear (mistakes, judgement, self-disclosure) vii) Ego vs. soul

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Discuss Creative process:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask group for ideas - Give suggestions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Play ii) Being lost iii) Trusting the Process iv) Creativity a labyrinth v) Blocks seen as ally vi) Mistakes vii) Waiting viii) Doubt vs. confidence ix) Frustration and discontentment • <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Hinduism: rhythms of creation and destruction (Shiva) b) Buddhist: that things are not permanent, that we can also understand that being stuck is also impermanent - Scientific: The whole universe is engaged in this 'cosmic dance', endlessly moving, a rhythmic dance of creation and destruction
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>A Process to help engage with creative process</u> DESIRE, ASK, BELIEVE RECEIVE <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Write what you <u>desire</u> (intentions) on paper ii) <u>Ask</u> for guidance - Sit quietly ie in nature alone iii) <u>Believe</u> – listen and look, you should find the answers around you, visualise opening door iv) <u>Receive</u> –start to play with materials. Sit, walk around, be guided by your intuition, look, admire, copy, express • <u>Discuss 'intentions' for workshop</u> • <u>Write down intentions for workshop</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The writing of the intentions helps focus their ideas about what it is they truly would like to achieve from the workshop as a whole or that particular day. Could be just a celebration of creativity. • <u>Cognitive Journal</u>
8.30 – 9.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Warm up - Physical experience 1:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swop paintings (Materials – paper, oil pastels, paint, music) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Write name on paper b) Start on own picture with music and one medium c) Stop, swop pictures, and repeat for a few sessions. d) Get original back

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <u>Warm up - Physical experience 2:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paint to music– combines suggestions from Allen and McNiff (Materials – large paper, paint, music) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Based on McNiff observations of Picasso, feel the full extent of their bodies b) Ask them to become aware of the forces that are generated by the lower body. c) allow the feet to contribute to the gesture d) Forget what one looks like. Close the eyes and submerge oneself in the imaginings. e) Allen describes drawing as a way of ‘making energy visible’, getting to know ones own inner energy before looking outwards f) Play different music use different mediums: to explore ones energy g) i.e. Masters’ images, even if very realistic, look at a small section, one would see scribbles, these are energised marks that give the drawings power. ◦ <u>Briefly discuss experience</u>
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THURSDAY	
7 - 8 am	Breakfast
8 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <u>Check in</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask how everyone is feeling ◦ Re-cap
8.30 - 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Discuss ‘Why make art’? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Play ii) Social awareness and responsibility (contributing) iii) Therapeutic iv) Self awareness v) Fame vi) Story telling
9 – 9.30	<p><u>Warm up experience</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ - <u>Trust the senses, listen and respond</u> experience which grows into a process and demonstrate a process London has an idea to engage the artist with nature and then to create from this connection.. <p>(Materials – small piece of paper)</p> <p>(Instructions given – go away to do experience alone)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sit quietly in nature, using, and slow the heart. - Deep breathing to still the mind. The mind will wonder, bring it gently back to the present. The more you speak in your mind the quieter nature will be. Put energy into staying alert - Nature will start a conversation. Almost like a tap on the shoulder only it will probably be subtler than that. A quiver of the lips, shiver down the spine...could have heard something unusual. - Bring awareness to this part of you where you 1st ‘heard’ nature - Respond to what you received however you wish for example vocalise it, write or even just breathe with it. - Use the earth, sticks and stones, saliva, voice any way that seems appropriate to you to express - Don’t rush in your response or force the effort. Hold back on ambition, and desire to make something good or specific. - The ‘Mark’ becomes a new thing in the Universe. Try not to think what or how mark will become artwork. Things to try would be. - Close eyes when making the marks, only opening them when you want to see what is being created. - Let the eyes just ‘see’ but don’t let them direct the process. They should remain passive. - Use both hands to make marks.

9.30 - 10	Discuss experience briefly
10- 10.30	Tea break
10.30 – 11am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Discuss Why nature? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Mirror – rhythms and cycles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Light/dark, life/death, male/female - Reflects aspects of self ii) Listening (not alone) iii) Symbols and messages (Nature-based cultures) iv) As humans part of nature, not separate <p>Plotkin sees 'wandering in nature' as being the most essential thing people can do as we have wandered so far from nature. That nature can 'speak' to us with a 'manner and muscle which nothing in town compares' Plotkin says nature can complement the noisy intensity of the cities with all its news and social chatter. That we need nature's news to save our souls. That here in nature we could find the seeds for dreams, storytelling, symbolic art work, soul poetry.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> v) Feminine – birthing/creation of new <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Being alone in nature is a good way to find out more about self. <p>'Broken off from the great patterns, pulses, people, things of the universe, we in turn break everything. Deaf to the great music, the grand dance of Nature, we experience a small universe, domesticated and without ultimate meaning.'" (London)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> vi) vii) Therapeutic and healing benefits of Nature viii) Inspiration for artists both visually (seeing, basic drawing skills) and spiritually ◦ How to be in nature? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Don't just grab, ask, thank ie respect ii) Walk with awareness iii) Know you are not alone, you are part of, all is connected iv)
11 - 1	<p><u>Solo time in Nature with experience suggestions as guidance:</u> (Materials: anything and journal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Recap - Desire, ask, believe, receive techniques ◦ Discuss experience suggestions as combination from Goldsworthy, London and Plotkin. (Materials- take from take anything they want in packet, paper, etc) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goldsworthy walks into a natural environment where inspiration is generated by the immediate interaction with found objects or changing environmental conditions. - Everything we need is right with us, in this moment. All we need do is look, feel and trust. - Wander aimlessly in natural environment, until one feels drawn to something, it could be interesting that makes one feel curious, allured, or attracted, repulsed, or even fear - Could take time. One needs to come from deeper self and not strategically thinking mind. - Spend time sitting and looking at it for a long time, give it your most concentrated visual and aural attention. - Record in journal what you observed. - Collect interesting objects, leaves, wood, stones (ask before taking from plants)
1 – 2.30	Lunch break
2.30 – 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <u>Creative process</u> based on experience, found objects and drawings start creating
4 – 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <u>Discussion</u> in group with show and tell
5 - 6	<i>Free time</i>
6 – 7.30	Supper

7.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Rhythm in creativity</u>: Discussion (labyrinth) Dance Gabrielle Roth 5 rhythms <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Flowing (feminine rhythm) breath in ii) Staccato (masculine rhythm) breath out iii) Chaos (combination) breath in and out iv) Lyrical (playful, celebration) v) Stillness (peace with self)
FRIDAY	
7- 8	<i>Breakfast</i>
8- 8.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Check in</u>
8.30 - 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Discuss head/heart</u> Allen says 'art making is a way of bringing soul back into my life. Soul is the place where the messiness of life, where stories exists. Soul is the place where I am replenished and can experience both gardens and graveyards. Art is my way of knowing who I am.' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being in connection with the soul is way of building confidence - Levi and Smiths debates two basic theories on the creative process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) <u>Aristotelian</u> perspective 'the imposition of form upon matter' Aristotle had a more head like approach based on the intellect where the artist starts with an idea and the materials are controlled for the desired out come b) <u>Plotonic</u> view 'expression of emotion through inspiration' Plato's theory is based on the heart, 'inspired and possessed' rather than knowledge c) <u>Combination as necessary</u> one is inspired with an idea, that one does ones best to render this idea but allow for synchronicity, new ideas and inspiration to ultimately mould the final art work. - Left brain/right brain theories
9 – 9.30	<p><u>Warm up experience: Allow the unexpected to emerge from the unknown</u> (Work in group and lead through process by myself) (Materials: Clay, cardboard surface)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play with clay – eyes closed - Be aware of the physical aspect of the clay and the way it moves. <p>(Be confident that new forms exist; that what appears random can have a purpose. For something new to emerge the old must break down, the motions of the hands are what is shaping this material.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open eyes: Think of the eyes as allies, Just observing what happens, rather than directing, guiding the process with suggestions - Look at shape made, try to observe something in it however fanciful, try to create this thing. - Allow for process to take own journey
9.30- 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of process
10- 10.30	Tea break

10.30 - 11	<p>Discuss Dark/light in nature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark and light as tool to get drama, form, depth in art works • The cycles of nature and mulching analogy. • The power of the dark, mirroring aspects • Not necessarily aesthetic only, emotions, fears • Death as an Ally. Power of the dark things to feed the light • Plotkin suggests looking more closely at the dark side of self. Ask how does what I see in nature mirror my own dark side? • A metaphor for the 4 basic human stages in development and experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - South / childhood - West/ adolescence The dark times are seen as the adolescent time of life This is a necessary and valuable time. Like the roots of trees, in the darkness of the earth, drawing up nutrients, to help later in the creation of new leaves - North /adulthood - East/ Old age
	<p>The cycles are mirrored in nature, or we nature the cycles found in Nature. Cultures from all over the world use the compass signs to help people understand the cycles we move through as human beings. (M. Little and S. Foster <u>The four shields: The initiatory seasons of human Nature</u>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plotkin understands the importance of the dark as a place where 'the wanderer' is likely to discover their soul. He suggests that one needs to sink deeper into 'more fertile, darker soil' to find wilder possibilities. He says that the greatest gifts are to be found in this dark space is not what you find but rather how it may change you, we need to have 'faith in the night'. (Plotkin)
11 - 1	<p><u>Time alone in Nature</u> (Materials: take paper, charcoal and whatever else they wish)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants to spend time in a darker place in nature. Reflect on aspects of self one does not like. Use nature to help reflect this. • Could start by finding something in nature one is repulsed by. A spider or bit of fungus growing on a tree. • Dialog with this thing. Write down the key things that come up for you, what don't you like about it, how does it make you feel. • Look around for other things that reflect dark/ light in nature or as mirror. Collect, draw, photograph • On a piece of paper, draw in more depth how it made you feel. Embrace it and engage with its dark power.
1- 2.30	Lunch break
2.30 -4.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Creative process</u>: Continue with creative process using new reference and experience. Art work should include dark/light metaphor. Start new or continue with same work.
4.30 -5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion in group with show and tell
5 - 6	Free time
6 - 7.30	Supper
7.30 - 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Create music</u> form objects/ drums/ rattles/ ask students to bring drums if have. Allow music to take own form.

SATURDAY	
7- 8 am	Breakfast
8- 8.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Check in</u>

8.30 – 10.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Time alone and or Continue with creative process</u>
10.30 -11	Tea break
11- 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Final show and tell process</u> London suggests taking all preliminary sketches and putting them out to view. This can be done at the end of workshop. And can be the reflection for the creative process. Patterns can be revealed that could be important. ie Degas preliminary sketches.(London, pg 106) Tell story of process
1 - 2	Lunch
2 - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Finish show and tell process</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Discussion on taking skills into the future</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Closing</u> – thanking participants
3 – 3.30	Pack bus
3.30	Leave Kokstad
6	Arrive in Durban

ARTISTS WORKSHOP

Questionnaire

These questions were sent to the participants prior to attending the workshop.

1. Have you or are you experiencing Artist's Block, creative block or sometimes referred to as writer's block? If yes, please explain how it affects you.
2. Have you found ways to help yourself move out of this blocked state? Please explain.
3. What is your intention in doing this workshop?
4. Are there any specific issues that you would like to discuss or explore during this workshop?

Program

This is the program I used when facilitating the Artists' workshop. I have listed only the important time limits for experiences and meal times. I felt confident enough to trust that as the workshop progressed I would be able to fill gaps and be an effective guide where necessary, depending on the issues and needs as they arose. In Chapter 6 I discuss my feelings and observations about this approach in more detail.

<u>Friday</u>		
4 pm	Centre piece preparation	Donations
	Introductions: pairs question What it means to me to be artist/creative?	
	Show materials, set intentions	
Supper 5.30 – 6.30		
7	Experience: Swop painting with music	

	Discussion: creative process, artists block	
	Experience: Paint to music	
9ish	Close evening	

<u>Saturday</u>		
Breakfast 7.30 – 8.30		
9 -10	Checking in	
10 – 10.30	Experience: Nature introduction	
10.30 - 11.30	Discussion: Nature as source of inspiration-how to be in nature	
	Experience: Desire ask believe receive – use clay with group to demonstrate	
11.30 - 12.30	Experience: Take materials. Wonder around, find a piece of nature you feel safe in or are inspired by. Desire ask believe receive.	
Lunch 12.30 – 1.30		
1.30 – 3.30	Experience: Go play use, different materials, be in nature, use desire ask...	
3.30	Check in about experience	
Supper 5.30 – 6.30		
7	Gabrielle Roth record experience on paper or clay	
9	Brief discussions	

<u>Sunday</u>		
Breakfast 7.30 – 8.30		
8.45	Workshop starts	
9 – 10	Checking in.	
10 - 10.30	Morning walk alone in nature, wonder around	
10.30 – 11.30	Warm up different for each person	
11.30 – 12	Discussion	
Lunch 12 – 1		
1 – 3	Experience: Expand – trust the process, see where it takes you, experiment, play	
3 – 3.45	Discuss process in small groups	
3.45 – 4	Thank you. Closing	

EXPERIENCES FOR WORKSHOPS

I have divided the experiences into three types: Introduction experiences, Warm up experiences, and a group of Main experiences which refer directly to issues that were discussed in chapters 1 and 2. I use this list as reference when planning a workshop or on-hand during a workshop when I need to suggest an experience for a specific issue which has arisen or when a participant is 'stuck' and needs direction.

Introduction experiences

As discussed in detail in Chapter 4 on page 87, Introduction experience are important to begin the establishment of the safe container for the new group by acquainting the participants with each other, or starting each day with a check-in to ready the participants for the days proceedings and give an awareness of the individuals in the group.

Introductions in pairs

This experience introduces group members to each other (Liebmann, 1997:114). The group is separated into pairs. For 2 minutes, each person has a chance to introduce themselves and answer a question put to the whole group. The question I have used previously is: What does creativity mean to you? (Liebmann, 1997: 25). The partner will introduce the other to the group, mentioning their name, brief aspects about them and then telling the group the person's answer to the question.

Random introductions

Liebmann (1997: 115) suggests that the group walk around and randomly introduce themselves to as many people as possible.

Group introductions:

If it is a small group, each person can introduce and briefly say something about themselves. There could be a specific topic that can be addressed as a way of introduction. For example, what do you hope to get from this workshop experience? (Bekker And Morris –Vision quest workshop)

Checking-in

If the group has been together for a day or two then simply asking each person to say how they are today, can help bring everyone into the present moment. It also allows the participants a chance to share any important things on their mind with the group. (Bekker And Morris –Vision quest workshop)

Metaphor

As an introduction, when everyone has been together for a day or two, each person expresses how they feel as a metaphor and then explains why. For example –“I feel like a box. I feel self contained.” (Bekker And Morris –Vision quest workshop)

Rounds

Liebmann (1997:114) suggests ‘rounds’. Each person has a turn to finish a statement. For example they could begin with:

I am excited about...

Right now I am feeling...

On the way here I noticed...

Clarifying intentions

As mentioned in Chapter 2 and 4 clarifying intentions is important to setting the creative process in motion. My suggestion is for each person to write what they want from the workshop/creative process. It may also be important to get people to try to isolate what their block is. This can assist the facilitator in guiding the participant during the workshop. A questionnaire can be answered prior to the workshop.

Warm up experiences

Warm up experiences, as discussed in Chapter 4 on page 87, are valuable in breaking boundaries of discomfort with the new group, or the starting of the new day during the workshop. These experiences can help loosen up the participants both physically and mentally for creative freedom and exploration for the day ahead. They generally are fun, playful and light.

Ball play

Ellis Pearson (Appendix D: 159), suggests playing games as a good way of engaging the participants with the group and relaxing them into the workshop. He says that the games may not necessarily be art related. He suggested the group plays with a ball, where the ball must not touch the ground.

Swop painting with music

I have used this type of experience in many workshops including the Student workshop 2006 and the Artists workshop 2007. Set out on a long table with enough space for each participant, a large piece of paper and some art materials (paint, crayons etc). Tell them to put their name on the back of the paper. Give them no warning of the process to come. Put on loud, dance type music, and encourage the participants to move their bodies and create with the music. After a short period of time, and when it

looks like each person has covered a large percentage of the paper, stop the music. Have the participant's swap their picture with someone else's, then start the music. This can be repeated several times. At the end, return the picture to the original artist. Ask for responses and observations from the process. Generally, the response is varied, but ultimately the experience lightens the group dynamics and can help relax individuals frightened of producing 'bad' art.

Paint to music

Allen (1995: 21 – 22) describes drawing as a way of making energy visible. So one can play with and get to know different types of energy and make contact with the energy of the object chosen through drawing. She suggests that one gets to know one's own inner energy, using music, before looking outwards. The participant can also explore their energy using different materials for different effects. In Fine art Master's images, even if they are very realistic, if one looks closely at a small section, one would see scribbles, these are energised marks that give the drawings power.

- Draw to music. Explore different marks. Fill the page.
- Change music. Try a different medium

Making Music

Make music from home made instruments (Pearson, Appendix D: 159). Playing with rhythms, space, sound, colour, shape and pattern.

I introduced this experience to the students on the workshop. They responded well and seemed to enjoy it as a playful creative incident, view the documentary in Appendix B on page 152

Making body shapes

Making shapes by moving bodies in space, dodging, not colliding, like the chaos of the universe. Suddenly get everyone to stop, observe the body shapes surrounding them (Pearson, Appendix D: 159).

Object associations

The participants get into pairs, and a natural object, a rock in this situation, is found. The natural object is used to help tell the story, through visual and imagined metaphorical associations of the participant's life or creative process, problems and ideals.

The participant is asked to create a question which concerns the problem they may be having. The object's patterns, colours and shapes are observed. The partner writes down key observation, perhaps 5. The observer then, using metaphorical associations, explores the possible meaning from these observations, keeping the question in mind. The partner will also write down the meaning found from this object. The suggestion is that one can get meaning out of anything.

An example of this process comes from my experience in the Facilitation workshop. The question I asked referred to my creative process and what it means in the bigger picture. I observed several aspects in the rock, for example, there was a line which reminded me of a palm line of my hand, which had a clear direction. The reflected meaning I came to was that it was like a time line, showing my destiny, the way things are supposed to be. The sense and meaning that I derived from this observation was that I was on the right path. (Bekker and Morris –Vision quest workshop)

Clay work;

I have used clay in many of the workshops I have facilitated. It can be very centring and therapeutic, bringing the participants back in touch with their emotions and allowing for spontaneous expression. I usually suggest the participants close their eyes and allow how they are feeling to be explored with their hands. Working with clay in the natural environment can be helpful to explore sounds and sensations through the clay. After a time, I suggest they open their eyes and look at what they have made. Through visual association, the participant is encouraged to find shapes that remind them of something, then to create this 'object' that they see. They can continue changing and rearranging. At the end I usually ask the participants what happened, how did they feel during and after the experience?

Opposite hand

Paint with brush or fingers using opposite hand (Liebmann, 1997: 122). A theme can be set. This can be playful, and done to music.

Mandalas

Liebmann (1997: 190) and Jung (1993: 96) are among many who suggest the creation of mandalas to be helpful as a meditation and as relaxation techniques. Draw a large circle on a piece of paper. Be aware of the centre of the page (and the two halves, if the focus is on opposites). I have used these in the past as a 'non-judgmental creation', and suggest the participants allow the mandala to develop without too much conscious control. Liebmann recommends themes such as exploring:

Your day and night and the transitions from one to the other.

Using bright colours

Exploring inner landscapes

Nature introductions

This experience is used to introduce people who are unfamiliar with spending time in or engaging with nature as mentioned in Chapter 3 page 55. The participants pair-up. They remain silent. One person closes their eyes, the other takes them on a sensual journey through a natural environment, getting them to smell,

touch, hear. Occasionally, through a pre-agreed signal such as a gentle squeeze, their eyes can be opened for a brief moment. (Cohen, 1989: 4)

Desire ask believe receive

A detailed account of this process is mentioned on page 79, Chapter 4. I suggest the participant keeps their eyes closed through most of this experience.

Desire - The participant takes a moment to consider what he/she wants or desires from the artwork, experience or from nature. This can be written down or just meditated on.

Ask - The participant asks God, their higher self, or nature for guidance. The asking need not be to someone or something specific. The idea is that the asking for help or guidance sets an intention which carries an energetic awareness of need.

Believe - I suggest the participant opens themselves to the real possibility that they will get what they want. It becomes a sense of knowing, and an opening of self to this eventuality, that they will find guidance on the journey.

Receive – Through inner knowing and trust, the participant starts the process. Perhaps by noticing what is directly in front of them when they open their eyes, and starting with this. It could even stem from an image that came to them through their imagination or memory.

Solo in Nature

Spend any amount of time alone in nature as mentioned in Chapter 3, page 57. I have found that the above experience (desire, ask, believe, receive) is a useful technique to help centre oneself into the environment. The participant can also breathe deeply, watching the rhythm of their breath (Cohen, 1989: 13). It can be time to relax or as a beginning moment before starting an art work.

Main Experiences

I have focused on some of the issues mentioned in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, and organised the experiences under main headings for easier access. Wherever possible these experiences should be done in a natural environment. Some of the experience may overlap with other headings, or may also be suitable as Warm-up experiences.

INSPIRATION: (Chapter 1: 18)

Engaging the senses in nature

Hadden (2004: 30) suggests using one's senses, smell, taste, and touch, visual and audio senses, to guide inspiration. The natural environment is full of these kinds of sensory stimulations. This is mentioned in

Chapter 3, page 51, where the natural environment can be inspirational for both visual and imaginary images.

Object drawings

Based on an experience suggested by Leland (1990: 7), I suggest the participants walk around in the natural environment, choose one object at a time and do simple line or contour drawings (following the interesting contours of the body of the object, not just the outline). The object should be drawn from several perspectives before moving on to the next. Limit each drawing to 2 – 3 minutes, so that the participant doesn't get bogged down with getting them 'perfect'. From these images ideas may emerge, and ideas about what to do next. Sections of the images may be abstracted so they become landscapes, or the artist could explore the subject with other mediums and scale.

Brainstorming

Hadden (2004: 226) suggests "brainstorming", to help with inspiration. There are many different ways of brainstorming. I suggest a method which I have used frequently. In the centre of the page, write the problem, or theme interested in perusing. Have spider like lines branching out from the centre idea; write any ideas or thoughts that may come spontaneously. Each idea should be written on a different 'leg' and from here can be explored outwards or branched from there. This is a good way of getting ideas to flow.

Adopted earth

London (2003: 95-96) describes Monet's garden as a constant source of inspiration for Monet. Adopt a piece of earth as if one's own, choosing it because it is a place that one responds to for what ever reason; observe it, touch it, listen to it, be with it over a period of time (duration of the workshop). Look closely at its patterns and colours, is there a main feature that dominated this space. For each day of the workshop spend time alone there, drawing, writing, creating using all the senses. By developing a relationship with this particular place, it may become a 'safe container' for the participant to work within. The importance of a safe container is mentioned in Chapter 4, page 86.

PHYSICAL BLOCK: (Chapter 1: 17)

5 rhythms dance

Solutions for being physically blocked, which may be affecting creative freedom are discussed in Chapter 1, page 17. Gabrielle Roth explores five rhythms found in nature through dance. Choose music that best explores each rhythm.

Flowing: feminine rhythm, circular movements

Staccato: masculine rhythm, sharp, clear movements

Chaos: mixed up, male and female rhythms combined, uncontrolled movements

Lyrical: fun playful rhythm

Stillness: moving slowly, like through honey until comes to a point of stillness

I suggest the participants then paint their experience at the end, moving from stillness into the painting.

Drumming

Dancing to drumming or drumming itself is suggested by Plotkin (2003: 160). The participant does not limit or embellish how the dance will unfold, but to surrender to the rhythms of the body. After this experience or during it, the participant can express their experience on paper. Perhaps stories come to mind, words or images.

Walking

Walking is suggested by Cameron (1995: 40) as a good way to free the mind and get the creative energy flowing. The walk should not have any expectations put on it. It is best to walk alone and see where the journey takes one.

SETTING BOUNDARIES: (Chapter 1: 15)

Limited elements

Boundaries can be selected by or for the participant. For example, only a few elements are chosen to work with; a selection of 2 or 3 colours, one chosen concept is selected for exploration or a limited choice of materials can be used.

Small space

Goldsworthy (1990: 1) walks into a natural environment where inspiration is generated by the immediate interaction with found objects or changing environmental conditions. Based on Goldsworthy's technique, the participant is shown a place by the facilitator with a 2m radius in the natural environment. Here, alone, the participant looks and listens, opens senses and then creates something from objects found within this small space. Using only the objects found in this space to create with.

The idea is that everything we need is right with us, in this moment. All we need do is look, feel and trust.

TRUST THE PROCESS: (Chapter 2: 42)

Expansion

Any of the experiences mentioned here could be taken one step further. My suggestion is to see what happens with each individual. They could choose a section of an image already made, cut it out, redraw it

on a larger scale or continue exploring from this point with new mediums. Intuition will help guide the process.

Doodles

Start with a doodle. This is described by Danto (2001: 15-26), to be important to the artist Motherwell. It is important to not control the hand by any conscious mental processes. Therefore, the hand should wander across the surface, with the sense of being disengaged from it. Motherwell called it the 'original creative principle'. The Surrealists referred to this idea as 'psychic automation'. The doodle needs to be done without being controlled by a conscious mental process. Once time has been spent on a doodle or two, observe the shapes and patterns; perhaps they remind you of something. Explore this, or just redraw and emphasise the shapes that seem most prominent in the doodle.

Overview

London (2003: 106) suggests taking all preliminary sketches and putting them out to view, in order of creation. This can be done at the end of workshop or the end of the day. It can be used to reflect the creative process as it journeys to the last image. Observing the process thus far can also inspire the direction to take from this point onwards. I use this often in a workshop -- at the end of an experience, to conclude the day or at the end of the workshop -- to consolidate the participant's experience of their creative process.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE: (Chapter 1: 8)

Gentle building

The basis of the workshop is to build confidence, but also to challenge. Growth and development of confidence may happen fast or slowly depending on the individual. It comes from respecting the individual's situation at the present time and where they are in their own journey, without judgement. Gently showing the participant where their strengths are can help build their esteem. This may not always be long lasting, as the individual is also responsible for their own development and process.

Discuss process

Discussing the process at the end of the workshop can help the participant understand their process with more clarity, and help them in the future if they were to experience lack of confidence or artists block.

PLAY: (Chapter 2: 26)

Spontaneous clay:

McNiff (1998: 29) suggests using clay, a great way to allow the unexpected to emerge from the unknown. The participant needs to be confident that new forms exist; that what appears random can have a purpose. For something new to emerge, the old must break down. Be aware of the physical aspect of the clay and the way it moves. The motions of the hands are what are shaping this material. Think of the eyes as allies, just observing what happens, rather than directing, guiding the process with suggestions. A completion is often instinctive, a feeling as to when it is time to stop, rather than seeking a visual ideal.

Haphazard experience:

Enjoying an experience similar to Jackson Pollack's methods can be fun and liberating. Put the paper on the floor; dribble paint over the surface. Try using the hands or feet or anything that comes to mind. Don't be limited by thinking it has to look good. When it is dry, take a look at it from different perspectives and from a distance to see if any interesting images or patterns emerge.

No goal:

Practice painting, drawing, dancing, moving without any goal in mind. Having a positive regard for this type of expression helps the process. Humble expressions could be the source of the most profound according to McNiff (1998: 27)

IMAGINATION: (Chapter 2: 28)

Creating a story board

Active imagination, as used by Jung (Allen: 82) and is described by Allen to be 'dreaming the dream onward'. To allow the soul to tell us all it knows from its deepest truth through images and metaphors. Jung recommends an active engagement with the image, to interact and even conflict with it, rather than passively observing it as with most meditation techniques. Dreams can also be painted. Let the story emerge in its own time. These images hold information not yet understood by the conscious mind. Journaling can accompany the images. Try not to interpret the story, but try to just receive it. Don't edit it to make it more logical, let it be. Begin with simple mediums to get started and then later elaborate with others if you wish to. This experience could be done throughout the workshop and then examined at the end.

Guided meditation

There are many guided meditations which can be spoken out to the group while they sit or lie comfortably with their eyes closed. I have not included specific examples here, as they can be lengthy. I suggest looking at Starhawk or Marian Liebmann for suggestions. Usually the participant is guided through an environment where the details are filled out by their imagination, rather than the spoken word. The listener is guided but not controlled. The reason for doing such an experience would be to help stimulate imagination, induce a relaxed state of mind, or create an opening to new potentials. The importance of an active imagination to the creative process is described in more detail in Chapter 2 page 29, and Chapter 3 page 53.

Ink blots

This experience is inspired by both Liebmann (1997, 123) and Carl Roberts (Appendix C, 157). First, take a piece of paper and fold it in half. Blotch paint on one side of the fold, and then while the paint is still wet, fold the two sides together. Open this out and then look at the image from a distance. Allow the images to guide the imagination. Expand on these images. Sections could be cut out, redrawn or the original blotch image can be expanded on.

CONNECTING TO SOUL: (Chapter 2: 33)

Touch drawings

This experience is a great way of warming up to the beginning of process without having to be too conscious of what is being created. It also allows the participant to make many artworks without becoming too precious about them. Wood block ink or oil paint is rolled onto a glass or Perspex surface. Paper (preferably light weight, such as tissue paper, typing paper, newsprint) is gently placed on top. The participant draws by touching the surface with their fingers. Deborah Koff-Chapin (1996) has used this technique with groups of people for years. The hands are no longer instruments of the mind, which may be inhibited by judgement and fear. She suggests that once the board is prepared that the participant takes a moment to centre them selves. Start to become aware of body sensations, feelings and thought. Accept whatever you're experiencing at the moment to be the starting point. Then with eyes closed, start moving the hand over the surface. When that image is complete, pull the image off without looking at it too much. Prepare the board again and continue. Try different approaches; using different hands, opening and closing eyes, exploring different thoughts and feelings. If one feels stuck, draw what that feels like and be open to the unknown. A good subject is drawing faces, using both hands for the different hemispheres. This process should continue for at least 90 minutes. When the session is over the participant could layout the series of completed pictures in the order they were created. Show the drawings to others in the group and share the process and insights that came up. They could do several things during this sharing time;

tell a story with the drawings, starting “Once upon a time...”. The images could help start the next stage in the process, by choosing one and expanding on it. Doing these touch drawings in a natural environment can help connect with the essence of nature by not drawing what is seen but rather what is felt.

Connecting to nature

This experience is a combination of suggestions from Cohen (1989: 8 and 9) and London (2003: 121) Sit quietly in nature, using breathing techniques to still the mind, and slow the heart. The mind will wonder, bring it gently back to the present-- being in nature. The more you speak in your mind the quieter nature will be. So put energy into staying alert.

Nature will start a conversation. Almost like a tap on the shoulder, only it will probably be more subtle than that. A quiver of the lips, shiver down the spine... could have heard something unusual.

Bring awareness to this part of you where you first ‘heard’ nature.

Respond to what you received, however you wish. For example, vocalise it, write or even just breath with it.

Use the earth, saliva, voice, or any other way that seems appropriate for you to express what you have experienced. Don’t be rushed in your response or force the effort. Hold back on ambition, and desire to make something good or specific.

The ‘Mark’ becomes a new thing in the Universe. Try not to think what or how mark will become artwork. Close your eyes when making the marks, only opening them when you want to see what is being created. Let the eyes just ‘see’. Don’t let them direct the process, they should remain passive.

Use both hands to make marks.

BEING LOST: (Chapter 2: 39 and Chapter 3: 68)

Wander through nature

Plotkin (2003: 168) suggests a process which I feel can be adapted for artists.

Wander aimlessly in natural environment. Until one feels drawn to something, it could be interesting that makes one feel curious, allured, or attracted, repulsed, or even fear.

Take your time. One needs to come from your deeper self and not a strategically thinking mind.

Spend time sitting and looking at the object chosen for a long time, giving it your most concentrated visual and aural attention. Draw what you observed.

CHAOS: (Chapter 2: 40)

Energy made visible

Allen (1995: 21) refers to drawing as 'energy made visible'. Explore to music, or perhaps just being outside in the environment, using mediums such as charcoal, or pencil to begin with. Make marks, lines, shapes on the paper. Fill the paper as completely as possible. Stand back and observe the energy that appears on the page. Try to describe it: light, dense, playful, nervous etc. If standing for the first drawing, sit for the second. Notice the difference in energy. Draw on large scale, then on a small scale. When there is a whole collection, stand back and view the differences in energy. Now go into the environment, choose to draw something, and with the knowledge of this energy transfer it into the drawing of the different objects.

Chaotic Environment

Draw something that appears chaotic, a flowing river, the dense bush, the twirling clouds etc. Cut out a section of this that seems most interesting, or find a section which reminds you of something, redraw with image in mind, or enlarge section that seems interesting using a specific selection of materials. The image will possibly turn out to be quite abstracted, but should contain the original energy seen in the beginning.

MATERIAL LISTS

I use this material list as a check list when packing for each workshop as an organisational assistant so I don't forget anything important. I add materials as I think of them. I find this list is useful when organising from one workshop to the next. I keep a box with most of the materials in storage, ready for use. With such a large selection, I find that there are always materials left over from the previous workshop, so I usually only need to top up or add new ideas for the next workshop

Pack	Done
Big containers for easy transport	
Bottles for water etc	
Brushes – good oil and old	
Big brushes	
Paper – scrap	
- white (big)	
- brown (thick and thin)	
- small pads of paper	
- roll	
- coloured	
- cardboard	
- sugar paper	
Newspaper	
Mixing plates	
Rags	
Paper/plastic bags to carry materials	
Black plastic bags	
Plastic spoons	
Prestic	
Masking tape	
Selotape	
Sosati sticks	
Sand	
pencils	
Chalk pastels	
Oil pastels	
Wax crayons	
Oil Paint	
Pencil crayons	
Kokies	
Punch	
Stapler	
glitter	
Glue – contact x2	
- wood x2	
- clear x2	
String	
Cotton	
Charcoal	

Pack	done
Oil paint	
Acrylic paint	
White PVA	
Drill	
Jigsaw	
Knives	
Spare blades	
Wire	
Wire cutters	
Scissors	
matches	
watch	
Basket	
Bell	
Plastic sheets for floor and tables	
Music/cds	
Batteries	
Computer	
Extension	
Camera	
Batteries	
Memory card	
Medical kit	

Chapter 6: Workshop Reports

In this chapter I give a report on the overall facilitation experience and layout of the Student and Artist's workshops. I also give detailed reports which discuss the effectiveness of these workshops based on the participants' responses in a questionnaire given to them to complete after the workshop. The writing of these reports has helped me analyse the success of the workshop, build confidence and make changes for following workshops. If the reader is intending on creating and facilitating workshops of their own, I hope that this information will be valuable.

REPORT ON STUDENT WORKSHOP

This workshop was run for 13 2nd year Fine Art students from the Durban University of Technology (DUT). It was a 3 day workshop, run in April 2006. The workshop was experimental, and I used the basis of this research to help guide the structure of the workshop. Chapter 5, on page 99 shows the program I created for the workshop.

Before the workshop, I asked each student to fill out questionnaires. The questions I asked were around the students' understanding of creative process and artists' block. I also asked if they felt the DUT helped them to understand their creative process. The responses that the students gave around the questions were varied. A few students did not seem to understand what the questions were referring to, either about creative process, artist's block or both. Other students articulated their experiences and understandings with clarity. Clearly stating what they viewed artist's block and creative process to be. There seemed to be a general consensus that the DUT helped them understand their creative process. Some of the skills learned from DUT were referring to books, theory, critiques and lectures.

The workshop took place on a private farm in Kokstad. An old farm house was perfect for sleeping arrangements for the 13 participating students, and for containing the workshop. The house was far from major roads and was surrounded by garden, farm lands, and backed by a rocky hill. This venue I felt was suitable for this workshop because it was a quiet safe environment in a natural setting, and that it was suitably far from Durban to give the students an opportunity to feel a significant change from their normal environment.

To ensure that I was clear on the procedure of the workshop, I set up a detailed program. Times and experiences and the topic for discussions were clearly laid out ensuring that I had all the information I would need at hand. It meant that I would know what was happening well in advance so I could inform

the participants what would be happening in the next session. To help the participants plan their time and to give them a sense of direction I posted abbreviated schedules around the house.

During the discussion periods, to ensure that everyone had a chance to speak, we would move systematically around the group. Some of the discussions flowed with enthusiasm; others were quiet with long silences and a general feeling of resistance. These times were difficult, and in hindsight, I perhaps should have asked the group if there was something important to discuss that was on their minds. The short experiences were mostly embraced with enthusiasm, but the chances to work alone in the natural environment, often meant the students distracted each other and did not stay focused on their process.

In general, I feel that the workshop went well and I learned many important lessons from the experience. Although I feel that I would do many things differently, I also realise that the students did gain some insights into their creative process, and had a chance to think about the significance of the natural environment as a starting point for creativity. This was made clear in the questionnaire that students completed a couple of months after the workshop. A full report on the workshop and questionnaire is follows in Section 2. To help summarise and as an aid to any person wanting to see how the workshop functioned, a short 12 min video documentary on a DVD is included as part of this study (Appendix B: 152).

REPORT ON QUESTIONNAIRE AND VIDEO OBSERVATIONS

This report takes into account the responses from the questionnaire which the 2nd year painting students filled in and from the observations I made while editing the documentary video. This information has helped me acquire clarity as to how improvements can be made to future workshops and to assess whether the workshop fulfils the desired results set out by this study.

Out of the 13 students who attended the workshop, 12 were present to complete the questionnaire, though one student completed only half of the questionnaire. The results are indicated in percentages from the rating scale and yes/no questions. In some situations, I have summarised their written responses, this is because the students did not always use concise English. In other situations, I quote directly from the answers given.

The questionnaire was given to the students 4 months after the workshop. This was to give them plenty of time to consolidate their experiences and to observe if they were able to use any of the techniques experienced in the workshop.

All of the students found the workshop to have benefited them in some way. A small percentage found the workshop to benefit them very little whereas there were several who felt it had a great benefit. The

	Rating scale and Yes/no answers	No answer	not at all	very little	a little	a lot	a very great deal
1	Did you find the workshop to be helpful?	0%	0%	8%	33%	33%	25%
2	Did you find the workshop to be interesting?	0%	0%	0%	8%	83%	8%
3	Did you find having the discussions to be valuable?	0%	8%	0%	33%	58%	0%
4	Have you used aspects of the workshop since April?	0%	17%	17%	33%	25%	0%
5	Did any of the experiences from the workshop help you better understand your creative process?	0%	0%	8%	42%	33%	8%
6	Did you find spending time in nature during the workshop helpful in connecting with your creative self?	8%	0%	0%	33%	33%	25%
7	Have you spent time in nature since the workshop in April? For example a park, under a tree etc.	No answer 8%		Yes 67%	sometimes 0%		No 25%
8	Did you seek out this time consciously to help you connect with your creative self?	No answer 17%		Yes 58%	sometimes 8%		No 17%
9	Since the workshop, have you experienced artist's block?	No answer 8%	not at all 0%	very little 25%	a little 25%	a lot 42%	a very great deal 0%
10	Have you used any aspect from the workshop to help you re-engage with your creative process?	No answer 8%		Yes 67%	Sometimes 0%		No 25%
11	Did you find the technique 'Desire, ask, believe, receive' helpful during the workshop?	No answer 8%	not at all 8%	very little 17%	a little 33%	a lot 33%	a very great deal 0%
12	Have you used this technique since the workshop?	No answer 25%		Yes 33%	Sometimes 8%		No 42%

written responses were varied showing that some students found the workshop to be helpful by exploring new approaches to art, clearing of mind, finding inspiration from nature, learning new creative skills, and a student indicated that "nature can talk". There were indications that they better understood how to work through 'artist's block' and that it was a time to share and speak in front of a group of people. One student said that it was a time to learn to 'tolerate' classmates.

The majority (83%) of the students found the workshop to be 'a lot' interesting. Some of their comments were that the venue and activities were interesting, and that this was an opportunity "to express differently in a different environment". One student said that it was a chance to make artworks which would not be for marks.

Several students pointed out that the most valuable discussion was around 'artist's block', with a student sharing that it was comforting to know that this state of artist's block is 'normal'. In general, the questionnaire showed that the discussions were found to be interesting, with comments that stated that they found how other students thought and felt about things to be interesting. One student rated the discussions to be of no value at all and yet had written under question 1 that there was a better understanding as to how to get rid of artist's block implying that some discussion time must have been helpful.

A small percentage of students reported that they have not used any aspect of the workshop (17%) in this four month period, although the general responses showed that the rest of the students have employed at least some aspect of the workshop in varying amounts. Most of the students found that they had a better understanding of their creative process from the experiences they had on the workshop. There was no indication that there was no benefit.

The responses to spending time in nature indicates that the students found this to be of value. Their responses ranged between a little (33%) to a very great deal (25%). The majority of the students have spent time in nature and consciously sought out this time to connect with their creative self since the workshop. One student indicated that being in nature afforded 'a shift in life where you question everything about yourself' and another said that "It clears my thoughts and helps me relax as well as energise. It is where I can be free". Another student wrote that "I've grown to appreciate it".

Almost all of the students stated that they have experienced artist's block at some time since the workshop with the majority (67%) showing that some aspect of the workshop helped them engage with their creative process. A student indicated that having fun while creating helped re-engage with the process.

The response to the technique 'desire, ask, believe, receive' was varied, with a small percentage not finding it to be valuable during the workshop with others finding it had at least some value. The questionnaire showed that the use of the technique after the workshop was equal for those who used it with those who did not. One student felt that to gain better understanding of the technique more time could have been spent on it.

The general comments about the workshop were positive. They show that there was value for each student in different ways, indicating in general that a better understanding of their creative process was attributed to discussions and sharing with the group, even though for some it was difficult. Several students stated that they would like to do something similar again and that it could be of value to others

and not just painting students. Another said 'More students need an opportunity like this because some of them just don't understand where their art and future is going, and there is a lot of artist blocks happening.' (sic) A student suggested more time for creating art works.

Possible improvements for the workshop:

These improvements I have deduced from the above report, from my own observations during the workshop and from the film footage.

1. More time to understand and practice 'desire, ask, believe, receive'

My general feeling about this technique is that I did not give enough guidance on how to use it. In past experiences on private workshops I have run, I have found this technique very helpful to the participants. I am aware that it may not have value for everyone but that in this situation I did not give the students time to practice it.

2. Less allocated time for discussions

Watching the video footage I realised that some students shut down during the discussion, became fidgety or had private conversations on the side after a period of time. Although they stated they found some discussions to be interesting, only the discussion on artist's block was memorable enough to write down.

3. Introduce more fun, short experiences

The experiences gave the students more to talk about instead of the set up discussion program I had pre-set. Talking from experience showed more enthusiasm and they had more to share. 'Doing' was more effective than listening to a lecture.

4. Give more guidance on how to be in nature, how to see, smell, hear and touch.

On reflection and from discussions with the students I realised that most of the students had no prior knowledge of nature as they have spent most of their lives in the city. Possibly more guidance and practice was required for the students to experience nature as a tool to understanding creative process and how to 'be' in nature.

5. Give more guidance on how to be alone.

As indicated above, some of the students shared that they have not experienced much time alone. One student shared with the group that for her time alone meant a type of punishment i.e. banishment.

6. Use a less structured workshop program

Having a set structure and time table does mean security and order for myself the facilitator but does not allow flexibility for the group dynamics and potential for the group to choose its own direction. For this type of workshop creative process needs to function on all levels. Allow the needs and personality of the group to guide the workshop process.

7. Not facilitating alone if possible

This means the co- or assistant facilitator can help observe the group, give suggestions and support, and help direct the flow of the workshop, and give them both time out from time to time to gather energy, and reflect.

8. Less free time in nature

Students took advantage of this time to socialise. Although I would not want to control their decisions about what to do with their time, plenty of time had been allocated for socialising. I would insist more strictly on the importance of being alone. The general inability to try to be alone could be because they are unfamiliar with being in nature. Some students indicated a fear of being alone in nature. The setting up of this could be more controlled by placing the students alone but where they can see each other.

9. Find more subtle ways of documenting the workshop

Although it was valuable to have visual documentation of the workshop process for evaluation later, it was distracting for both my self and the students. I found I become aware of the camera operator, sometimes feeling intimidated or sidetracked. I also had to think about interviewing and what I wanted filmed instead of immersing myself in the needs of the group. I sense that the students could have felt 'safer' in the sharing sessions if they were not filmed.

10. Addressing issues through experience

The 'experiences' (exercises) need to have more direct relation to some issues brought up by the workshop such as 'lack of confidence' and 'artist's block'.

What was valuable?

It is clear that for the majority of the students some aspect of the workshop was valuable, both during and after the workshop, though different aspects were valuable to different people. I feel confident after evaluating these results that a modified workshop could have an important impact on the participants for these reasons.

1. Time alone

A chance for people to reflect on who they are, what they want in life and to connect with their creative integrity.

2. Better understanding of personal creative process

Through discussions and experiences

3. To re-evaluate reasons for being creative

Not all art has to be done for the purpose of marks or for sale and that other reasons can be found and experienced for example spiritual, therapeutic or fun

4. Sharing with peers

Having an opportunity to see how one's peers think and feel in a 'safe space' can help give comfort in knowing that one is not alone or at least share vulnerable type situations, for example knowing that others experience 'artist's block'.

5. Nature can reflect a creative process or aspects of creativity

Some students engaged with metaphorical ideas such as light and dark and they experienced this while being alone in nature. It was not clear how much nature could help facilitate a creative process but it was clear that being in nature afforded a time for clearing the mind and self reflection. This study has shown that although for this group nature is not necessarily a direct source of inspiration it can serve the individual in some way for example to clear the mind or reconnect with soul.

6. Experiencing a new place

Being out of one's comfort zone can help shift an individual into new ways of viewing themselves.

7. Learning new skills

Although may not be helpful for everyone, some may benefit from new input and guidance

The student's responses in the questionnaire did not conclusively show that nature can support an artist into an engagement with their creative process. However, the general indication is that they did benefit from the experience as a whole and in an individual way. Some modification is required for future workshops but generally it has value as it stands. The workshop also highlighted the need for experiences to address issues such as 'lack of confidence' and 'artist's block' which affects student creative process and output during studies. Although difficult to quantify, being in a natural environment has some positive influence on creative process i.e. clearing mind and self reflection, being in an unfamiliar environment to influence new ways of looking at life and creativity.

REPORT ON ARTIST'S WORKSHOP

The artist's workshop forms the concluding and consolidating portion to this study. The intention of facilitating the workshop was to establish if a workshop can be created which could help an artist establish his/her own methods of unleashing creativity during 'stuck' periods. I facilitated the workshop surrounded by the natural environment to ascertain if being in nature can help artists re-engage with their creative process. The workshop is evaluated for the effectiveness of future workshops for artists and academic institutions by means of observations made from participant responses to questionnaires and through conversations.

It would be difficult to accurately quantify whether the workshop can help all artists and what exact effect the natural environment has on the participants. Therefore, to help formulate a conclusion on the effectiveness of such an experience I asked the participating artists to answer post-workshop questions. This report is therefore based on these answers as well as comments made by participants during the workshop and my own observations. I chose not to document the workshop by either recording conversations or video, as my observations from the student workshop showed that this was intrusive to the participants and therefore could affect the outcome.

Report on workshop program

I had 14 artists participate on this 2 day workshop. Although there was a lot of interest, I was limited by space and funds. All participants were artists. Some had studied some type of art-related program at a Technikon or University at various levels. There were a few participants who have had no formal art training but are practicing artists. The participants were experiencing different levels of artist's block, and wanted to deepen their understanding of their process. Several participants wanted to engage in their process with a group of like-minded people.

I used a venue in the KwaZulu Natal midlands, which was a large barn-like building with plenty of space for creative work and discussion groups. It was surrounded by natural environment and farm lands with a view (Figures 5 – 6: 135). I set out a diversity of art materials: oil paints, acrylic, PVA, drawing materials, sculpture material, tools, wood, paint and paper (Figure 2: 134). My intention in supplying such diversity was to encourage and inspire the participants to try out new materials and without feeling restricted.

I sent out a questionnaire (Chapter 5: 106) to all the participants prior to the artist's workshop, asking questions about their reasons for attending and their experiences with artists block. Most of the participants responded to this, and it was evident that in writing many of them considered what they

intended to get from the workshop. The report back at the end of the workshop showed that there were many participants who received insights and engaged with their process in ways that they had not initially expected.

The program was simple (Chapter 5: 106). The first evening we introduced ourselves and established commonality through discussions over 'being blocked'. Then I facilitated two experiences. The first was to paint to music, then swap the picture with someone else (Chapter 5: 109). After the experience a short discussion established that this had positive effects for some, surprising results for others and one participant found it very disturbing to have someone else paint on their image when they weren't expecting it. The next experience was to paint to music but without swapping (Figure 1: 134). The group seemed to enjoy this and relaxed into the process. This experience inspired the beginnings of the creative process for a few participants, as was revealed towards the end of the workshop.

On Saturday morning, we gathered to 'check-in' on how everyone felt after the previous evening. We engaged in a discussion which proved to be very valuable and thought provoking for many participants who would refer to it throughout the workshop. This spontaneous discussion resulted in defining the difference between what is considered to be a 'goal' versus an 'intention'. It was realised that the use of the words can be dependent on the user's interpretation, but that as a general consensus an 'intention' is something 'soft' and internal, whereas a goal tends to be something very final, an external manifestation with a specific outcome. They observed that often something happens in-between the intention and the goal; a negative thought pattern, belief structure or behaviour pattern that distorts the path to the goal. Often this leads to feelings of disappointment and frustration. This insightful observation seemed to help the participants be gentler with their expectations prior to their creative process. After the discussion, we wrote our intentions on pieces of paper and put them in a basket on the table in the centre of the group (Figure 3: 134).

Next I explained the use of the simple 'recipe': desire, ask, believe, receive (Chapter 5: 112). To initiate this experience and to understand the method I gave each participant a ball of clay and they engaged with the technique by allowing an image to emerge. Some of the participants had interesting insights. For example, realising that they did not believe they were worthy to *receive* their talents or some other aspect of self was not good enough. Several participants realised that they did not 'receive' easily, not even a simple compliment. Many of them reflected that they often felt stuck on one or two of the points. For example, someone shared that they found it hard to believe that they 'deserved' creative fulfilment and that this meant they never received it. We also discussed how we often don't want to accept that which we are given. We *desire* to be recognised as an artist or have our art works admired, yet when someone compliments us on even the smallest aspect of the work we rebuff it with negative comments such as:

'it's a mess', or 'it's unfinished'. This discussion was referred to or joked about throughout the workshop. It became an important theme or experience for the workshop for many of the participants.

The participants then took some materials with them into the natural environment. Finding a spot that resonated for them, engaging with the above mentioned technique, the participants were to engage with a piece of environment which was 2 m radius around them (Chapter 5: 114) . This experience really started the process for many people. (Figure 4: 134)

After lunch, for those who were still stuck, I asked them to walk around and draw anything that they found interesting in the natural environment. They were to do simple contour drawings of each object from 3 different view points before moving on to the next object (Chapter 5: 113). None of the participants listened to or used the instructions. They began and then were side tracked into beginning other projects that resulted in their engagement with a process.

In the evening we experienced a Gabrielle Roth dance wave (Chapter 5: 113), which was facilitated by Sylvé Sandalls, who is experienced in this process. The response was very positive, and most of the participants commented the next day and in their report-back questionnaire how inspired they were from the experience. Some of the participants painted during a second wave while many chose not to.

On Sunday morning, we gathered to check-in with each other. After this check-in, I suggested that everyone went for a walk, to regroup them selves and gather any new inspiration. They then returned to work on whatever they had started the previous day. The participants responded to and used the supplied art materials in a diversity of ways. Most combined these materials with found natural materials: simple printmaking techniques such as woodcut and monoprints, oil painting and mixed media drawing, the use of 'junk' found outside juxtaposed with nature objects and working with natural and man made objects in the natural environment. (Figure 4: 134, and Figures 7 & 8: 135).

We concluded the workshop, in a place in the woods, around a 'carpet' made from natural elements created by a participant during the workshop (Figure 9:135). Here the participants wrote their intentions for their creative process in the future. Together, with the piece of paper with their intentions written from the beginning of the workshop, they were burned, one by one, in a ceramic bowl passed around the group. This became a symbolic release of their intentions for the future.

As the facilitator, I experienced a level of calmness that I have not experienced previously in workshops I have facilitated. I was able to trust in myself, that all my knowledge and experience was sufficient to hold a space conducive to facilitating a workshop that would benefit the participants in some way. I realised

too that I did not have to know 'everything' that the participants would through discussions and their own insights find their own solutions. I have confirmation of this due to the many compliments I received from the participants during and after the workshop.

Report on Post-workshop questionnaire

To help evaluate the workshop I asked the participants to answer questions about their experiences. Most participants responded to this request and I have extrapolated the essence of their comments below.

1. Did you find the workshop to be helpful in anyway in unlocking your creative block? Please explain.

All the participants answered 'yes'. They mentioned that the short experiences helped connect to the process, and discussions in the group assisted in them feeling that they were not 'alone'. The concentrated time away from normal everyday life distractions gave focus to creative impulse. A participant said that she was comfortable to follow any whimsical idea she would normally have rejected. There was a mention that the natural environment and being with other artists assisted in unblocking creativity, and hearing what others had to say about their methods of relieving artist's block was also helpful. The studio space was also mentioned as "inspiring and enabling". There was a realization that "having fun" is key to engaging with creative process, and doing simple things such as doodling, sketching can also be used as inspiration for new work.

2. During the workshop what now stands out to be useful, interesting, exciting? Please describe.

The participants mentioned the chance to experience a diversity of materials and to combine them in one artwork, the short experiences were a distraction from taking 'things' too seriously, being in a group with other artists was inspiring and the dancing was mentioned to be 'exciting'. Participants also declared that time spent in nature gave them chance to listen to inner guidance. The experience of being limited to a 2m radius was mentioned as valuable by one participant, which triggered a direction of creating which revealed many layers of meaning. An artist mentioned that she overcame the 'limiting belief' about what her art works should look like, while another artist found that she was excited by realizing that she could 'call up' some part of herself which never really goes away, though seems absent at times, to help her create effortlessly. The discussions triggered many thoughts and ideas and they were mentioned to be times of support with the realization that many problems for the participants were similar. The different experiences gave rise to a participant realizing that quiet alone time, dancing and music are helpful to getting the creative process flowing. A participant observed that she needs to be more playful and to take

art less seriously, which she felt was the direct influence of her experience at University because of deadlines, numerous critiques, exhibitions and marks. The closing ceremony was mentioned to be 'unforgettable' sitting around the carpet made from natural elements and the burning of intentions.

3. Was there any aspect of the workshop which you did not like, found uninteresting or was not beneficial to you?

There were not many comments raised on the negative aspect to the workshop.

One participant mentioned that the continuous referring back to and experiences related to the natural environment became too much, even though she understood it to be the theme of the workshop. She felt the experiences could be more varied. One participant found that there were too many discussions surrounding each person's work. She would have preferred more time making art with less time spent on the end results.

4. Which discussions stand out to you as being the most beneficial? Please describe.

A participant said that the discussions were held in a safe container, where she felt she could speak her truth without intimidation. The discussion about the difference between 'intentions' and 'goals' was referred to several times, with a participant asking; do goals block us creatively? The discussion about how an artist's work at the beginning of their career still relates to their work later on was especially beneficial to one participant. The discussion around the statement 'Desire, Ask, Believe, Receive' was particularly valuable for a participant who said that she will continue to work on this awareness as it is fundamental in life let alone creativity. There was a realisation that there is a need to be around other like-minded people, to have discussions with or work in an environment where people who are involved in the same processes are together, to become inspired and driven with those who have a similar feeling of purpose. The final discussion about each person's work was found to be interesting as it gave the artist a chance to observe what was going on in their mind while creating, and gave a realization that each artist draws from their life experiences.

5. Did you find spending time in nature during the workshop helpful in connecting with your creative self? Please describe.

The general consensus is that nature was important to the inspiration of the creative process. Although one participant mentioned that it is more the "focus and intent" that inspires the process for her, as she is so often surrounded by nature. Nature is reported to give energy, allowed for internal explorations of self and that there is something profound and magical about using nature to express self. It was mentioned

that there was an opening to the senses; the observation of small things such as an ant, the feeling of the texture of bracken when crushed, the harmony of the sounds, and the warmth of the sun. There was a mention of the enjoyment of the possibility, without restraints, to create from the different fibers found by knotting and weaving. Several artists mentioned that being surrounded by nature was very calming, with inspiration drawn from nature. There was a realization that more time alone in nature is important to connecting to creative process as a source of inspiration.

6. Are there any other comments you would like to make regarding the workshop that you think could be beneficial to the development of the workshop in the future?

It was mentioned by several participants that the workshop could have been longer. One participant's reasons were that this could help those stuck have time to shift through with perseverance, and for those who found their process quickly to go deeper and work through new levels of frustration. Another type of workshop could have collaborative creative activities in small groups as an interesting and inspiring focus. A follow-up workshop was suggested to be beneficial to see how the artists have progressed, or not, once back in their familiar environments. It was also mentioned that taking the work further by having an exhibition at the end of a workshop could be interesting. There was a mention that more table space was required. One artist suggested that having bigger canvases or grounds available to work on might help shift an artist into a different perspective.

Conclusion

From my observations and the feed back, both written and verbalised, I can confidently say that the workshop was very successful and fulfilled the intentions laid out at the beginning of the thesis. A workshop is an effective method of reengaging artists to their creative process, while the natural environment inspired the artists on many different levels and in different ways depending on their needs. The facilitation skills I acquired and practiced over the past years had been beneficial in instilling confidence and the ability to facilitate a workshop which 'flowed' and yet had sufficient structure giving a sense of safety to the participant.

Many artists have continued with their creative process after the workshop. I have communicated with three participants who will be having a joint exhibition next year, while one artist has been inspired to curate small exhibitions bringing different modalities together such as visual arts and music. One artist intends to start a print making studio as she realises that she needs the input of other like-minded people to help inspire her and others. Another artist is inspired to try working on a larger scale which he has not previously experienced.

Artist's workshop photographs:

(Refer to List of Illustrations on page vii for details)



Figure 1: Warm-up experience



Figure 2: Material tables



Figure 3: Centre piece



Figure 4: Participants gathering inspiration from nature



Figure 5: The Venue from the outside



Figure 6: Inside the venue



Figure 7: Participants inspired by nature



Figure 8: Installation in natural environment



Figure 9: Closing ceremony

Chapter 7: Further reflections

This chapter is a reflective synopsis of the study I undertook over the past four years. Section 1 draws together the essential themes and ideas around artist's block, creative process, nature as a facilitator and the facilitation of workshops that I have recorded in this study into a diagram which can be read at a glance. I have then summarised this diagram, *The Process Wheel*, to help the reader see the connecting thoughts of a multilayered process in creating the final workshop. Section 2, briefly reflects on my own personal creative journey over the past four years. This can also be read in the diagram of the Process Wheel.

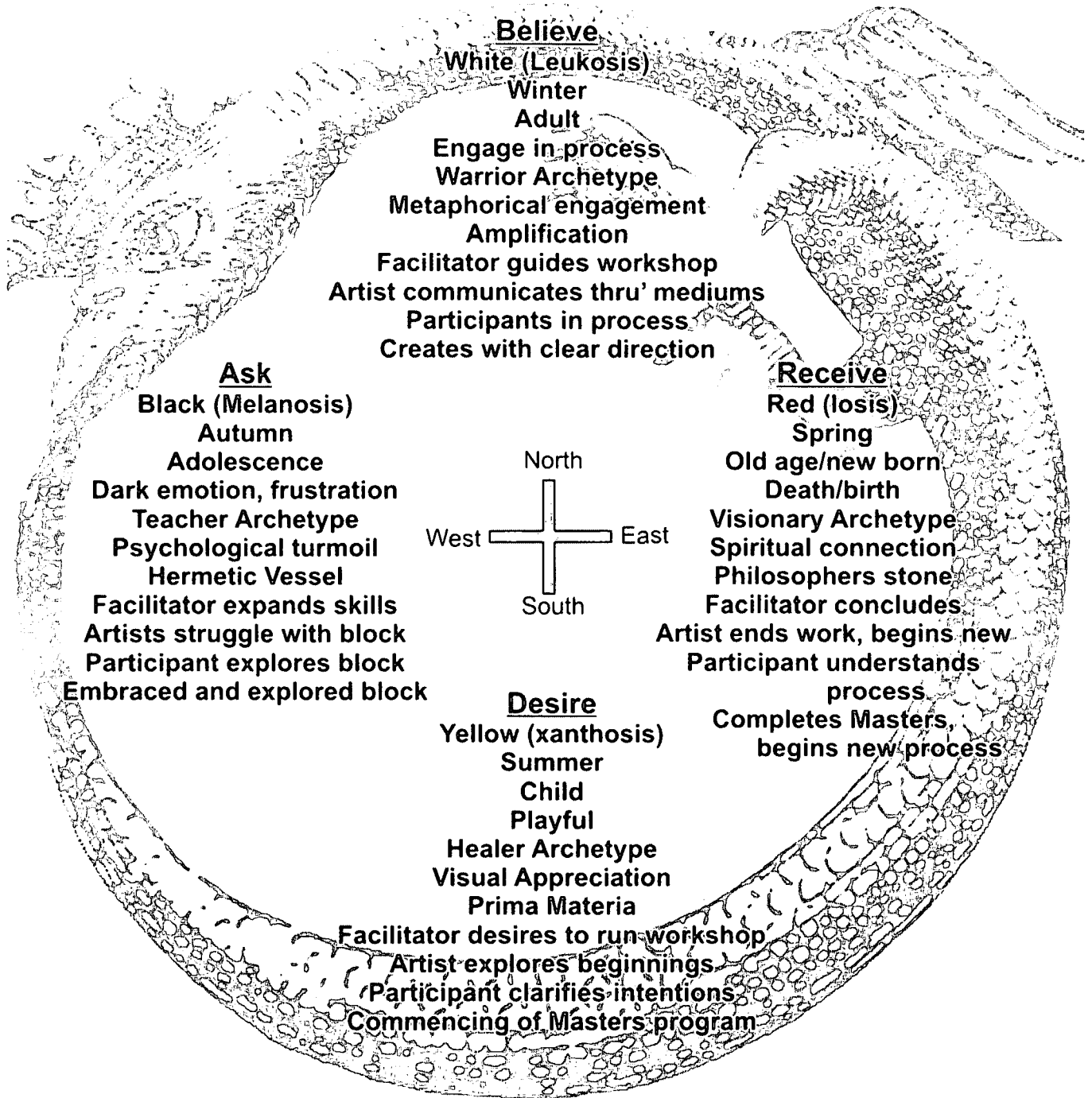
Section 1: The Process Wheel

To bring to closure the entire experience of completing a four-year Master's process, I refer back to Chapter 4, page 78, which describes the significance of the Native American medicine wheel. This is divided into four quadrants; and reflects a continuously evolving and repetitious process that has no beginning or end. To help visualise and simplify this study, I have created a diagram which contains the important aspects of this research, bringing it into a cohesive body. Within each point is reflected the place where the facilitator and the artist may find themselves when engaging in their respective journeys. Readers should remember that, although the circle may reflect, at first glance, the period of a four-year process, or the duration of a workshop, these cycles can also occur within shorter periods, for example, within a day.

To create the outer circle, I use the early alchemist's symbol of the dragon, Ouroboros, eating its tail. This is my Opus (Figure 10: 137). It symbolises the movement of the artist from darkness into light, from poison of serpent to freedom of bird. The diagram is also designed as a recipe, to guide the reader through the process, as I perceive it.

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? This commonly asked question describes the dilemma of the Process Wheel. I have decided to start in the bottom quadrant so that it will end in the right-hand quadrant. Ultimately, the wheel indicates that no one point is more important than any other. For example, artist's block is an integral part of the cycle of the creative process. The recipe, as explained in Chapter 4, on page 136, is used as titles to each stage: 'desire, ask, believe, receive'.

Process wheel



DESIRE : We enter the cycle as a child, in the south. Steven Foster (1998: 29 - 40) describes this aspect of nature as summer, when it is hot and the optimal time for growth. This is a time when the world is alive.

Summer's flesh harbors the erotic impulse, the play and interplay of sensuality and desire that insures the propagation of the species (Foster, 1998: 31).

Foster also says this time is where the ego contains the primal emotions of rage, fear, happiness and loss. This is where children start to explore the possibilities of where their journeys may lead. Angelis Arrien's (49 -68: 1993) research reveals the archetype of the 'healer' in this quadrant; and the direction of south, is, for native people around the world, the place of healing. The earth, 'Mother Nature', the kingdom of plants, minerals and creatures, is seen to be 'healer' in its entirety. Perhaps then, the artist can call forth, from nature, the desire to heal artist's block, by enjoying the visual aspects of nature with child-like wonder and appreciation. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Read (1970) highlights the principles of form and origination as the two main aspects of art. Imagination is spurred on by the magic of nature.

In this quadrant, the alchemist may have an idea of the goal he wishes to reach through his process, and may call this the philosopher's stone or the gold. The Prima Materia, as mentioned in Chapter 4, already contains the desired gold, only we cannot always recognise what it is without going through some process that reveals it. The alchemist's colour xanthosis (yellowing) would be well placed here. The colour, which is often left out of the alchemists' descriptions, is described by Jung (1993: 229) as a 'reddening yellow'. This could be interpreted as the dawning of the end goal, or the gold.

For the facilitator, this is the time when the notion or desire to create a workshop is conceived, and intentions and aims are explored. In the case of this study, my desire was to run workshops in which artists could gather together, share experiences of artist's block, and enjoy experiences that might help them reconnect with their creative processes. The early stages of the workshop are a time for being playful, for unifying and relaxing the participants and familiarising them with the environment. It is important that in the early stages of a workshop the participants clarify their intentions, and their desired goals.

For artists, this is the time for creative play; for exploring new ideas, experimenting with materials, and testing boundaries. The creative process, as previously suggested, can start with play and exploration,

ASK: The west quadrant follows the south. Foster (1998: 43 -57) describes the west as the position of the adolescent, who here observes the dualities of life, the contrasting expressions that may seem confusing, dark, and pointless. Arrien (1993: 109 -112) sees this as the teacher archetype. Here the participant learns

how to trust and to be comfortable with uncertainty, where deep wisdom is gathered and assimilated. She says it is considered by the native cultures to be a time of silence, as this it is in solitude that inner guidance and transpersonal experiences take place. The season associated with this quadrant is autumn, when the leaves fall, and the dark, barren state of mulching occurs. It is a time of death and of shadows.

In the west, the ego of the south gives way to the psyche. This is when nature can help support the disturbed psyche, as is mentioned in Chapter 3, on page 63. There is an acknowledgement of the dichotomies of life; Plotkin (2003: 24) says that it is in the dark places that we are likely to discover our soul. In quiet solitude, we can converse with nature, the natural world being a non-egocentric listener, a mirror, and a non-prejudiced physiologist, guiding and supporting the lost artist through this time.

For the alchemist, this stage in the process could be described as 'melanosis' (blackening), and indicates the death of the old material before it takes on its new form (Haarhoff, 1998: 133). Into the Hermetic Vessel, all components for this process are placed. The dualities are all placed together, representing the confused state of the opposites. Past experiences, mixed with the new, will form the ingredients of the creative process.

For the artist, this is the dark time, the questioning time. How does one portray what one desires to create? Chapter 1 elaborates on what could be experienced as artist's block: fear, lack of inspiration, lack of confidence, being lost or in a state of confusion or chaos, among them. Through struggling with these, often debilitating problems, an artist may determinedly start to gather images, materials and skills. It then becomes a time of searching and gathering, exploring and discarding.

The facilitator asks for guidance, and seeks the knowledge needed to run a workshop. For the workshop participants, this is the time to discuss and reflect on issues arising from being blocked, to gather art materials, and to look around for inspiration. The facilitator may guide this discovery through short warm-up experiences and by discussions.

BELIEVE: From the west, we move north. This is, according to Foster's (1998: 61- 75) research, the season of winter for the Native American cultures. It is often represented by the colour white. The harvest of the autumn has been gathered and stored. It is a time for being indoors, where all manner of internal adventures and discoveries will take place. In this quadrant, the adolescent of the west is now an adult, or warrior. This archetype, as Arrien (1993: 15 -36) elaborates, represents leaders, adventurers, explorers, and sorcerers. The warrior is present even when things seem challenging, and will respect and honour all things, including self. Arrien defines 'honour' as the capacity for bestowing respect on another individual.

For a leader to be effective, there must be an allowance for, and appreciation of, diversity within others and self.

A true warrior/leader is identified as someone who knows how to extend honor and respect: set limits and boundaries: align words and actions: and extend responsibility into structure and function in an empowering way (Arrien, 1993: 25).

Arrien says one of the qualities of the warrior is the ability to set boundaries with clarity. In Chapter 2, it is mentioned that discipline can be destructive of the creative process, but Arrien indicates this to be a favourable attribute of the warrior, and defines it as meaning that one is a disciple of oneself.

“When we are disciples unto ourselves, we honor our own rhythm, our step-by-step nature. We are most likely to be thrown off course when we have too much to do or too little to do. These times should act as reminders to engage discipline, to move not rashly but step by step.” (Arrien, 1993: 19)

Warriors know their own power, and how to use it correctly. As a facilitator, it is important not to abuse one's position of power over other people, but to be gentle and respectful. The artist, when viewed as a warrior, is free of self-diminishment and will be less likely to accept the perceptions of others, or be influenced by what others perceive can and can't be done. No longer will the blocked artist be plagued by low self-esteem (discussed in Chapter 1, on page 8). Artists need to be willing to take a stand. As a warrior, communication is important. Artists communicate through their artworks, being clear about what it is they want to say and how to go about it. Arrien says that in shamanic societies it is the warrior's task to become visible. Here the place of the facilitator is that of a guide, steering the participants through their processes in a workshop situation. The facilitator needs to be present, to listen to the stories of the participants, and observe, without ego interference, what is going on. For Arrien, the power of presence is to bring forward four intelligences: mental, emotional, spiritual and physical. Artists also seek to become visible, to have their artworks viewed by others. Bringing these four intelligences into their work can greatly enhance their powers of communication.

The natural environment supports the warrior, through its metaphorical power. Arrien likens the warrior to a tree, rooted and contained, flexible and bending in the wind, yet very stable. The tree is a metaphor for the warrior's creative process: the roots of beginnings, strength in the present, and branching out into future possibilities. She also reflects that a warrior finds an empowered healing tool in nature and the wilderness. She recommends that the warrior spend time in outdoors everyday to replenish and maintain health and well being. Simply going for a walk can help recharge creative flow.

The possibility of being physically blocked was mentioned by McNiff and others in Chapter 1, on page 17. Not being able to move the body is often indicative of the 'stuckness' that an artist may experience. Arrien recommends dance as being important to the warrior: dance helps us touch the essence of who we are, and helps us experience the unity between spirit and matter.

For the alchemist, 'amplification' takes place in this quadrant. The fire is lit and all that is within the vessel will be transformed. The substance in the vessel turns white, through a process called 'Leukosis' (whitening), which means that it is soon to be transformed into silver (Haarhoff, 1998: 133).

RECEIVE: East is the fourth quadrant. After the cold, hard winter comes spring (Foster, 1998: 79 -91). This quadrant represents both 'old age' and 'the new born'. The responsible adult can relax into a state of deepening maturity and 'knowing', receiving the fruits of their hard work. The old dies, and is re-born, refreshed with new wisdom and vibrant energy.

The east is where the sun rises, and to the shamanic cultures it is also where the Great Spirit resides. Arrien (1993: 79 -99) says this quadrant represents the archetype of the visionary, with the principles which allow for knowledge and communication of the creative purpose and life dream. From this direction, they call forth the power of vision, dreams and spiritual guidance. In this direction one discovers authenticity, vision and creativity. First-hand experiences in nature can connect one with the wild soul within. Foster suggests that one should converse with nature to help answer questions:

The spirit of nature answers the questions of the heart. The wind does speak. The trees do have a voice. Does the voice belong to nature or to us? What's the difference? (Foster, 1998: 83).

Foster describes the spring as a time to wake up, to open one's eyes. Through metaphor and imagination we can connect with the spirits or God, where there is an impulse to regenerate and heal. This is the spark that gets the new art project or creative project going.

The alchemist ends his journey here, by receiving the philosopher's stone and the merging of dualities. Many alchemical images show this union through the combining of the male/female body (like the left/right brain, mentioned in Chapter 2, on page 34), with both the hemispheres working compatibly. Through 'Iosis' or reddening, the heated substance will turn into gold, the philosopher's stone, or the completed artwork. Once the stone has been received, the journey starts again, only this time with new knowledge and skills, awareness of self and process.

For the facilitator this is the end of the workshop, time to wrap things up, and to help reveal the 'gold' to the participants. They are now responsible for observing and owning their 'gold', taking it into their

future, back to their everyday lives. For the artist, this quadrant represents moments of rapture or ecstasy, or a sense of peace and calmness on the completion of the artwork, or the hanging of the exhibition. Soon after this elation, the process will start afresh, the old work becoming the stepping stone for the new. Often at this stage, artists will plunge into states of depression or despair, and the cycle begins again.

Section 2: My Creative Journey

This section briefly maps out my personal creative journey for the practical aspect of the Masters program. I also include my Artist Statement for the final exhibition at Artspace Durban.

DESIRE: (Figures 11- 12: 146) As I entered the Master's programme in 2004, I started with the playful exploration of ideas, images and materials. I explored time spent alone in nature. Spending many hours next to or in rivers, I wildly and often blindly explored the medium of acrylic and oil paint on unstretched canvas and paper. This journeying process helped me clarify my desires, and helped me create the necessary boundaries within which I would investigate. The 'desire' that emerged was that of engaging in my creative process, of understanding my creative process, and being able to work through my blocks. My goal was ultimately to be confident of my creative abilities and to readily exhibit my work. I chose to do this through the DUT institution, and realise now, at the end of the journey, that my returning can be likened to a homeopathic remedy, returning to the source, healing through a 'like cures like' approach. The writing and rewriting of the thesis proposal also confirmed my desire, and gave focus and clarity to the direction it would take.

ASK: (Figures 13- 17: 146) For me this quadrant represented my experiences of frustration, tears, and confusion. I often questioned why I was participating in the Master's programme, feeling insecure, out of my depth, and fearful because of the expectations, perceived and real. I learned about my process through gently embracing this 'dark' time with determination and lots of dark-coloured paint and imagery. I learned from these dark experiences, through trial and error, that I must not stop. As discussed in Chapter 2 on page 31, a gentle discipline of working, even for a short time, every day, can be enough to break the block. This became apparent as I continued. I often found myself painting without any clear direction, only knowing that I must keep on painting, regardless of the terrible images that emerged. Courage and trust began to develop; discipline seemed to be the key. Most of these explorations I did alone without too much input from anyone. I found that critiques at this stage caused anxiety and confusion because I could not articulate my process clearly. Towards the end of the third year, I was ready to 'ask' for help from one of the lecturers, realising that I could now move on. The support I received was just what I needed in order to become focused and productive.

BELIEVE: (Figures 18 -20: 147) This stage occurred for me at the end of my third year of the Master's. Suddenly the veil lifted, and I started to get a clearer picture of what I wanted to do and how I might proceed. Now I spent many hours alone exploring a new world of paint and texture. I did not necessarily always feel clear in my direction or process, but my inner strength and conviction about this particular journey and direction kept me going. The flowing river became the main analogy representing my

creative process at this period; continuously moving, chaotic and overwhelming at times, made up of different layers, cool and refreshing, dark and dangerous, warm and fiery. The layers of the river represent the layers of the history which I bring to the process; ancestral, societal, and personal. By sinking into the layers of self, I started to understand my creative process. The river is full of movement, emotional variation, and creative energy. It was important to go with the flow, jumping in and taking a risk, and at times surrendering to the chaos just to see what would happen.

RECEIVE: (Figures 21- 22: 147) I have experienced this quadrant several times during this journey. The most memorable was the completion of a triptych of paintings which was the culmination of the explorations of the previous three years. At this point, I realised that I had a glimpse of the final 'gold', and that this was a taste of what was to come. From this point on, I built on these foundations, extrapolating and deepening, eliminating and adding. The completion of this process -- the final exhibition and handing in of this thesis -- is the Philosopher's Gold I hoped to find at the end of the four-year Master's Degree. My initial goal was to free myself of creative block, and to engage in my creative process. Through struggles with chaos and frustration, and seemingly getting nowhere, the process started to flow and I found myself moving. Now that I celebrate the end, I also anticipate a beginning. I will start the process again. This is a daunting prospect, but at the same time, I now realise the potential it has, and look forward to the journey with expectation, curiosity, and delight.

FINAL EXHIBITION:

The exhibition title was **Forward**. To view the final exhibition at the Artspace Durban Gallery which was shown to the public from the 18th February to 8 March 2008 , please see my website:

http://www.sarahrichards.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=55&Itemid=35

Artist's Statement:

This body of work shows the complex layering of my experience with the creative process. I started this journey of the Masters because I was experiencing 'artist's block'. Levels of fear, and apprehension essentially blocked my creative process. These images show this struggle; between that which flows and that which hinders.

The natural environment has been important as a facilitator in unblocking my creative process. It is where I began the process, observing how a small stream and later clear mountain rivers flow; often between perilous rocks, showing turbulent chaos, and at other times in wide open spaces reflecting peace and equanimity. The river is affected by its history, and yet there is surrender to the unknown; there is always

the uncontrollable force powering it determinedly forward. This has been my experience of the creative process.

Layers of personal and cultural history have been revealed to me through this metaphor of the river, which engages in a never ending journey of the unexpected, while at the same time reflects the immediate experiences of what is present and new. This has challenged me to look deeply at my own layers, from inherited characteristics to personal experiences. The river's journey is one of trust, playfulness and improvisation. My greatest challenge over this four year period has been to trust the process. Yet I have learned to be playful and experimental, and have found a willingness to take risks.

Here, with debilitating apprehension and fear, I expose my vulnerability, first to the process and then later to the external environment - the public. At times I must leap, at other times surrender. Often there are periods of chaos and confusion. Subtle barriers appear to obstruct the process, but they are usually illusionary. The figures highlight the relationship between the human and the natural environment, between the conflicting aspects of self and the struggle with ancestral and personal history.

This has been the discovery and an experience of spirit, of creative essence, through the use of layered paint and textured depth, deepening my experience and understanding of self. Eventually I began to experience this creative process with instinct and trust. The work began to change, as I became more confident. The end is a new beginning, from here I move further forward...

A selection of artworks which represent my creative process

(Refer to List of Illustrations on page vii for details)

DESIRE: The process begins – photos taken in nature



Figure 11: Path Reflected 1



Figure 12: Path Reflected 2

ASK: Fragments cut from larger artworks



Figure 13: Fragment 1



Figure 14: Fragment 2

Experimental works on unstretched canvas



Figure 15: Chaos – A dance of discovery



Figure 16: Looking back



Figure 17: Kick start

BELIEVE: 'Going with the flow' triptych



Figure 18: Going with the flow: Surrender



Figure 19: Going with the flow: Engagement



Figure 20: Going with the flow: Fear

RECEIVE: Art works which show engagement with my process



Figure 21: Forging a path



Figure 22: Forward

Conclusion

I started this Master's programme with several ideas about what I hoped to achieve. My objectives were woven into an *Opus* in which the primary objectives were met. My *philosopher's stone* was found, and it revealed much more than I had expected.

The questions I asked in the beginning were: what is 'artist's block' and what causes it? Exploring this, I discovered that many different factors could cause the artist to be blocked. Further investigations and a deepened understanding of the creative process showed me that artist's block, this 'dark' time, was integral to the development of the artist's process. Seen from this perspective, it is not necessarily something to be feared – it is, rather, something to grow through. As with life in general, the highs are highlighted and enriched by contrast with the lows, just as the dark areas of a painting heighten the bright areas.

My next question was: can a natural environment be used to help a variety of artists back on to their individual creative paths? My intuition, and my experience up to this point, led me to believe that nature could facilitate a process. Using a variety of literary resources as guides, I established that nature can have a positive effect on the artist on many different levels: visually, spiritually, metaphorically, and psychologically. Interviewing artists, I found that the natural environment was important to most of them as inspiration on many levels. I also set up two workshops, one for art students and the other for artists, which took place surrounded by a natural environment. With the student workshop, I concluded that it was difficult to quantify the effect the natural environment had on their creative process during the workshop, though it was clear, from answers to a questionnaire given to the students four months after the workshop, that being in nature had afforded a time for clearing the mind, self reflection, and connection to soul; and on several occasions during the workshop I observed occurrences of visual inspiration and a metaphorical relationship with nature.

My observations of the artist's workshop confirmed the impact that the natural environment had, directly and indirectly, on the creative process of each artist. All were greatly inspired by the environment. Many used natural materials in their works of art (Figure 7: 135) or made installation artworks outdoors (Figure 8: 135). Other artists were inspired by the visual findings in and around the venue. The feedback from the post-workshop questionnaire also emphasised the degree of inspiration that all the artists received from the natural environment. They also found that getting away from their demanding lives into a beautiful environment with other creative people was inspiring and energising.

The next question I asked at the beginning of the study was: can a workshop be created which could help artists establish their own methods of unleashing creativity during 'stuck' moments? To help answer this question I went on a training workshop, interviewed facilitators, and practised facilitating different workshops. I learned that the facilitation and creation of a workshop is also a process, and certainly not a structured one. It needs to be allowed to flow with the group's needs. While facilitating the artist's workshop, I experienced a level of calmness that I did not experience previously in workshops I facilitated. I was able to trust in myself, trust that my knowledge and experience was sufficient for the task. I realised, too, that I did not have to know everything -- the participants would find their own solutions through discussions and their insights. I also created a list of possible 'experiences' (Chapter 5: 108) borrowed from different sources, including artists. These were useful during the workshop as starting points that helped the participants connect to their process. Several discussion groups were held, and participants said that these helped create a safe container for openness and sharing with like-minded people. Some specific discussions were mentioned as particularly beneficial: for example, the discussion about the difference between 'intentions' and 'goals', and the discussion about 'desire, ask, believe, and receive' (Chapter 5: 112). From my observations, and from the feedback, both written and verbal, I can confidently say that the artist's workshop was very successful, and fulfilled the intentions laid out at the beginning of the study. A workshop is an effective method of re-engaging artists with their creative process, and the natural environment inspired them on many different levels and in different ways. The facilitation skills I acquired and practised over the past years had been beneficial in instilling in me the confidence and the ability to facilitate a workshop that 'flowed', and yet had sufficient structure to give a sense of safety to the participants. Since then, several of them have mentioned that they will be holding exhibitions, or have facilitated exhibitions.

Last, I asked, as a subsidiary question: how can a workshop, during study years, help students understand their own creative process and blocks once they have left the institution? It is too soon to judge the exact benefit to the students' future of such a workshop. However, what was revealed was the art students' need for forums or workshops in which to discuss and address issues such as lack of confidence and artist's block, which affect their creative process and output during their studies, and give rise to fears on leaving the institution.

In parallel, the research and practical application of this four-year period has substantially benefited my growth as an artist. My acquisition of skills and confidence in facilitation, my ability to create a workshop to help other artists, and the benefit to my own practical work, exceeded all my expectations. I am convinced that nature is an appropriate environment in which artists can regain confidence in their creative process; and that a workshop situation benefits those who choose it.

Appendix A: Informed consent form information letter

DURBAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

INFORMATION LETTER REGARDING RESEARCH PROJECT

DEPARTMENT OF: Fine Art

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:

Artist's Block: The creation of a workshop to re-engage visual artists with their creative process by using the Natural environment as a facilitator.

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: John Roome

NAME OF RESEARCH STUDENT: Sarah Richards

Dear Participant

I am currently undertaking a research project, which aims to investigate the phenomenon of 'artists block'. Through the participation of artists and art students I will investigate if a workshop can help artists re-engage with their creative process.

The study will involve being interviewed by the researcher and/or participation in a workshop. I therefore would like to appeal to you for assistance by participating in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.
The information you give will only be used for research purposes.
Your willingness to co-operate will be very helpful.

Yours faithfully

Sarah Richards

Contact details: Cell: 0837070126
 Phone: 0312010306

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
(to be completed by participant)

Date:

Title of Research Project:

Artist's Block: The creation of a workshop to re-engage visual artists with their creative process by using the Natural environment as a facilitator

Name of Supervisor: John Roome

Name of Research Student: Sarah Richards

PLEASE TICK THE APPROPRIATE ANSWER	YES	NO
Have you read the Research Information Sheet?		
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions regarding this study?		
Have you received satisfactory answers to your questions?		
Have you had an opportunity to discuss this study?		
Have you received enough information about this study?		
Who have you spoken to?		
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study? (a) at any time (b) without having to give any reason for withdrawing		
Do you agree to voluntarily participate in this study		

If you have answered no to any of the above, please obtain the necessary information before signing:

Please print in block letters:

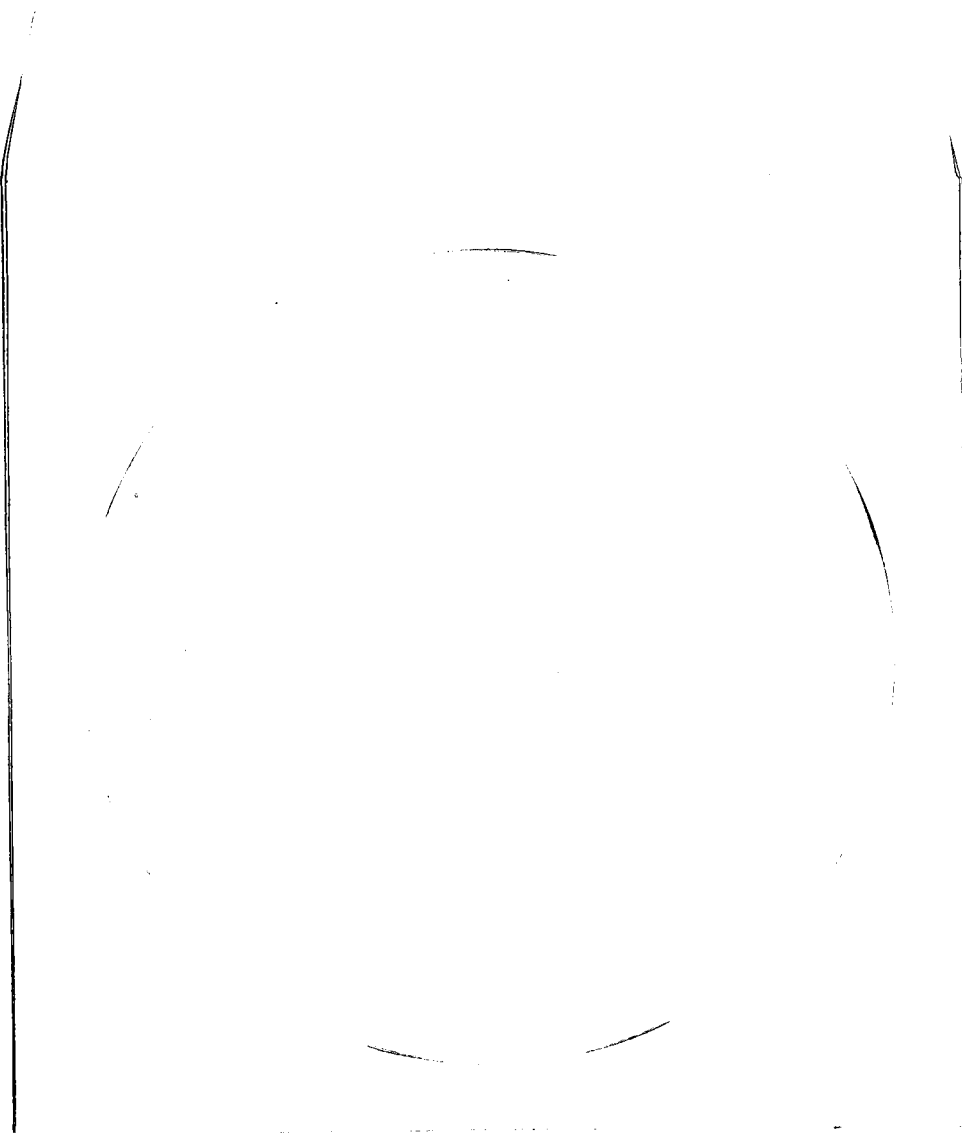
Participants Name: Signature:

Witness Name: Signature:

Research Students Name: Signature:

Appendix B: Documentary on Student workshop

Please find enclosed a DVD showing a documentary on the student workshop. Chapter 6 on page 121 contains the report summary for this workshop, explaining briefly the format of the workshop and the responses from the participating students.



Appendix C: Interviews with artists

Contents:

Sasi Paton , Morningside, Durban..26 July 2005 at 7.30 pm for 30 minutes.	153
Michelle Penfold, Morningside, Durban..26 July 2005 at 7.30 pm for 30 minutes.	154
Clinton De Menezes, Morningside, Durban. 24 August 2005 at 6,30pm for 30 minutes.....	154
Grace Kotze, Forest Hills, Durban. 23 August 2005, at 3.30pm for 30 minutes.	155
Virginia McKenny, Capetown. 15 August 2005 at 8.30pm for 40 minutes	156
Carol Gainer, Capetown. 15 August 2005 at 8.30pm for 40 minutes.	157
Carl Roberts, Hillcrest, Durban. 13 March 2007 at 10.15 for 60 minutes.	157
Roz Cryer, Salt Rock, KwaZulu/Natal . 3 March 2007 at 2.45pm for 20 minutes	158

The interviews were recorded and then précised for this study. The artist's were selected for a variety of reasons, each stated before the précised interview. Many of the artists I interviewed at the beginning of the study. This helped me understand what I needed to look for in the literature I was studying.

Sasi Paton

I chose to interview Sasi because she studied with me in the late 80's at the Natal Technikon. She has a successful company which creates various sculpted and painted scenes for different environments and clients using a variety of materials. Her job is all consuming and she has little time to create for herself.

1. What would you understand Artists block/creative block to be? Do you or have you experienced this? If so how often?

I haven't been exploring my own personal work because of being in this business. I get enough creativity from work and getting out into the garden or natural environment. It is not the time in my life to make art, though I will doodle here and there. I know about the block, but don't get bogged down by it.

2. What are the key things that help you re-engage with the creative process?

I sketch. Mostly I am playful, and don't get too precious about not being creative. When I go away, I take a bag full of art materials, all ready, for play.

My attitude is generally to 'move forward, not to dwell on past'.

Normally with work there is a time frame to stick to. So have to 'Blast through any blocks' with the creative work projects.

When I am engaged in a creative process then things flow. When I stop, I can get stuck.

3. Would you participate in a workshop if you thought it could help you with your creative process?

Yes, I would be happy to be in a group.

Michelle Penfold

I chose to interview Michelle because she studied with me in the late 80's at the Natal Technikon. She has a successful company which creates various sculpted and painted scenes for different environments and clients using a variety of materials. Her job is all consuming and she has little time to create for herself.

1. What would you understand Artists block/creative block to be? Do you or have you experienced this? If so how often?

Artist's Block is when I can't go any further. So I go back to last thing I did, and then that is where I get stuck.

Come up with things last minute, time pressure helps in work, which is a creative process. Block can happen at work. Procrastinate, small doodles.

2. Please describe what happens.

A little barrier, a wall, can't see past it, that sort of feeling, frustration.

3. How do you get out of it, where do you start?

Doodling, to play around with something physical, i.e. clay, physical act, carving into something, not thinking or writing it is a physical act.

4. Creative process, what does this mean to you?

I have become more 3d oriented. On a miniature scale. Sometimes I work from pictures. Always time to do a little something. Identify something that inspires, this could be spontaneous experience, a shape, then progress from this point.

5. What are the key things that help you re-engage with the creative process?

Nature, whittling knife, beautiful shapes, calmness. Take photos. Getting out of the city environment into energizing natural environment.

6. Would you participate in a workshop if you thought it could help you with your creative process?

Yes, it would be very nice, weekend, or day

Clinton De Menezes

I selected Clinton to be interviewed because he recently completed his Masters in Fine Art at DIT, and is currently making a living from painting murals and occasional commissions. He intends to continue making art for exhibitions.

1. What would you understand Artist's block/creative block to be?

For me, at this time, making work is two things. I have to ask myself what should make that will not compromise myself. So I have to divide the work into two parts.

I experience artist's block often. This is when I do not know where to go and what to do. Often it has to do with making work to show to the community, but also to be happy, ultimately, with what I am making. For example if I make very specific art works, such as painting which is not considered the in thing at the moment in the contemporary world, then I may not get acknowledged in the SA Fine art environment. Therefore, the block is due to the need to find ways to work, that is contemporary and that I can be happy with personally. What is happening out there has a specific language especially using installation and videos. So if not involved with these mediums then one can't be with them. I prefer representation to these other methods of art creation. I found ways around this in my Masters. Who one is making for is the problem? Therefore, the split comes from the need to make commercial work to live off, and then the academic pressure to be with the contemporary expression.

2. Please describe what happens.

Frustration, apathy. Feels very numb. Conflict on deciding on how and what. Lethargic. I don't work until I see something and feel inspired. Not sure what I want to make at the moment. Have ideas not but not sure where to go from here. Blocked now in terms of own work, but not with the commercial work.

3. What are the key things that help you re-engage with the creative process?

To get back into it = Discipline!

If the blockage stops me, then I need to get working again. Does not matter what it is. Things start working in the working process. If one pushes oneself too much, then there can be burn out. It is better to be disciplined to work regularly everyday, and to find a balance.

4. Would you participate in a workshop if you thought it could help you with your creative process?

I could be interested. I suggest a long workshop so one can get into it, like studying again.

5. What do you feel about nature or the natural environment?

A lot of work I do deals with the natural environment to some extent. It can offer a lot of sense to the way we live our lives, and the cycles that we go through. When I am feeling low I go to a quiet beach. I find the stillness invigorating. We are not separate from the natural environment.

Grace Kotze

I chose to interview Grace because she was a co-student with me at the Natal Technikon in the late 80's. She has explored different fields of making a living such as design work on computers for different companies, painting commissions, and mural painting. She has recently started teaching private art classes, and is exhibiting as a full time artist.

1. What would you understand Artists block/creative block to be?

This is for me if I get to a point in myself when I am not working or not connected to the emotional aspect of myself. Then I have no point of reference.

2. Do you or have you experienced this? If so how often?

This happens if I put too much energy into my commercial work, especially if it is an emotionally dead job, or dead place. Then I find that I hardly want to create my own work. I also experience artist's block off and on after doing a body of work for an exhibition, and then want to start a fresh.

3. Please describe what happens.

I feel frustrated. I often have a strong sense of wanting to be creative, but if don't have the images then I get frustrated.

4. How do you get out of it, where do you start?

More time I spend on own work the more I have to produce. If I stop it is hard to get going again. I need to be disciplined to do my own work, some times this is impossible. Sometimes I make the time on the weekend. Even just putting on a glaze, if that is all I have time for, helps keep the process going

5. Creative process, what does this mean to you?

It's about accessing feelings; from this emotional state, everything else is influenced.

6. What are the key things that help you re-engage with the creative process?

Becoming less self-conscious, and to stop judging myself. To let the process flow and see what happens. It is also important to not see everything as an end product.

7. Would you participate in a workshop if you thought it could help you with your creative process?

Don't think I would. I get quite insular. I am melancholic, but enjoying it.

8. What do you feel about nature or the natural environment?

I can get in touch with my own emotions, because I am away from the noise of people. When in nature I become more aware, and these sights heightened the way I paint.

Virginia McKenny

I chose to interview Virginia because she is both a successful lecturer now at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Capetown and a successful exhibiting artist.

1. What would you understand Artists block/creative block to be?

It is the incapacity to make art. To feel you should be making but cant.

2. Do you or have you experienced this? If so how often? Please describe what happens

There is a difference between not getting around to making work and not being able to make.

This can lead to feelings of desperation.

I have experienced this several times. There is a flow and then it stops. This nothing space I have had 3 times in big way. I start to grasp at straws because I feel blank or else I procrastinate. I think this is due to feeling cut-off from a life source.

3. Creative process, what does this mean to you?

The creative process is full of possibilities, there is an aspect of play, and is not product driven. It is an experience which is filled with possibilities, juicy opportunities, which takes one from one thing on to the next. There is a sense of excitement. I know when it is happening because my body gives me signs such as shivering.

4. What are the key things that help you re-engage with the creative process?

Using my sketchbook, or doing exercises such as working from life, drawing drapery.

For me drawing is meditative process. I go back to the last thing I found stimulating. Artist dates are helpful, toyshops, walking, flying kite, and play. Even cleaning my studio can help.

5. What do you feel about nature or the natural environment?

First I find nature reconnects me to own body, then I start to feel connected to deeper levels of myself. I get high in nature. I have feelings of bliss, where I have had religious type experiences by being in nature. This is similar to my experience of making art works. Therefore, there is a strong connection between the two. Dappled light makes me feel happy. Bare feet on wet grass, gets my juices working.

Carol Gainer

She was selected because she recently completed her Masters in Fine Art at DIT. She also lectures art and is an exhibiting artist in Capetown.

1. What would you understand Artists block/creative block to be?

It is when you feel you can't make art because of being stuck in some way.

2. Do you or have you experienced this? If so how often? Please describe what happens

Yes, although it doesn't happen often. When I am blocked there is an inability to make art, and I am incapacitated. This makes me feel desperate. One wants to, but just cant do it.

3. Creative process, what does this mean to you?

It is the processing of an idea into reality making it physical and tactile. Often it starts as an intellectual idea. But being playful and connecting with my gut- feelings I can move beyond the experience being product based, so that I am not concerned with end product.

4. What are the key things that help you re-engage with the creative process?

Drawing can reengage me with the process; using my sketch book. Also reading.

It is important to not loose touch with the process for long periods of time, so discipline is needed to keep going.

5. Would you participate in a workshop if you thought it could help you with your creative process?

Yes to workshops in general but not necessarily art workshop, especially not art therapy.

6. What do you feel about nature or the natural environment?

If there is no connection with nature then I feel panic and blocked

I feel a strong connection to nature and so draw from this the most.

Carl Roberts

Selected because he is an accomplished artist, with formal training, who has managed to make art he desires to make, as well as make a living from it.

1. Do you or have you experienced artists block? If so, how often?

Not sure if I think I experience artist's block, as there is too much to do. Sometimes I have to think long and hard about what I am doing, not a lot of pre images. But perhaps I do get blocked when I am thinking of the next thing. The production line pressure, means that there isn't a long time to think. Does not have pre-images, sometimes sits and thinks about, to initiate ideas. Sometimes can sit a week and look at a piece of wood. Perhaps could call this as artist block. Sit for a week to get ideas. I do not think of it as a block, but rather 'a thing to be solved', a challenge.

2. Do you have a clear idea of how your creative process moves, please explain your process?

(Disciplined rhythm, regular work times, tries to be very productive.)

Rhythms within rhythms for creative process. Getting to end of one thing, then moves into next. There is a symbiotic relationship between two types of sculpture. Looser and more controlled, each is good for the other. One gets forced to do one thing in a certain type of way and the other in another way. Get to a point where I just want to do something else. Need to trust the subconscious. Subconscious is at the root of creativity. The problem is that it is a non-academic process, there is no formula for it. Conscious mind acts against it. Some of my images come from dreams. Don't know what creativity is, and where it comes from. Rorschach test (pronounces raw - shock), ink blot test, allows the visuals to guide process. I look at

piece of wood to allow textures to guide me. This is a more honest way of doing things. I do not put boundaries on myself. Sometimes I go back to old themes. Not linear process.

3. What would the key things be that would help you engage with your creative process?

I have looked at Max Ernst's rubbings and others, they would look into those to find a subject. Kept with same images from the beginning, in some ways doing the same thing from when a child. Do what you want to do! Do what you do best and what you enjoy. I am not trying to do this, it is what comes naturally.

4. What do you feel about nature or the natural environment?

At heart of it are human beings and the person themselves, and can only describe the world from the lexicon one is familiar with. These things can exist at many levels. Even animals can represent something else. Therefore a way of expressing things. Uses a word because you know that I will understand it, we have a communication, using an image of tree or leopard, that commonality of communication that makes that thing useful. Symbols, communication value, such as lion, in coat of arms, identify with image, i.e. UK, symbolic and communication thing. Wildlife thing is not about the animal itself...it is a common language. Metaphorical. Does not want to put tags to nature as it is many things. The word is Commonality. Part of a language i.e. tree. Nature is a lexicon, an alphabet, series of images that we can use to be used to express what we want to express, metaphorical, spiritual, and symbolic.

Roz Cryer

I chose to interview Roz because she has no formal Fine art Training (has training in textile design). She has taught herself to paint and also has attended private art classes. She has recently started exhibiting and selling her paintings.

1. Do you or have you experienced artists block? If so, how often?

My understanding of creative block, is when one is standing in front of canvas, completely lost inspiration and motivation.

2. What does it feel like?

Difficult to say, as I have only been painting fulltime for eight months. I have only had minor moments of being stuck. Then look through reference. So far I have had enough beautiful pieces of reference to inspire me. Therefore finding a good starting point is important. How can you feel uninspired when looking at a beautiful piece of nature? There is always the most beautiful things to capture and paint. I have minor moments of feeling blocked. I am learning to recognise early when something is not working for me. I think I would be very blocked if I was painting something tame.

3. What about the natural that you like?

Light. Light can do the most incredible things. There is something in nature that touches one so very deeply. When I am stuck I go back to nature. When running out of inspiration, I go back to Umfolosi.

4. What happens with you and your creative process?

I like working on a few paintings at a time. I am quite obsessive side to me. If I am working on more than more painting obsessive side comes out less. This stops me from getting obsessed in one area.

Appendix D: Interviews with Facilitators

Contents:

Ellis Pearson, Hillcrest, Durban. 14 March 2007, at 10.30 am	159
Malcolm Christian, Caversham, KwaZulu/Natal. 5 May 2007 at 4.30 pm.....	161

Ellis Pearson:

I chose to interview Pearson because he is an artist, an actor, as well as a facilitator of creative, theatrical workshops for a variety of groups. I attended a series of workshops in the Botanical Gardens several years ago and was impressed by his energy and his style of facilitation. I asked him about the facilitation of workshops.

1. You are an artist as well as a facilitator, I am looking for exercise experience, fun and quick to do, to connect person to nature and art?

Stop thinking, to stop criticizing, to stop the noise, contain through centring, prayer, to be here, present.

Attempt to be back in this moment, it is enough! Back in this moment, full of things

Linking human body /nature. We forget we are nature. All universe is one.

Facilitator starts activity – sees bigger picture- taking on a journey- sharing- at pinpoint of creativity – almost stillness and motion.

The more I do workshop. Part of the creative process is to stay here. What is going to connect us most?

Therefore not to get distracted. To be in nature is a connecting thing. Being artist is both difficult and

wonderful at the same time. When I teach I look for the bigger picture, ask, what are we really doing

here? When one runs workshop and teaching, connecting to what I need to learn on my journey, what

are we really doing here, look at the bigger picture. When I run a workshop can't not talk about all of

creation and the creator and about God, the intelligence we call love. If people don't relate to this,

encourage people not to be frightened, very simple and common or garden, what is here in creation.

Understanding the flow of life, for example Andy Goldsworthy.

When talking to students, look at the bigger picture, Universe, our stars we see only one galaxy, they

have discovered there are 130 billion galaxies, the nature of the universe is that it is expanding, it's a

process the essence of life, the way God works, creation is a process, essence of creativity is a process,

extremely important not to see it as an end product. To be a part of a process is very native to us. I tell

group that I am starting a process, starting something that will never end. I tell them that I am not going

to teach them to be a good actor. Which is what they want, but I encourage them away from this. I

encourage them not to listen to their teachers and parents too much, because they are often too worried about themselves to see you, to be aware of your journey.

I remind myself about what is really happening, the bigger picture, this he does through meditation, the

witness. Think as God, the witness consciousness. No one can ignore the very nature of the Universe

and what has been discovered for example Quantum Physics. This beyond linear notions found in

philosophies of Utopian model, Descartes, Francis Bacon, this causes this and that causes this, saw

Universe as a machine. Since Einstein the Universe is not like that. The rational mind, helps one to

choose, even in creative process, consciousness comes in to help one choose, with no doubt, otherwise

thinking is not much use. As artist needs to choose, all the time. This is where consciousness comes in,

to help choose, not to doubt oneself. The intuition, to feel, psyche, insight, is more useful than thinking.

Thinking can be useful to bring one to a point of choice.

There is often a huge need for playfulness. The very nature of the Universe is very playful and interactive. It seems to have no use to anyone, as is not goal orientation.

Employ the heart to do what you like. Ask people in workshop what gives you the most joy right now? What makes your heart fly...? Details are very important in creativity. As stepping stones along the way. More detailed in ones thoughts of joy. If you want to be happy what would be happy doing. Draw or write about that thing they would like to do which would bring joy. I met song writer from band D63, John Ellis, on the plane, He was saying that one needs to 'allow yourself to be bad'. It probably won't to be bad, encourage self to just do it. Just start painting, or drawing or writing. Get down and do it. We do shopping and other things instead of paint, for example.

2. What do you feel about nature or the natural environment?

Interconnection of things, art, music and nature- nature is all those things together, our body comes in, philosophy and spirituality, all there in nature

Suggested exercises from Ellis or that came out of the discussion:

- **Ask people in workshop what gives you the most joy right now?** To make your heart fly... Details are very important in creativity. More detailed in one's thoughts of joy. If you want to be happy what would you be doing? Draw or write about that thing they would like to do which would bring joy.

- **In workshop encourage people to be bad, just do it.**

Probably won't to be bad, encourage self to just do it.

I.e. get participants to try doing something they consider themselves bad in, or something they haven't tried before.

- **Simple playfulness**, i.e. no real goal. To keep a plastic ball in the air, get the group to keep it moving. Lighten up, get group working together.
- **Making shapes**: move in space, dodging, not colliding, i.e. chaos of the universe. Suddenly get everyone to stop, observe the body shapes surrounding them.. Also using bodies.
- **Paint with bodies** – Picasso

Nature of universe is – expansive- spontaneous – in the now – expressive with paint.

- **Subject not important**, process is.
- **Music instrument**, make music from home made instruments.

Playing with rhythms, space, sound, colour, shape, pattern.

- **Become a plant or animal**: Spend time observing, then physically act it out, then draw the whole experience.

- **KING** spells King look at the shapes as essence, life is creative. Being present in body moment

Know that I am art, rhythm, beauty, pattern, colour, form.

- **Excuses**: Ask the participants to write down what excuses they use to stop self from being creative.

Malcolm Christian

I chose to interview Christian because of his experiences of facilitating workshops. He owns Caversham Press, situated in the KwaZulu Natal midlands, which facilitates collaborative workshops using print making as the primary creative medium.

Please can you tell me about Caversham and what it is you do here?

It's after 22 years of collaboration in the print area. It takes us back to 1985 when I was teaching at University. Left Wits in 1985 and bought this property. In some ways it's what you were talking about, creative block, but also the rationale as to why we teach and what drives us to teach. In some ways creativity is about that sharing process, that you really want to share your unique and personal insights into both your life and the meaning of that life. I think because of how South Africa is situated you automatically go from being a student to being a teacher, particularly in the Fine Art area. Ben Shahn quotes from early 60's, Shape of Content, that you start off as primary artist and secondary teacher and before long you are secondary artist and secondary teacher. It is a division of focus. As well, it is a process of understanding creativity as the study that you are doing is quite esoteric, in that it is so personalized that very often it isn't accessible to someone else.

Within creativity you have got that duality, that dichotomy, between something very personal and something which is making sense on a broader basis. When teaching Fine Art very often you are talking about what is the meaning of things, what is the content, what is the intention behind what you are doing.

Artist's block can be termed a moral block, rather than just a technical block; it is about a belief structure. I am not talking here about religion, or particular doctrines. It gets back to why we spend time and energy devoted in pursuit of these esoteric pursuits. It is a relevant question when we look at society and the shift in this dynamic. And it was relevant at time of 1985, at the height of the struggle. How does one rationalize teaching in an institution, is there a way of contributing more by being outside of the institution? Artists are looking for uniqueness in whatever they are doing; it is not just a receptive thing and fitting into an orthodox and established mould.

For me it was an intuitive understanding that creativity and the arts can have a dual persona, one which can be a unique individual personal expression, and the other, in a medium like print making, which is collaboration. What very often is missing is the notion of the sharing of an interaction, of spending time and sharing of ideas and experiences. In early times of the Renaissance and before Fine Art was put on a pedestal, it was more of an apprenticeship process, was a more sympathetic, incubator for creativity. Because it made a natural link between skills and acquiring skills, learning those skills but then translating them into a knowledge base, in other words, being able to use them in unpretentious ways that can be seen as enlightened.

The more I worked here the more I realized that my role is being a collaborator; it is not being a unique artist. Rather to assist others to allow their voices to be heard. I finding resonance, find recognition and affirmation in that process. I think that is the difference when teaching outside of the formal bureaucratic institution. (In lots of ways Artist's block is in a reaction to the constraints that are placed on us. It is a subliminal thing, whether it is in its demands, qualifications, in terms of one's recognition, or your status as artist in community or gallery structures.)

Having said that, there is the dichotomy that creativity only happens within constraints. I firmly believe that you have got to have defined parameters in some ways for creativity to kick in. The boundaries need to be related to meaning and to the relevance of what we actually do.

The collaborative nature and history of Caversham really has been like working on an etching, the background, the environment, one's life becomes like an etching plate. You put a ground on it, and then you start drawing through it and then you add, as a person comes into your life, into this sphere, into this environment. Through the years it has been what drives us. It becomes apparent that it is not sufficient to just make marks, or to create an object that just fits into a market or has resonance in exhibition openings. That is why they say that 'art is life and life is art'. It is that indivisible element. By living in a natural environment, and we very often are drawn intuitively to those echoes of meaning and relevance in our

lives. I think the environment plays a significant role in that. In some ways what it does do, when one steps outside of one's metaphoric stress and challenge, you step into an environment that is stunningly beautiful, and allows you to connect on a different level.

If you look at Caversham and its roots, this property was built as a Methodist church in 1870. For me the connection with a place like this and a growing understanding over 22 years, really the discovery of what my true role is, makes me talk about creativity in a spiritual base rather than in the product that comes out of it or the process that drives that production. That is why I say that creative block has a lot to do with a moral dilemma or moral challenge.

I think when you spend everyday amongst 60 graves in the garden are a reminder of our mortality. It helps one observe and accept your mortality, and I think it is a critical element. That is why I think your natural link into taking people back to nature is once again that time element, once again you are here temporarily, it is not the edifices that you are going to leave behind, it is maybe the memories, the resonances that you leave in people's lives. That is what we are really talking about. If we look at a great painting that moves you, it isn't the technical, it isn't the colour, it is the meaning that comes beyond that. In a natural environment is the reestablishing of that balance, I think that's what critical.

I tend go through life, with the feeling that when people are meant to arrive in my life they actually do. When things happened, one actually looks for the meaning in them, and how it happens, and when one looks back, this is one of the aspects of getting slightly older, one can see can see the patterns, and you then become relaxed in a cyclical journey. I think of myself walking around, and I think of a circular building, because every single step gives you a different vista and yet you will return to where one started and then see it for the first time. The link with nature does that for you, if you think about your life ultimately what you really want to do as an artist is to wake up, or to engage life with a survival mentality but with the faith that you know that that survival leads to something greater than just the food in your mouth, that it is food for the soul. By putting people in natural environment, essentially what you are doing is engaging that element of survival, and what is survival but heightened awareness, what is heightened awareness, that you cannot rely on pre-existing knowledge or experiences. That is where the notion of newness actually comes from. I think it is easier to do that in a natural environment than in an urban environment. Because it gives you a greater range of experience, urban environments very often, this is very generalized, have too much, are too intense, too concentrated, and this obviously sets up its own dynamic. Fine art student's are people who are bound in an existing building, an existing structure, an existing paradigm, and what you are doing is literally flipping them on their heads. I have had youngsters here who have not seen trees before, coming from townships and walk around a road where they see huge plantations and they can't believe what they see...

...Collaboration is about adding value, adding rituals, and sharing responsibilities. That's what has driven us. Gaby, Jabu and myself are the core team. If you think about print making as a technically skilled orientated medium, equipment orientated, an infrastructured medium. Is there a way to allow art to become more accessible without undermining or demeaning the seriousness of what we do as artists? Very often it is looking at that conjunction of creativity and spirit, that you actually find that blend, this is what makes artists different. One can say that creativity is inherent in everyone. But education systems are developed to educate the creative spirit out of you. The demands on your time and attention, on how you provide and gain meaning in your life and society is the antithesis of that.

Trust yourself. There are so many quick fix solutions, really interesting exciting, innovative programs, but at the heart of things, actually a fundamental shift, reflected in the role of collaboration, from competition to complementary, change the way that we see and use the word challenge, change is not about changing something, but to make a change in yourself, in order to make a contribution. We use up so much of our energy and time, in trying to undermine and change things out 'there', that in actual fact what we are trying to do is to say that the very nature of creativity is to actually engage change. It is the bottom line of what creativity is, it is our natural innate ability to embrace change. It is as simple as that.

How you justify spending 3 – 5 years at a University or Technikon or where ever you are actually studying, in pursuit of technical excellence, content, self expression etc? How do you bridge that and real life? Having to actually balance the challenges of earning a living, providing for all your responsibility, both in terms of society and relationships. How does art actually help that or is it still the stereotypical notion of a solitary pursuit, that artists should be on their own? Is there a way that one can naturalize their role in society? Jennifer Wood in a conversation about if artists can contribute in some way to society, said that artists are naturally self-absorbed people. I agree with that to a certain extent, except that I think that it is part of cultivated cultural perception of what an artist is. That is not a blanket statement, and what I am saying here when I talk about a complementary rather than competitive situation, is not black and white, more an organic and integrated process. Starting to say, 10 percent of 1st year intake graduated, and 10% of those continue to produce art. You have a huge number of people who spent 4 -5 years of their lives who won't actually do anything with these studies. Is there way of actually improving this? What does an institution actually do? Would it be interesting as a good starting point for research that you are doing, to clarify what are the advantages, the positives of the institutionalized experience? I come back to the notion that it is a complementary rather that competitive study. The heart of what we do here, try to find where one can add value rather than repeat, regurgitate or over throw a particular system. In some ways one can understand the demands of an institution, like an educational institution, requires uniformity, requires standardization, requires criteria that can be applied right the way across the board. In lots of ways that is their positive aspects rather than saying the lectures should engage in creative exercises... We need to teach our lecturers to know how to engage creativity. It is a fine line between creativity which can be seen as, 'indulgent', to engage and entertain, rather than the seriousness of saying I need to discover if I have something to say. What is an effective way of expressing it? Art is a personal system of making sense of the reality that surrounds us and what we are actually experiencing.

It has a great healing value...

Obviously, it gives you purpose. In some ways, what it does do it gives you purpose, brings you back into balance, gives you focus, gives you discipline it allows you to build a sense of self belief, because you are able to make things which you recognize and you can actually judge as being meaningful or something to actually dispense with. But it is also a source of affirmation and recognition. Why am I talking to you, its because of recognition and affirmation, I recognize you on a search, on an authentic search. It is not trying to find a crutch for something, we search for the truths in life, art allows us to do this, to make physical. You can say creativity is about technique and nature, but essentially it is about making. It is the making that builds faith and builds belief. It think it is a combination of ideas, of formulation and also taking form, that allows that bridging, the disparate aspects of ourselves, brought on probably due to the demands of our lives. That's nature that's natural. If you think about it, with teachers, very often it is a passive engagement, it's a cerebral engagement that leaves behind the actual making of things. That you do it as part time... and I go back to Ben Shahn...secondary artist and secondary teacher. That is why I set up a separate studio at home when I was teaching. I did that because I resented students interrupting me while I was doing my own work. One does not want to be interrupted when in that engaged process. One has to differentiate between your job, the responsibilities for that and responsibilities to yourself as an artist.

That is why taking people into nature or bringing them to a place like Caversham allows them to see a different side of institutionalization, particularly here, in a studio which replicates in lots of ways what you get in a University or Technikon, except that when you come here it is totally focused, you are here to do nothing other than engage and make.

How long do people normally come for?

Workshops last between 5 days – 3 weeks. We don't work that much on production, but it is more to do with process. It has to do more with small groups, and the focus is with 'residential fellowships'. That is the difference between a single day workshop, and a little element of real life. As you are realizing creativity is not just one specific aspect, it is all aspects of your life. It's how you actually engage those,

how you energize those, how you fill them with meaning and relevance rather than an activity which allows you to come up with a product, with a mark, or whatever it is. We use the words 'fellowships' to denote integration of social aspects as well creative and productive aspects.

Is that how you bring in the social, leadership aspects?

Not necessarily leadership, it is just sitting around table to really engage people. Like the prototype of breaking bread.

Do you try to get people to come out with their problems and with who they are?

No, we just relax. I have learned to trust over 22 years, to trust the creative process, that it is a process.

Do you then have to have enough time?

You have got to have time. Even over a 5 day or three day weekend. If you think about the natural cycle of our lives, you wake up in the morning, you are occupied with activities, you break for food, and we break for tea in the morning. At 10.30 we sit around the table have tea and biscuits, then go back in again, lunch in the afternoon, and supper in evenings. If you look at your natural cycle it is broken up by activities and then engagements in different cycles, different elements of stopping. It is during stopping that people become less self-conscious, less self-focused. That is really where the heart of what happens, happens.

Do you help guide this?

It has changed over the years. We used to have the artists stay with us, and Roz would cook all the meals. When we changed to having longer residencies we then designed workshops which were self catering. We get artists and writers from around the world, we call these Creative cultural dialog residencies. Artists and writers from around the world spend three weeks here. They get a food allowance, they cook their own food. With the shorter fellowships what we do now is, Jabu and Gaby help prepare meals. They share the meals. I am outside of that, and so is Roz. It is part of that succession and part of building sustainability and growing a different dynamic. It is an indispensable element in creativity that we don't always recognize and trust. That is the indispensable element here. If there is no trust then we can't work together. That is one of the things that people go back with, after being here. It is the element that provides the bridge with the spirit, it is a process of integration and engagement and interaction with humanity. Because we do not make objects in isolation, we do not have to make objects, unless there is another person to actually see it. It is about people, it is not about things. In lots of ways creative block is about the engagement with humanity. Like you said, that going back to Tech is like taking Homeopathic pills, tiny little elements within a sugar pill, which holds a remarkable amount. It is your engagement with those things that challenge you, and it is not simply for yourself, it is a reflection of you as part of humanity.

The cornerstone of what we do is complementary. If you are looking at being competitive, you will hide your weakness and vulnerability, and that will close down that creative bridge. The essence of your spiritually, you instinctive self.

I have found it very difficult to marry the two worlds which don't understand the other, that I work in, the academic (conceptual) and the commercial (to make a living)?

I think that it then becomes an issue of clarifying your intentions. Even if one goes into an environment with one particular perception, this is what I am going to be doing; the process clarifies things for you. That is what creativity and art or the manifestation of creativity helps you with, in other words it clarifies intention, it makes you become aware of how important it is to start with that intention. It means that you use your time with more focus, based on, not in terms of it being the conclusion, but in actual fact the starting point. Going to a Technikon, or doing a degree, you really have to clarify why you are doing it, then in some ways you are lead instinctively through one aspect. You think you are on a particular journey and in actual fact you are going in the opposite direction. You realize that that is what you were meaning anyway.

I have been looking at alchemy, and a lot of these ideas are expressed in alchemy, the creative process with their fancy names and chemical processes; intention, trust and spirit. This is where my journey has taken me, to realizing that it is a big experiment, a big process.

I think you have to trust yourself as well. I think that in lots of ways setting up Caversham, after all these years you start to actually trust yourself and then consciously removes oneself from the formal information systems. It is reflected in the international programs that we run. When we started we thought we would have such a diversity of experiences, of values, of things that actually drive people. No matter whether they come from Mexico, or Ireland, it is the commonality, not the diversity, not the differences; that is staggering. I think in some ways what you are talking about is this journey of discovering the spirit. Whether it is called alchemy, whether it is called creativity or religion, whatever it is, it is linking us with a continuum that goes beyond our mortal span. It allows us to say 'How did I actually know that, where did that actually come from? I didn't read that in a book'. But it has resonance for people. That is why I say to you 'trust', use your life as the basis for developing the prototypes that you will actually use, because it then has authenticity. It is not only authenticity in terms of projection but also in terms of self understanding. It is that affirmation, that there is something which goes between the gaps of institutions and one's life. People call it a spiritual path, depending on where you are coming from you can read that into formal structures or religions or what have you. But ultimately if you are on a creative path that is essentially what you are trying to do. The element for us is to realize that in some ways creativity is dynamic, and that in actual fact what we are seeking is balance. But if we are in balance then we are in stasis.

Some one said to me that one needs to be in a constant state of rhythm instead of looking at it as balance. It is like a stepping stone analogy. When you are running down a river over rocks, you are never in balance, you are in a state of imbalance; it is the momentum that keeps you going. As soon as you stop, you slip off or fall. We use the word balance, because it seems comfortable.

You are saying, by bringing someone into a natural environment, you are establishing balance, and what does balance mean? It is a question to ask yourself and why is it so important?

This research has given me more confidence. I have been teaching art to adults and others needing extra tuition with regards to improving skill. I teach for an income but also because I enjoy sharing what I know; I have gathered many skills over the past years. I find the teaching frustrating because people want you to give them everything instead of discovering for them selves. How do you teach with out telling them everything and getting them to understand that it is a creative process, and that there was a kind of a mirroring going on? Trying to come from what I know to be more authentic in my teaching. I realized that people were getting stuck in the beginning stage of just copying pretty pictures. I find it hard to get people to come on a workshop and challenge their boundaries. People come to classes with very channelled ideas about what art is about. I feel I spend most of my time trying to break these boundaries down.

Why?

Because they feel...

No because you feel?

Yes, because I feel, that there is a perception, perhaps coming from my own perception, that society has blinded us to seeing our own full potential.

But maybe those are not the people you should be working with?

Maybe not..

That is what I mean about intention. You have an experience; you go in thinking that you are doing one thing and ultimately that experience, that process will actually lead you to a greater understanding. But you have got to constantly reassess what you are actually doing. Your time is too precious. Look at these graveyards. You have very limited time, if you have that drive to make a contribution. You are not saying it is their fault, they are too scared to go into the environment, maybe it is not them that I should actually

be working with, and maybe I need to actually find people that need that kind of contribution. It's frustrating for you, its frustrating for them, because there is a short circuit, a kind of barrier. That is what they are there for. They are there for that leisure time, nothing further. You have got to find areas that people are craving to be stimulated, to be challenged and in that instance. One of your comments is that the formal aspects of your programs, gives you comfort as a facilitator, but in actual fact you get in the midst of a group of highly creative people they are going to push you beyond your boundaries as much as you will push them beyond their boundaries. So in lots of ways what you are looking for is creative interaction, almost on a peer basis to actually force you to expand your notion of creativity rather than you being the facilitator. It is why I say that it is once again complementary, its collaboration, you are sharing responsibility for engaging in your full potential and their full potential, in whatever that means.

That makes sense in context to my readings on facilitation. Some of the facilitators work with their clients; they are as open and honest about what is going on for them. It levels the playing field, everyone is equal. This is what I have to learn when facilitating, not to be the boss. I am used to that because the teaching role, the lecturer role one is the 'boss'. It is a difficult thing because people are looking you to hold the space.

I think you have got to, in some ways you have got to lead, but in some ways its complementary leadership. For me that is what my life is about, and that is what Caversham is about. I think that is what is a unique element, not unique in terms of extra-ordinary, but in terms of how we actually approach things. I am just wondering if there is not another dynamic, where you said you got a large commission, which meant you had the opportunity not to have to continue with certain things, and whether there is a way of differentiating the things that you require and the things you actually want to give. And if you are going to give then don't put any constraints, don't put any economic or anything that will undermine that or constrain you. And whether it is the thing that is closest to your heart in terms of creativity if you don't do an experiment by getting a group of really creative people together and just sharing that experience, rather than making it a prototype that you would then be able to use to generate income or use in a particular context. That maybe the constraining element, maybe that is the contrast that is the balancing element, that you are looking for.

Like creating a support group of creative people?

Exactly, they could come from all sorts of different backgrounds. Then say, let us see were it goes, not to predetermine, not to actually constrain it. It was something you were saying earlier on. You make animals for money and you can see how the guys at tech do not actually understand that. But that is what I am saying, maybe the sculptures have an integrity in themselves in terms of the intention, in terms of the space it occupies within your life, that you need to find a way to integrate all those rather than saying we have got to put it all into one fruit salad. You separate those elements out, that you don't try and change the world, or change other people to your kind of existing paradigm. Explore them, rather than having to come up with an answer every single time. Put yourself into an environment, and into a situation, and its almost like saying I have x- number of days that I can devote totally to this. With no restrictions whatever, now what is the most potent way for me to stimulate creativity, to catalyze creativity, and let me start exploring that. Let me see it as creating a sculpture of my life, in this particular time, with no other intention, saying that it is just an experiment. It has no resonance beyond that, but you will find a resonance beyond that, obviously.

I have personally found that I have more respect for both sides now that I have gone back to study. I have found that in the exploration in my own work for the masters its been an interesting process in keeping true to myself regardless of the lecturers influence, although being guided by them to explore more deeply. This has helped me in my commercial work, because of the way that I am working and creating has changed. So I might be doing an animal, or nude, but it is how I work that is important, not what I am creating, but how I use my energy in it. I am playing with my messy style and my ability to capture detail. I am feeling so much better, I feel that I have integrated a lot of that.

That is essentially what we are looking at. That is why I keep say it is spiritual thing to integrate all those parts of you. It's not an either or process. If you learn it yourself then, you have to define what has happened in your own life, and how does that replicate in other people's lives, and does it replicate in other people's lives, and is it important to them. That is the exploration that you should be undertaking.

So when I am running a workshop it is more about asking people questions, getting them to decide what they want, what are their intentions, asking what creativity is for them? There is a sharing of that. When you are blocked you don't always know what you are trying to do.

I think there are different levels of engagement, but what you are talking about is essentially, you could call it complementary leadership, but I would call it mentorship because you are mentoring people. And that is what collaboration really is, it is asking questions. Asking the pertinent questions at a particular time. And I think when you are leading, you are really facilitating, collaboration is really mentoring. So you have to understand where someone is coming from, to actually phrase the right question, to know when to time that, for the maximum impact, not from your intention, but for their growth.

That's a skill! I find that I am quite self absorbed, and I am so worried about, what I am saying.

Forget about all the aims and intentions that you've got in one aspect of your life, and just engage with people you actually trust. But be as methodical and absorbent as you are in your facilitator process. In other words go back and assess why things impacted on you in a particular way, why they carried a greater resonance than in other ways, so that you are constantly looking. Because if one were to see our path as similar, it is to try and establish models for others to utilize as a point of departure. I think that is really what we are about. That means that we are not here for ourselves. That is the sense of purpose within ones life to be a collaborator. You are not here for yourself. That means that you are really concerned about how to grow others, and through growing others, and not in a territorial sense, but in a catalyzing sense, you grow yourself. And that gets back to the authenticity and the uniqueness.

Please can you define your understanding of leadership and mentorship

Leadership is, I call it complementary or collaborative leadership is not a hierarchical structure. It is still taking up the challenges of leadership. Leadership is really moving people in a particular direction, but being aware of how to actually grow those people, how to add value through that leadership role, rather than simply getting someone from A to B because it is part of your vision. In other words you are leading people, in front of them, metaphorically, and taking them in a particular direction.

Whereas mentoring, I see them in two opposites, the person is in the middle and if you are leading you are in the front, if you are mentoring you are behind.

I find it simpler to go into the teaching role, I forget to ask...

But why do you go into that role? Is the intention there to earn money, to keep yourself going? Though maybe it is to get yourself affirmation because you went through a tough time at University and you need that kind of affirmation? If it is because you really believe in the things that you are doing and you want to share that skill. If that is your role then you are going to mentor people you are not going to teach them in a didactic way. You have to ask them what do they want to do, otherwise they become pastiches of you.

Appendix E: List of Student and Artists' Workshop Participants

Student workshop Participants from the DUT Fine Art Department

Starting at 12.30 pm on the **26 April 2006** ending at 6pm on **29th April 2006**

Deepa Daya
 Bongani Luthuli
 Blessing Maphumulo
 Eric Maskoka
 Nomkhosi Mazibuko
 Winston Mbelu
 Nothando Mkhize
 Evidence Mngomezulu
 African Mzobe
 Mondli Ngesi
 Londiwe Nzimande
 Patrick Sosibo
 Saskia Whitehead

Artist workshop participants

Starting at 4 pm on the **4 November 2007** ending at 4pm on **4 November 2007**

George Holloway
 Janine Holloway
 Nick Crooks
 Mandy Crooks
 Njabulo Hlalanami
 Charlene Nel
 Maggie Matthews
 Jane Digby
 Hermine Coleman
 Liz Speight
 Kim Wessels
 Anni Wakerley
 Irvin Nkwanyane
 Sizwe Mnikathi

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