

*You could actually sum up the history of your life in one stroke -
that's possible."*

-Chogyam Trungpa, "True Perception"

Soiled Knowledge:

Reminiscence and Rejection (with shuffled music)

In 7 Fragments

Pre-Amble

**July 7.
On a Bus.
Somewhere in Wisconsin.
Heading south.....**

At the McDonalds 'fast stop' (it doesn't even bother with the 't' - its called 'Fas-Stop').

The shadows are gently lengthening into a late afternoon, as we leave the golden M behind.

At this odd juncture, I want to start with a question: How do we write? How do we express that which needs to be?

When I was writing my PhD many years ago (and what follows here is about that) I stumbled into a space of **deep confusion about, uncertainty and ultimately rebellion, or refusal towards** ways of writing I had been taught.

I could say it like that - as a rebellious fight with formal Academia and its particular rigour. But it strikes me now that I could equally see the rebellion as 'internal.' Even s a school boy, I'd relished writing essays - explanatory explorations that 'interrogated' and elucidated. And why not? A desire to explain is so fine and natural.

Very early on in my PhD project, 'Soiled Knowledge,' something 'intervened' however into this natural space,. I began to find that I wouldn't or couldn't (or shouldn't?) write 'about' the topic I had been commissioned to examine, which was the work of the notable Post-Jungian writer, James Hillman. I wonder if the Archetype that configured over my word processor was not Apollo or another God of logic and order, but something more *Trickster*.

[An aside: I recall now, the stupendous novel *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* (probably my favourite book of the last decade) where we have an encounter with *faerie*. One of the

consequences for those who become aware of an opening to the 'Perilous Realm' are tricked or 'silenced' by Faerie Power. Whenever they try to warn others in the 'ordinary' world, of the danger of that 'other world', they are compelled instead to spout nonsense, try as they might.]

Sometimes I think this happened to me.

But I could give myself more agency. Perhaps I could say I chose to let go of my usual ways of wiring (writing?), as an experiment.

The project 'Soiled Knowledge' is available [here](#). And please do glance that way, if you would like? Perhaps to just get a flavour of the kind of 'elsewhere' it might represent.

Or, you could read the whole thing and then pour yourself a drink. Cheers.

As to whether "Soiled Knowledge" and what follows here are *Auto-Ethnography*? I confess I knew nothing of that term 25 years ago. And in looking at debates on-line I feel drawn to this warning:

When the term "auto-ethnography" is associated with an overemphasis on the experiences and feelings of the researcher, the other meanings and implications of the term may be overshadowed and its value to critical perspectivesdiminished¹

¹ Quote from: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0162.xml>

Opening Scene

They viva'd me in Chelsea College of Art. An anonymous place in which to be offered up for sacrifice. I'd never been there before (or since); simply a convenient room booking for the examiners.

Well anyway it was a long time ago - who cares? Obviously I still do: having a failed PhD (yes it was) is a rare kind of minor torture, that body and soul do not forget. Even though it is beyond 25 years ago.

I hope the point of this essay is not to indulge myself in pressing on the bruise.

A poor boy :
so worried for his self

On the other hand I don't want to write as if there is no wound. So here is an aspiration for what follows: to touch a vulnerable space that is both of the distant past and of right now. It is more than a sad story - it is also a celebration of the possibility of writing that is like a gasp - a visceral brush stroke against the rigour of the 'academic'.

Who leaves his armour down

Fragments of a Soiled Offering 1

Tell me that it's nobody's fault...
but my own

*"This thesis reflects on itself as a journey in the process of being made."
(from the forward - all subsequent direct quotes form Soiled Knowledge are in italics)*

This quote is taken from the 'Forward'. In fact, it may just as well have been called the 'backward' - in the sense that I had virtually no sense of direction at any stage of writing Soiled Knowledge.

I feel confident making this claim so many years later. I can feel it in my body as I sit here writing this in 2018, a visceral quality of 'circling' an opening and clutching, and sometimes the breath of a wind in my mid-riff.

My body is like a wind chime, one that circles and can't 'develop'. This might sound like a trap, a stale quality of 'going in circles'. I think when I was writing back then, it was more often a giddy free-falling into space; at other times the wind felt like grace, the 'Imaginal' personified as a dragon, gently snorting warm air.

This circling had to be (and still has to be) set against the developmental drivers that commissioned me. I was registered to complete a scholarly road. My tarmac was the stuff of the gaze of humanities researchers on the psychoanalytic schools. In my case I was held within the gaze of 'Post-Jungian' studies, ostensibly researching the writing of James Hillman.

And what did James Hillman write about? My 'take' (and I can't be sure if this is my take now or then - sorry) is that he was an incredibly able thinker - who longed to transcend the restricted dimensions of sensible psychoanalytic theorising. His writing often 'flew' (for me, at least). There were two contradictory qualities to this flight. On the one hand, it felt like a breathless deconstruction of stale thinking about Psychology. On the other, it felt like a flight **from** something - a breathless exit from embodied life, into 'thin air'. My body felt the ground - **was** the ground - and sometimes reading Hillman I felt a kind of 'altitude sickness'.

My sense - now - is that the first qualities of flying had carried, swept me along into an inspired state - the inspiration to take on this Doctorate. Yet, when the work actually started, the second quality took centre stage and thereafter would not budge. It still has not.

How do we 'feel' writing, with study, with research, in our embodied being? What is allowed, what is censored?



I look up now to an image on my wall at home. Two Shepherds in the moonlight look up to a solitary castle tower. The sheep have settled for the night, protected and safe. The world is in a state of hush and something beckons....and there is a wagon on the road.

Samuel Palmer (1805-81)
'The Lonely Tower'
1879

The night is a
starry dome

Fragment 2

*The Imagination, a great animal, a dragon under whose heaven we breathe its fire.....
James Hillman*

Rather than drain the pool of life in order to uncover knowledge, the writing is a record of three years spent swimming. Rather than try and slay the dragon and so to study it, instead you can find that all life is contained in its belly.

Back to the dragon and the breath of Imagination, with its capital 'I'.

Don't Let me down

Dragons are approached with great respect, awe, and a sense of the numinous. Even while knowing Dragons are beyond tricky - they are Arch Tricksters: wise, unfathomable, and beyond the human (although also strangely intimate with humanity).

With the Trickster - this is intrinsic to the imaginal realm - we (I) are wrong-footed, slipped up, led astray, into thickets and impenetrable forest, and yet also visited by moments of transcendence.

It's a treacherous road

I got swallowed up by Dragon in writing Soiled Knowledge, like some kind of Jonah.

And I don't even try

To be swallowed whole is to live in the middle of psyche, a fish in the ocean (as Jung said: The Psyche doesn't live in us - we live in the Psyche. We can no more contain the Psyche than a fish can swallow the Ocean)².

I feel now, and I think I felt then, we are educated to get out of the sea and try and pretend we are fisher-people, with our trawlers, nets, and leave our residues and micro-plastics everywhere. When we fish - we need to search - to re-search; fish don't need to search - they are already at home.

Am I going all primitivist and anti-rational? This worry is haunting. Perhaps we could open the windows in the stale room labelled 'rational' or 'irrational.' We have reason, and yet also we have wonder and the daemonic - or perhaps the daemonic has us.

What is the imagination for you? When do you feel struck, possessed, and frightened; also held and whispered to? Where does Imagination begin and end - where are its edges?

Writing now, my palms are sweating. Maybe it's just the coffee.

² This quote is found in Jung's 'The Undiscovered Self', Collected Works, published by Routledge (London), 1957, No. 10., page 271.

And turn the white snow red
As strawberries in summertime

Fragment 3

[June 6th On a Train Heading to the Deep North: 7.27 am]



A brand new start

[But] the only sure thing that was in me (however naive it might be) [was] a desperate resistance to any reductive system. For each time, having resorted to any such language to whatever degree, each time I felt it hardening and thereby tending to reduction and reprimand, I would gently leave it and seek elsewhere: I began to speak differently..

Fragment 4

...these notes were clearly full of holes. Rather than successfully fill them in, from there bit by bit I kept falling into the holes until rather than dragging the roots out of the ground into the light of day, I got dragged down, onto the ground, into the soil.

Do you feel dragged down or are you sailing free right now?

Fate
up against your will

I wonder how you are feeling right now? For myself, I'm struggling to focus. What was the purpose of this essay? (Is it an essay?) I see a bird flying in a seemingly random ship, across my field of view. And the fields are full of lines, and train lines, and electricity cables.

Most of the time, if I try and feel back into the writer of Soiled Knowledge, I sense a kind of restlessness. At its most extreme, I have a clear memory of getting on a bus with no idea where it was going...just to feel that **something** was moving,

For, there was, and is, a stuttered quality to 'Soiled Knowledge' (until the end perhaps). In the middle chapters particularly, I am caught: wanting to articulate some kind of thesis, (and a thesis moves - it travels to some kind of destination - it has a point of arrival, an appointment).

And yet also I was wanting to/needing to/being led to.. slide off the road.

*Can we ever follow a water course for long.
Before it disappears underground.*



Always Returning

Fragment 5

....this eye is not roving, winking, crying, wandering. It must be a fixed eye, staring straight ahead

As I sit here in a crowded cafe, everything is as you would expect. A man in a green t-shirt waits patiently to be served. The waitress looks bored and the dogs look hot.

The man in the green t-shirt turns to me and the symbol on his shirt styled like the classic CocaCola symbol...but actually says 'obey Cthulhu. The name Cthulhu is derived from the word *chthonic*, derived from Classical Greek, meaning "subterranean" - or, "of the Underworld"³.

Best to keep our eyes straight ahead if we don't want to meet the Chthonic. And I'm striving for clarity right now, trying to explain and articulate myself. But these fragments are intended (almost despite myself) as 'under-views'.

To actually follow soiled knowledge, which is knowledge of and in the shadows of the despotic eye, is to go down with the roots.

In Chapter 3 we find the phenomenologist Robert Romanyshyn and his beautiful essays on the '*despotic eye*'⁴.

This was a moment of feeling 'met' on this twisted journey

What a beautiful world this will be/ what a glorious time to be free

Despite all the computations

I wish I could just relax and tell it to you straight. But Romanyshyn tells of the Latin roots of the word 'explain' - it is to flatten the land. If we want to wander we have to get out of the car and come right into the perilous realm.

The balm in reading Romanyshyn was to hold me on the ground and yet articulate a vision that honoured the ground, even in its raised up vision.

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cthulhu>

⁴ For example see Chapter 3 of Soiled Knowledge or alternatively : <http://www.janushead.org/10-2/Romanyshyn2.pdf>



*....under the fixed gaze which stares at the horizon, the human body is taken up into the heady eye of mind*⁵

Na nanana na nana na

⁵ Robert Romanyshyn *Technology as Symptom and Dream* p 48

Oh, and when the morning comes,
We will step outside
We will not find another man inside
We like the newness, the newness of all
that has grown in our garden,
soaking for so long

Fragment 6

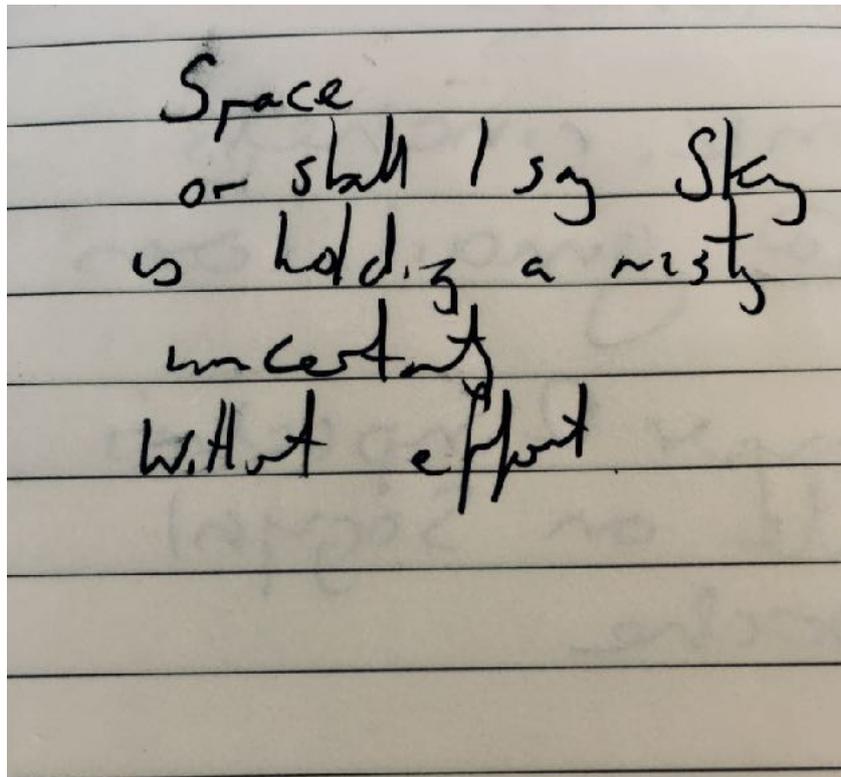


*....demons rise up at us from below, from beyond the observed, from the shadows.
Not demons of the night which can more easily be expected and protected from,
but the passions of the day, who remind us of themselves on hot afternoons as we sit at
our desk and pray in our cells..... Something's missing!.. .what is it, I need to move, get
away from here, I feel restless...go to the shops...*

The butcher arrives.

He is carrying meat to the cafe. I see him because I'm sitting by the back door. The butcher has a limp.

The great escape/ he tried to make/ was not to be



This morning the sun shone early, and by 11 am it is receding into grey morning.

An obvious metaphor perhaps, for daytime shadows, for visions that cloud, recede, or implode; for writing that can't hold up to scrutiny, for feelings that fog and piss in our minds.

Yet at the same time, it's ok...because...because now the salad lady arrives at this cafe's back door, and she smiles at me.

And life flows on
within you and without you

...What we are is what we ordinarily are. This is what we do. We are our own embodiment. If you are possessed by the suspicion at this point that I have told you nothing that you did not know already, that is precisely my point...⁶

....For both of us, me the writer and you the reader, we can't get to the 'primitive'. There is a frustration for both of us, can't I try and explain again, get to grips with this idea of a 'reality of our lived lives'. But perhaps this primitive cannot be gripped, one has to allow oneself, open oneself - to be embraced.

I'm standing on the edge of view.
I need a connection



And I worry that this writing makes no connection to you, that you feel no embrace. Scraps of something cooked a long time ago, maybe just stick in the throat.

⁶ Quote by Brian Appleyard - from Soiled Knowledge page?

The dog barks at no one else,
but me

The way we could connect is to share our restless-ness. Perhaps today is the thread from Soiled Knowledge 25 years ago, to me here now, on this cloudy June day and...to you... wherever you are, right now.

Breathing in and out. As we check our email, and pick up, pick up, put down, our attention roving and wandering.

This is momentary knowing, this is - in fact - soiled knowledge - right now.

The Final Fragment

The wind has shifted, and is blowing fair from the south. Doors close and windows open.



Mystic circles of the young girls

In the midst of things there is no clear inside and outside, because you are in the middle.

The midst of things.

I feel now, right now, that phrase as a summation of Soiled Knowledge.

Although there is no summation to a circle, to a shuffled dance and a Walk-About.

My heart feels full, and a strong, inarticulate, presence.

Benedictus

Explanation can be let be, but a space can be opened up for other voices that want to honour the wilderness, to love wild places and wild animals.....

Are we at the time of day that announces the end?

And I don't know what else to say.

Praise to the fan that stutters its cool air, periodically, like a hesitant friend. And the sunlight casting lines on the table in front of me.

How do you and I help each other live?

Silver Morning

If you read the last chapter of Soiled Knowledge, you might sense a dissolving. What little scaffolding I clung on to, the academic props for a minimalist scholarly performance, just couldn't hold together anymore. I'm not sure whether I knew then that I was throwing something away, rejecting admission and anticipating my admission rejected.

Was I giving up on something, or giving something away? Or was I, like now, happy to sing a song, that has been given?

Happy to be a chime, circling on the breath of wind.

The offer of eternity

Would you care to explain?

Appendix:
Shuffle on

Music Played

Nick Drake: Poor Boy
Nick Drake: Chime of the City Clock
Beck: Nobody's Fault but my Own
Joni Mitchell: Carrie
Beatles: Don't let Me down
Beck: Golden Age
Fleet Foxes: White Winter Hymnal
Van Morrison: Listen to the Lion
Echo and the Bunnymen: The Killing Moon

Brian Eno: Always Returning
Donald Fagen: ICY
Velvet Underground: Rock and Roll
Velvet Underground: A Real Good Time Together
Midlake: Roscoe
The Divine Comedy: Absent Friends
Beatles: Within and Without You
Jane Weaver: I need a Connection
Radiohead: Tourist
Stravinsky: Rite of Spring
Mozart: Requiem Mass
Brian Eno: Silver Morning
Talking Heads: The Great Curve
Steely Dan: Gaucho