A phenomenological exploration of ecological consciousness development

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

.................................................................
Peter White
## CHAPTER 3 - JOURNAL REFLECTIONS: LIVING THE QUESTIONS

### 3.1 Introduction

### 3.3 Thematic Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Thematic Category: Eco-consciousness development</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Thematic Category: Ecological sense of self/Self and Being</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarising thematic table</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 Thematic Category: Negative States of Mind</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pessimism</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despair</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarising thematic table</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4 Thematic Category: Direct Nonhuman Contact</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 Conclusion

### CHAPTER 4 - ENGAGING NONHUMAN NATURE: TO THE EXPERIENCE ITSELF!

### 4.1 Introduction

### 4.2 Nature engagement method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Fieldtrip Reflections</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2 First Impressions</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3 Sound Mapping</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.4 Mindful Hearing</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.5 Mindful Vision</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.6 Touch</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.7 Affective Engagement</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.8 Reflections</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3 Two-fold vision method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Review of Worksheets: The Scribbly Gum</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Review of Worksheets: Tawny Frogmouth</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3 Review of Worksheets: Manly Creek Waterfall</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.4 Reflections</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER 5 – UNDERSTANDING MY EXPERIENCE OF ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Review of Worksheets: The Scribbly Gum</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Review of Worksheets: Tawny Frogmouth</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3 Review of Worksheets: Manly Creek Waterfall</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.4 Reflections</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Summary of the Heuristic Research Method (Ferendo, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Validity Criteria I Used to Facilitate ‘Sound, Just, and Well-Founded’ Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Suggested Measures for Assessing the Trustworthiness of This Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Thematic Insights into My Ecological Consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Thematic Insights into My Ecological Sense of Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Thematic Insights into My Negative States of Mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Examples of Responses to Direct Nonhuman Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Engaging Nonhuman Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>Thematic Insights into My Direct Nonhuman Contact Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10</td>
<td>Meanings Interpreted from My Heuristic Reflections on Eco-Consciousness Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11</td>
<td>First Impression Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>Sound Mapping Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13</td>
<td>Mindful Hearing Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14</td>
<td>Mindful Vision Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15</td>
<td>Overview of Approaches to Evoking an Affective Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16</td>
<td>Affective Engagement Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 17</td>
<td>Summary of Scribbly Gum Engagements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 18</td>
<td>Summary of Tawny Frogmouth Engagements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 19</td>
<td>Summary of the Manly Creek Waterfall Engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1 - MANLY DAM RESERVE, SYDNEY ................................................................. 19
FIGURE 2 – KU-RING-GAI CHASE NATIONAL PARK, SYDNEY ..................................................... 19
FIGURE 3 - BLUE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK, WEST OF SYDNEY .................................................... 19
FIGURE 4 - THESIS OVERVIEW .............................................................................................................. 42
FIGURE 5 - METHODS USED TO EXPLORE MY EXPERIENCE OF ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT 57
FIGURE 6 – MANLY DAM FORESHORE .................................................................................................. 62
FIGURE 7 – NORTH CURL CURL HEADLAND ........................................................................................... 62
FIGURE 8 – BARRINGTON TOPS ............................................................................................................. 62
FIGURE 9 - DATA ANALYSIS FLOWCHART ............................................................................................. 70
FIGURE 10 - THEMATIC CATEGORIES OF JOURNAL ENTRIES .............................................................. 82
FIGURE 11 - MORTON NATIONAL PARK ............................................................................................... 84
FIGURE 12 - LYRE BIRD ....................................................................................................................... 127
FIGURE 13 - FLANNEL FLOWER .......................................................................................................... 143
FIGURE 14 – IRIS ................................................................................................................................. 143
FIGURE 15 - WARATAH ....................................................................................................................... 143
FIGURE 16 - MANLY DAM AT SUNRISE ............................................................................................... 146
FIGURE 17 - SCRIBBLY GUM BARK..................................................................................................... 174
FIGURE 18 - SYDNEY BLOODWOOD ............................................................................................... 174
FIGURE 19 - RED PIGMENTS OF A JUVENILE EUCALYPT LEAF ......................................................... 175
FIGURE 20 - SKELETAL REMAINS OF A EUCALYPT LEAF .................................................................. 175
FIGURE 21 - SCRIBBLY GUM BARK ..................................................................................................... 182
FIGURE 22 - ROCKY CREEK .................................................................................................................. 183
FIGURE 23 - WATERFALL IN BARRINGTON TOPS ............................................................................... 184
FIGURE 24 - WET CASUARINA LEAVES ................................................................................................. 185
FIGURE 25 – SCRIBBLY GUM ............................................................................................................... 202
FIGURE 26 – SKETCH OF SCRIBBLY GUM 1 ....................................................................................... 203
FIGURE 27 – SKETCH OF SCRIBBLY GUM 2 ....................................................................................... 203
FIGURE 28 – SKETCH OF SCRIBBLY GUM 3 ....................................................................................... 203
FIGURE 29 - SCRIBBLY GUM WORKSHEET NO 2 (CONSISTING OF TWO IMAGES) ............................. 204
FIGURE 30 – TAWNY FROGMOUTH .................................................................................................... 208
FIGURE 31 – TAWNY SKETCH 1 .......................................................................................................... 208
FIGURE 32 – TAWNY SKETCH 2 .......................................................................................................... 208
FIGURE 33 - TAWNY FROGMOUTH WORKSHEET NO 1 (CONSISTING OF TWO IMAGES) ............... 209
FIGURE 34 - MANLY CREEK WATERFALL ............................................................................................ 214
FIGURE 35 – SKETCH 1 ........................................................................................................................ 214
FIGURE 36 – SKETCH 2 ........................................................................................................................ 214
FIGURE 37 – SKETCH 3 ........................................................................................................................ 214
**ABSTRACT**

There is now substantial literature directly attributing what is commonly described as the global environmental crisis to a crisis within human beings themselves. Ecologically alienated and restricted consciousness is proposed as substantially causative of decisions and behaviours that lead to environmental degradation. As an environmental professional, community activist, concerned parent and citizen, I share with others the view that an ecologically affective, respectful and relational consciousness, or ‘ecological consciousness’, is to be encouraged in order to not only improve environmental behaviours but meet the challenges posed by a global environmental crisis.

This thesis explores my experience of developing ecological consciousness. An interpretive phenomenological approach was brought to consideration of the research questions: ‘What is my experience and understanding of ecological consciousness?’ and ‘What is my experience and understanding of developing ecological consciousness?’ In order to evoke ecological consciousness, I developed structured experiential exercises that incorporated sensorial, mindful and affective approaches to engaging with nonhuman ‘other’. This experiential approach was supplemented by heuristic inquiry in which I maintained personal journals of my experiences, reflections and feelings in dwelling upon the research questions. These three activities were undertaken in a range of natural settings, from urban bushland to wilder mountain terrain.

In thematically analysing my journal entries and exercise worksheets, as well as being informed by relevant literature, I arrived at a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of ecological consciousness. I found that for me, there are two aspects to ecological consciousness. The first, which I describe as heightened ecological consciousness, is a transitory state consisting of highly relational, restorative and meaningful experiences. The second aspect I refer to as durable ecological consciousness. This involves an overall level of ecological
awareness during normal waking consciousness, characterised by: (1) a sense of connectedness with, respect for, and appreciation of nonhuman nature, (2) a deep concern about the consequences of industrial modernity, and (3) responding to a perceived global ecological crisis in pre-rational, affective and psycho-spiritual ways. I discovered that there is a mutual connection between these two forms: heightened states can be recalled in suburban, busy living to strengthen durable ecological consciousness, while the durable aspect provides the motivation and the foundation from which a heightened state can grow.

Significantly, I also learned that undertaking experiential ‘nature’ exercises provided respite from negative states of mind, such as anxiety, despair and anger, and increased my emotional resilience regarding news of environmental degradation, particularly evidence of climate change. Consistent with interpretive phenomenology, I identified potential uses for ecological consciousness development to the broader social context. If my experience of ecological consciousness has commonalities with the experiences and concerns of others, future applications of my approaches to eco-consciousness development have the potential to (1) offer individuals a structured way of deepening connection with nonhuman nature, and (2) provide a practical, psychological coping tool for helping people, as I experienced, in managing negative states of mind such as anger, stress, anxiety, powerlessness and despair, especially in regard to perceived threats of a global ecological crisis, including climate change.
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION
New Beginning

The whole world's broke and it ain't worth fixing
It's time to start all over make a new beginning
There's too much pain too much suffering
Let's resolve to start all over make a new beginning
Now don't get me wrong I love life and living
But when you wake up and look around at everything that's going down
All wrong you see we need to change it now
This world with too few happy endings
We can resolve to start all over make a new beginning
Start all over start all over start all over start all over

The world is broken into fragments and pieces
That once were joined together in a unified whole
But now too many stand alone
There's too much separation
We can resolve to come together in the new beginning
Start all over  start all over  start all over start all over

We can break the cycle we can break the chain
We can start all over
In the new beginning we can learn we can teach

Tracy Chapman, singer/ songwriter
From her album, New Beginning, 1995

Cover image: Gloucester Tops National Park, 2006
1.1 Introduction

As an environmental professional, community activist and concerned parent and citizen, I am deeply concerned about the state of the planet and humanity’s increasing impacts on its ecosystems and life support systems. I have recognised for several decades that there is a growing global ecological crisis and I am deeply concerned whether we have the collective will to tackle this threat. By crisis, I refer to the severe global adverse human-caused impacts on nonhuman nature that is causing climate change, reducing biodiversity, undermining ecosystem health, increasing deforestation and desertification, compromising human sustainability, and increasing the likelihood of spontaneous and potentially catastrophic non-linear ecosystem changes (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005; Worldwatch Institute, 2009).

My perception of an ecological crisis has primarily arisen through mainstream media, as well as through United Nations, governmental and scientific reports about various aspects of severe environmental degradation. There is substantial support for my perception that there is an unfolding ecological crisis (Bahro, 1994; Gore, 1992, 2006; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005; United Nations Environment Programme, 2009; World Wildlife Fund, 2008; Worldwatch Institute, 2009). There are those who do not see human impacts on the environment in such a threatening way or with the same priority, in comparison to the humanitarian crises inflicting many parts of the globe (Lomborg, 2001). I align with the former group of concerned people or organisations. Laszlo (2006) argues that humanity has gone past a tipping point, a point of severe ecological stress, and soon we will approach a ‘chaos point’ from which chaos and catastrophe will become more desperate in more parts of the world. This concern has provided an important formative influence for ecological consciousness (eco-consciousness) development in my life and the social context for this research.

I arrive at this research from a green rationalist perspective (Dryzek, 1997). I am concerned about the social dimensions, systems and structures, as well as the type
of consciousness that, I suspect, underlies the present global ecological and humanitarian crises. I am cognisant of the need for transformational change at the individual and social levels, a need for systemic approach, as articulated by Gregory (2000). She argues that to address the global ecological crisis, society needs ‘to establish change that is both meaningful to participants and sustainable in the long run’ (p476). While I acknowledge the necessity of fundamental systemic changes\(^1\), I have chosen to restrict my research focus to consciousness transformation, or rather, my experience of eco-consciousness development, which I link with the need for consciousness transformation.

Many environmentalist writers argue that an alienated (from ‘nature’), mechanistic, instrumental individual and collective consciousness is the basis of a global ecological crisis (Bahro, 1994; Berman, 1981; Birch, 1993; Bohm & Edwards, 1991; Capra, 1996; Fisher, 2002; Kidner, 2001; Laszlo, 2006; Metzner, 1999; Naess, 1986; O’Sullivan & Taylor, 2004; Reason, 2007; Roszak, 1992; Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995; Shephard, 1982; Williams & Parkman, 2003). The potential demise of

\(^1\) I refer to what I believe is the need for radical changes to the democratic consumer capitalism system and culture by which our lives are increasingly mediated and ‘nature’ degraded. I find it ironic and deceptive that many politicians, bureaucracies and corporations have exploited and integrated the notion of ecological sustainability as part of its economically driven platform, yet refuse to acknowledge that many western ‘needs’ cannot be sustainably met. As Bluhdorn & Welsh (2007) argue, faith in technological innovation, market instruments and managerialism, as well as the ascendancy of neo-liberal free market principles, such as infinite economic growth and wealth accumulation and the ‘metaphysics of efficiency’ means that fundamental change to address the ecological crisis cannot occur. With the normalisation of the expanding ecological crisis, the fixation on the ‘war’ on terror, the widespread lack of serious concern about catastrophic climate change (Sandvik, 2008; Weber, 2006), the promotion of economic growth, record consumer spending and material accumulation, the mainstream agendas and relationships of once ‘radical’ non-government groups, we have entered an era of post-ecologism and the politics of unsustainability, that is the art and spin relating to sustaining the unsustainable (Bluhdorn & Welsh, 2007).
western civilisation as a result of a disengaged or alienated consciousness was hinted at by Thoreau nearly 150 years ago:

> Here is the vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so weaned from her breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man, … destined to have a speedy limit. (Thoreau, 1862/2008:281)

There is, as Reason (2005) argues, an ecological, ontological, political, educative and spiritual imperative that humanity deal with this alienated consciousness by more fully participating with nonhuman other, ‘living as part of the whole’ (p37). If a purposive, ecologically disengaged consciousness has damaged the ecological whole, as Bateson argued almost forty years ago (Bateson, 1972), then perhaps we need a more participatory, ecological consciousness, one that arises and sustained by an embodied, relational and caring engagement with the nonhuman world.

An alienated, purposive consciousness can be viewed as resulting to varying degrees from what has been termed ‘phenomenol dissociation’. Worthy (2008) presents empirical evidence which found that the more removed or dissociated an individual is from the consequences and victim(s) of their act or behaviour, the more likely they were to continue or exhibit this destructive tendency towards the natural environment. One of the consequences of industrial modernity in the 21st century, argues Worthy, is that technologies, institutions and organisational structures draw people away from a direct experience of their actions and propagate destructive choices. He argues that personal ethics may not be important in terms of environmental outcomes so much as the social structures and systems that keep individuals cocooned from the consequences of institutional and/or remote decision-making.
While acknowledging at the beginning of this inquiry the significance of social, cultural systems and processes in influencing and mediating our sense of self, our consciousness and behaviours, I want to keep the focus on my attempt to understand my experience of consciousness transformation and its meaning for me. In spite of the perception of crisis, Bahro provides an optimistic interpretation of this global context as an opportunity for a consciousness shift:

The ecological crisis is a unique occasion to develop a new mode of consciousness to save humanity from destruction. We must widen and perfect our self-awareness in order to free ourselves of the conditioning of our birth and socialization. (Bahro, 1994:219)

This collective consciousness can, according to O'Sullivan & Taylor (2004), be termed cultural consciousness which is the taken-for-granted beliefs, assumptions, rules and values that individuals from that culture share. Consciousness transformation must happen, according to the writers above, at both the individual and cultural levels to properly deal with the crises that beset humanity.

Arne Naess, the founder of Deep Ecology, criticises the reform or shallow environmentalists which assume the ‘environmental’ crisis is a technical, lifestyle

2 I deliberately refer to the term ‘environmental’ here, rather than ecological as I do elsewhere, to comment on what its use symbolizes about our relationship with the world. The term signifies what is around something, in other words what is in the background and not us (Hannis, 1998). It infers a separation between humans and what surrounds them by placing humans at the centre, and thereby making humans the referent for all value (Devall, 1988). As Hannis (1998) argues, ‘to locate the crisis in ‘the environment’ is to locate it outside of ourselves, to see it as another intellectually challenging problem to be solved by tried and tested scientific method, and to deny that it is at least partly our crisis – a crisis in our way of being in the world’ (p4) and as I have argued, a crisis of the dominant collective human consciousness. Finally, Evernden (1992) says the term is not a life-world but just a surrounding which is nothing but a statement of anthropocentricity. By using ‘ecological’ I
problem that can be overcome with purely technical, regulatory and efficiency measures. He further states that we cannot rely totally on or wait for lifestyle and political actions but that changes have to be from the inside and from the outside, all in one (Naess, 1989:89). I frequently encountered people in environmental oriented government and corporate organisations that demonstrated, through attitude, language and behaviour, an ecologically alienated and restricted consciousness. The ‘environment’ (not the term ‘nature’) was mostly some abstract stage upon which they and other actors played their roles as stewards, developers and regulators. In work situations I was unable to suggest ideas or approaches inconsistent with the predominant environmental value system, one that could be labelled conservationism (Corbett, 2006). When dealing in my professional and activism activities with people in bureaucracies and corporations or with politicians, I sensed they were speaking abstractly and with relational detachment about the natural ‘environment’ they were planning, developing, managing or regulating. They spoke the ‘right’ words such as promoting sustainable outcomes, community engagement and win-win economic-conservation outcomes but the decisions made were usually a big win for economic interests and a loss for ‘nature’. I did not know their personal predispositions towards ‘nature’ but certainly the vast majority indicated little meaningful concern or connection\(^3\). I can understand why many environmental writers identify an

am indicating my ecocentric values that positions humans within and interdependent with the ecological systems and processes that creates and sustains life, including humans. By ecological, as I discuss in chapter 5, I am referring to both scientific and metaphysical constructs, and particularly, the idea of an interdependent diversity-within-unity.

\(^3\) This is not meant to imply that they may not have held more aesthetic or relational attitudes or even ecocentric values on a private level, its just that the anthropocentric culture of their work and political environment may have mitigated against any honest personal expression. As Hannis (1998) comments, when environmental policy-makers conform and attempt to continue or prove their objectivity and detachment (their professionality), it leaves little hope for ordinary citizens to have any influence over the decision-making process, especially when valuation of nature is explicitly or
excessive anthropocentric, materialistic consciousness as a fundamental driver of most environmental behaviours and decisions that lead to environmental degradation (Capra, 1996; Laszlo, 2006; O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004). I use ‘excessive’ to indicate my view that as humans, we ‘naturally’ view life from a human orientation but that a total, utilitarian and detached orientation is excessive and deleterious to aspects of nonhuman nature and ourselves.

While there are other drivers of environmental degradation, it is the more fundamental or ‘radical’ consciousness and ‘nature’ connectedness that is my focus for this research. My approach is consistent with Al Gore’s statement of hope with regard to humanity’s response to climate change:

What is needed is a higher level of consciousness and that is hard to create, but it is coming. There’s an old African proverb that says if you want to go quickly, go alone, if you want to go far, go together. We have to go far, quickly. So we have to have a change in consciousness, a change in commitment, a new sense of urgency, a new appreciation for the privilege we have of undertaking this challenge. (Gore, 2008)

I am interested in understanding and developing, in Al Gore’s words, ‘a higher level of consciousness’ that may lead to ‘a change in commitment’. While it could be challenged, I chose to accept the implicit proposition behind this statement that a ‘higher consciousness’ will necessarily lead to ‘a change in commitment’. But what do he and other environmental writers, such as those identified above, mean by a new or ‘higher consciousness’? How do we experience this higher form of implicitly being decided. My experience of being ‘professional’ over many years, one that construed, often implicitly, ecocentric values and attitudes as ‘radical’ or unrealistic or naïve, left me disillusioned, de-spirited and detached from society and mainstream environmentalism.
consciousness? How do we get, individually and collectively, to this ‘higher’ level? If I do not know what this abstract term requires, implies or how it might be experienced, then I may be reluctant or cynical to seriously contemplate realising this. If we are to shift from the dominant western consciousness, which has been described, for example, as mechanistic, utilitarian, consumeristic, and individualistic (Bahro, 1994; Berman, 1981; Birch, 1993; Capra, 1996; Devall, 1988; Laszlo, 2006), then I suggest we shift to a consciousness that is more grounded and deeply and empathically\(^4\) relational within our ecological reality. A higher level of consciousness for me, in this context, constitutes the development of an ecological consciousness (eco-consciousness). From my personal lived experience, I have associated eco-consciousness with a deepened sense of relationship and an affective and spiritually oriented participation within natural settings. I am curious, indeed passionate, to understand what an ecological, affective, connected, relational consciousness, an eco-consciousness, implies for me. Perhaps if I explore ways of holistically engaging nonhuman nature I can begin to respond to these questions.

It has been suggested that the nature of the global ecological crisis highlights the need for humanity to become more conscious of the wholeness of nature and humans (Hoffman, 1998). To become more conscious or to transform one’s

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\(^4\) According to Neumann, Bensing, Mercer, & Ernstmann (2009), empathy, with its origins in the German word Einfühlung (‘feel into’) can be interpreted in several ways including 1) affective empathy 2) cognitive empathy and 3) behavioural empathy. The first is an affective reaction stemming from a perception of another emotional state or situation in another person evoked by similarity, familiarity or affection. The second views empathy as being a cognitive role-taking orientation to understanding, rather than sharing another’s feelings or perspective. The third perspective sees empathy as an intersubjective, social tool necessary for effective social competence. My reference to empathy in this dissertation refers to the first two interpretations, particularly cognitive. This was diminished and replaced by affective empathy when an expanded, less ego-oriented sense of self evolved.
consciousness, to bring forth more of what one has ignored or taken-for-granted and to strengthen the relationship to nonhuman other is a significant challenge, individually and collectively. Hoffman’s statement places significance upon acknowledging and educing our inherent capacities for wholeness. To become whole, suggests Drengson (1989), we must move beyond our cognitive abstractions and our theoretical and emotional preoccupations and experience the spontaneity and wholeness of life, recognise the diversity and individual uniqueness within our ecological communities, and of our own unique phenomenological experience of them. Part of the work to become whole, or as Devall (1988) states, to become ecologically conscious, is to work on our own lives to encourage deeper, fuller meaning and broader identification with Earth and its life, to become alert, attentive and attuned and make the ordinary, extraordinary (Devall, 1988:35). In other words, we must seek to understand our world beyond the surface appearance of things and step away from our habituated way of thinking, as Thoreau too reflected:

By closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit every where, which still is built on purely illusory foundations...... I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that that is which appears to be.’ (Thoreau, 1854/2008:68-69)

This research is an interpretive phenomenological heuristic exploration into the purposeful development of my ecological consciousness. Within this study, I have engaged with the processes of reflecting on, understanding and making meaning of my own experiences of eco-consciousness. While eco-consciousness may be viewed as a transformative consciousness with potential social implications, my experience of its development privileges the insights of subjective experience and is most amenable in its depth to a phenomenological exploration. Specifically, I
preferred a self-reflective approach as observing consciousness requires a meta-
awareness, one in which I am focused on being aware of my states of consciousness
and its changes through perception, experience and interpretation.

1.2 Ecological consciousness: meanings and initial interpretations
In this section, I briefly discuss some of the interpretations of the term eco-
consciousness. In undertaking a preliminary literature search on this term, I found
remarkably few journal articles and books discussing it, or outlining a
comprehensive interpretation of it or describing the phenomenological lived
experience of eco-consciousness. There are numerous references to the term in
environmental discourse, in areas such as environmental philosophy, design,
psychology, management and education but few of these go into any depth about
the term or experience of eco-consciousness. I give a few examples of these
interpretations to indicate how the term has been re-interpreted from its origins.
My primary focus however is to give a brief description of how and why it evolved
in the 1970s and 1980s.

Prior to discussing the terms recent derivation, I want to acknowledge that the
experience, rather than the term, of ecological consciousness has been prevalent
over millennia in indigenous cultures, early agricultural societies and the first
civilisations. Hughes (1991) argues that primal or indigenous societies exhibited
eco-consciousness, an awareness of the intimate, spiritual connection of the self
with all of nature and a reverential recognition of the sacredness and sentience of
life. It was achieved by normal psychological development in contact with nature,
assisted by those cultures positively adapted to the natural environment. Hughes
argues this eco-consciousness began to diminish with psychological or cultural
dysfunction resulting from the failures of psychological maturation associated with
three revolutions: the development of the plough, city and writing. As cultures and
societies grew and became separated, psychologically, physically and spiritually,
from nonhuman nature, eco-consciousness was lost at the collective level and
environmental degradation began to occur (Hughes, 1991).
Devall (1993) identifies the term eco-consciousness as appearing in the environmental literature in the 1970s and links it with the ecophilosophy of deep ecology\(^5\) which views the ecological crisis as resulting from an ecologically alienated consciousness and values and a restricted conception of self. Devall does not provide a thorough description of the term, using it interchangeably in some of his writings with ecological self, ‘ideal state of being’ and Self-realisation (Devall, 1988). Eco-consciousness has been further developed or referred to (sometimes by other names such as ecological sensibility) by other environmental writers (Beck, 1995, 1999; Bragg, 1996; Devall, 1988; Devall & Sessions, 1985; Drengson, 1989; Hill; Wilson, & Watson, 2004; Leff, 1978; Milbraith, 1984, 1989; Morris, 2002; O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004; Uhl, 2004). According to Christopher (1999), the term ‘ecological consciousness’ was developed by deep ecologists to philosophically differentiate from the more mainstream term ‘environmental consciousness’. Each term appears to be conceptualised differently. Environmental consciousness, as I view it in its current vernacular, accepts the predominant free market view, focuses on natural resources (as against nonhuman nature) and its exploitation, management and conservation. Christopher (1999) considers environmental consciousness as being driven by a cognitive, materialistic consciousness and anthropocentric value orientation that seeks to mitigate and manage the impacts of human activities, and facilitates the treatment of nonhuman nature as a separate, ‘lower’ entity to be exploited and abused as required. Mainstream environmentalism, argues Kidner (2001), in its managerial/technological focus cannot offer fundamental and sustainable solutions to the environmental consequences of industrial modernity.

\[^5\] The founder of deep ecology, Arne Naess, apparently was not interested in establishing a philosophy or established discipline (a view shared by other deep ecologists/ecopsychologists such as Roszak, Metzner, Devall, Sessions) but referred to it as ‘the deep ecology movement’ to connote a dynamic methodological process of self-examination that facilitates Self-realisation through re-awakening our co-evolutionary relationship with ‘nature’ (Schroll, 2007).
While I am positioning my interpretation of both terms with Christopher’s perspective, I would however offer a qualifying reflection about the rationalist, status quo viewpoint of environmental consciousness. I recall in the early 1980s of hearing and reading about the need for a new environmental consciousness. I recall watching documentaries about the social revolutions in the 1960s and the call for a new social and environmental consciousness (and rights, freedoms, peace and ways of living). This call for a new environmental consciousness of the 1960s parallels my understanding of the need for a ‘new’ eco-consciousness for the 21st century.

Those calling for ‘environmental’ consciousness in the 1960s onwards rejected the status quo economic, managerial and anthropocentric approach to exploiting and managing the environment that positioned humankind at the supreme heights of the ‘pyramid’ of life. They called for, among many things, a new way of harmoniously connecting and living with nonhuman nature. Out of these calls for a transformative environmental consciousness evolved, directly and indirectly, an increasing environmental awareness and support for not only mainstream environmental approaches such as pollution control, impact assessment and resource management statutory and regulatory instruments but the development of a spectrum of ‘alternative’ or radical ecophilosophies, such as deep ecology, social ecology and eco-feminism. Unfortunately it is my experience, as indicated in section 1.3, that the term environmental consciousness became mainstreamed. It maintained the exploitive, economic, managerial assumptions and values of western society’s treatment of the natural environment ‘out there’. This form of consciousness, which I associate with the more common term, reform environmentalism, tends to be parochial and concerned mainly with the symptoms of environmental disease and third world socio-ecological issues (Devall, 1988). This business-as-usual approach I am sure did not mean this to environmental activists in the 1960s but that is how over the course of the last few decades it has appeared to have evolved.
I therefore associate environmental consciousness with an anthropocentric reform environmentalism which is oriented towards conservative political agendas with economic rationalist and utilitarian oriented values and policies. Intervention strategies are, in my professional experience, limited to statutory, regulatory and financial processes, as well as restoration, conservation and educational programs. I have participated professionally within each of these areas. But as Devall (1988) points out, reformers rarely question the fundamental social and philosophical assumptions of industrial modernity that underlie our relationship with nonhuman nature. While I believe these ‘outer’ changes are necessary, they are only part of the response required. As Zimmerman (1994) points out, many deep ecologists work within the prevailing socio-economic system to change it gradually while simultaneously working for personal and social transformation. Whether within and outside the ‘system’, questioning assumptions will also require questioning our ways of thinking, feeling and relating – to others and our inner self.

I have been, and still am to significantly lesser degrees, associated with reform environmentalism, as can be observed in my story outlined in section 1.3. I chose to work within the environmental arena to make a contribution to protecting the environment. I had a conservative environmental awareness in my early adult years that aligned with the anthropocentric, rationalist political and bureaucratic agendas. These agendas were developed not only by the three levels of governance in Australia and the private, corporate sector but by reform environmental groups. These groups, as Devall (1988) identifies, use reformist agendas and arguments in order to be heard by political decision-makers rather than ‘deep’ philosophical and valuational questioning, and thereby, he argues, legitimate and reinforce the economic rationalist, consumerist worldview of decision-makers. Having been involved with various environmental organisations in the 1980s and 1990s, I find that this critique is consistent with my experience.
I view the notion of eco-consciousness development as my logical and emotional response to my experience of reform environmentalism and its epistemological prosthesis, environmental awareness. I have had to divorce myself from working within reformist institutions and agendas to give priority and focus to understanding the more ‘radical’ experience of eco-consciousness development. I position my research as part of the deep, long range ecology movement which advocates, in part, a practical reflexivity and praxis about our relationship with nonhuman others. This research differentiates from a reformist environmental awareness by exploring the term, eco-consciousness, which requires facilitating a ‘process of grounding ourselves through fuller experience of our connection to earth’ (Devall, 1988:11).

In contrast to environmental consciousness, I position eco-consciousness as being grounded in an eco-centric value orientation that values the intrinsic worth and rights of nonhuman nature, that views humankind as a part of ‘nature’, and gives priority to an empathic relational orientation to nonhuman other. The shift to an ecological mode of consciousness may be understood to occur when there is recognition, respect and valuing of nonhuman nature, experience of connection and dependence on nonhuman nature, concern and action for nature and a sense of self that includes nonhuman other (Devall & Sessions, 1985; Fisher, 2002; Fox, 1990; Naess, 1986, 1989; Uhl, 2004). Based on my reading of the literature referring to eco-consciousness, more recent references often do not explicitly define or interpret the phrase: it is taken as a given. This is problematic in that a variety of interpretations will be made based on the reader’s value orientation and experiences. Many of the definitions provided lack the relational consciousness and ecological identity orientation of a deep ecological or transformative environmental value perspective that was the basis of the formation of the term ‘ecological consciousness’. Its use, particularly within environmental education (excluding the interpretation of Morris, 2002), explicitly or implicitly infers behavioural and cognitive/ rational outcomes. It appears to be undifferentiated from environmental consciousness that, in part, relies predominantly on
environmental understanding through rational, analytical and transmissive learning approaches. Some such interpretations include:

- A state of being in which all daily behaviours are viewed through a lens of ecological literacy and responsibility, forming an ecologically beneficial lifestyle (Forum for Ecological Education and Action, 2008).
- The degree of daily instruction and discussions that occur in schools as perceived by teachers that would prepare teachers and learners to be a) ecologically literate, b) capable of making ecologically consistent changes in their own lives, and c) able and willing to contribute to ecological societal changes (Puk & Makin, 2006:270).
- A consciousness that is based on value attitudes oriented toward the preservation, restoration, and rational use of the natural world (Biriukova, 2005:34).

I suggest, based on my personal experience and ecocentric values, together with the preceding writer’s views, that the following characteristics of eco-consciousness, derived from Christopher (1999), provide an adequate framing at this stage of my inquiry:

- a deep awareness of one’s connection to nonhuman nature;
- personal identification with nonhuman nature;
- intrinsic valuing of non-human nature;

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6 People with ecocentric values believe that there is no ontological divide between humanity and the rest of nature and that there are no reasonable grounds for giving general priority to human interests where they are seen to conflict with the interests of nonhuman species. While there are specific examples of where human interests may over-ride those of nonhuman species, nonhuman nature should be preserved for its own intrinsic value, independent of its value for humans (Humphrey, 2000).
• a deep concern about the destruction of our natural environment but dealing with this understanding in pre-rational, affective and psycho-spiritual ways;

• interest in Self-realisation\(^7\) oriented towards meaningful engagements with nonhuman other;

• understanding that our global crises are consequences of a dominant industrial, consumer modernity and individual responses such as powerlessness to negative consequences can lead to a pre-reflective, affective desire to connect with nonhuman nature.

Eco-consciousness can be viewed as a fundamental way of relating to ‘nature’ and re-engaging the world that offers the possibility for shifting perspectives on ‘self’ and ‘nature’. As Kaplan (2000) states, individuals need to discover their own ways of relating to the world to improve and/or sustain environmentally responsible behaviour. He argues that we need learning strategies based on relationship, intimacy and attentiveness. This is similar to Martin’s (2007) call in environmental

\(^7\) Self-realisation and biocentric equality are the two primary tenets of the radical environmental philosophy of Deep Ecology. Self-realisation broadly means a process of identifying with a larger Self beyond the individual persona or ego (Dryzek, 1997). This ‘Self’ is not the ‘self’ of the individual personality or ego (Devall, 1988) but refers to a person’s Being, their soul, a more expanded and non-physical energy-consciousness. Through an expanding process of identification with all of nature, especially nonhuman nature, one comes to understand that we are part of nature and identify with greater wholes without diminishing or merging the little self. As Naess (1989) states, ‘by identifying with greater wholes, we partake in the creation of and maintenance of this whole …the ego’s develop into selves of greater and greater dimension, proportional to the extent and depth of our processes of identification’ (p173-4). The term comes from the Norwegian ‘Selvrealisering’ which is an active condition, not a place one can totally reach as complete Self-realisation would require the realization for all beings. It is a process of spiritual development from a deep ecological perspective (a cultivation of deep consciousness, identification with increasing levels of existence and awareness of diversity-within-unity), a way to live one’s life (Rothenberg, 1989).
education for facilitating care for nonhuman nature as a means of addressing collective beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. I reflected that ‘facilitating care’ or ‘discovering ways of relating’ could not rely substantially on my normal cognitive, rational or analytical consciousness orientation. Relating and ‘facilitating care’ implied ways I had enjoyed, since childhood, of interacting with natural settings in which I tended to immerse my self away from other humans. My preferred mode of engagement had been sensorial, affective and spiritual and this would often lead to a deeper care and relating with nonhuman nature.

The preceding discussion focuses on differentiating eco-consciousness from environmental consciousness and on the overall meaning, in terms of characteristics, of eco-consciousness. I then consolidated this with a brief discussion about the importance to me and several writers on intimate, sensorial and affective ‘caring’ engagements with nonhuman nature. These characteristics and aspirations do not however inform us about the actual lived experience of such a transformative consciousness. It is this, an experientially oriented understanding that I seek to contribute through this inquiry.

1.3 My story of arriving at this inquiry

I have arrived at this inquiry in mid-life, a stage of re-evaluation and self-reflection, in which I have substantially withdrawn from previous environmental work and activism to focus on coping with what I perceive as an unfolding multitude of crises - personal, social and ecological. In this section I reflect upon several key personal experiences that I believe have been seminal to bringing me to this inquiry into eco–consciousness development. My story of coming to this inquiry is the research

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8 I had worked for 20 years prior to this research in the environmental fields such as planning, policy, resource management, assessment and sustainability. I had also been involved in environmental and community activism, primarily with local issues, committees and projects.
context. I begin my story not at the beginning but at the end, that is, the end of the initial adult stage of my life and the critical transition time just prior to commencing this research in 2006. This mid-life transition stage, as I view it, highlights the tensions and dilemmas I had faced during my adult life, from which emerged my curiosity and passion for understanding eco-consciousness. My way of dealing with my emotional pain and alienation, through relational, affective engagements in natural areas, reinforces the personal basis of my exploration but perhaps also the social potential to those who may experience similar angst.

In the years leading up to my PhD, I found that I was feeling stronger emotions and confusion about my personal and social situations. I felt increasingly alienated from, and resentful of, a dominant materialistic social paradigm with its ‘shallow’ environmental values. I was dissatisfied with my environmental vocation in terms of tension and disenfranchisement stemming from continuous value conflicts with organisations. After my last contract position in 2003, I felt chronically discouraged about my life prospects and ability to fit in with others. I became more sensitive to environmental bad news, especially with increasing evidence of climate change and the probability of ecological and social catastrophe within my lifetime. These were problems for me because my subsequent feelings of anxiety, anger, despair and

\[\text{\footnotesize{\cite{Eliot}}}\]

9 ‘What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from’ (Eliot, 1944).
powerlessness were impacting upon my sense of self, my happiness and my close relationships. I responded in part to these negative states by making more regular visits to my local bushland reserves such as Manly Dam Reserve (refer to Figure 1) and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park (refer to Figure 2), as well as the Blue Mountains (refer to Figure 3). These visits helped to alleviate or manage my negative feelings. These visits tended to be affective, sensorial and spiritual engagements from which I generally experienced a variety of positive affective states such as a sense of restoration, being connected and grounded, peacefulness, a more expansive sense of self and spiritual meaning. As Thoreau once observed: ‘there can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his sense still’ (Thoreau, 1854/2008:91). These experiences therefore provided a form of psychological nourishment that helped me cope with anxiety, alienation, tension and discord in my life. Between the end of my environmental work in 2003 and my enrolment in this doctorate, I increasingly became interested in this approach to effect a transformation of consciousness and manage negative feelings and tensions around my personal and social circumstances.

In 2003, I came to the end of a contract position within a state government land and water management department. I had been substantially involved in policy and environmental project funding administration activities. I felt like a very anonymous cog in a very big Newtonian machine. I was very unhappy for a number of reasons beyond this cog-like sense of diminishment. I felt alienated from ‘nature’ and overwhelmed and claustrophobic by suburban living. During this contract position over several years, I became increasingly despondent about my sense of alienation from the organisation and ‘nature’. I felt a deep loss of connection, workplace isolation and diminished sense of self, all leading to a loss of vitality and happiness.

The other reason for my unhappiness and disengagement from the department had, in retrospect, much to do with a clash of environmental values, which led to a tension or dissonance in my work situation. There was no shared field of value
discourse in my work. This was one of the common problems I constantly faced in undertaking short-term contract work within organisations. I was silent about my ‘radical’ transformative ecocentric values such as my commitment to ecological diversity, complexity, integrity and harmony because there was no interest or opportunity to engage in discourse about these. There appeared to be an unspoken, perhaps even unconscious, acceptance of the organisation’s values, as implied by its official role and responsibilities and perhaps political sensibilities. I held deep green and spiritual perspectives towards the conservationism concept of sustainability and I was disenfranchised with, even hostile to, mainstream conservationism with invariably its highly anthropocentric, technical, managerial, wise use orientation which I had to conform to.

After championing the concept of sustainable development since the early 1990s, I became cynical and disinterested in its shallow green, economic, business-as-usual orientation. In reflecting on this I can now understand that this clash of values, my lack of meaningful contribution to the department and connection to colleagues, leading to feelings of isolation, alienation, disenchantment and despair, all fuelled a desire to remove myself from this kind of work situation. It fuelled my desire to understand eco-consciousness, as an alternative conceptual and experiential mode to sustaining human and nonhuman life consistent with my values. I came to view, during the times just prior to considering this research, this transformative consciousness as a potential linking tool between engaging nonhuman nature and sustainability. Perhaps this ‘radical’ eco-consciousness was a missing link in the ‘reformist’ sustainable development concept or ‘mantra’. Perhaps eco-consciousness could be a relational tool to better sustain and develop richer, respectful ways of ‘being’ in this world.

I could not, despite the pressure to keep working, maintain integrity and purpose by continuing on with this type of meaningless, alienating work. My flight from alienation led to two years in a ‘wilderness’ without paid work, without a clear way forward for my flagging career, or strategies to inquire into eco-consciousness.
Researching eco-consciousness was my way to avoid resignation and so I retired to the ‘woods’ to learn what it might teach me. Thoreau’s explanation of his retreat from ‘civilisation’ in 1845 resonates with my experience and thinking:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life…… (Thoreau, 1854/2008:65)

I gradually developed the passion to inquire into a form of consciousness that I saw as holding potential to transform destructive collective attitudes and behaviours. In no longer pursuing more contract work, I effectively made a decision to break from my old vocational orientation and my measures of success, despite enduring feelings of desperation. I needed to let go of fitting in to what was not authentic to who I was becoming, although I was not confident of understanding who I really was, let alone becoming. I needed to walk to the beat of my own rhythm, as Thoreau once recommended:

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. (Thoreau, 1854/2008:219)

This post-work period of 2004 to 2006, while emotionally and financially tenuous, was a transitory period of coming to accept where I was at and my need to identify, to paraphrase Thoreau, the ‘music’ to which I could ‘step’. There were a number of dilemmas during this period that influenced my decision to undertake this
doctorate. The primary dilemmas included becoming more concerned with the global ecological crisis, my son’s environmental education or lack thereof and my involvement with community resistance to excessive urban development.

While I had been concerned about the global ecological crisis since the 1980s, it was the issue of climate change that re-sensitised me to the ‘ecocidal’ behaviour of humanity and the need for fundamental change that environmentalism or environmental consciousness had not achieved. No amount of environmental management, technology and conservation, I suspected, could stem the rising tide of environmental degradation if we remained disengaged from nonhuman nature and our impacts on the environment. The increasing number of headlines about more evidence of the seriousness of climate change connected with this suspicion. Headlines ‘screamed’ out to me: ‘Arctic meltdown just decades away, scientists warn’, ‘Climate change shock unearthed’, ‘Hottest year on record as extreme weather lashes globe’, ‘Sea warming threatens climate disaster’ and ‘Sydney’s vanishing future’. There were many, many compelling headlines and scientific reports yet no shift in Australian government’s attitude and no sense of urgency or concern by mainstream society. These headlines and reports have increased in frequency since I began this research inquiry in 2006. In 2009, I am reading more reports about increasing, even accelerating, greenhouse gas emissions, glacial melting, Arctic and Antarctic ice melt, ocean levels and temperature, more frequent extreme weather events and the increased concerns by scientists about the potentially catastrophic trajectory of regional and global impact projections. In reading these reports, I felt a cycle of anxiety, anger, despair and powerlessness. During 2005-06, I began to consider the role of our collective alienated consciousness to meet these challenges. If this was the prime reason behind our ecological crisis, if it was a similar kind of environmental awareness and values I had experienced within my contract work, as well during my involvement in environmental campaigns, then this was a significant problem for me, my family, humanity and significant proportions of nonhuman other. It therefore appeared
useful to understand what its opposite, an ecologically connected consciousness, was and how it could be experienced.

Then there was the experience of my son’s environmental education at primary school. The problem from my perspective was that in talking to him and his teachers and environmental education specialists, I found that this form of education was nearly all conducted in the classroom in a transmissive, cognitive oriented pedagogy. It was based upon lots of information, pictures and learning facts and figures. There were perhaps only two excursions into local bushland in his six years of primary school, and these were curriculum driven with sheets to be filled in of facts and figures. It did not seem likely, at least from my perspective that he and others could learn to engage holistically with natural settings that were so abundant around them. With such little experiential education, how could children, if this were a common experience, not become, without intervention from family and peers, ecologically alienated and disengaged from the richness and significance of nonhuman nature?

Prior to undertaking this inquiry and during this two-year transitional period I continued my role of supporting pro-environmental outcomes in my local community. I observed that due to the value conflicts within the land and water bureaucracy and my subsequent disenchantment with my environmental profession, I avoided, unconsciously at first, going back into similar situations and sought voluntary work with people concerned about unsustainable development. I found voluntary involvement with community or residential groups much more satisfying because I was dealing with like-minded people and using my technical and regulatory knowledge for an ethical cause. I was actively involved in at least six different groups in this way as well as being a member of three council advisory committees relating to coastal and lagoon management. I found it much more satisfying to be supporting local activists and sustainable projects. In 2006, I helped organise some local residents and activists to undertake regular bush regeneration
at a heavily degraded suburban boundary of Manly Dam Reserve. In this way I could convert my deep concern and sense of frustration and alienation of my previous paid work into rehabilitating spaces I held of value. I could not do this in paid work, in terms of hands-on involvement, which for me symbolised one of the problems of my previous paid work, the lack of opportunity to directly engage nonhuman nature in a way consistent with my values and concerns. I also involved my young son in pulling weeds and planting indigenous shrubs and trees as I was concerned he might not develop a tangible connection to nonhuman nature and I wanted to help counter his ‘nature deficit disorder’ (Louv, 2005). Upon reflection I view undertaking bush regeneration, like my other voluntary environmental activities, as a process of meaning-making. My inquiry into eco-consciousness, spurred on by my experiences with paid work and community activism, can be viewed as reflective of my attempts to not only find meaning and value ‘autonomy’ but to act upon and understand my deep connection with nonhuman nature.

In terms of my support for community environmental battles, I was confronted with the same kind of environmental values and almost unquestioning adherence to the status quo as I was in my professional work situations. The development proposals that threatened the character and ecology of suburban and semi-rural areas eventually proceeded – medium density housing, rural residential subdivision, telecommunication towers, large commercial office buildings were approved. Whether it was the local council or through the courts, it was difficult to battle entrenched interests and a planning and political system favouring well resourced and connected corporate players. While I have no regrets in helping people fight overdevelopment over the past ten years, I view being an environmental activist as generally being frustrating, disempowering and alienating, a view consistent with that of many environmental professionals (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Thomashow, 1995). I found that losing battles and knowing what the loss means for local bushland and biodiversity, as well as current and future generations, made me sad, angry and frustrated. It helped me realise the lack of awareness and acceptability
of eco-consciousness to those confident that environmental consciousness is sufficient to deal with our environmental challenges.

The preceding story of my ‘mid-life transition stage’ highlights some of the personal dilemmas I experienced that brought me to this inquiry. My disillusionment and powerlessness regarding my environmental professional and activist activities, dissatisfaction with my son’s environmental education, my environmental value dissonance with mainstream environmentalism, sensitivity to environmental bad news and the loneliness of alienation and social disconnection can all be viewed as the motivation and context, even part of my problematic, behind this inquiry. This mid-life ‘transition’ phase indicates a relationship between perceiving global ecological threats, a sense of powerlessness, anxiety and alienation with the dominant values and institutions of industrial modernity and my interest in eco-consciousness. This relationship between eco-consciousness, powerlessness and the negative consequences of industrial modernity is discussed by Christopher (1999) who explored how some members of the Californian Green Party had developed their ecological consciousness. I will discuss this further in Chapter 5. I include here, however, an excerpt from his study that discusses the role of experiencing powerlessness in evoking an eco-consciousness:

I have found that the anxiety about modern life, which is so common among ecological thinkers, has much broader sources than just knowledge and experience of environmental degradation. When asked how they came to their ecological consciousness, ecological thinkers inevitably relate some experience of personal powerlessness … profound enough to generate a hypersensitivity to power relations and a propensity to question the status quo such that they came to reject the individualistic conception of self in favour of an ecological conception of self. That is to say, they began to feel connected to, or part of, something larger than themselves.
as a result of the inability to escape, or externalise, threats to their sense of autonomy. (Christopher, 1999:366)

This quote is relevant for highlighting not only the role of powerlessness in seeking close connections with nonhuman nature but the importance of maintaining autonomy of one’s personal meaning and having this subjectively and inter-subjectively validated. Adrift in a sea of self-doubt, ambiguity and alienation, I needed a sense of autonomy and connectedness and I found that in immersing my being in natural settings, being involved in local community work and environmental projects at my son’s schools. All the preceding dilemmas in various ways undergird my commitment to this inquiry, in terms of understanding if and how eco-consciousness development can help me cope or manage my responses to them. My experiences of deep connectedness within natural settings, consistent with my remembrances of childhood engagements with natural areas, provides the context for my methodological approach. Spending more time in natural settings was a form of healing, a ‘therapy’, and a way of being personally sustained and revitalised. It is from this position of challenge and deep concern that I begin my personal quest into understanding eco-consciousness.

1.4 Research Questions

The questions guiding this inquiry are:

i. What is my experience and understanding of ecological consciousness?

ii. What is my experience and understanding of developing ecological consciousness?

1.5 Research approach

This section provides an overview of, and rationale for, my research approach. As stated previously, my research uses an interpretive phenomenological heuristic approach to explore my ecological consciousness development and identify and understand my meanings of developing eco-consciousness. This approach allowed
me to focus on my subjective experiences as well as discussing its wider social potential.

1.5.1 Interpretive phenomenology
Phenomenological inquiry is a well-established qualitative methodology for understanding the nature and experience of phenomena, of lived events or things in the everyday world (Heidegger, 1962; Moustakas, 1990; van Manen, 1990). An interpretive phenomenological approach is consistent with my intent to understand the meanings I interpreted from my experience of eco-consciousness. In contrast with a descriptive phenomenological approach, taking an interpretive phenomenological approach meant that I was not required to bracket or put to one side my own life experiences and natural stance towards nonhuman nature. In this case, this meant that I was not required to ignore my prior experiences. For my research, this approach required that I immerse myself in the exploration and development of eco-consciousness as directly and intimately as possible within natural settings, ranging from suburban bushland reserves to mountainous ‘wilderness’ areas. These places are part of my lived-world, my being-in-the-world, places that are important aspects of my research and contexts for understanding eco-consciousness.

Waddell (2007) argues that to understand a person, one must understand their context, their worlds or situations, in which they live. Consistent with interpretive phenomenology, I must likewise come to understand eco-consciousness by reflecting upon my biophysical and social contexts and experienced (rather than abstracted) situations. A preliminary review of various books and dissertations discussing eco-consciousness found little in the way of lived descriptions of the experience of eco-consciousness and its development. This review therefore identified a gap in the literature about the lived experience of eco-consciousness and is developmental processes. Even if there had been relevant inquiries, reliance on such second-hand accounts of other people’s experiences may have led me to a highly restricted cognitive and abstract understanding. Consistent with my
research focus on personal meaning and understanding, I needed to be the central instrument in interpreting the phenomenon, the observer of my own experiences and interpreter of personal meanings from these.

This self-reflective process was made more challenging in that the observations were not just of my sensorial and imaginal perceptions, but of my own consciousness, as I responded to these perceptions. This interpretive, direct approach to the research questions meant that I experienced intimate connections within the natural settings that I engaged in, while remaining aware that I was being affected by this engagement, my observations and reflections. Within this method of inquiry the emphasis is on engaging in a process of repeated cycles of reflection and interpretation, through which a co-evolutionary emergence of understanding might arise. This understanding is co-evolutionary in the sense that it evolves in the dialectical process of observing, reflecting and developing emergent understanding. This process needed to go beyond rational abstracting thoughts if it was to be a ‘whole-of-person’ inquiry and allow affective, intuitive and spiritual insights in interpreting my experiences of ecological consciousness.

Interpretive phenomenology allowed me to tell my story about evoking shifts in my consciousness and how these relate to my social context. It allowed me to include my own story of how I arrived at my own eco-consciousness in undertaking this research. The self, the consciousness I seek to understand and develop is always situated, enmeshed within social, cultural and historical contexts, as much as it is within environmental contexts. I had originally considered writing in an autoethnographic style in order to explore bridging the subjective with social contexts. I understand autoethnography to be both a genre of writing and research method that positions the self within a social context (Reed-Danahy, 1997), displays multiple layers of consciousness (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and critiques the situatedness of self within social and cultural contexts (Boyle & Parry, 2007) using information such as journals to speak of personal experiences. In my journaling, consistent with Ellis & Bochner (2000, 2003), I wrote about personal experiences,
reactions, emotions, thoughts, insights regarding my engagements with nonhuman nature and reflected upon the social forces and contexts that influenced my exploration of this phenomenon. Writers use their own experiences within, or in reference to, a socio-cultural context to observe deeply into the interactions between self and other (Holt, 2003), with ‘other’ in my research largely referring to nonhuman other. During the latter stages of my research, I recognized that my writing and my direct involvement with my social context was not sufficiently in the autoethnographic genre and that indeed my desire to bridge the subjective/social divide could be comfortably accommodated within an interpretivist research approach. Although aspects of my writing are similar to autoethnographic writing, the overall emphasis or focus of my research is on the subjective experience of a phenomenon and this was more suited to my self-reflective, interpretive phenomenological heuristic approach.

One of the issues for me related to taking an interpretive research approach for the first time, especially from my technical, positivist orientation, is the strong subjectivity or use of the ‘I’ in exploring a situation or phenomenon. This strong subjective approach has been criticized as being self-indulgent, romantic and unable to provide insights beyond personal experience (Papen, 2008). While understanding that this could be viewed as an issue in my research, I contrarily viewed it as an opportunity to provide an apparently unusual subjective description and understanding of eco-consciousness. My story is as meaningful as any other story of an experience and so, I would argue, equally capable of offering insights and understanding to others interested in the phenomenon and its wider potential. As Sparkes (2002) states, given that individuals are always part of a larger socio-cultural context, autobiographic approaches are never purely about the individual and that increased understanding in individuals often influences the social group(s) the individual associates with. To not rely on an autobiographical or self-reflective study, I could have developed an understanding about eco-consciousness through the use of narratives of others, through, for example, interviews or journal analysis of diaries. In reflecting on my priorities, I considered that understanding my own
experience of eco-consciousness was the first priority. If I did not focus on my own experience, I would be reliant on other’s experiences and capturing this second-hand in a more constrained, post-experience interview or narrative analysis process seemed problematic to attaining a first-hand understanding of the lived experience of eco-consciousness. I wanted to begin with my own experience, to express my own voice and experience my own shifts in consciousness. This research may be viewed as a form of pilot study for a much broader potential post-doctoral exploration of other people’s experiences of eco-consciousness.

1.5.2 Methods

In keeping with interpretive phenomenology, I developed methods for immersing myself within nonhuman nature and observing my responses and consciousness. I regarded these methods as tools I could take into the field. They were highly structured (nature engagement and two-fold vision\textsuperscript{10}) as well as unstructured (heuristic journaling). They were cognitive, affective, somatic, rational and intuitive, analytical and imaginal, written and drawn, as I wanted to be able to integrate my experiences of sensorial perception, analytical observation, reflective and reflexive processing, imaginal and contemplative practice and affective sensitivity. These methods were necessary tools for facilitating a personal interpretation of my experience and meanings of phenomenon.

I intuitively felt that a sensorial, mindful and affective oriented approach would be effective in evoking tangible shifts in consciousness and meanings when engaging natural settings. While I thought eco-consciousness could be evoked in this way, I was uncertain as to how a transformative consciousness could be evoked when I

\textsuperscript{10}Two-fold vision is a structured method I developed for this research which uses analytical and intuitive/imaginal modes of consciousness to understand a subject. The aim is to develop a holistic understanding of a phenomenon in which the external and inner essence is interpreted and described. It is described in Chapter 2.
wanted it. My research would therefore confirm whether this intuition was correct. I was also guided by Sewall (1999) and Abram (1996) who argue for the need to revitalise the senses, to awaken and recover the fullness of sensory and perceptual capacities. In developing sensory awareness, I could refine and re-energise my perceptions of natural settings and come to understand both my surrounds, my connections to nonhuman other as well as how perceptions affected my consciousness and sense of self. Arriving at this broader understanding required not only focused sensorial practice, but also a contemplative, mindful and affectively oriented phenomenological immersion into natural areas, if I wished to evoke a state of eco-consciousness. My intended focus in this study on ‘improving’ or re-sensitising perception was also supported by my reading of Hunt (1995) and Reason (1993) who argue that perception influences both consciousness and experience of reality. I argue revitalising perceptions in a mindful manner can play a crucial role for expanding and deepening meaning as well as consciousness within me when experiencing nonhuman nature. As Abram states:

.. a genuinely ecological approach [to our eco-crisis] does not work to attain a mentally envisioned future but strives to enter, ever more deeply, into the sensorial present. It strives to become ever more awake to the other lives, the other forms of sentience and sensibility that surrounds us in the open field of the present moment. (Abram, 1996:272)

### 1.6 Significance of this Study

This research may be viewed as being situated between environmental psychology research into personal variables such as environmental concern, values, attitudes awareness and their relationships to environmental behaviour, and environmental writing about the lived experience of engaging and connecting with nonhuman nature. There has been discussion by environmental writers such as Devall & Sessions (1985), Milbraith (1984, 1989), O’Sullivan & Taylor (2004) and Uhl (2004) about the phenomenon of eco-consciousness. Despite the exercises provided by
Uhl (2004) to facilitate increased environmental awareness, the literature in this field, however, has been largely theoretical and abstract. While various writers within the book on ecological consciousness by O’Sullivan and Taylor (2002) seek to give it meaning within educational settings, for example Hill; et al. (2004) and their learning ecology approach, there is very little in the way of what is experientially and hermeneutically encapsulated by the term, beyond its value and relational qualities to nonhuman nature. One of the key writers in deep ecology does not, at least in my reading, address its experiential meaning and infrequently refers to it (Devall, 1988). He refers to it at one point as an extremely abstract term. There have, in my search of the literature been relatively few scholarly research projects exploring the lived experience in the experiential, self-conscious orientation taken here. As far as I am aware, no formal studies have delved into the experience of eco-consciousness development as well as the socio-cultural contexts within which the phenomenon evolves (refer to Christopher, 1999). I view part of the significance of my research as contributing to understanding this extremely abstract term and giving insights into the experiential meaning of eco-consciousness and the social contexts within which it may evolve.

I view my research as being holistic in the sense that it is inclusive of different modes of consciousness (rational and imaginal) of perceiving the world. This significance in other words is not just related to using cognitive, affective, somatic and psychological orientations to engaging natural settings first-hand or to facilitating structured and spontaneous engagements with nonhuman other. It is significant too, because the research includes attention to the social contexts influencing this form of consciousness.

This research represents a significant approach to self-transformation in which nonhuman nature is the primary physical context and catalyst for experiencing
deep connections and caring for nonhuman other, and deepening awareness of one’s sense of self in relation to nonhuman other. It is research that prioritises individual human experience (my own)\(^\text{11}\), that positions self-transformation within the biophysical and social contexts of my lived-world, my connections and feelings for nonhuman nature. Fien (2003) advocates, rather similarly to Martin (2007), an ethic of deep caring, the development of a capacity for deep compassion with human and non-human nature and the need to facilitate an expansion of consciousness beyond the immediacy of our ego selves. I seek through this research to contribute to understanding personal change through my approach to eco-consciousness development:

> It is true, we have focused on structural change to the neglect of personal change in environmental education, and we have neglected the important links between personal, social and ecological well-being. It is also very true that we have ignored spiritual ways of knowing and empowerment. (Fien, 2003:2)

The significance of this research in terms of the preceding discussion on personal change lies with the recognition that both individual and collective or cultural transformation are crucial for dealing with the crises we now face. I am contributing an understanding about one individual’s journey into consciousness transformation. I am not attempting to solve any problems or crises, only to shed light on a phenomenon that has been little contemplated in the way I have done. This approach can be seen as an initial step, the grounding for further studies with

\(^{11}\) In prioritizing experiential learning about eco-consciousness, I am perhaps being consistent with the deep ecology logic of individual and societal transformation. That is, deep profound experience of ‘nature’ can lead to deep questioning about oneself and one’s relationship with society and nonhuman nature and a deep commitment to working for fundamental, grass-roots change in our relationships and living ‘lightly’ on the earth (Naess, 1989).
groups of people, which may then impinge upon the sphere of social transformation. As Laszlo states:

We live in a chaotic system – more exactly, in the chaotic decision-window of a transforming system – and we are not passive bystanders but crucial participants. Our task is not to predict what will happen, but to tip the system so that what will happen corresponds in some measure to what we would like to happen. Fatalism is not the indicated attitude, nor is optimism or pessimism. The indicated attitude is activism. (Laszlo, 2006:83-84)

The significance of my research lies not so much in its consciousness transformative inquiry that may or may not contribute at some latter time to ‘tip’ the system to less catastrophic outcomes, but in that it indicates an attitude of ‘activism’. I believe this is significant because firstly, the reader can observe authenticity or consistency with my activism (indicated in section 1.3) and secondly, any discussion about transforming normal waking consciousness to an ecological consciousness is not helped by holding onto fatalistic, optimistic or pessimistic attitudes. My inquiry, while providing insights into my responses to the ecological crisis, such as despair, anxiety and pessimism, is framed overall within an activist attitude. I mentioned Laszlo’s view that humanity is reaching a chaos point beyond which there is likely to be catastrophic ecosystem and climatic breakdown. As he identifies, we are at the window of threshold looking out upon radically different future scenarios. I am, to use this metaphor, there too standing at the window, framing an understanding of a type of consciousness that could make this chaos point a period of necessary opportunity for broader social change towards sustainability and expanded identification with all of nature, and our inner selves.
1.7 Proposed research outcomes

The proposed outcome of this phenomenological inquiry is a more comprehensive understanding of eco-consciousness, one not based on the experience and reflections of others, nor on abstracted, philosophical treatise, but on direct experience alone in my lived world. To paraphrase Gore from Section 1.1, I am, in effect, trying to go far alone in developing and understanding this transformative consciousness. My hope is that this work will be of assistance to others seeking practical and meaningful ways of managing their responses to awareness of an ecological crisis, from which I hope that eco-consciousness may ‘help us all go far together’. I am seeking a way of learning that not only revitalises perception but that integrates cognitive, affective, imaginal and spiritual ways of connecting and relating with nonhuman nature, and hopefully, translate experience into an understanding of a potentially transformative eco-consciousness.

1.8 Delimitations

The research is limited in that it explores eco-consciousness from a ‘radical’ green perspective. I am, like anyone who has passed through the various human development stages into their 40’s, filled with experiences, memories, values, beliefs, emotions (repressed and expressed), and behaviours. I have a lifetime behind me that is closely aligned with non-human nature within the arenas of work, recreation and activism. I am not someone who may be naïve about the experience of eco-consciousness. This subjectivity means that the meanings, essences, insights and values generated come from only one person, in this case, myself.

One of the limitations of this research, and a possible criticism, is that I did not provide an overview of the deep ecology philosophy (or rather deep ecology movement as Naess prefers, according to Schroll (2007) from which the term ecological consciousness apparently evolved (Devall, 1988). This limitation also applies to not reviewing the arena of ecopsychology which brings together ecological and psychological understanding about human-nature relationships. I avoided discussing these because it was not within the research scope and focus to
do so. While I did write extensively about the two perspectives early in my research, as I undertook the experiential part of my research, I realised that I wanted to retain my self-conscious focus on my reflexive engagement with the process of engaging nonhuman nature. If I were to discuss theoretical or philosophical subject matters, I wanted this to be kept to the terms (nature, ecology and consciousness) and experiences directly related to my experiences, given the experiential focus of the research.

I also avoided doing an extensive literature review about eco-consciousness at the beginning of my research although I did review literature on other relevant areas, such as environmental education. This was intentional to allow the possibility of being as open to emergent moments of discovery and understanding as I could possibly be. In other words, I wanted to maintain a certain level of intellectual naivety so I would not be overly biased or burdened by expectations and assumptions based on other people’s stories. This is not a guarantee that my unconscious understanding about previous experiences of connecting with nonhuman nature did not influence my expectations and interpretations but it did minimise the influence of other people’s stories upon my inquiry. Morrow argues a greater grounding in the literature militates against bias by broadening the researcher’s understanding of the various ways of observing the phenomenon (Morrow, 2005). While I did undertake an initial literature search to explore appropriate methodologies and methods, I deliberately did not undertake an extensive review, as I did not want to muddy my expectations, assumptions or interpretation of my data. I believed that by not reading extensively, I would approach the exploration with a fresh, open and curious disposition.

1.9 Literary inspiration

I discovered *Walden*, the classic naturalistic novel by the American naturalist, romanticist and transcendentalist philosopher, Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) late in my research. Like other Romantics such as Wordsworth, Schelling and Goethe, Thoreau viewed nature from an ecological, holistic and animistic perspective where
the emphasis was on human-nature inter-dependence, relatedness and wholeness in which separateness was seen as an illusion, community was a necessary counter to private consciousness and nature necessary for spiritual and physical healing (Worster, 1994). This view captures the essence of my beliefs, assumptions and approach to relating to nonhuman nature. *Walden*, completed nine years after leaving Walden Pond, represented Thoreau’s voluntary retreat from living in his local community in 1845 to the rustic, simple life in the woods on the shore of Walden Pond, one mile from Concord, Massachusetts. It was here where he attempted to understand his own human condition through close observation and interaction with nature (Anker, 2003), experience a spiritual renewal (Worster, 1994) and practice the transcendentalist revelatory imperative in nature (Dean, 2000). Walden has been described as a self-help book urging us to show up for our own lives and to have the courage to find our own convictions and to live them (Richardson, 2004). To a large degree, this thesis can be viewed as a response to this urging.

After the Walden period, Thoreau became more intimate with his surrounds and concerned with the widespread clearance of forests in his home state of Massachusetts. Further, according to Worster (1994), one of his concerns became the conservation and regeneration of the forests of Massachusetts that had already been substantially cleared. Thoreau became more interested in the intrinsic, ecological qualities of ‘nature’ which influenced his seven major revisions of Walden before it was published (the book, despite appearances is not a first-hand journal). The period following his Walden retreat represented, further according to Schnell (2001), a transitional period for Thoreau, from holding an anthropocentric, utilitarian and symbolic perception of ‘nature’ to a more ecocentric perspective combining scientific and metaphysical ecological perspectives (I discuss these terms in Chapter 5). In his naturalistic explorations, he developed his own perspective towards nature that combined, what would later be termed, ecology and eco-spirituality (Schnell, 2001). Walden reflects Thoreau’s developing ideas on nature, ecology and spirituality over the intervening period. As Schnell (2001) further
argues, Walden can be viewed as a ‘superficial summary’ of Thoreau’s post-Walden maturing perspectives on the holistic qualities of nature, through close observations of the natural world. I could see some parallels between his experiences and reflections at Walden Pond and mine:

- he spent several years focused on understanding his relationship to nature;
- he experienced long periods of solitude in natural areas;
- used a sensorial, reflective and participatory approach to engaging nature using rational and affective ways of knowing;
- asked questions about personal meaning, spirituality and societal directions;
- as I went to the Barrington ‘wilderness’ area to immerse in the sublime and otherness of nonhuman nature, so did he go to Mt Katahdin during his Walden retreat where he faced with awe and wonder the ineffable mysterious qualities of nature’s ‘otherness’;
- Thoreau died at the young age of 44, which was my age for most of my final year and the age I began to really get into my stride with this dissertation.

My exploration differed substantially of course in that I did not ‘escape’ society for any long periods of time, I was more self-focused in my responses than being naturalistic or socially critical, I was highly structured in my sensorial approaches and I needed to maintain a scholarly approach within an academic context. However I felt a sense of connection with the ideals and insights of Thoreau and this is why I quote Thoreau regularly in this thesis. Like Thoreau, I had intimate

12 In my reading of Thoreau’s works, I suspect that it was not ‘wilderness’ per se that Thoreau sought to connect with, to desire a sense of place but to appreciate the intrinsic quality of wildness of nonhuman nature. I, too, while enjoying wilderness experiences, more regularly experience and appreciate the wildness of my everyday surrounds. I discuss this quality of wildness in Chapter 5.

13 It could be argued that Thoreau never really escaped his society, his local retreat by being only several kilometres from the outskirts of Concord, having regular visitors and having neighbours such as Ralph Waldo Emerson to occasionally visit.
engagements within nonhuman nature alone over an extended period to restore my connections and experience gratitude, inspiration and ‘wholeness’ within nature’s embrace. Connecting with nonhuman nature for me was not a matter of escaping humanity and any crisis of meaning or environmental ‘bad news’ but of seeking a way to bring something back to be of service to humanity. In a commentary on *Walden*, Cavell (1981/2008) speaks of *Walden* as a reflection of Thoreau and his gift to humanity. I too view my story of eco-consciousness, a concept demonstrated by Thoreau (Segura, 2004), as an honest reflection of my exploration and my gift to others who share concern and love for ‘nature’:

The boon of *Walden* is Walden. Its writer cups it in his hand, sees his reflection in it, and holds it out to us….. He is bequeathing it to us in his will, the place of the book and the book of the place. (Cavell, 1981/2008:481)

Some of Thoreau’s reflections and insights are consistent with my reflections which I found reassuring given the 160 years or so since he went into the Concord woods. This for me is an important observation – that in deliberately going into my experiential encounter with the ‘wild’ of nonhuman nature before my literature review, before my reading of Thoreau and other environmental writers, I was generally naïve to the insights and ideas of the many influential writers in the environmental philosophy field. It gives my experiences and insights, I believe, greater authenticity and validity, in terms of their (now) apparent congruence with the insights of Thoreau and other lovers of nonhuman nature.
1.10 Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured in the following way:

**Chapter 2** – sets out methodological approaches and associated methods.

**Chapter 3** – presents an analysis of my journal writing which formed the basis of my heuristic inquiry.

**Chapter 4** – provides an analysis of the nature engagement and two-fold vision methods

**Chapter 5** – discusses my constructions of the three key terms, nature, ecology and consciousness, the key themes relating to my experience of eco-consciousness and the broader social context in the development of my eco-consciousness.

**Chapter 6** – discusses my reflections on the research outcomes and approaches and the social potential of my understanding of eco-consciousness.

All images found throughout this dissertation were taken by me during the course of this research, mostly during my experiential sessions at Manly Dam Reserve or the Barrington Tops. As Bergman (1999) argues, pictorial images or photographs provide a rich, pictorial layer of information that can complement the written presentation of experiences. I incorporated the images to provide the reader a useful context for the descriptions and interpretations in my writings about nonhuman beings and landscapes that I engaged with.

The following diagram provides a visual outline of the subject matter I discuss in this thesis.
Figure 4 - Thesis overview
CHAPTER 2 - RESEARCH APPROACH
We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavour. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, (1854/2008:64-5)
2.1 Introduction

This research, as explained in Chapter 1, engages an interpretive phenomenological heuristic approach to understand my experience of eco-consciousness development. This approach allows me the epistemological framework to 1) explore my taken-for-granted experience of eco-consciousness in a fresh and renewed way, and 2) to link my lived experience of eco-consciousness with the socio-cultural context within which I, as researcher, am embedded. This opportunity is captured in the following quote:

> From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings...Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to our being. (van Manen, 1990:5)

My inquiry into eco-consciousness development represents a disciplined way of questioning my experience of connecting with nonhuman nature. Understanding this experience is something I care greatly about. To understand this phenomenon, the experience of being ‘touched’ by other, I have to directly involve my self, my being in the experience. This chapter describes the research approach I have selected to understand the experience of my eco-consciousness.

2.2 Ontological and epistemological assumptions

It is important to understand how a particular view of the world, one’s ontological beliefs or assumptions, affects the whole research process and to have an understanding of the connection between the components of research (Grix, 2002). These assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and the nature of our world (deQuincey, 2002). Ontological beliefs can be seen as the formative cause of one’s research questions and as a starting point of research, after which one’s epistemological and methodological positions logically follow (Grix, 2002). The overall guiding ontological belief in this research is
that consciousness is the primary mechanism for creating, interpreting and understanding one’s reality, that evoking different modes or states of consciousness can expand one’s experience and conception of reality, that consciousness is not an epiphenomenon of, or restricted to, the brain and that ‘reality’ is constituted by physical and non-physical dimensions, including a creative, spiritual intelligence within all aspects of ‘reality’.

Epistemology, derived from the Greek word episteme (knowledge) and logos (reason), refers to one’s philosophical position on the theory of knowledge, especially its methods, validation and how we come to know what we know (Grix, 2002; Krauss, 2005). There are a number of epistemologies or paradigms that can be used in qualitative research. I selected an interpretivist approach as it gives primacy to the role of individual experience in meaning-making while considering the social and cultural embeddedness of the subjective experience.

Researchers who favour an interpretivist approach share interest in understanding the complex world of lived experience from the perspective of those who live it. As Denzin (1994) argues, interpretation is transformative, illuminating and sifts meaning from experience. Understanding experience inescapably implicates meaning making activities of the inquirer (Schwandt, 1998). Gough (2004) argues that the researcher ‘produces’ rather than ‘collates’ data or knowledge, in other words the ‘data’ is not out there but produced and constructed by the interpretive activities of the researcher. My research pursued an interpretivist approach of deriving knowledge with the focus being on allowing meaning and interpretation to arise within my research experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), in this instance, my experience of ecological consciousness and its development.
2.3 Methodological Approach

For my research, I use specific experiential and reflective activities to collect rich descriptions of my experiences of eco-consciousness and its developmental processes. My autobiographical, self-reflective style of writing is consistent with an interpretive phenomenological approach and heuristic inquiry in terms of its focus on expressing my lived experience of this phenomenon in a first person narrative. What follows represents my understanding of interpretive phenomenology as well as a philosophical discussion of why heuristic inquiry influenced my overarching phenomenological approach.

2.3.1 Interpretive phenomenology

Phenomenological inquiry represents a descriptive, rather than explanatory, approach to understanding and interpreting how people experience their life-world through direct experience and personal meanings (Abram, 1996; Schroeder, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is described as the science of seeing behind the appearance of things, beyond the ‘natural attitude’ or normal unawareness of life and interpreting meanings from the experience of a phenomenon within an individual’s lived-world (Heidegger, 1962). It is, argues Quinney (1988), part of our human nature not only to be suspended in webs of significance but to understand our world through making meaning out of our interactions. In interpretive phenomenological research, the researcher interprets meaning within the written description of the experience. To understand a phenomenon, phenomenologists argue, we must therefore see it afresh, opening up our consciousness beyond our every day habitual perception, beyond our ‘natural attitude’. As Thoreau similarly stated about people’s lack of perception:

> By closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit everywhere, which still is built on purely illusory foundations...... I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the
surface of things. We think that that is which appears to be.
(Thoreau, 1854/2008:68-69)

In phenomenology, the researcher attempts to go beyond ‘the surface of things’ to understand the lived experience of a phenomenon, rather than speaking abstractly of it. It is a two-fold process of describing the lived-through quality of an experience and a description of the meanings of these expressions of lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Knowledge about a phenomenon is therefore based on subjective or private experience rather than conjecture or abstraction. This is the experience of the life-world, a pre-objective world in which phenomena and being are inseparable. In this understanding, there can only be a phenomenon where there is a subject with intentional consciousness who experiences the phenomenon (Abram, 1996; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Phenomenological practice has been described as the practice of making the familiar, the taken-for-granted of routine experience, the ‘natural attitude’, open to new interpretations so as to gain a more accurate and genuine understanding of a phenomenon (Schroeder, 2007; Sheets-Johnstone, 2008), where the researcher is the tool for collecting and analysing experiences (Higgs & McAllister, 2001).

This requires ‘the intentional act of attaching oneself to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to become the world.’ (van Manen, 1990:5) in which the researcher seeks situations as faithful as possible to the situations the researcher is attempting to understand (Giorgi, 2002). In going into natural settings I am being consistent with this requirement of phenomenological validity, that if I am seeking knowledge about my experience of eco-consciousness, then the situation within which I explore this must be natural settings with the intent of facilitating a closer relational engagement with nonhuman nature.

Interpretive phenomenology constitutes a philosophical school of thought informed by the philosophical tenets of Martin Heidegger and further developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricouer and Max van Manen (Mackey, 2005). It evolved from descriptive or Husserlian phenomenology, which treats consciousness as
transcendent, rather than embodied. Descriptive phenomenology is not oriented towards meaning but rather ‘objective’ descriptions of the fundamental ‘essence’ of a phenomenon by a ‘detached observer’. Heidegger introduced interpretation as a way of uncovering understanding of meaning of ‘Being’ rather than using the Husserlian descriptive approach. Unlike descriptive phenomenology, Heidegger’s approach emphasises the rich meanings to be found in everyday living, and the interpretive basis of all understanding (Mackey, 2005). He felt that there could be no pre-suppositionless philosophising, no ignoring or bracketing personal assumptions, no innocence or valueless approach to the phenomenon such as advocated by Husserl. He rejected the idea of Husserl’s that a person and their biases could be separated from the world he/she experienced.

With interpretive phenomenology, the researcher is considered inseparable from assumptions and preconceptions about the phenomenon of study: instead of bracketing and setting aside biases, they are explicated and integrated into the research (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006; Gearing, 2004; Gearing, 2004; Levasseur, 2003; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Maggs-Rapport, 2001; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). They are considered valuable guides to inquiry and essential to making the inquiry a meaningful undertaking (Draucker, 1999; Lopez & Willis, 2004). One of the consequences of this approach is that, according to van Manen (1990), we know too much about the phenomenon being inquired into and that our suppositions and assumptions may predispose us to interpret the phenomenon before we have come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question. It was partly because of this difficulty that I chose not to undertake a significant literature review of eco-consciousness prior to undertaking the exercises that facilitated this. Only at the end of the research did I begin to understand the significance of the research questions. I was drawn to interpretive phenomenology because of the priority it gave to subjective meanings. It provided the framework to undertake this experiential investigation and enabled me to integrate my values, beliefs and assumptions into the experiential methods without bracketing them artificially to one side.
The aim of interpretive phenomenological writing is to provide rich, ‘dense’ descriptions of the lived experience of a phenomenon without judgment, as the researcher experiences it. As van Manen (1990) further identifies, the effect of the descriptions is both a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful, which the reader may relate to. In Chapter 4, I describe my experiences, how these experiences affected and changed me and I identify the overall meanings that I either felt at the time of the nature engagement or two-fold vision sessions, or more often, reflected upon after the experiential session had been completed. A thin description, according to Denzin (1994), simply reports ‘facts’ or abstract non-contextualised interpretations, whereas a ‘thick’ or rich description provides the experienced context, the intentions and meanings that evoked the experience as well as reveals the experience as a process. Interpretive phenomenology requires that the researcher write thick descriptions of the lived experience and reflections on the lived experience as well as the social and biophysical contexts behind the writings. For me, this involved providing the epistemological basis and biophysical and social contexts for each method, both journal entries and worksheets. These entries and worksheets recorded in the field thoughts, feelings, emotions and sensations in order to later reflect, interpret and thematically analyse. I needed to convey the meanings interpreted. An interpretive style of writing allowed me to:

• use journals and worksheets to provide rich, ‘dense’ descriptions of the lived experience of ecological consciousness;
• include self-dialogue, emotions and personal reflections in my narratives about self and consciousness;
• use my experiences, mostly within nonhuman or natural settings, to explore perceptual, affective and spiritual interactions between myself and nonhuman other;
• interpret my experiences and reflections about eco-consciousness with a view to not only understanding the phenomena but identifying potential personal and social applications;
• provide quotes and reflections from my journals about my observations of the fractures and ambiguities of my self and my engagement with my social context, as well as my interactions with nonhuman others;

• make sense of experiences within natural settings that have expanded my sense of self and helped me to understand the role of my sense of powerlessness in the formation of my eco-consciousness.

I conducted most of my writing in natural settings where I was in contact with the beings and processes I was seeking relationship with. I undertook all of my writing alone, often in isolation. As van Manen (2002) states, writing is not just about externalising internal knowledge and feelings but about the act of making contact with the world we seek to understand or participate, ‘to achieve phenomenological intimacy with an object of interest’ (p245). I aimed to transform lived experience into a textural expression that can help the reader think about and relate to my experiences. I wrote about my experiences or as van Manen (1990) refers to it, the lived-experience descriptions, without offering causal explanations or interpretive generalisations. I wanted to develop an understanding that captured my exterior sensorial world, as well as one that spoke of and to my inner felt and reflective world. Through my interpretive texts I sought to not only honestly convey my experiences and meanings but hopefully facilitate an authentic understanding for the reader so that they could ‘live their way into an experience that has been described and interpreted’ (Denzin, 1994:506). As van Manen states:

The researcher is an author who writes from the midst of life experience where meanings resonate and reverberate with reflective being. (van Manen, 2002:238)

I was not interested in producing theories but rich descriptions of the change of perceptions and at times, consciousness, as captured in the following statement:
Fidelity to nature is gained, that is, only through fidelity to experience – through paying attention not only to our experience of nature but to the nature in our experience. (That we too are nature is an idea in which ecopsychology must keep itself soaked). Our experience is grounded in our bodily nature, in felt intentions that arise of their own. (Fisher, 2002:26)

I therefore needed to design, plan and implement activities within natural settings to evoke experiences that were not just perceptual or cognitive but physically felt. I needed to feel the wind and water against my skin, the tingles up my spine from the crack of an Eastern Whipbird and from varying energetic ambiences of the settings I visited. This made it more tangible and meaningful than just a visual or hearing experience. Working within an interpretivist approach, I wanted to make sure I had written the experience and the meaning from any engagement session. Some experiences are harder than others to capture in the written form, experiences such as awe, wonder, and intuited spirituality within settings. To have the experience without recognizing meaning would have minimized the experience and negated a meaning-making understanding. This insight is similar to how I interpret Eliot’s phrase in the Four Quartets in which he says that we can have an experience but not be conscious of any particular meaning, and that re-invigorating our approach to meaning-making can restore the fullness of the experience (Eliot, 1944).

When I sensed that a nature engagement experience was meaningful to my sense of self, it was to indicate that I had experienced a significant or an eventful engagement that posed insights, perspectives or emotions that affected my sense of self and relationship to nonhuman nature. Hung (2007) argues that perceiving meaning in nonhuman others can help individuals understand themselves and the world. Consistent with a Merleau-Pontian perspective, the world more perceived and engaged becomes a world of meanings through the interaction of body and world (Hung, 2007). This sense of meaning for me can either immediately be
intuited in my body, especially my gut or later recognized in my reflections about the experience. This is consistent with the research by Ratcliffe (2005) who found that bodily feelings such as feeling overwhelmed, at home, lost, alienated, humble, complete, unworthy, vulnerable and oneness are not just descriptions of inner states but of one’s relationship with the world, of a sense of the being of object encountered and a sense of the object/world as a whole. He argues that feelings, which I view as physical and intuitive sensations arising within my body from external and internal stimuli, are more important, overall, than emotions and thoughts in relating to the world and becoming aware of one’s reality. My point here about the importance of feelings in making conscious inner felt meaning is that without a totally present and mindful disposition, I can remain inattentive and unaware of my bodily feelings and lose the meaning within an experience.

The meaning associated with an immediate, bodily felt reaction to a perception can be interpreted as oriented towards situational meaning (Park & Folkman, 1997). Situational meaning in Park and Folkman’s schema indicates an initial appraisal of the meaning of an event and the search for meaning, in other words, the significance of a particular occurrence in terms of its personal relevance. A ‘higher’ order level of meaning in this framing is described as global meaning, one that encompasses a person’s enduring beliefs about the world and the self, fundamental assumptions about the world and valued goals. It is more abstract, more oriented towards past, present and future (Park and Folkman, 1997). Within this framework I can view my meaning-making as consisting of a global orientation – meaning of eco-consciousness for dealing with past, present and future (especially the eco-crisis) – but primarily situational in that I interpret the affective and psycho-spiritual significance of experiences with nonhuman nature. As Milton (2002) argues, the meanings we perceive, whether they be emotional or feeling based, help give things their value. In other words, we value things by perceiving meanings in them as they become known to us through emotions and feelings. As Milton sums up, the things that matter the most are the things that makes life most meaningful (Milton, 2002). My approach to understanding my eco-consciousness development can be
viewed as substantially consistent with this perspective, in terms of its perceptual, experiential, mindfulness and meaning oriented approach that gives emphasis to affective states.

Interpretive phenomenology requires being fully present in the here-and-now. As Quinney (1988) argues, everything outside of the moment constitutes an abstraction and the more we think in abstractions, relying on rationality, the more we lose the reality of everyday experience. Even the act of interpretation is an abstraction. But before the interpretive act comes the openness of being in the moment and in the lived world. As Berleant (1992) stated:

We live first and foremost in an extended present, which is the primary reality. And the quality of that present should be our greatest concern (p187).

For interpretive phenomenology I needed to cultivate a ‘beginner’s mind’, an open, empty mind that is watchful of my experience of dwelling in the situation, I, as researcher, was seeking understanding (Quinney, 1988). In using meditation and mindfulness approaches to clear and still the mind, I hoped to ‘see’ further, deeper into eco-consciousness, before the cognitive act of interpretation distracted me. Seeking surrender to the mind, I could intuitively sense the changing state of my consciousness, even the expansiveness of my Being. As Quinney describes it: ‘As in Zen Buddhism, we are ‘enlightened’, we see clearly, when the suffering ego is lost to the true self, the higher self, the ‘emptiness’ of no-self’ (Quinney, 1988:103).

2.3.2 Heuristic Inquiry

Heuristic inquiry was the other methodological approach to exploring eco-consciousness and its development. It constitutes a self-reflective form of interpretive phenomenology, requiring the researcher to directly experience the phenomenon in a contemplative position (turning inward) in order to allow the
character and meaning of the phenomenon to reveal itself (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas refers to this process of turning inward as ‘indwelling.’ It involves a willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration into some facet of human experience. It emphasises connection, relationship and intense engagement between the researcher and the researched. It explores the human experience of a particular phenomenon with attention on the feeling responses of the researcher and on the patterns of perception and consciousness which shapes his or her reflections and interpretations of an experience (Moustakas, 1990).

While phenomenology ends with the essence of experience, heuristic inquiry retains the essence of the person in experience (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic inquiry positions the researcher at the centre of the inquiry (Braud & Anderson, 1998). It is a process that requires attention to all waking, non-waking and altered states of consciousness of the researcher. It is guided by only the initial question and the passionate desire for a new way of being or way of understanding and depicting the essential meanings and significance of the chosen phenomenon (Etherington, 2001; Ferendo, 2004; Hiles, 2001; Sela-Smith, 2002) and can be described as a way of knowing involving self-search, self-dialogue and self-discovery (Moustakas, 1990).

One of the criticisms of heuristic inquiry is that the knowledge generated may be abstracted away from the broader social context. Braud and Anderson (1998) argue that there is no requirement for conceptualising about the experiences or linking the interpretive findings to the phenomenon’s social context. Moustakas focused on creating a descriptive subjective account of an experience rather than an explanatory account of the phenomenon’s socio-cultural basis (Moustakas, 1990). Given the social basis and context of the phenomenon of eco-consciousness, it was important I had the methodological scope to do this and interpretive phenomenology allowed me to do this. Another critique of heuristic inquiry found that most research studies using this method were focused on external descriptions of the lived experience, usually of co-participants, rather than the inner feelings, experiences and insights of the researcher. Sela-Smith (2002)
argues that the place of co-researchers is to act as reflectors of possible areas of resistance, not as a source of more observations and thoughts. She argues that this disorientation away from the I-who-feels has subsequently focused heuristic research onto the exploration of experiences in others and towards a less tacit and more externalised form of phenomenology. According to Sela-Smith (2002), most research using this method does not emphasise self-discovery or self-transformation. The themes of the experience are also sought from co-participants instead of focusing on the nature and meaning of an experience within the self. She considered that the key to heuristic research was missing, that the self-search within an experience (the I-who-feels) was replaced by a phenomenological explication of the definition of an experience (Sela-Smith, 2002). In other words, the observations and thinking about the experience became the focus rather than the inner feelings and insights of the researcher. In this way and to varying degrees, feeling is disconnected from the research. While Moustakas did identify the need to totally surrender to an internal question, to a letting go, a surrender, a leap into the unknown or darkness, to reach into the tacit dimensions through self-dialogue, self honesty and self disclosure, he went on to orient the method to a more objective, external approach of the experience (Sela-Smith, 2002). I have taken into consideration Sela-Smith’s suggestion by emphasising the I-who-feels perspectives in exploring the experience of eco-consciousness. In doing this, I believe I am being authentic to Moustakas’ initial focus for heuristic inquiry and being consistent with an autobiographical, self-reflective style of writing.

2.4 Methods
The methods used to explore eco-consciousness sought to catalyse experiences and reflections that would deepen my perception, understanding and connection within the natural environment. The primary method was what I term heuristic ‘immersion’, the staged application of the heuristic inquiry methodology. Whereas the broad, philosophical underpinning of heuristic inquiry complements the methodological umbrella approach for this research, interpretive phenomenology, the specific six stages and reflective tools of heuristic immersion are more
appropriately described in this section. To distinguish between these two aspects, I labelled, as indicated above, heuristic immersion which for me more accurately reflects the requirement to immerse within the lived experience of the research questions. This was supplemented by two structured, sensorial and affective oriented methods, two-fold vision and nature engagement method. These methods sought to cultivate a heightened sensitivity to perceptual experience. They are consistent with interpretive phenomenological methodology in that they allow for rich, ‘dense’ descriptions of the lived experience of connecting with nonhuman nature in order to interpret meanings and insights.

The three methods, 1) heuristic immersion, 2) nature engagement method and 3) two-fold vision method are ecologically based in the sense that I conducted the activities immersed in the natural environment ranging from my local bushland reserves through to more remote, wilder mountainous areas. The first method can be viewed as primarily self-reflective and reflexive while the two structured methods can be seen as primarily experiential, perceptual and affective (nature engagement method) or transpersonal (two-fold vision). They combine to provide a rich account of my experiences and reflections. Refer to Figure 5 for a diagrammatic overview of this approach.

![Diagram of methods](image)

**Figure 5 - Methods used to explore my experience of eco-consciousness development**
2.4.1 Heuristic immersion

The heuristic immersion method required an on-going reflective stance towards the questions. I recorded my feelings, intuitions, insights, dialogues, synchronicities, symbolisms and whatever inner and external meanings I perceived when contemplating my development of eco-consciousness. I followed the six phases of heuristic inquiry, as set out by Moustakas: (Moustakas, 1990) (refer to Table 1):

i. Initial engagement – heuristic research commences with the identification of an intense interest or concern that forms the guiding question

ii. Immersion – the researcher’s life revolves around the research question, reflecting and writing about their experience of the phenomenon

iii. Incubation – is a time when additional input is stopped because living with the question has provided all the information needed to answer the question(s) (Sela-Smith, 2002)

iv. Illumination – the researcher recognises themes that characterise the experience. Illumination opens the door to a new or modified awareness

v. Explication – is a time of fully analysing and clarifying the descriptive qualities and themes that characterise the experience being investigated. The recognition and living of the new insight or understanding occurs at a daily conscious and deep conscious level and it is a period of transformative awareness (Sela-Smith, 2002:68)

vi. Creative Synthesis – is the final phase of heuristics in which the essences of the experienced phenomenon are fully expressed. This is the stage where there is evidence that transformation has taken place by way of a creative synthesis that not only fully responds to the question but may help others in their transformative journeys.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Initial engagement | Autobiographical  
                Personal and social encounters relating to the theme or questions  
                Intense interest arises                                        | Intuition  
                Tacit knowing identification                                        |
| Immersion     | Surrender to the theme  
                Experiential  
                Journal writing  
                Integrating inner reflections                                   | Self dialogue  
                Intuition  
                Tacit knowing  
                Self discovery  
                Focusing  
                Indwelling                                                   |
| Incubation    | Unconscious  
                Resting  
                No active work                                                   | Tacit knowing  
                Intuition  
                Indwelling                                                        |
| Illumination  | Naturally occurring  
                New insights  
                Spontaneous  
                Making meaningful connections  
                Deepening the understanding                                       | Tacit knowing |
| Explication   | Examine what has been awakened  
                Look at the details, analysis, integrate inner and outer experiences | Self searching  
                Self awareness                                                      |
| Creative synthesis | Making rational sense  
                Pulling together core themes                                      | Intuition  
                Tacit knowing                                                        |

Heuristic inquiry does not require a specific external activity but does require the use of a number of cognitive, psychic tools to dwell upon the phenomenon and its meanings. They are an essential part of the heuristic inquiry process. They occur within any of the six heuristic stages (although they will tend to be more relevant at specific stages). I used these ‘tools’ to create a more mindful or self-aware inquiry – a process that allowed me to explore my inner world of head, heart and gut in a more structured, disciplined way. I used these tools often without thinking or
planning them; they arose as I needed them as I had used them over many years, especially during nature engagements. These tools are (Moustakas, 1990):

i. **Self-dialogue** – this is the back and forth inner exchange of ideas, questions, thoughts, feelings and insights within the mind of the researcher (Hiles, 2001);

ii. **Tacit knowing** – underlies and precedes intuition, this concept alludes to sensing the whole essence of something through pre-reflective contemplation on aspects of the whole phenomenon. It guides the researcher into unsuspected directions and sources of meanings (Hiles, 2001);

iii. **Intuition** – an inner knowing or feeling that helps make connections, to form patterns and relationships between ideas or processes (Hiles, 2001);

iv. **Indwelling** – involves the discipline of sustained immersion and concentration upon the phenomenon using meditation and reflection in order to seek deeper understanding of the experience being explored (Moustakas, 1990);

v. **Focusing** – involves the quieting of the mind to focus on one particular thing, looking for a deeper meaning. It is sustained and systematic (Hiles, 2001).

2.4.2 **Nature engagement method**

This method is derived from the interpretive phenomenological approach of this research. This method was primarily developed according to how I had engaged natural settings over many years, in terms of evoking a restorative or deeply connecting experience. It was a matter of fine-tuning this approach by identifying procedural structure and mindful practice. The sensorial, relational approach, in promoting a shift in consciousness or deepening relationship with nonhuman other, also appeared consistent with the ecopsychological literature (Cornell, 1979; Fisher, 2002; Kidner, 2001; Plotkin, 2003; Sewall, 1999; Thomashow, 1995). My interest in evoking emotions and/or feelings to deepen connection and concern is consistent
with approaches advocated within the environmental psychology literature such as Allend & Ferrand (1999) and Kals, Schumacher, & Montada (1999).

My exploration of eco-consciousness from an interpretive phenomenological orientation was based on increasing perceptual acuity\textsuperscript{14} and sensitivity to emotional states and bodily feelings, an approach I later found was consistent with the sensual perceptual notion of engaging nonhuman other by Abram (1996). To avoid over-reliance on a cognitive or ‘surface’ sensorial approach, I emphasised a mindfulness orientation to deepen my self-awareness during the engagement and increase my capacity to perceive more clearly my surrounds and inner states. Normal waking consciousness is not, I believe, nearly as effective as mindfulness to fully perceive outer and inner environments. Our awareness is the conscious registration of stimuli through the five physical senses, the kinaesthetic senses and activities of the mind. Brown, Ryan, & Creswel (2007) further argue that perceptual reactions are quickly influenced by cognitive and emotional responses, usually unconsciously, due to cultural and biographical experiences. The result is that the observer imposes concepts, labels and judgments on everything that is encountered and therefore all sensory objects and events are seen through the filters of self-centred thought and prior condition. This, as Brown et al. (2007) say, risks an incomplete, superficial, distorted picture of reality.

\textsuperscript{14} Increasing perceptual acuity, especially vision, was very important to Thoreau in his naturalistic walks in the countryside and wilds of Massachusetts and elsewhere. By increasing his capacity to see through his habitual way of attending to reality and by evoking a keener eye to what was in front of him, he was able to see more of what was on offer: ‘a single gentle rain makes the grass many shades greener’ (Thoreau, 1854/2008:211). Perhaps he took a mindful approach to increasing his environmental awareness, as he hints in the following passage: ‘we should be blessed if we lived in the present always and took advantage of every accident that befell us ..’ (p211).
Mindfulness has been described in various ways in differing contexts but fundamentally it is a quality of consciousness. It can be seen as a specific meditation practice derived from Buddhism, a state of mind or the effect of that practice (Childs, 2007; Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006). Mindfulness has been defined ‘as a receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience’ (Brown et al., 2007). Mindfulness allows the practitioner to be fully aware of each moment, self-regulate attention on the immediate experience, be open to whatever it has to offer and free of the domination of habitual cognitive routines (Bishop, 2004; Holland, 2004; Teasdale, 1999). I followed the three mindfulness capacities listed beneath (Shapiro et al., 2006):

- **Intention**: why one is practicing mindfulness.
- **Attention**: observing one’s moment-to-moment internal and external experience without interpretation or judgment.
- **Attitude**: the attitude one brings to attention determines the quality of the experience as well. Bringing attitudes of patience, compassion and non-striving helps develop the capacity not to strive or deny specific states and outcomes.

In using these capacities to prolong my perceptual contact with natural settings, it allowed me, as Brown et al. (2007) identify, to be fully present and not overlay discriminative, categorical and habitual thoughts onto direct experience. It brought increased clarity, mental freshness and interpretive depth.
I applied mindfulness to my preferred senses of vision, hearing and touch. I wanted to use senses I was both comfortable with and that could capture relatively efficiently and effectively the perceptual characteristics of natural settings I visited. Vision, and to a lesser extent hearing, was more predisposed to capture using the written word, so crucial in phenomenological analysis. My decision not to use smell and taste was, apart from my predisposition, based on my presumption that my sense of smell would not be as effective or useful as my more dominant senses of vision, hearing, and touch. My sensorial orientation, according to Press & Minta (2000), is a typical Western preference due to the dominance of the visual mode of perception and its reliance on language for cognition. Perhaps my sensorial preferences belie my scientific, technical background. While smell and taste are considered purely subjective, sight, hearing and touch lend an objective, independent quality to perceiving external objects (Press and Minta, 2000).

The structured methods were undertaken in a range of natural settings within Sydney and the Barrington Tops, a largely ‘wilderness’ mountainous area three hours drive north of Sydney. A total of 33 sessions were conducted, 26 over a six month period in 2007 and 7 more in 2008, each lasting between one and two hours. The latter seven sessions were undertaken to observe whether there were any noticeable changes in my responses as a result of increased experience and understanding. Engagement worksheets were developed to record biophysical characteristics, setting naturalness, perceptions and responses (refer to Appendix 1 and 2 for a sample worksheet and a completed, hand-written worksheet). Each session incorporated the following exercises:

i. **Meditation**: a simple 10-20 minute breathing technique of deep, rhythmical inhalations and exhalations, supplemented with visualisations, to calm the mind, become centred and focused on being present and so facilitate a mental, psychological and affective state of awareness of internal and external phenomena.
ii. **Sound mapping**: usually with eyes closed or focused on an object immediately in front of my sitting position, I recorded all sounds in the soundscape, mapping direction and distance. This helped to get a sense of place.

iii. **Mindful hearing**: once the more rational sound map was completed, a mindfulness meditative state was evoked to observe my cognitive, emotional, somatic responses to the surrounding soundscape.

iv. **Mindful vision**: I chose a nonhuman object or setting and recorded the physical appearance and any inner responses to the object or setting. I was guided by different ways of seeing; observe with the ‘eyes’ of the body (analytical), heart (emotions) and gut (intuition).

v. **Touch**: I scanned the immediate environment for an object of interest such as a tree trunk, lichen covered granite rock, thick, wet moss on a riverbank. These were then carefully touched.

vi. **Affective reflections**: I conducted an affective activity at the end of each activity when grounded and re-sensitised to the natural setting. I focused empathically on a particular object or landscape feature allowing emotions and feelings to arise. The aim was to focus upon and record emotions and feelings during this engagement, particularly noting expanded states of consciousness and/or sense of self.

### 2.4.3 Two-fold Vision

The two-fold vision method, derived from Johann von Goethe’s work, offers a structured approach to experiencing nonhuman nature in a creative, experiential way using analytical and intuitive perspectives. Two-fold vision refers to approaching a phenomenon using both analytical/ surface and intuitive/ imaginal perception to understand the relationship between the physical, the inner aspect and its relationship with its surrounds. Nature is revealed differently in each and each is complete in itself but neither is comprehensive. As Bortoft (1996) suggests, the complete phenomenon is not the sum of these two modes of perceiving but more than this. According to Bortoft (1996), there is no dualism in nature, but
dualism only appears to us as a result of the way we go about interacting and learning about our world. Two-foldness is the fundamental characteristic of language: sensory manifestation and non-sensory meaning present together as one. So reading nature for Goethe was not a metaphor but a literal process of reading the parts and the meanings as one whole vision (Bortoft, 1996).

Two-fold vision, similar to interpretive phenomenology, requires, argues Bortoft (1996), that the researcher goes beyond habitual ways of seeing things, beyond the ‘natural attitude’ or which Bortoft refers to as ‘onlooker’ consciousness. It requires that I go beyond the obviousness of my sensorial surrounds to intuit the wholeness of a phenomenon such as a tree, place or landscape. My habitual viewing tends to focus primarily on the exterior, the appearance of an object. While I have intuited the formative, non-physical basis of things due to my ontological and epistemological perspective, many people, according to Davis (2006), do not perceive an inner being or meaning within things. As Davis (2006) argues, when things are just exteriors, then ‘nature’ shrinks to be just a resource or group of things, to be exploited and despoiled. Not only do we just perceive surfaces, we do so judgmentally, paradigmatically and conceptually, often unconsciously, with all the socially and historically constructed meanings we bring to any interaction. Davis notes that Goethe warned against imposing intellectual structures and judgments upon the object of study because this would keep the observer at the surface, onlooker state of consciousness and therefore restrict the person’s relationship with it (Seamon, 2000). Thoreau hinted at the need to intuit the essence, the ‘germ’ of the external expression of an object. Very similar to Goethe’s notion of ur-phenomenon, or the inner idea or pattern that underlies external phenomena, Thoreau perceived a world of ideas and laws beneath the fields, trees and wildlife he observed:

No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labours with the idea inwardly. The atoms have already learned this law, and are pregnant by it. The overhanging leaf sees here its prototype. ... The whole
tree itself is but one leaf, and rivers are still vaster leaves whose pulp is intervening earth and towns and cities are the ova of insects in their axils.

(Thoreau, 1854/2008:205-06)

I developed a step-by-step method by amalgamating a number of interpretations suggested by Bortoft (1986, 1996, 2000) and other commentators (Cameron, 2005; Hoffman, 1994, 1998, 1999, 2007). I followed these steps for each method – for a Scribbly Gum tree, a Tawny Frogmouth and a waterfall – recording the results on a worksheet I developed for this method (refer to Appendix 3). The two-fold vision method consisted of the following steps:

i) I selected an object: a tree, a bird and a waterfall.

ii) I described my first impressions of the object.

iii) Taking an analytical mode of consciousness, I:

a) systematically described the whole object and its parts and features;

b) described the biophysical, ecological and/or socio-cultural contexts of the object.

iv) I ended my analytical engagement and attempted to evoke a participatory mode of consciousness through meditation or a reflective/ affective activity. This allowed me to get out of my outward, surface orientation and get into an imaginal, receptive state.

v) I entered into an imaginative mode of consciousness in which I:

a) imaginatively projected my consciousness into the object so I could empathically intuit its inner nature without imposing knowledge or structures upon it. Dwelling upon its intuited inner nature helped to reveal a perception of its essential nature, the ‘ur-phenomenon’ as Goethe called it;

b) attempted to hold a detailed image of it in my mind’s eye using visualisation, termed extra sensory imagination process. Within this imaginal realm, the image may be exactly like the physical impression and/or it may illicit the creative impulse or gesture of the object;

c) sketched my impressions and/or gestures of the object.
d) Following this process, I reflected on the sketches and/or the intuitions received from flowing into the phenomenon and described the internal relationships between its features.

e) I then imagined the time-life of the object, in other words, I imagined its past and future. I described the movement of the object through time and space, like ‘snapshots’ of its movement. As Cameron (2005) states, to ask about the time-line is to ask about the spatial movements of the phenomenon as it is formed, lived and aged away.

f) The final stage termed ‘being one with the object’ involves a heart-felt understanding of the phenomenon, one’s new perception of it and its environment.

2.5 Data analysis

In interpretive phenomenology the purpose of analysing and reflecting upon the written experiences of a phenomenon is to try and grasp the essential meaning of something. According to van Manen (1990) this involves a process of reflectively appropriating, clarifying and explicating the structure of meaning of the lived experience. My approach was to write in as much experiential detail as I could about my observations and insights into my journals and activity worksheets for later thematic analysis. Thematic analysis refers to the process of revealing themes embedded within the written text. Themes can be described as structures, meanings or qualities of lived experience (van Manen, 1990). I am attempting to reveal or recover the key themes – my meanings and ideas - which lie behind my experience of eco-consciousness and its development. This was approached through deeply immersing myself into my writings, reflecting and thematically analysing these. This process of analysis is described in this section.

2.5.1 Heuristic inquiry journals

I kept journals from the end of the initial engagement stage, when I had confirmed the research question, through to the creative synthesis stage. Over a period of about thirty months, I made approximately 160 entries relating to the research
questions, primarily relating to my own experience of eco-consciousness. These entries or the raw data contained approximately 60,000 words from which to read, reflect and analyse. Not having conducted thematic analysis, I sought advice from various sources (Creswell, 1998; Hanson & Klimo, 1998; Kleiman, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1990; van Manen, 1990; von Eckartsberg, 1998) and other doctoral dissertations in this field, such as Bellotti (2006). What I discovered was that there was no one ‘right’ way to thematically analyse narratives but a number of possible approaches that could be used to distil themes and meanings. A theme refers to meaningful words or phrases that occur frequently that capture the essence of the narrative with phenomenological themes, being the experiential structures making up an experience (van Manen, 1990). The key process recommended by these sources was immersion into the data at every stage of the analysis, closely reading the journal entries with an open, reflective stance using the research questions to filter and sort out relevant and irrelevant descriptions and insights. This process has been labelled phenomenological reflection, the purpose of which is to grasp the essential meaning of a phenomenon, to effect a more intimate explication of the lived experience through text (van Manen, 1990). I combined the data analysis model of Miles & Huberman (1994) (data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification), the detailed reading approach of van Manen (1990), several considerations from existential phenomenologists (Hanson & Klimo, 1998; Kleiman, 2004; von Eckartsberg, 1998) and the identification of textural and structural descriptions through reflection and intuition recommended by Moustakas (1990) to arrive at the following procedure for analysing the journal data (refer to Figure 9):

**Step 1:** I transcribed the journals into electronic format and reviewed them. Immerging myself into the journal entries, I read them with a pre-reflective disposition, in their entirety to get an overall sense of the whole in order to understand how the parts might be constituted. I became familiar with the overall flow and evolution of my thinking and importantly I began to discern various
thematic categories. I created electronic files for each thematic category into which I could cut and paste relevant descriptions.

**Step 2:** With large amounts of data, the key process is to reduce or simplify this data into thematic clusters or categories. Having identified the categories, I then re-read the entries closely and extracted relevant textural (content) and structural (process) descriptors (words, sentences, paragraphs). These were placed in the relevant thematic category. In doing this, I eliminated extraneous statements and reduced the volume of data.

**Step 3:** Once I had created the primary thematic category files, I analysed these and identified secondary thematic categories or sub-categories. I closely read the category descriptors and identified which ones related to a sub-category and which ones were, upon reflection, repetitive or extraneous. This culminated with a new file for each category identifying firstly, all the thematic sub-categories and then, secondly, the condensed sub-categories, based on overlapping or very similar thematic sub-categories. The file was arranged with all descriptors (or significant statements) and relevant useful quotes within these condensed sub-categories. This process was guided by asking the following questions: in what ways is the description revelatory of the phenomenon? What does the text tell me about my experience of the phenomenon?

**Step 4:** Each thematic sub-category was read with a view to extracting key descriptions and possible themes, essential and incidental to the research questions. These descriptors were then coalesced for each sub-category to create a final structural summary of my reflections on the experience.

**Step 5:** The data has been reduced to a sufficient level from which I can identify inter-relationships between the key primary categories of eco-consciousness, eco-identity, direct nonhuman contact and negative states of mind. I summarised the
descriptors and identified the overall themes and meanings of this heuristic exploration of eco-consciousness.

**Step 6:** The meanings of the analysed journal entries were verified by checking their consistency with the explicated and subtext of the journal entries.

![Components of Data Analysis Flowchart](image)

**Figure 9 - Data Analysis Flowchart**

### 2.5.2 Nature Engagement and Two-fold Vision Worksheets

In analysing my nature engagement method (33 worksheets with their approximately 30,000 words), I focused on extracting key insights and meanings, as well as experiences of key events associated with this activity. I typed up each
worksheet and then entered each key statement (description or reflection) into a thematic category or sub-category using the thematic data analysis software program, QSR. I used the program as a way to sort out meaningful words and statements from my worksheets according to each specific exercise, for example mindful hearing, vision and affective reflections. This substantial process led to the extraction of key statements for each activity for each worksheet. Each statement, phrase or key word was reflected upon and I interpreted an overall meaning for them. I then placed these statements and their interpreted meanings into a summarising table, from which I extracted key meanings of my eco-consciousness experience (refer to Chapter 5). I did not use this approach for the two-fold vision worksheets as there were only eight worksheets. I simply read and re-read these, looking at the content and process descriptors to understand how this activity evoked affective and imaginal responses.

### 2.6 Validity and trustworthiness

Validity is an essential criterion for any researcher when designing research, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. Validity, in terms of my qualitative inquiry, corresponds to the question ‘How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). Put more simply, I was interested in understanding how to ensure that my research was ‘sound, just, and well-founded’ (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001:527). While researchers need to ensure they are embarking on ‘valid’ research, the numerous definitions, labels and criteria suggested to assess validity (or validation) indicates that it is problematic (Angen, 2000; Koro-Ljungberg, 2008), in that validity criteria should be specific for each qualitative methodology (Rolfe, 2006). Koro-Ljungberg (2008) qualifies these issues by arguing that validity and validation are conceptualised constructions, which are always partial, limited and located within epistemological positions. While I cannot tell the reader how to appraise my research, I did identify criteria and strategies that helped me in appraising the validity of my research, which the reader may or may not consider.
Validation, according to Whittemore et al. (2001), is the process ‘whereby ideals are sought through attention to specified criteria, claims to knowledge are made explicit, and techniques are employed to address ... threats to validity’ (p527). They argue, similarly to the point above by Rolfe (2006), that it is essential for the researcher to determine the appropriate primary and secondary validity criteria, to use methodological techniques to minimise validity threats and, critically, present the research process in detail. In reviewing the suggestions made by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Polkinghorne (1983) and Whittemore et al. (2001), I have selected credibility and authenticity as appropriate primary criteria and auditability, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and accuracy as appropriate secondary criteria for my research. The following table (refer to Table 2) provides the reader with an overview of these criteria and the techniques I used to address the issue of research validity. I developed this table and the following trustworthiness table not only to clearly present appropriate criteria but also as a way of synthesising my concerns about how to make my research ‘valid’ and ‘trustworthy’.

Table 2 - Validity criteria I used to facilitate ‘sound, just, and well-founded’ research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Techniques employed to meet research criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Establishing confidence that the ‘data’ has been consistently interpreted.</td>
<td>Data analysis and interpretations clearly explicated. Articulation of data analysis decisions Acknowledgement of research bias/perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Research reflects the lived experiences of the researcher. Researcher has remained true and consistent to the phenomenon under study.</td>
<td>Research questions developed to address issues or uncertainties of direct relevance to researcher’s life experience. Thesis discussion consistent with data presentation and analysis demonstrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Auditability</strong></td>
<td>Audit trail of research-generated data consistently recorded, accounting for methodological decisions, interpretations and biases, explicit presentation of results to provide evidence and support inferences/proposals.</td>
<td>Development of self-conscious research design employing triangulation* Provision of examples of verbatim transcription Data reduction tables Reflexive journaling used throughout the research process Maintenance of an audit trail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vividness</strong></td>
<td>Does the work draw readers in through its sense of reality and honesty? Are there thick or rich descriptions of the researchers lived experience?</td>
<td>Providing thick descriptions of experiences relating to eco-consciousness development, expressing intuitions, tacit knowings and feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creativity</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrating novel methodological designs to answer research questions, flexible inquiry process, imaginative ways of organizing, presenting and analysing data.</td>
<td>My choice behind the development of my research questions. My choice to use a phenomenological heuristic approach to explore the phenomenon Development of the two-fold vision method. Data reduction tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thoroughness</strong></td>
<td>Research questions must be convincingly answered. Adequate attention between themes and the ideas proposed.</td>
<td>Using thematic analysis program. Performing focused literature review. Consulting numerous literature sources to personalize my thematic analysis approach. Drawing a flowchart to describe the thematic analysis process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Validity in heuristic inquiry, according to Moustakas (1990), stems from systematic observation of, and thoughtful, deep dialoguing with one’s conscious and unconscious aspects. Moustakas argues that the researcher needs to demonstrate that they have held a focused, sustained engagement with the research question, problem, or phenomenon. In doing this Moustakas argues that the researcher can provide a more intimate, ‘thick’ description of the lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1990). The reader may not discern this from the analysed data and discussion although the researcher should attempt to convey this inverted perspective. I have set out my work in such a way as to convey this, as seen in my presentation of my analysed data (broad discussion on meanings, verbatim quotes for each theme, thematic summarizing tables) in Chapters 3 and 4, and the inclusion of substantial quotes. The criteria for validity and trustworthiness, outlined in this section, is relevant to heuristic inquiry, given that it is a form of interpretive phenomenology. These criteria and the techniques for demonstrating consistency is especially relevant for my approach to heuristic inquiry in that I did not have co-participants to validate my findings. As having co-participants is the norm in heuristic inquiry, contrary to Moustakas’ original basis for his self-reflective method, it was especially important for me to clearly outline criteria to assess my research and to offer the field within which I research.
Establishing the trustworthiness of my research is critical, particularly because of its highly subjective nature, and it is closely linked with establishing research validity and rigor (Seale, 1999). What makes self-conscious interpretive research such as mine worthy of the reader’s trust? Seamon (2000) argues that trustworthiness in phenomenological studies requires that the reader is drawn into the researcher’s discoveries, ‘allowing the reader to see his or her own world or the worlds of others in a new, deeper way’ (p17). In other words I am required to vividly and honestly capture my lived experience of eco-consciousness and present unique and nuanced interpretations that hopefully will resonate with the reader. Resonance encompasses the felt effect or intuitive grasp of the meaning of something by the reader upon reading the study (van Manen, 1990). If the reader can be drawn into my explorative inquiry through both my experiential self-narratives, my engagement and demonstration of reflexivity, praxis and verstehen (enhanced understanding of a phenomenon), then I argue trustworthiness and validity of my inquiry will have been substantially met. As Angen (2000) similarly states, the reader can intuit trust through substantive validation by considering how the research question was considered and contexturalised, how respectfully the research is carried out, the persuasiveness of the arguments, the transformative value of the inquiry and the provision and interpretation of data (Angen, 2000).

In terms of using the first approach of Angen (2000) identified previously, (Morrow, 2005) suggests that interpretive research use the following criteria for trustworthiness, some of which originate from quantitative perspectives:

- dependability (a systematic research process duly followed),
- triangulation (multiple ways of capturing data about a phenomenon),
- researcher reflexivity (researcher experiences and understandings affecting the research process),
- praxis (the integration of theory and practice) and
- verstehen (enhanced and deep understanding).
Reflexivity has been interpreted as thoughtful, conscious self-awareness in which there is a continual evaluation of subjective responses, inter-subjective dynamics and the research process (Finlay, 2002). As Hertz (1997) states ‘To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment’(p.viii). Based on the preceding discussion, the following table (refer to Table 3) provides a list of criteria, which I offer the reader to assess the trustworthiness of my research. It is my way of clearly presenting how I attempted to meet the problem of trust in a self-search inquiry.

Table 3 - Suggested measures for assessing the trustworthiness of this research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reader engagement</td>
<td>Reader is drawn into research purpose, approach, findings and interpretations.</td>
<td>Places importance on a clear and compelling writing style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader empathy</td>
<td>Reader understands the researcher’s motivations to understand the phenomenon. Researcher aligns research experiences, interpretations and meanings.</td>
<td>This criteria stresses the importance of including in Chapter 1 the discussion of key experiences that led me to inquire into eco-consciousness. The inclusion of indicative quotes/excerpts from my writings to convey significant insights or affectively oriented experiences may help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>Researcher has systematically followed the proposed research process.</td>
<td>Each of the methods had clear stages or steps that were followed as can be seen in Chapters 3 and 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Researcher has demonstrated multiple ways of engaging the phenomenon and capturing data.</td>
<td>Using three methods for understanding my experience of eco-consciousness helped me arrive at understandings from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>Researcher has demonstrated ongoing self-reflections and reflections on the how to develop and improve methods.</td>
<td>All written responses contained reflections upon my direct experiences within natural settings. These were reflected, thematic meanings identified and suggestions for improving methods and approach made (Chapter 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praxis</td>
<td>Researcher has integrated theoretical concepts into conduct of exploration and practices have transformed understanding and translated into theoretical contributions.</td>
<td>Role of consciousness and connection in eco-crisis were notions that underscored the relevance of understanding eco-consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verstehen</td>
<td>Researcher has demonstrated a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.</td>
<td>My understanding of my eco-consciousness experience is outlined in Chapter 5 and I hope the content here demonstrates the depth of my understanding of the phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3 - JOURNAL REFLECTIONS: LIVING THE QUESTIONS
To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower
Even the loose stones that cover the highway
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,
Or linked them to some feeling. The great mass
Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
That I beheld respired with inward meaning.

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, (1850)
3.1 Introduction

This chapter represents the completion of the explication stage of the heuristic inquiry method. It presents the results of the thematic analysis of my journal entries which recorded rich, ‘dense’ descriptions on the lived experience of my dwelling upon the research questions. I identify thematic categories and subcategories providing an overview and representative journal entry of each thematic category along with a tabular summation of the key sub-categories and personal interpretations. I leave the discussion of the key themes and relevant literature until Chapter 5 following my presentation of the analysis of my experiential methods in Chapter 4.

3.3 Thematic Categories

The thematic analysis of my journal entries was a substantial process involving immersion into my writings, culling extraneous reflections, extracting and refining or reinterpreting each thematic descriptor to produce themes. I repeated this process three times, as discussed in Section 2.5.1, in an effort to not only reduce the large amount of writing but to extract what I believed to be the substantive or insightful themes as they related to the research questions, the evolving research orientation and the overall direction of the research process. This analysis revealed a number of broad thematic categories, each of which contained one or more subcategories (refer to Figure 10).

I identified four primary thematic categories in my journal writings. These were eco-consciousness development, eco-identity development, negative states of mind and direct nonhuman nature engagement, each of which in turn had five to six subcategories. Given the number and diversity of expressions in each category, I have provided an indicative overview for each category. This chapter can be viewed as the first stage of my presentation of the analysed journal entries. It is part of my distilling process in which in this chapter I introduce the reader to the broad themes, indicate the minor themes and provide a ‘taste’ for my reflections on the overall research themes fully discussed in Chapter 5. I hope it gives the reader an
idea of each thematic category, a broad sketch of the nature of my writings prior to the more detailed summarising category table. For each of the following sections, I commence with an overview of that primary category, then present an important or meaningful journal entry and conclude with a presentation of a table summarising the sub-themes. These tables include representative entries and brief reflections on these. The tables were created towards the end of my research well after I analysed the journal entries, as represented in Figure 10. They therefore emphasise or exclude a number of thematic sub-categories shown in Figure 10, in line with my evolving understanding of eco-consciousness and its development. The second stage of my data analysis is found in Chapter 5 where I distil the overall research themes, incorporating the thematic analysis of my nature engagement worksheets, for my eco-consciousness experience, and link these with relevant literature.
Figure 10 - Thematic categories of journal entries
3.3.1 Thematic Category: Eco-consciousness development

Overview
This theme dominated my journal writing, consistent with the research questions. The key thematic sub-categories I interpreted were aims or motivations for evoking eco-consciousness, my key experiences, personal barriers to experiencing eco-consciousness, ways in which I evoked eco-consciousness and other process reflections. Many of the journal entries in this category describe my experiences of heightened eco-consciousness, although there are reflections on durable eco-consciousness, which is my term for a sustained level of day-to-day eco-consciousness. The challenge of translating heightened states into enduring or durable levels of eco-consciousness became increasingly important to me in 2007. Despite the reinvigorating and enlightening experiences of heightened states, I wanted to give more emphasis to durable levels, which is the type of consciousness, from my perspective, that Al Gore refers to as a ‘heightened consciousness’ to address the spectre of climate change.

In reviewing my entries, I discerned common descriptive terms or phrases associated with heightened eco-consciousness such as a sense of reverence, humility, ecological sense of self, openness, focusing and deepening perceptual skills, appreciation and caring for nonhuman other, empathy, spirituality, calmness, sense of place and restoration. My approaches to evoking this heightened state include heightening sensorial receptivity and sensitivity, being mindful of my inner states, acknowledging and using intuitive awareness, seeking direct, intimate, caring disposition towards nonhuman beings, being aware of potential risks when in natural settings, being focused in my engagements and feeling respect for nonhuman others. Behind all of these approaches was an openness to dwell in the moment, to be as present as much as I could be, so as to allow an expanded consciousness to arise.

As may be noted from a perusal of Figure 10, I do not discuss most of the sub-categories and instead focus on my meanings interpreted from the analysis. Most
of my entries were postulations, abstractions based on my reflections of what it might mean to exhibit eco-consciousness. For example, I wrote about the characteristics of an eco-conscious person only belatedly realising this was deviating from my research focus on my experience of eco-consciousness. Similarly, I wrote very little on durable eco-consciousness throughout my inquiry only identifying and discussing its connection to a heightened mode in my latter stages. As I developed my understanding about the phenomenon, I felt that I needed to minimise these more abstracted reflections and focus more, consistent with the research questions, on my experience of eco-consciousness. Consistent with my increased understanding in the latter stages of my research, I also identify in my writings the social contexts of eco-consciousness development and the challenges of translating brief lived states into a more enduring (durable) level of consciousness.

**Indicative journal entry**

The following journal entry was one of my last journal entries and it provides what I consider one of my more insightful and ‘accurate’ reflections about my views on eco-consciousness. I not only describe, in broad terms, my developing state of heightened eco-consciousness during a bushwalk, but I make the link between heightened and durable modes of eco-consciousness, one of my primary insights of my research. I consider that this quote provides a satisfactory description of my experience and goes a reasonable way to responding, by itself, to the primary research question. It does not contain all the key themes of my eco-consciousness.

![Figure 11 - Morton National Park](image-url)
experience outlined in Table 10 at the end of this chapter. While it is a long quote, it is necessary to provide this entry in full given the relevance of each sentence, and to help the reader understand the link I make between heightened and durable eco-consciousness.

I understand my experience of eco-consciousness as a heightened state of consciousness that arises within a sensorial, affective and meditative immersion within natural settings. I feel calmed, present, grounded in a place and centred within self. It appears to arise through a quiet, caring and appreciative engagement with nonhuman other, quite often trees, shrubs, flowers, rocks and birds. As I meandered along a bush track within Morton National Park enjoying the sensorial diversity of the bush, I became calmed and relieved for finally being in this place of nature. I breathed in the sights and sounds of this sandstone escarpment. A flood of deep olive greens and red ochre stains in cream sandstone dominated my vision. It felt like a tsunami of colour, sound and forms washing over me. The landscape flooded my being. I felt it wash through me, cleansing and restoring me. Through aesthetic engagement and appreciation and joy of both ‘being’ and being there, a sense of grounding arose. I recognised that around this point of my immersion, perhaps twenty minutes into my walk, a heightened state of eco-consciousness began to emerge. I began to feel intimately connected with my surrounds, the landscape, the sandstone rocks, the flowering heath and gnarly scribbled eucalypt trees. The familiar otherness of a dry eucalypt woodland community was comforting and revitalising.

I became mindful of a growing inner tranquillity, a sense of centredness, a deep valuation of nonhuman others in their beautiful, intelligent diversity around me and a sense of grace, humility and ‘being’. I became a person immersed in the engagement with the natural ambience rather than my usual distracted, mindless ‘doing’ self. It, eco-consciousness, is a relief to experience; it frees me to ‘be’, it stems from a deep caring, relational disposition and experience and seemingly contradictory, stills and invigorates me. I became part of this landscape as it, it’s energies and presence, filters into my consciousness. Eco-consciousness is ultimately restorative in the sense that it restores and reinvigorates my little ‘self’ while my deeper, higher ‘Self’ emerges from behind the veil of unconsciousness. It is therapeutic in that I come to attend perceptibly and mindfully to those I experience around as well as attend to my inner Self that desires expression and relationship with my outward-focused self.
An experience of an eco-consciousness state also provides perspective on my life (perspective taking), how I approach and the influence of my socio-cultural, historical situatedness. It moulds my sense of self. It gives me the psychological and physical space to step back from the doings, from my ego sense of self with its attachments. It allows a space for honest reflection within a depersonalising process of ‘being’. Surely this experience of ‘being’ is part of my Self-realisation! These experiences, I am sure, can feed into the development or sustenance of a more enduring level of eco-consciousness. A heightened state of eco-consciousness is an altered mode of consciousness from normal waking consciousness. It lasts for only part of a nature engagement such as a bushwalk. I experience it in-between an initial aesthetic stage of getting comfortable and settled within a ‘holding’ environment and recognising the need to return to camp or home stage. It provides the reinvigoration, renewal, emotions, experience and memories to help me maintain a balanced, grounded sense of self in my normal waking consciousness.

I view heightened eco-consciousness as an experiential resource to help sustain my more socially oriented, durable eco-consciousness. This heightened experience provides a valuable opportunity to develop perspective on my self, on society, on my life direction, on being. I must remind myself to call upon the memories and feelings of heightened eco-consciousness states to help me cope with my enduring negative states of mind as a result of personal and global issues. With heightened eco-consciousness I experience inner harmony, caring, respectful disposition towards ‘nature’ and as a consequence, enjoy this fleeting moment of happiness and deep calm. With durable eco-consciousness I bring together social awareness and service, personal discipline (cognitive, affective, spiritual) and heightened eco-consciousness memories to evoke emotional resilience, a deeper perspective on my life and a sense of deep connection with ‘nature’.

September 18 2008
Summarising thematic table

In the following table, I discuss the key thematic sub-categories that I considered were more relevant to the research questions and/or to my priorities at the end of this research. The majority of the table revolves around the content and process of developing heightened eco-consciousness, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5. The reader may note in Table 4 beneath that there is material that is not mentioned in the preceding overview. There were many ideas or insights that I did not give priority to here or in Chapter 5 but which could be the subject of further post-doctoral exploration and development.
### Table 4 - Thematic insights into my ecological consciousness

(ECD refers to eco-consciousness development)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Indicative quotes</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims of evoking eco-consciousness</td>
<td>Restoration</td>
<td>Feeling very depressed and lonely at home, I went to the Dam for a walk to clear my mind. It was a lovely, soothing experience, it was a chance to let go of my negative feelings and appreciate the wet beauty, the soft rain, being alone but not lonely. Jan 17 2008</td>
<td>When overwhelmed by negative feelings from news about climate change, or personal circumstances, I would go to the bush or lake or headland for time out, to feel some nurturing energies and get out of my negative or mundane focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with nonhuman nature</td>
<td>I feel relieved to enter into a natural landscape, I slow down my thinking, I experience a sense of peace, of intersubjective connection with nonhuman life, a groundedness of my inner being, a deep sense of humility and respect, feelings of love. April 9 2007</td>
<td>Mostly focused on wanting to observe owls, I would hope to have a close contact with wildlife, trees, waterfalls and other nonhuman beings. Connecting with nonhuman ‘other’ was significant for sensing humility, appreciation, awe respect and other feelings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-realisation</td>
<td>Eco-consciousness at higher, deeper levels is more a personal development orientation than a necessary collective aim, at least at this stage of our social and cultural development. People like me can use the various activities to deepen their eco-consciousness but this ceases to become necessary for minimising ecological footprints through transforming behaviours. April 18 2007</td>
<td>A recognition that this form of consciousness is not necessary for reducing ecological or carbon footprints but is also highly relevant for Self-realisation, within a nonhuman relational context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological resilience</td>
<td>Eco-consciousness development is in large part about Self-realisation which requires, in part, that we explore our little self while allowing for the integration with a more expansive Self. July 23 2006</td>
<td>A comment reflecting my view that eco-consciousness development is in large part about expanding one’s sense of self to include other, less recognised aspects of one’s being.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
consequences and extreme weather events. As time period shortens and more and more events and evidence of climate change, food shortages and corporate greed are filling the media, I have come to strongly sense that the chaos point is closing in on us all. It is not a matter of if or perhaps in some distant future but in the dark foreboding near future. At the very least psychologically I can use eco-consciousness to increase resilience. May 5 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Experiences</th>
<th>Sense of reverence and humility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What do I mean by this? I never use the term except here so it is really necessary? Originally I indicated that it stemmed from a more spiritual/affective connection and appreciation. Now I associate the terms with a common eco-consciousness experience of deep appreciation and respect for a subject’s presence and form/design whether it be a landscape, tree or spiders web. It can stem from an awe/wonder experience or a more refined perceptual examination of a subject’s features. I sense a creative intelligence behind the form/design and I think wow that’s incredibly beautiful, ‘right’ and intelligent. From this perspective comes a deepening respect and honouring feeling, which is what I have labelled ‘reverence’. It is not necessarily a recognition of a spiritual force, is not artificially putting something on a pedestal above and better than me or anything else. I guess I

| outcome of ECD. Becoming more emotionally resilient to ‘bad’ news and gaining a different perspective was important for me |

| Deeper feeling of reverence didn’t always occur when deeply immersed in natural settings but certainly did when I deeply appreciated and amazed at my and others existence, and the diversity and complexity and miracle of life. Reverence is honouring the uniqueness of every being and humility is feeling a small but equal part of this reality |

15 van Manen (1990) considers wonder to be the heart of the phenomenological attitude. Not only do we want to lead the reader to a sense of wonder about the phenomenon, we want to induce wondering about wonder. He considers wonder to be more a state of being than a cognitive activity in which one needs to adopt a state of receptive passivity, of non-activity. ‘The person who is struck with wonder is overwhelmed with something that defies quick resolution .... For ....what seemed commonplace has now become extraordinary’ (van Manen, 2002:250). It shakes us up enough to really open our eyes and for at least that moment, be unable to act. As van Manen comments, wondering was viewed by Wittgenstein as a form of questioning for which there is no answer.

89
| **am honouring within the uniqueness and intelligence of the unique being I**
| **conscious engage with. It is a form of reverence and prior to, during and**
| **after this recognition arises a sense of humility, a sense of being part of this**
| **web. June 22 2008**

**Ecological awareness**

| At a very practical level, being ecologically conscious is very basically being aware of the environment one is within, recognising one’s ecological interactions with it, having some level of eco-literacy and recognising the intrinsic value in all beings, with the ethical and affective responsibilities and actions this stimulates. July 27 2007 |
| Having some level of eco-literacy helped me appreciate the workings of a natural setting, which often led to wonder of the diversity, complexity and interdependence of all aspects of an ecosystem. Wonder and deep appreciation is a core meaning of eco-consciousness |

**Being**

| ECD requires that we strive to ‘be’ in our ‘doing’, to not only understand or intuit what it is to ‘be’, to exist as an embodied being in our world but to develop a mindful awareness of one’s physical, cognitive and affective orientation when engaging with nature Sept 5 2007 |
| A significant insight during my heuristic reflections was appreciating a sense of being beyond my doing self, an intuition and sometimes a direct connection with my core self, my Being beyond my physical, ego being. Useful experience in letting go of fears and existential doubts |

| This ‘being’ is I believe the core of one’s identity, one that sees from behind the veil of ego-consciousness and even an eco-consciousness because these are the tools the ‘I’ uses to be aware, relate, interact with human and nonhuman ‘other’. It is in the development of a deep eco-consciousness that I can more consciously come into empathic relationship with deeper aspects of my being. This awareness of the ‘seer’ behind the tools of consciousness is crucial for perspective, humility and self-transformation. All I have to do is loosen and shift my perception, my frame of mind, using body, heart and soul vision in order to just be-in-the-moment. Engage and greet the self through mindful attention and presencing June 19 2007 |
| A perspective on being, sometimes I referred to it as Being, which alludes to a spiritual aspect of one’s self behind the ego-self. A sense of my Being arose in deeply present or meditative moments during nature engagements |

| Being-in-the-world for me infers the use of inner reflective, contemplative capacities and skills to become more conscious of our lived world. It is a |
| Being-in-the-world is a phenomenological term which takes on |
mindful situatedness of the self, in physical, cultural and spiritual worlds. It can occur in contemplative aloneness or through immersion and participation with the 'other. I have found that the more present I am with a being, a process, a space-time event, the deeper the quality of the engagement. My deepest engagement in nature has been during the two-fold activities in which I have focused intensely at surface and intuitive levels. I have not only forgotten time, been more focused on the subject of my intent but allowed another aspect, so it feels, of my being, beyond my ego-con to be a co-participant in the exploratory process. May 7 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of place</th>
<th>The person who physically dwells in place lives or frequents the same area frequently, they face the challenge of over-familiarity with the appearances and consequent habitual surface vision. With love and focus and openness, they can develop a deep participatory sense of place and identity, tune into the subtler qualities, physical and spiritual, of their place. March 13 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual meaning</td>
<td>The affective experience led to a calmer, restorative state. It did not take long to become mindful of my state of mind and body, an awareness of my deeper responding to my sensorial and energetic engagement. Out of this stemmed a deeper state of connection, perhaps another flavour to my connective, appreciative awareness. I would label this a sense of communion, a sense of both an underlying commonality or ontological basis and a sense of unity, of a respectful otherness within the whole of this shared reality. This awareness ebbs and flows as I walk slowly carefully, my vision and hearing delving into the bush around me. It feels that at this deeper end of the eco-consciousness spectrum, this sense of communion arises from the initial states of safety, relief, sensorial delight, appreciation, calmness, restorative feelings, love and respect. It is not necessarily as linear as this implies, it can be experienced rapidly or as gradually as the observer/ experiencer is open to it May 29 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

meaning within the context of my nature engagement. I felt my being behind my outer engaging focus intimately related to the unique beings within my phenomenological experience.

In my rambling writing here, I manage to use several key descriptors I feel are useful for developing a sense of place – participatory, identity and tuning into. A sense of place was closely associated with a sense of extended self arrived at through an affective participation with nonhuman other

The more profound or intimate a connection, the more likely I felt a non-physical basis for life and interacting. I found it tricky to describe sensing spiritual meaning and energies, especially as I could only intuit rather than see them.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appreciation of wildness</th>
<th>Knowing and feeling the relative distance from human formed landscapes and other significant signs of human impacts not only reduces the chance of human interruptions but opens up that feeling of psychological expansiveness, a freedom from the social, cultural processes that influence and dominate identity, states of being and mind. Here there is just peace, a profound absence of social mores and expectations, just [what appears to be] an ecologically undisturbed mindscape for direct, unmediated personal interpretation. March 12 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Otherness</td>
<td>I see all aspects of nature as ‘other’, as differentiated expressions of nature-as-one. The eucalypt tree nearby is an ‘other’, very different although constitutionally organically similar to me. I appreciate and relate to its ‘otherness’, its intrinsic worth. I enjoy the sensorial distinctions of its physical being while intuitively and cognitively understanding that our fields of selves intertwine at some energetic, subconscious level. This phenomenological and intuitive recognition and appreciation of our sharing, our relational fields and the important qualities of ‘otherness’ is for me an important quality and expression of eco-consciousness. This recognition and enjoyment of ‘otherness’ builds an unspoken relationship between beings, a connection, knowing and unconscious, that encourages tolerance, equity, respect, humility. To hold true to this recognition and appreciation is an important process and destination of eco-consciousness development. June 14 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic resonance</td>
<td>I do feel that the sensorial appreciation of otherness is an important part of a therapeutic, loving, humbling and learning relationship with the spirit of nature. June 27 2007</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>The process of deepening my eco-consciousness is fundamentally a therapeutic, evolutionary one. At its metaphysical core is the recognition to integrate the body with mind, spirit with matter, self with Self and self as Nature. It is a journey where my consciousness is the subject of focus of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Although wildness is not synonymous with ‘wilderness’ (as I argue in Chapter 5) I found that being physically isolated from obvious human intrusions or structures led to feelings of freedom and connectedness. My visits to ‘wilderness’ areas was an enjoyable and significant ‘flavouring’ to my overall eco-consciousness experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Otherness was my counter to the naïve pressure I originally had to experience a oneness state, a tangible sense of merging with ‘nature’. I enjoyed the diverse, complex differences in natural settings and this increased my appreciation and wonder of nonhuman ‘other’.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If an affective connection was long enough and/or intense through mindful attention, I sensed a release of habitual emotional states and anxieties, a sense of relief and what I describe as a psychological healing. I add the ‘resonance’ term to indicate that connecting meaningfully often felt like a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Barriers to evoking eco-consciousness</strong></td>
<td><strong>Daily distractions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Negative states of mind</strong></td>
<td>I believe negative states of mind such as anger, angst, sadness, disempowerment, futility are all understandable, expected from a personality like mine, okay to feel this given the contexts I live within but not to dwell upon or hold/be held in their grip to the detriment of one’s sense of self, creativity and well-being. June 27 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evoking eco-consciousness (approaches/activities)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Direct, sensorial engagement</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Exploration, understanding and development. March 11 2007** | **Resonating process, ‘tuning’ into the feel or ‘vibe’ of a place** | **Direct, sensorial engagement** | ECD requires that one learns by seeing beyond the surface appearance of things and become aware of the possibility of hidden ecological and non-physical processes and beings. June 6 2007 | Sensorial engagement was essential but insufficient to get a feel for an object of interest or curiosity. Intuiting and imagining things beyond the physical senses helped me appreciate nonhuman other and deepen appreciation and awareness |
| **Mode of vision** | The intent and mode of vision will determine the depth to which I interact and respond to the subject being perceived. Looking with the physical eye only tends, for me, toward the analytical rational orientation. This vision is likely to be objectifying because it focuses on the aesthetics, values, patterns of the object, it is an active mode of visual perception, a surface level engagement. The intent can be artistic or scientific but the visual process is | A simple reflection for me as I attempt to describe how I view life: see with my analytically oriented eye as well as my relational, open minded oriented eye. One eye, two (perhaps more) oriented vision. Both important to evoking eco- |
cognitive. Another type of vision is a more dynamic, flowing, relational one where I consciously allow love, awe, wonder, joy, fun to flow from my heart to the subject of my vision. I can in this way become receptive to its inner and outer being. This form of visual perception is a physical gateway to deeper ways of interacting with nonhuman others, therefore into a widening and deepening of my sense of self. I tend towards the cognitive vision but often slip into a relational or heart based vision. Both are complementary to one another, both critical for a visual engagement and interpretation of the worlds within and around me. August 15 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECD requires vision enhancement including:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Strategic vision: seeing the big picture of where one’s is in relation to the whole (such as landscape, community, Earth, cosmos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Embedded seeing: viewing within an intimate, sensuous field of the subject (not physically detached viewing of something)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Empathic/ affective seeing: viewing through the filter of emotions (‘heart-based vision’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Soul seeing (imaginial/intuitive sensing): intuitive sensing of a subject beyond the surface appearances June 6 2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My use of vision term refers to the act of ‘seeing’, understanding the big picture of one’s being in the world, reaching out perceptually with feeling and intuition of a world beyond physical perceptions. Similar to 14th century mystic Buenaventure’s three ways of seeing (mind-heart-soul)

The surface of things, the interface between mediums such as water and air, is what I perceive with my eyes, my physical vision. I perceive appearances of things knowing that there is much I cannot see behind the appearance. The surface appearance that greets my eyes is not so much an illusion but a meeting of cognitive recognition and the veil of surface/ interface processes. …. My sensorial experience is an attachment to the world of phantom appearances that while ‘real’ to the observer, mask the underlying physical and non-physical dimensions or layers of a greater reality, hidden from our physical senses. Intuiting the inner world, psychically seeing into the multidimensional depths can deepen awareness of our reality and broaden and transpersonalise one’s consciousness. This tangible recognition of the need to cast aside the aesthetic surface appearance of phenomena has given me greater urgency to deepen my exploration. I have touched upon this I knew that I could only see the surface of things in my visual engagements. This aesthetic understanding was fine but many times I wished I could see beyond the surface appearance. I believed that each object had an aura around it, as I have been told by people who can see them. Instead I could only use my caring, intuitive vision like I did in Two-fold vision to sense a deeper dimension to existence.
<p>| Intimate, relational engagement | I felt the tree with eyes closed and I felt its textures and patterns of bark, the strength of the trunk. It felt intimate and caring. Aug 8 2006 | Insight based on numerous instances of sensing a change in awareness or type of connection when becoming focused on an object directly such as a tree or owl. Much more common than with a collection of things such as a landscape. |
| Solitude | I've finished the Gloucester Falls walk, a couple of hours of nature bliss, just had a healthy lunch and am in that in-between feeling. It was a good walk of which the highlights were the first writing at the tree, the falls and the solitude for several hours. Like anything you don’t get much of, you don’t realise just how much you miss and need it. Dec 4 2005 | Being alone in the bush without human disturbance was critical for evoking eco-consciousness for me. It allowed the physical and psychological space to more fully engage nonhuman other and connect with a place and with my self/Self. |
| Focused and peripheral awareness | Fully engaging and developing one’s perceptual ability is crucial for ECD, which has two consciousness orientations – focused and peripheral awareness of inner and outer environments July 27 2007 | I found it important to be able to be focused on one thing in my field of engagement and within me but also be able to be aware of things, feelings, emotions, thoughts on the periphery of my consciousness and field of perception. Otherwise its too easy to become lost or mindless in the dominant focal alignment. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective engagement</th>
<th>To love in an open, respectful, appreciate, empathic non-judgmental, companion kind of way. In feeling this for objects of perception I feel feelings stir within my heart, warmth, connection, more expansive, a greater sense of identity and place. In using this loving approach to connecting with nonhuman nature, it minimises the dominance of the rational, abstracting thought, the emotions of attachment and the pain and projections of my inner psychological baggage (disempowerment, anger, grief, sadness). All these things cease to exist in my conscious experience and I feel more integrated, light, happier and calmer as a result Aug 25 2006</th>
<th>An important way of evoking eco-consciousness was taking on a loving, empathic and/or respectful disposition towards my surrounds. You get out what you put in and I felt this was especially true if I wanted to connect quicker or deeper to nonhuman other during my excursions</th>
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<td></td>
<td>I realised that the core experience of eco-consciousness is in the affective domain, it is essentially an altered direct awareness of the emotions and feelings within. The affective experience led to a calmer, restorative state. May 29 2008</td>
<td>Positive emotions and feelings are critical to the experience of and desire for eco-consciousness experiences. By ‘altered’ I infer a mindfulness about affective states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>Although I've been aware of and used mindfulness before, its really become clear that I need to employ this method in exploring consciousness, identity and NSM, especially disempowerment. The opposite is mindlessness, not being fully aware and present in the here and now, in our doings. Even in nature, perhaps especially so, I am often not present, not even fully mindful of what I am and how I'm experiencing the moment, unless I'm disciplined, captured or in a altered state of mind that is focused on the moment. I spend a significant percentage of my waking hours alone and preoccupied with routine, habitual thinking and behaviour and doings (human doings) and definitely not being fully embodied, that is being mindful of body and mind. If I'm not mindful, then I'm mindless, chugging along in a surface level of passive awareness. July 18 2007</td>
<td>A key process of ECD is being mindful. The deeper and more sustained my mindfulness during a nature immersive activity, the deeper sense of connectedness and awareness of my being and Being, I generally became. I believe mindfulness improved the quality of my engagement and sense of relationship with nonhuman other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being fully present and grounded</td>
<td>Letting go of thoughts outside of the here and now, outside of the object being observed, to just be more fully present in the moment, to be aware of everything that one can perceive without becoming attached to any one thing. This approach can be undertaken anywhere, anytime, being still or walking, it aims to facilitate a full presencing of ones attention and being, to allow for a more authentic engagement with the ‘other’ and this can only help improve the quality of ones consciousness and being. I believe it enhances the ability to relate to ‘others’ in a more direct and insightful way. July 27 2007</td>
<td>To be fully present within a place or with a subject of perceptual engagement was a challenge to my wandering mind but absolutely critical for the depth of eco-consciousness experience. Being distracted by thoughts incongruent to the physical setting one is immersed diminishes perceptual acuity and consciousness transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Openness to being in the moment and space, being present to dwelling with a childlike openness and curiosity with the regular experience of wonder and appreciation is critical for deepening a state of eco-consciousness. May 29 2008</td>
<td>Being open minded and hearted to new situations is important in order to not unnecessarily foreclose any spontaneous events or experiences. Being open to being, fully present, to each moment of the immersion experience is critical for deepening eco-consciousness. Dwelling and being are complementary states of engaging nonhuman beings.</td>
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| Process Reflections | Development orientations | I feel the development of an eco-consciousness has two broad orientations … The first is on nonhuman nature which is primarily an external, phenomenological, physical-sensorial interactive waking consciousness. It essentially relates to deepening ones understanding, connection and commitment to nonhuman nature through cognitive, sensorial and affective learning activities. It will have personal/spiritual development implications but this is secondary or a consequence, not a primary motivator. …. The second orientation is Nature eco-consciousness where the intent is a descending and ascending transpersonal exploration of the ecology of beings, of Self. …. The primary intent is transformed consciousness. April 24 2006 | Perhaps a similar distinction between environmentalism and deep ecology. This insight reflected my views of two broad aspects of ECD, an outward, relational, sensorial orientation and a self-reflective, contemplative, spiritual orientation. The first transforms awareness and self, the latter is transpersonally focused on inner ‘ecological selving’. |
| Initial orientation | To go beyond this requires a conscious intent, a desire to expand and deepen one’s relational capacity and engagement with nature, to recognise intuitively the possibility of the unique, precious aspects of all beings and the desire to engage with the world beyond the surface levels of perception and understanding. To do this requires a more reflective, contemplative, intuitive, empathic mode of being. July 27 2007 | I quickly realised that the major barrier to ECD was bringing habitual ways of perceiving and relating into the bush, into the nature connecting exercise. To build a relationship with nonhuman other was helped by both an affective approach and a desire to see/feel beyond the surface appearances of others |
| Insights, intuition and synchronicity are complementary to cognitive, rational approaches to ECD | The initial development also required balancing my natural disposition toward analytical, rational thinking with an intuitive, affective and imaginal mode of engagement |
| Becoming eco-conscious requires that we become more aware of our dualistic, objectifying interpretation of phenomenological experience June 5 2007 | |
| Contextual influences | Heightened eco-consciousness experience was different as a visitor to wild natural areas (Gloucester Tops NP) compared with being a ‘dweller’ within a familiar place (Manly Dam Reserve). The familiarity-newness context affected the duration of my perceptive sharpness and emotions within the landscape. A person who physically dwells in place [dweller approach], who lives or frequents the same area frequently, faces the challenge of over-familiarity with the appearances and consequent habitual surface vision. With love and focus and openness, one can develop a deep participatory sense of place and identity, tune into the subtler qualities, physical and spiritual, of their place. A visitor approach has a snapshot, naive orientation, upon which the eco-consciousness experience can impact more vitally, intensely at all levels of being. March 13 2007 | An insight that increased familiarity with a place required more focus or intentional curiosity to deepen perceptual acuity. Not always true but a new, safe place was more likely to hold my attention |
| Translating states to a level of consciousness | But how to convert states into a consistent level is the challenge given the dominance of purposive/instrumental consciousness, ego, habitual thinking and responses, global events such as climate change and negative states of | A relatively common conundrum I considered was bringing a temporary experience into a more durable level of |
mind April 28 2008

I was quite sure that I couldn’t until latter in my research. The thesis by Christopher (1999) helped me realise that perhaps I already was ‘at’ an eco-consciousness level. Nevertheless it was the need to tap into an altered state of consciousness during my normal suburban awareness that was perceived as critical.

Without regular ongoing experiences the state of eco-consciousness drifts into memory and enigma. The experience becomes a reference point, a potential rather than an on-going living experience. March 13 2007

This was an important insight for me, that while eco-consciousness may be transitory and limited to natural settings, from urban parks to ‘wilderness’ areas, by strengthening my experience of it, I could remember it during my normal waking consciousness state and tap into it as a source of calmness and groundedness when needed.

Despite my suburban boxed in context, I could intuit my sense of deep connection with ‘nature’, a valuing of both connection and ‘nature’, including the ecosystem services that sustains us all. I daydreamed being in the mountains and I tapped into the memories of peace, inner calm, love, quiet joy and care for my nonhuman friends. I can only describe it as a tangible background awareness of a more expansive, interconnected state. While secondary to my primary awareness of the road in front of me, it provided a distinctly surprising flavour to my waking consciousness.

I wanted to capture the way I attempted to manage a normal daily stressful situation, traffic jam, by tuning into the memories of wild areas I had visited. I started out by recognising the need to change my mindset to deal with my frustration and despair of being trapped in traffic, in suburban mundanity. I wanted to feel a moment of connection, so I remembered my experience of strong nature connections. Then I imagined being in the ‘wilderness’ of the mountains, then the memories of walking

I would suggest that, consistent with my experience this morn, intuition, imagination and memory re-collection are essential tools. I can intuit something meaningful beyond the immediate perceptions and interpretive confines. It is an intuition of a more expansive reality or relationship of

<p>| 99 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of eco-consciousness development</th>
<th>I have intuited that rather than a linear spectrum of consciousness it is more like a spiral – ascending, dynamic, infinite where at some point, the evolving state reaches a plateau stage in which the deeper qualities of eco-consciousness can be readily accessed at anytime and place of ones intent. I imagine that ECD is a spiral evolutionary process, every person requires specific approaches and tools to evolve at their own pace and capacities and inclinations and at some more advanced stage, the state translates to plateau and to a more expanded level that transcends the nature context March 22 2007</th>
<th>This quote reflects my reluctance to view an eco-consciousness spectrum as linear. Instead I viewed eco-consciousness as part of an evolving continuum of consciousness. As part of a process of Self-realisation, I viewed it evolving upwards into higher levels of awareness beyond the ‘nature’ aspect to a more mystical, cosmic consciousness including</th>
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<td>To be able to store and recollect memories of special places, and to be mindful of ones responses, is one of the keys to bringing eco-consciousness into ‘flavour’ one’s level of consciousness. Hence the importance of the initial and on-going eco-consciousness learning experiences to facilitate depth and richness of experience, where the experience of nature prepares the psyche within which nature as a lived place can grow. June 5 2008</td>
<td>An experience of a place in nonhuman nature can provide an imaginal and affective tool for evoking a sense of perspective, connectedness and harmony to one’s daily life, as I experienced on occasions. Mindfulness was an important approach in consolidating feelings with a particular experience which provided a memory ‘databank’ to use in normal suburban ‘doing’ situations</td>
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<td>along a heavily vegetated track to a lookout over deep, wild ravines and then to a thundering waterfall. All of this in a blink of an eye. I felt better for this imaginal exercise, I felt more in control of my responses to the traffic jam and felt more relaxed and accepting, and even a sense of connectedness with the places I visited in my mind. Perhaps I thought this was away of bringing states of eco-consciousness back to a daily, lived reality.</td>
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<td>some type. This intuitive grasping or knowing, whichever, can provide the impetus or motivation to imagine that I am dwelling in a specific natural setting or some more interconnected, holistic and meaningful reality beyond what I can perceive. It is easy from this inner visual space to recollect memories from the imagined natural setting, somatic, affective, psychological, spiritual states I have stored in my memory. This three step process can help flavour ones primary state of waking consciousness to evoke a more durable eco-consciousness. April 30 2008</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
but beyond an earth-based consciousness focus. I also recognised that people have different levels of awareness, capacities, motivations, values and skills which would need to be considered in encouraging a shift in consciousness.
3.3.2 Thematic Category: Ecological sense of self/Self and Being

Overview

i. Ego self

A minor but important theme dealt with my normal waking consciousness or sense of personality self. This was the identity I brought into natural settings from my socio-cultural contexts. I interpreted ego self to be constructed by my ‘doing’, surface, cognitive oriented consciousness with its outward, surface mental focus. It was often a type of consciousness I associated with mindlessness, an unaware, external oriented focus of attention that I recognised as being a liability to psychologically and spiritually immersing into my natural surrounds. I also associated it with a striving, achieving, self-judgmental, and narrower sense of self restricted by various beliefs and attachments including negative states of mind such as anger, fear, powerlessness, anxiety, despair and alienation from society and spiritual meaning. This sense of self was the ‘base’ identity, with its associated normal waking consciousness (see Section 5.3.3 for my construction of this term), that I felt needed to be transformed during my nature engagements. A caveat to this understanding of my ego self is that it did also include more ‘positive’ qualities such as reflection, reflexivity, critical analysis, deep feelings, ecocentric values and yearnings for deeper spiritual meaning and connectedness, all aspects of a more enduring form of eco-consciousness as I was later to discover.

ii. Ecological self

The second most common theme revolved around my sense of self and how this changed when in natural settings. My writings expressed insights and reflections about my normal waking consciousness and its transformation into an ecological sense of self and my sense of self beyond the physical focus of my ‘being’. Exploring what my ecological sense of self meant revolved around understanding how this was affected by my engagement with nonhuman nature. I wrote about the impact of my visits to Manly Dam and the Barrington Tops on my sense of self, specifically my normal suburban sense of self.
My deep appreciation of particular natural landscapes felt liberating and invigorating as I felt freed from my normal activities as well as my busy ‘doing’ awareness in suburban confines. It appeared to me that the more free of human intrusions a landscape was, the more liberating and wonder-filled I perceived it. One could say that the landscape became relieved of a human cultural context (Hannis, 1998). Through contemplative practice and/or being more present to my situation, being within each moment as far as I could, helped soften the perceived boundaries between ‘me’ and ‘other’. This expanded, ‘wave’-like sense of self I often referred to in my writings as an ecological sense of self or eco-self. This ecological sense of self occurred when I was in a heightened eco-consciousness state. When I was in this state, I was not only appreciative but felt a sense of awe and wonder\textsuperscript{16} about:

- the interdependence and diversity of my natural surrounds;
- my embodied existence within a web of life that spoke to me of unity, respect and aesthetic appeal;
- the undercurrents of infinite intelligence and purpose beyond the aesthetic appearance of things;
- that boundaries between my sense of self and ‘other’ were malleable.

My sense of self was substantially influenced by the otherness of my surrounds. The ‘otherness’ of nonhuman nature was important as not only in terms of recognising what was different from ‘me’, and in the degree of difference but how I responded to this otherness. In interacting with nonhuman ‘others’ and becoming mindful of ‘otherness’, I was not only able to appreciate the quality of ‘otherness’ but give intuitive meaning to biodiversity in a pre-verbal way. This helped expand my awareness of the diversity and uniqueness of a place but deepen my connection

\footnote{\textit{Wonder is the absence of interpretation (Evernden 1993:139).}}
to nature beings that were different from me. This was part of my experience of ‘ecological selving’, a term used by Spitzform (2000) to refer to an ecological sense of self which unfolds as one engages and learns from being-in-nature. This quality of ‘otherness’ highlighted my sense of the differentiated but unified whole, of the autonomy and interdependence of all systems.

Journal Entry

I include two entries here to highlight two broad aspects of this state of being. As discussed above, there is the cognitive recognition of the biophysical connections and dependency between myself and nonhuman nature, and the psychological experience of inclusiveness with my natural surrounds, an embodied experience of connectedness where my environment feels a part of me. In other words, these entries allude to the cognitive, affective and somatic aspects of ecological identity formation.

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To develop an ecological sense of self is a process of deeply acknowledging my shared evolutionary heritage with other beings, my common biological drives and needs, my total dependency on nature’s cycles and processes for my existence and recognising the sentient intelligence of all life, even inorganic beings.

April 10 2007

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iii. Ecological Self

I view this Self as my soul, Witness or higher self aspect that is consciously connected with some underlying spiritual basis of reality. This Self is part of the ‘ecological selving’ basis of our total identity discussed previously. My exploration of eco-consciousness and eco-identity strongly hinted at an eco-Self aspect to my self-concept. While I describe intuitions of my Self or soul, I more importantly stress the possibility of allowing an awareness of Self to come through the distractions of ‘doing’ engagements with the world.

In my writings I referred to my sense of self as having both point like and field like qualities, pertaining to ‘self’ and ‘Self’ aspects. I postulated that my biophysical, ecological and social aspects could be considered as representing a horizontal field of influence (referring to a sense of self-awareness beyond the skin, such as me-tree-community-landscape-bioregion-Earth) while my deeper aspects of my being had soul-spirit or vertical fields or dimensions (referring to the great chain of being belief of matter-mind-soul-spirit-God/Creator). I came to believe that the purpose of deepening my engagement with nonhuman nature was not just to evoke an ecological sense of self but to become aware of these vertical fields of self, the Self.

An expanded ecological sense of self has a significantly more porous and expansive boundary between the Self and the environment than an ego-self. This fluidity and flexibility facilitates a psychological dynamic that fosters a more direct and honest dialogue between the ego and the psyche, between the externally oriented cognitive self and the reflexive, intuitive, spiritual self. This open, diffuse boundary creates a more enduring relational and engaged relationship with others leading to a sense of self that feels balanced, harmonious and open to growth. One label for this is ecological self where the interconnections, inter-relationships and the well-being of nonhuman other are consciously respected, where the ‘ecology of being’ is in balance with the surrounding ecology and web of life.

December 2 2007
within and beyond the ‘little’ self or ego aspects. I viewed eco-self as mostly focused on an expansion of self outwards, which for me was an easier task than a more disciplined, contemplative practice of inner awareness raising. I experienced strong and frequent senses of being this eco-self but mostly intuited the less tangible vertical aspect of eco-Self.

Journal Entry

Upon reflection this is a rather convoluted expression of an intuition I had of my connectedness with my surrounds and higher self. At the time I wrote and read it, it made perfect sense. I include it here not as an example of clearly written, evocative narration, which it is not but to provide an example of my attempt to describe more numinous subject matter, in this instance, about how my ego, eco and Self aspects of my being might be related. My ‘ice-platform’ metaphor is apt given the increasing evidence of climate change. During contemplative exercises such as meditation I allowed my ego-self to also ‘melt’ away to allow my Self to enter my awareness. This is an important experience for heightening eco-consciousness in the sense of increased experiential awareness of my ecological selves.
**iv. Being**

The consideration of ‘being’ was a common topic throughout my journaling process, referred to in a number of ways: as my essential non-physical nature, my existence as an embodied person, being in the moment, being fully present when undertaking experiential activities in nature and when my being intersected with the being of others. I knew that being still for long enough, body and mind, was my challenge to allow a sense of what it might mean to be, that is to be in a quiet communion with deeper aspects of my self that lies hidden behind my ego-self. I must admit that there were times when this sense of communion eluded me, that my ‘doing’ mind filled the silence with chatter that distracted me from being, being...
in the moment. It can be one of the hardest things to achieve as it requires a stillness of mind, body and heart to allow that inner felt sense to arise.

**Journal Entry**

I view an experience of ‘being’ as a core aspect of eco-consciousness at the deeper end of its spectrum. When I was in a deep immersive experience dominated by a highly meditative, connected and present state of mind, I became mindful of another quality of my ‘self’, a deeper sense of ‘Being’. It was not a common experience and I still find it difficult to convey the experience of being. I can describe around it easily enough, such as feeling totally present, calm, tuned in, loving, connected to both my ecology and higher self. What is my being is on the tip of my tongue but I can not quite get there. I am not referring to a physical being such as human being but some more fundamental essence of my ‘self’ that learns, guides and evolves beyond my physical being. While a rare experience for me, it occurred sufficiently to make me realise that it was a significant experience in connecting with my higher self or eco-Self, and more important than eco-consciousness. The former state was relatively easy to evoke, ‘Being’ was only experienced in deeper altered states of eco-consciousness as well as during meditative states.
Eco-consciousness development requires at a minimum a cognitive, affective and ethical understanding of the natural environment, our impacts, our responsibilities towards sustaining it and having a sense of place. As I deepen my awareness, not only does understanding increase but my intuitive recognition of the biophysical, psychological and spiritual connections with Earth and its life. As I have deepened this sense of connection and reflected upon the essence of eco-consciousness, it has become more apparent that it is not just about transforming/expanding/altering consciousness – states or levels, but about understanding what it is to Be. I guess it’s about identity which I’ve alluded to previously but perhaps the ontology of Being is deeper or a more primary facet of self. What is it to ‘be’ in space and time in a body within a specific historical and sociocultural time? It seems that focusing perception, cognition and transpersonal activities is, while necessary, not touching on what it is to ‘be’, or at least to understand what is my Being. I feel I am still embedded in an unconscious state of mind in the doing of all this. And yet I need to facilitate a profound inner stillness, to cultivate a contemplative mindfulness to allow my being to become conscious. I feel it would be a profound, insightful experience to ‘taste’ my Being. And thus far my eco-consciousness exploration hasn’t explicitly addressed Being. As eco-consciousness deepens, so do I make more conscious my hidden Self, my inner quality of Being. To increase the experience of interconnectivity and interdependence deepens subjective understanding. Along with this comes a desire to understand Being. I know I need to make a substantial effort to complement the dominant experiential, conceptual approaches with an inner engagement with Being. Being-in-the-world as consciously experienced, as made conscious through immersion and participation with the ‘other’.

May 3 2007

Summarising thematic table

Table 5 provides the reader with a variety of themes related to the four main subcategories of ego-self, eco-self, eco-Self and Being. I aligned the subcategories in order of how I recognised my various levels of Being, a process I referred to as ‘ecological selving’, that integrates my ego or personality subjective nature, with the eco-self and eco-Self aspects, the latter representing my essential nature or ‘Being’. This table provides an indicative description of the entries that struggled to convey the numinous, transpersonal progression of altered states of consciousness and sense of self.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Indicative quotes</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ego-self</strong></td>
<td>Development of an ‘I’ perspective</td>
<td>I see ego-consciousness as my necessary but restricted smaller self heavily moulded by social, cultural and historical forces and processes. As one evolves through various developmental stages, we develop an identity which we hold to be the ‘I’ even while the peripheral aspects such as values, beliefs, external awareness and attitudes may change and evolve. April 10 2007</td>
<td>I am acknowledging the ego-self as part of some greater identity structure. I raise my uncertainty about how do I maintain a sense of self if everything about me changes.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consciousness as tool</td>
<td>Even though I may at times believe that I am my consciousness, I do recognise that my consciousness is just a tool, a lens that the ‘smaller’ ego self uses to interact with the world, physical or imaginal. From this perspective, identity is not a synonym for consciousness and what I am is much greater and mysterious than the lens of consciousness I wear in my life. July 13 2007</td>
<td>I argue that I am more than my current consciousness, that it is my ego-self that uses consciousness like a tool to create and explore meanings of perceived reality. Similarly eco-consciousness is just a tool for bringing about understandings about human-nature relations, self-nonhuman nature and self-Self awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need for strong, balanced sense of self</td>
<td>‘You have to be someone before you can be no-one’ (Wilber, 1998) appeals to me because our sense of self is important in differentiating ourselves from our surrounds, to have identity develops as we experience and learn from our interactions with human and nonhuman others. In a westernised, materialistic, consumeristic society, I think our individuation, the evolution of one’s identity can be hindered to a very narrow range of traits and characteristics. Yes a strong sense of self helps for external achievement. This is characterised by rigid, narrowly construed boundaries of identity, an over-dependence on our public role and image, often a utilitarian view of relationships, a tendency to desire domination over others and the collection of physical and psychological props to bolster the egoic identity. This form of identity as well as its opposite (an ill-defined, formed or experienced sense of self) is one of the root causes [I believe] of individual and collective suffering, one of the psychological driving causes of social and ecological degradation. April 23 2007</td>
<td>Reflects my view for my need to balance point like and wave like aspects of self, that is, to maintain a robust, resilient, empathic and fluid ego while being able to let go of narrow ego based boundaries that tend to separate and alienate. It is my reflection on my desire for oneness experience – oneness is an important experience for perceiving a greater reality, part of the eco-consciousness spectrum of experiences but its preferable for there to be a strong ego (not egotistical) foundation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Thematic insights into my ecological sense of self
| Sense of self and consciousness | My ego-self is not my consciousness, which is not my mind, which is not my brain, which is not my Self. The self is not one’s consciousness, itself a stream of fluctuating moments of perceptual and cognitive experiences. July 18 2007 | A simplistic train of logical assertions differentiating self from Self, consciousness from self. Linking perception and cognition with consciousness emphasises the importance of improving perceptual acuity and cognitive capacity |
| Eco-self | Going beyond ego-self | I have been immersed in a culture of materialistic, consumeristic approaches to living and identity. Every time I watch TV or go out into the shops and streets I am or at least my senses are overwhelmed by subtle and not so subtle cues and I respond or react to these. And this orients my sense of self to this context through perceptual responses. In contrast, I have just experienced three days in the natural beauty of the Barrington Tops. I have interacted with the trees, shrubs, wildlife, rivers, rocks and waterfalls. During this time I felt a completely different way of being. I felt that in closely engaging with my natural world that I deepened in being human in contrast to being a human doing – a human immersed within a social context responding to urban, social cues. In nature I experienced intimacy, a loving re-engagement with Nature and Self. The point I’m making is that my identity is largely moulded within the social matrix and that to facilitate an eco-self, I need to regularly engage with the natural environment, loosen my self concepts that restrict me to a limited experience of self, allow humility and love to flow within and to allow a spiritual sense of self to evolve. September 21 2006 | An understanding I arrived at whenever I returned from the Barringtons and other natural areas – that it is difficult to maintain a grounded, harmonious sense of self when returning to suburban routines. That much of my sense of self is affected by my social reality is itself an important reason to experience ‘being’ in nonhuman nature as a way of balancing often contradictory influences |
| Engaging nonhuman nature must honour life’s interdependent diversity, difference, unity, self authenticity. This process leads to a more physically and intuitive present individual whose awareness of self extends beyond the point of self to the fields of selves within a beautifully differentiated unity that is nature. June 14 2007 | Discussed elsewhere, I felt that the metaphor ‘field’ was a useful way to convey an expansion of my self beyond the narrow consciousness focus of my day to day ego awareness. That there was more to me than my point like self |
| To develop an eco-identity is a process of recognising and deeply acknowledging ones shared evolutionary heritage with other beings, of one’s common biological drives and needs with other life forms, one’s total dependency for one’s existence on the biodiversity, ecological, geological, atmospheric cycles and processes that | This insight is consistent with Roszak’s call to make one’s ecological unconscious conscious. I experienced an ecological sense of self as I cognitively and affectively connected with my |
create and sustain life on Earth.  April 10 2007

| What it means to have an ecological sense of self | Developing an ecological self means broadening one’s sense of self or identification with nonhuman beings. This process allows the individual to balance the narrow ego, socio-cultural and historical constructions of self to one that allocates importance of nonhuman beings in informing a sense of self. This process is conceptually based on the ‘field of self’ perspective [a notion that we are more field than particle like]. Actually, so is the internally oriented process of being with oneself. I suspect that developing an eco-self does not necessarily require an intimate relationship with one’s Self. This is because the focus is primarily external, outward, the ‘other’, despite the psychological, spiritual, valuational, integrative aspects of it. February 21 2007 | A simplistic proposal of what the term ‘eco-self’ means to me. Using ‘field of self’ notion was created to emphasise the possibility of a non-local quantum aspect to our total being (and Being), when we tap into this extended self through altering consciousness. Because this theme centres around the self, rather than Self, I made it clear that the focus was on external subjects of perceptual engagement, despite there being obvious inner development and Self-realisation outcomes of this focus and experience. |

| Otherness | Sitting on a sandstone rock overlooking a wintery Dam saturated by sun and cold winds, I observe the landscape with its plants, rocks and earth around me. They are all very familiar to me, they are ontologically, structurally, consciously different from me, they are the ‘other’. But is this view of ‘other’ useful when everything beyond the phenomenal consciousness is an ‘other’, including people, my left foot, my body. Other to what? Other to the subjectively feeling awareness of one’s self. What that ‘self’ is, is an issue and challenge for those wanting to go beyond the narrow confines of ego-self, or ego-con, one that I will discuss elsewhere. The point I make is that we choose who or what, depending on one’s proclivities towards objectification and detachment, is the ‘other’ and the quality and conceptual qualities one perceives of this others being. June 14 2007 | This meandering entry is indicative of my evolving thinking on ‘otherness’ and what that meant to me. Here I connected the notion of ‘other’ with sense of self, of questioning where my ‘self’ began and ended and where ‘other’ began. I questioned whether there was such a concrete or exact line of separation or boundary between myself and others around me. This ties in with the notion of eco-self. |

| Otherness | I see all aspects of nature as ‘other’, as differentiated expressions of nature-as-one. The eucalypt tree nearby is an ‘other’, very different although constitutionally organically similar to me. I appreciate and relate to its ‘otherness’, its intrinsic worth. I enjoy the sensorial distinctions of its physical being while intuitively and cognitively understanding that our fields of selves intertwine at some energetic, subconscious level. June 14 2007 | This entry indicates my sentiment that I can hold the view of everything outside of me being ‘other’ while understanding that we are all expressions of a unified ‘nature’ – diversity within unity. |

<p>| Otherness | The ‘other’ is also within us. The ‘other’ are those aspects of our psychological, | A rather clumsy expression but an important |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eco-Self</th>
<th>Experience of eco-Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall I felt at peace and connected. Then I felt my ego self soften and fade within a ‘higher’ self, still a ‘me’ but a much more expansive, wiser, collective self. Metaphorically like a bubble floating and being taken in within a much larger bubble. It felt reassuring, calm, nurturing, not alarming at ‘losing’ my identity. Indeed it felt like the first step of integration beyond dual being, a process of integration where the ‘I-them’ become one entity, two perspectives within the one identity within that timeless, infinite dimension beyond physicality. August 18 2006</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My physical personally oriented being is part of a much deeper, transpersonal field of self that has horizontal (space-time dimensions) and vertical (soul-spirit-God) states of being and expressions. June 14 2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During this meditation, I had an insight I found reassuring. From a place of inner stillness and detachment, I looked back upon myself from the perspective of a parent. I intuitively saw myself as a small ego self embedded within a much more expansive deeply conscious Self. A Self that is part of me yet not fully acknowledged and integrated with on a conscious basis. I felt its warm, non-judgemental, loving wise embrace. It helped put my ego self personality and life issues into perspective, one where I could evolve and grow into but not completely lose a sense of individual expression. I felt that alternate states of consciousness, especially dreams hinted at this more expansive Self. And relating this to my eco-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am attempting to describe an experience of oneness, a contemplative experience of the meeting between my outward oriented ego-self and my inner transpersonal oriented Self (or witness or Soul). This is the deeper stage or spectrum of eco-consciousness, verging on a more cosmic consciousness where, rarely, I felt a oneness experience, a connection with a numinous kosmos.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

biographical, emotional selves that we fight, struggle with, reject, project, fear and/or are addicted to, no matter how much pain and discomfort it may cause. For example, the ‘other’ might be death in its various forms, fear of physical death, fear of the void, death of a loved one, the death of an intimate relationship. In attaching to the surface expression of death, in my case, fear of non-existence, does one restrict ones capacity for the freedom of experiencing the lived world in its immediacy, in a way that honours life and one’s self. Death becomes the ‘other’ within. June 23 2007

insight in terms of emotions, feelings, thoughts we may hold, habitually or occasionally, that we may hold away from our self concept as the other. I am inferring to having an attachment to a ‘negative’ state of mind and heart that has a restrictive impact on our sense of self, and thereby a barrier to sustaining an ecological sense of self in its degrees of experience.

This experience came to me meditating under a tree at Manly Dam one morning. I felt wrapped up in the tree’s presence and my skin boundary became much less discernible and I felt my core being or Self arise within. I felt me but I also felt a kind of oneness or merging with the tree behind me. Difficult to explain.

Another typical rumination of who I might be, from my physical, ecological ‘field of self’ to an ascending/descending ‘field of self’. I have connections in horizontal and vertical fields of my Being
consciousness journey, I realised that not only was I really just touching upon this state but that it had more to do with consciously encountering my Self than just a deep relating to nature. I felt that this journey was as much about bringing into consciousness this expansive self as it was connecting with nature. A deepening of consciousness could lead to an even more expansive consciousness on Earth. July 23 2006
3.3.3 Thematic Category: Negative States of Mind

Overview

What I refer to as negative feelings or states includes anger, pessimism, despair, futility, sadness, powerlessness and fear. They were in response most often to bad news stories about environmental degradation, especially the growing evidence of climate change and potential future impacts. I labelled my feelings as ‘negative’ because they felt restrictive, alienating and morbid. They undermined my hope and optimism for the future. Despite this, I believe that they are natural responses to perceptions of risk, hazard and threats that challenge my desire for certainty, future well-being and continuity of life and lifestyle. They form the third thematic category not only because of their discussion in my journals but due to their general impact on my psychological state and my desire to experience heightened eco-consciousness.

In reflecting back on why I did not write as much as I could have on my negative feelings about environmental degradation, I observe that the writing would occur a day or more after the media stories that triggered the anger or pessimism. Within this period, and upon doing most of my writing in quiet bushland settings, I lost the intensity of the initial response. My feelings were mediated by the restorative, grounding effects of my natural surrounds. I therefore tended to write with reason rather than emotion, attempting to reconcile my feelings or justify them rather than attempting to capture the actual experience of anger, despair and powerlessness, for example. Upon reflection I wish I had done the latter. While my negative states are one of the drivers for experiencing and understanding eco-consciousness, they are not directly relevant to the primary research question of understanding my experience of eco-consciousness. While I am disappointed not to have written with more passion or emotion, I expressed enough of my negativity to indicate the subtext of my heuristic reflections.
As I proceeded through my research, I found that my negative feelings became less frequent and of less intensity and when they did occur, I did not dwell for long on them. I felt that my regular nature engagements helped, that my structured nature engagement exercises were restorative and minimised the impact of bad news and that the delay in journal writing reduced my sense of negativity regarding human impacts on the biosphere. After a while, I became aware of my coping mechanism towards bad news: cynical expectation, anger, bemusement, sense of futility, pessimism, sadness, despair, despondency and finally letting go of the emotion and further consideration about either the issue or the implications. Mostly this cycle would flow quickly and I would not dwell upon alarming news.

**Pessimism**

I often experienced pessimism about the global ecological crisis. I experienced it as a sinking or empty feeling in my heart when observing or reflecting upon environmental issues. Pessimism was closely associated with my sense of sadness about my personal and social contexts. Socially, this sadness reflected my concerns about the negative consequences of industrial modernity and that as a result, the future was going to be worse and threatening to me, my family and humanity. I felt overwhelmed by the enormity of the global environmental situation. My conscious initial response of pessimism would often translate into a kind of emotional detachment or numbness, what I refer to as ‘eco-autism’. I felt that this coping response could be viewed as an unconscious mechanism for minimising emotional impacts and protecting myself.

Pessimism was not a significant barrier for experiencing and deepening my own eco-consciousness as it would dissipate when I fully engaged with natural settings. It was, however, a mental and emotional ‘weight’ that I regularly felt, independent of my biophysical context and along with powerlessness, the subtext for my overall level of eco-consciousness, consistent with other environmentalists (Christopher, 1999).
Journal Entry

My pessimism about the eco-crisis and my future was upon reflection associated with pessimism about collective transformation of consciousness and behaviour. I interpreted the global ecological crisis as an indicator for the need of fundamental consciousness shifts at the individual and collective level but could not see signs that it would happen anytime soon.

...... This entire built scene also symbolises the dominant consciousness of modernity, a consciousness of ego, instrumentality, rationality and anthropocentric, economic rationalist norms and values. It is apparent that the axiom, of sorts, is true: consciousness is the creator, the moulder of reality, the world we bring into existence and sustain. I reflected on the challenges of shifting collective consciousness, especially towards an eco-consciousness that I have experienced. With the solid, vertical shafts of high-rise buildings in front of me, the type of consciousness they symbolise, I felt totally overwhelmed, pessimistic about a shift anytime soon. Just like I was standing on the fringe of this necropolis, in a tiny oasis of organic, living green, I have been living and researching eco-consciousness from the consciousness fringes of society. With so much of humanity cocooned in suburban and utilitarian transient spaces, consumed by busy-ness, stress, surface engagements and various types and levels of addictions, I wouldn’t know how to reach out to them with such a profound yet contradictory agenda. There is no valuing or broad recognition for this level of change, we are stuck at the technological management response to environmental/social issues. We focus on shifts in cognitive awareness, we ignore our collective pathological states of consciousness. It is this consciousness that is the basis for our mess yet our increasing environmental awareness has not borne fruits. Standing observing the state monuments of industrial modernity, I feel that familiar companion of dark pessimism drift across my awareness, his grasp holding my anxiety and powerlessness strongly. So much trivial change, so little transformation!

May 12 2008
Anger

I felt anger and its variants, bemusement, cynicism and disdain towards political, corporate and bureaucratic decision-makers who abused, in my view, their positions of power and influence to undermine social and ecological capital. I felt angry at the kind of society I was living within, the level of materialism, consumerism and apathy about environmental impacts and the lack of thinking deeply about life and the direction of society. Sometimes I was angry at my self for being in my personal circumstances that prevented me from participating more fully in promoting sustainability. My anger was generally very short lived, especially when I visited natural areas. I did not feel I needed to be angry. I came to view anger as a natural response to perceived unjust and unsustainable attitudes and actions that led to increasing social inequity, inter-generational burden and ecological destruction.

Journal Entry

This journal entry displays one of my typical expressions of anger and despair, this time at the surge in oil prices and the increased rate of de-forestation in the Amazon. I tend to get more angry with those whom I think should be regulating and protecting the public and public lands than the actual perpetrators. Here I unleash my anger at both. I tended to express more concern about global issues rather than local issues, perhaps believing things were worse overseas or perhaps local issues seemed less consequential and I could do something about them.
I felt despair this morning, a sense of dread about the future and a profound lack of hope for a positive future. This is nothing new, it is my constant companion. I become more conscious when I read news articles about climate change, environmental degradation, social inequity and so forth. This morning there were two stories that caught my attention. One was about the continuing surge of oil prices, up $20 a barrel to $134, triple what it was a year of so ago. Mostly due to increasing consumptions, especially in Asia but also investment speculators pricing it up. I felt anger towards these anonymous, greedy idiots as well as various government regulators for not restraining them, another example of how the parasitic few make huge wealth at the expense of the majority and the nonhuman world. I feel overwhelmed and saddened on many occasions by this immature, self-destructive humanity. Another story was about the increasing deforestation in the Amazon, 7,000km² in 5 months this year, the battle between pro-conservation and pro-development Brazilian politicians appears one-sided. Greed wins again! It’s a crime against humanity and nonhuman life. This despair makes me heavy of mind, body and heart. So my own personal issues, uncertainties and negativity are supplemented by these global issues. Given the increased consumerism, feeble, corrupted governance and an ‘unconscious civilisation’(as John Ralston Saul calls it), I don’t feel optimistic for eco-consciousness taking off. More cynicism by me and I know it is not helpful.

May 22 2008

Despair
I referred to despair quite often throughout my journal writing. I carried this heavy feeling around with me more often than not. I was so familiar with it that I took it for granted and did not express it as much as I could have. Despair represented a forlorn despondency about some seemingly insurmountable situation. I expressed despair about a number of inter-related issues: at the predicted severe effects of climate change, the lack of wise and visionary political leaders, the lack of fundamental change in consciousness and behaviour and despair for the current and future generations affected by the consequences of modernity.
Journal Entry

I often felt despair at the immense task at hand; to shift not just environmental awareness but ecological consciousness in order to counter the global ecological crisis. I do not see any evidence of this fundamental change and knowing the likely consequences, feel despair at the chaos to come.

February 9 2007

I see my son express despair about the drought and the potential of no drinking water; I see his anger at climate change and the consequences for him. He and millions of other children are inheriting a sick, depleted world where the human assault has mastised through the globe. There are less viable places to flee. Like everyone else, I am part of the problem and the solution, I can only do what I can do in my life and with my resources and time to minimise my impacts and prepare for these accelerating changes. There is systemic breakdown everywhere one looks, socially, politically, ecologically. I despair that the kind of consciousness shift needed will come too late for many lives and ecosystems. Unless some significant event happens to shift the majority’s attitudes, behaviours and consciousness, I cannot see any alternative to the continuing crisis.

June 7 2007

I distract myself so I can forget the despair that lurks beneath the surface of my consciousness. This despair of existential uncertainty rises above the surface in quieter, melancholic times. For me it raises the question of whether a deep eco-consciousness can help address this despair. I have ‘peak’ experiences within natural settings and yet I return to the depths of existential despair.

Summarising thematic table

Table 6 is commensurately smaller than previous tables due to the substantially less journal entries concerning negative states. I think the most important insight
within this table is the confirmation that feeling negativity prevented the development of heightened eco-consciousness. This is why I label the subcategory, eco-consciousness impacts, as I wanted to emphasise the actual or potential impacts of holding various negative states of mind on my experience of eco-consciousness. When overwhelmed by negative emotions such as anger, despair and anxiety, I did not have the focus to deepen my engagement with natural settings. If the engagement melted my negative feelings and emotions away, then I could enter into a caring, loving state and get beyond the normal consciousness I brought in with me. I was thankful that negativity did not often prevent me experiencing heightened eco-consciousness.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Indicative quotes</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Eco-consciousness impacts | Impacts on my consciousness          | If I get overwhelmed by a negative response to an environmental issue, then the accompanying pressure or burden on my heart, mind and self acts as a brake or weight on eco-consciousness development. July 29 2007  
If my consciousness is gripped, constricted by my negative states such as despair, sadness and anger, then I feel that I construct a barrier to experiencing a state of ecological consciousness. May 25 2008 | It is one thing being emotionally affected by bad news, it is another to let it dominate awareness to the exclusion of any positive feelings. I could not experience a state of eco-consciousness when overwhelmed by negativity. My sense of self felt constricted, point-like, disconnected when overwhelmed. The key here was to remove myself from the stimulus (media coverage of bad news), distract myself briefly (exercise, bushwalk, sensorial engagement), meditate and undertake one of the sensorial exercises |
| Self-empowerment | Deepening or expanding my awareness of [and feelings about] the eco-crisis and global pain and diminishment of human and nonhuman beings … raises the danger of becoming either hyper-sensitised or desensitised to the eco-crisis. Upon reflection and personal experience …. it is a strong, centred and expanded sense of being that is much more likely to sustain an empowered resilience to over- or under-reaction. The more that I can let go of attachments, especially of outcomes outside of my control and habitual responses, the greater the chances of feeling self-empowered August 8 2007 | I have commented upon attachment and suffering, here I recognise the link between attachment and self empowerment. My insight here is that I consider acknowledging and acting from one’s ‘core’ self or being as important for responding to events beyond my control. Being centred helps in my experience to not be hyper- or de-sensitised to threats, pain and risks associated with perceptions of eco-crisis. |
| Mindfulness     | With greater awareness and practice I can choose not to react with negativity but respond with calmness, being non-judgmental and mindfulness. I cannot keep reacting with anger, frustration, futility, derision and not expect this negativity to not affect me. In choosing how to respond, I can empower myself and develop a deeper sense of grace and non-judgmental acceptance, | I am encouraging myself to maintain and practice a mindfulness about my responses to global environmental issues. I am recognising that empowering myself will arise as I become more aware of my responses, mindfully choosing to |
| Doubts about therapeutic value of eco-consciousness | Perhaps in deepening my sensitivity and connection and empathy to nature, I become more vulnerable to experiencing negativity. It brings into question the consequences and supposed benefits of developing an eco-consciousness. In a world that has gone awry and pathological, I could quite easily be cynical or negative about my idealistic research. Do I dare admit cynicism? Well I do. I feel despair, sadness, anger, futility and baring witness to the irresponsibility and mess just reinforces this, and my eco-consciousness activities and reflections so far have not helped. Do I turn away from eco-consciousness? July 2 2007 | There were several time when I held contradictory views about the benefits of more closely connecting with nonhuman nature. There were times I felt overwhelmed by the news of environmental destruction and human misery from poorer nations and deeply connecting with nature didn’t help or felt an escapist exercise. I did not turn away from the process when I felt a bit cynical but it did make me realise that feeling emotional pain such as despair, deep sadness is natural in these situations and that eco-consciousness development had its place but certainly wasn’t a panacea to totally alleviating negative feelings |
| Physical activity | Being physical helps me to get out of the quicksand of overwhelming negative emotions and allows the possibility to experience healing, connection and being, essential if an eco-consciousness experience is to evolve. September 21 2006 | In terms of managing negativity, exercise was an important means of directing my attention elsewhere and feeling better. There are psychological and physiological reasons for this. In the context of my nature sensorial exercises, a bushwalk or stretching prior to the exercise would calm and ground me before I began. I believe physical exertion is an important response to managing negative inner states |
3.3.4 Thematic Category: Direct Nonhuman Contact

Overview

As heightened states of eco-consciousness arose within natural settings, so did most of my insights into eco-consciousness arise when observing and/or interacting with nonhuman beings such as trees, rocks, rivers, mountains and birds. Many of my journal entries about these encounters contained emotional, psychological and spiritual references. It was my experience of intimacy and nurturing with nonhuman beings that enriched me, that brought my awareness to bear upon the relationship and valuation of the nonhuman.

This category relates to direct and specific encounters with nonhuman beings and to a lesser degree the natural landscapes with which I was immersed. I often reflected on my restricted sense of self and how this would expand or feel more porous the longer or more profound the specific engagement was. Most of my entries speak to expanding my sense of self beyond my smaller ego-self, of the diversity within unity. When I connected with nonhuman beings I would often question how they experienced their world. This is consistent with my belief in panpsychism, which in essence states that there is a spectrum of consciousness within nature, from the simplest thing such as quarks, electrons through to humans and beyond to unknown realities and levels.

I was often attracted to trees, sensorially and physically, and this featured numerous times in my journals. By standing alongside or hugging a tree, I could sense the individual qualities of that tree and feel a tangible sense of connection to it. I often felt a sense of communion with them, a deep sense of appreciation and comfort for their towering presence. Being enclosed by tall trees helped to humble me, to feel nurturing and nurtured, to feel connected and grounded within restorative settings. Consistent with my nature engagement exercises, I felt these responses were important qualities or outcomes of heightened eco-consciousness. I summarise my responses to various encounters with nonhuman other in Table 7.
These emotions and feelings represent my intuitive understanding of a heightened experiences eco-consciousness.

Table 7 - Examples of responses to direct nonhuman engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encounters</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observing honeyeaters chasing each other in shrubby understorey</td>
<td>Elation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersing in natural settings</td>
<td>Sense of peace, nurturing and love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking mindful meditation in Barrington Tops</td>
<td>Sense of being grounded and soothed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Powerful Owl encounter at Manly Dam</td>
<td>Humility, joy and privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stillness of mountain tall forest</td>
<td>Calmness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative, tranquil space of bush</td>
<td>Appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing the intricacy of a spiderweb</td>
<td>Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersing in natural settings</td>
<td>Inner stillness, a calmness of mind and heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree hug</td>
<td>Nurtured and accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester Tops waterfall</td>
<td>Meditative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing spider webs hanging over the Gloucester River</td>
<td>Recognition and awe of natures intelligence and creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being enclosed by steep forested valley in Barrington Tops</td>
<td>Relief to enter wild areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing snakes in the undergrowth</td>
<td>Wariness and trepidation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersing myself along and within the Gloucester River</td>
<td>Soothed and revitalised, sensual feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still cool mountain air and views</td>
<td>Calming my fears, inner chatting and thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush meditation - imagining my skin boundaries expand to include the environment around</td>
<td>Expanded sense of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester Tops waterfall</td>
<td>Reverence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrington wilderness and potential encounter with snakes and wild dogs</td>
<td>Wariness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature immersion</td>
<td>Relaxation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I sifted through my journal entries looking for key descriptors, which I considered useful for facilitating heightened eco-conscious. Most of the descriptors in Table 8...
relate to facilitating states of mind, heart and body conducive to a mindful, intimate and relational engagement with ‘other’.

Table 8 - Engaging nonhuman other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locate private, safe natural setting, especially for meditation</td>
<td>Creates holding environment to establish a sense of place and situated basis for engaging nonhuman beings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand silently</td>
<td>Minimises disturbance to surrounds and awareness of inner and outer environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder (for example, at beauty, intricate designs, inherent intelligence,</td>
<td>To open up the possibilities of a richer, profound, perhaps mystical engagement with ‘other’ and to reduce the dominance of rational, aesthetic engagements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complex webs of biodiversity, adaptation)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathically observe</td>
<td>To allow things to become known in their own natural way and time, trust in ‘other’, to see without judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>Stills the busy mind and heart allowing for imaginal and spiritual possibilities to emerge during nature immersion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love or caring of nonhuman other</td>
<td>Part of eco-bonding, allowing for sense of communion, at-one-moment, stronger imaginal dialogue with ‘other’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginal dialogue with nonhuman beings</td>
<td>Develops an intersubjective engagement with nonhuman others, increases meaning of engaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen/ observe the ‘stories’ or self-expressions of nonhuman beings</td>
<td>Deepens connection, dissipates the rigid, social boundaries of self Acknowledges individual uniqueness and appreciation of aesthetic form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage curiosity</td>
<td>Provides self motivation to explore and openness to relational possibilities as well as wonder, awe, respect and love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft, safe exploring touching of natural objects e.g. trees, rocks</td>
<td>Grounded, intimate revelation, sensual experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My interactions with owls and Tawny Frogmouths, along with ‘wilderness’ areas, represented my most meaningful encounter with nonhuman nature. I had numerous spontaneous encounters with ‘night birds’ in Manly Dam Reserve and in the Barrington Tops. Most of these encounters were with resident Tawny Frogmouths in my well-frequented parts of the Reserve. I enjoyed observing them
at close range and often felt revitalised during and after these encounters. They not only represented the ‘wildness’ of nature but symbolised a number of aspects relevant to my exploration such as wisdom, vision, soul, the unconscious and becoming more aware of my outer and inner worlds. They were, for me, a reminder of my need for patience and visual or sensorial acuity in my heuristic exploration. The night birds represented, and reminded me of, my need to explore my inner and outer worlds. This ties in with my view of two broad levels of eco-consciousness, the outer eco-self initial levels of connecting with the nonhuman world and the inner eco-Self transpersonal level of connecting not only with the underlying spiritual basis for life but with the soul/ Witness/ higher self aspects of self. The Tawny’s and owls symbolised insight and transformation, important outcomes of my heuristic inquiry.

The following reflection occurred along the Gloucester River in 2006 during one of my many camping trips to the mountainous Gloucester Tops National Park. A place of sensorial delight with the deep rumbling, splashing, flowing Gloucester River, the surrounding beech forest ‘curtain’ hangs over the river with mountain ridges in the background. Beyond the river sounds were the calls of tree canopy birds along with the mimicking songs of Lyre-birds from the understorey. This entry demonstrates my meaning making through metaphor and symbology, when reflecting within and upon natural settings and reflects my search for connection to a greater power or process than my own fleeting life, in expressing a sense of self in connection with the world within and around me. As a person who has been consumed by existential doubts and fears for my adult life, to find a stable footing or understanding within nature, of the possibility of a much more expansive self and an on-going continuity beyond physical existence is important. This meaning making is, upon reflection, a key ingredient in my expansion of consciousness and sense of self. I believe that having a personal perspective on the continuity of
life after physical demise is for my sense of meaning, essential. Finding metaphors and symbols in the nonhuman world, helped me intuit a spiritual process and reality that my rationalising mind could not justify.

I observed the many individual rapids as metaphors for individual beings. I saw that each rapid was an emergent formation that was constantly changing with the inflow and outflow of surging water yet retained a remarkably consistent form or pattern. The rapid emerges from the rocks around it with the energy of the water maintaining its integrity. Its constancy is the outcome of all these factors, it would disappear otherwise. The rapid bounces and flows in frothing ways over the fast running water flowing and slipping into it. And so I recognise it as a metaphor for life and for our individual life. Our physical bodies are emergent structures, given shape by genetic design and other processes, and sustained by the ecological, social and cultural structures and processes around us and the flow of nutrients, water, resources and energy through us. Yes we are like rapids bouncing above the boulders and waters beneath, dependent for our existence, physical and social, on the constancy and interplay of the dynamic flows streaming through us.

And so when the river conditions change or the support structures shift, the rapid may wither and disappear. It will melt back into the river, not that it was ever separate from it, just a unique creative expression or manifestation. The rapid disappears when the emergent processes shift sufficiently to remove the creative processes that created the rapid. And so rapids come and go, as our individual lives do, we dissolve into the earth, matter and energy, and devolve from our temporary individualised structure. But just as consciousness itself is a tool, so does it use the matter/energy as tools to create emergent physical structure. The river rapid is therefore a metaphor for our physical bodies or communities. Our consciousness seeks to expand, to learn, evolve, seek unity through individuality, to recognise the interdependence and interpenetration of life, the seen and unseen. Our consciousness emerges from the river of life and merges back into the flow, rather than drowning into nothingness. It emerges into a physical existence, we grow and learn and then when the supportive emergent properties that underlie our physical existence whither and shift, we merge back into the underlying river.

22 March 2006
Summarising thematic table

Table 9 indicates how encountering nonhuman other such as owls, trees, ‘wilderness’ landscapes, wild rivers and spiders could evoke an experience(s) consistent with heightened eco-consciousness or catalyse reflections about the nature being, or my response to it, and what it meant for me and the phenomenon I was exploring. The entries in this table suggest that the Barrington Tops, trees and nightbirds were the most evocative in terms of eliciting a shift in consciousness and deep reflections on eco-consciousness and my sense of self.
### Table 9 - Thematic insights into my direct nonhuman contact experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Indicative quotes</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>Tawny Frogmouth</td>
<td>My strong first impression of them [pair of Tawny Frogmouth’s] was one of blending stillness, a quiet dignified repose, a fluffy indistinct form of feathery bundles. They not only represent patience, stillness and blending but a clear, strong and broad vision of their environment. Vision, dwelling and blending represent the basis and essence for me for these birds, and indeed for what eco-consciousness entails. April 9 2007&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Just sitting there still as always, very still and observant. I was happy to see it [Tawny Frogmouth] again. So I took a couple of photos and it again swooped me in the semi darkness. I felt a tinge of fear, just enough to get my heart racing a bit and feeling a bit vulnerable and a bit guilty for provoking it into this action. February 18 2007&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;I really appreciated its stillness and apparent powers of observation at night. I got quite close to it at this time, so I was not surprised it was disturbed by my flashing camera. It was rewarding to have a physical interaction with it although of the type I would not recommend.</td>
<td>An example of how a walk in a natural setting, this time Manly Dam Reserve, could provoke an insight into eco-consciousness. I regularly encountered Tawny Frogmouths in the first two years of my research. They symbolised qualities of eco-consciousness that I considered important for its development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Powerful Owl</td>
<td>I shone the torch up to a tall eucalypt with a limb over the road and there it feel upon a Powerful Owl. I was very pleased and appreciative. I think it was a juvenile with its flecked white belly. It looked down at me with its piercing brown wide eyes and hooked beak. I felt that surge of connection and humility and joy at observing it. I felt privileged. ……Then as I was walking alone to the entrance, I spotted a Southern Boobook Owl near the entrance above the road. Beautiful light brown feathers and single dipping eyebrow above piercing greenish eyes. Loved it, first time I've seen one of them. So two owls in close time. July 2 2006&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;One of my more powerful encounters with a nightbird. This owl, an endangered species, was eating a ring-tailed possum when I came across it. I felt very fortunate to witness this which then made me feel humble and deeply appreciative, further qualities or meaning about eco-consciousness (even though I wasn’t in a heightened state). Humility and appreciation can be outcomes or ways to help facilitate eco-consciousness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>The trees are tall and reaching for the sky. I stopped, I realised that they were individual trees with their own emergent structures reflecting their own unique sentence and energies. And once where I would see just trees, beautiful or plain, now I see them afresh. I appreciated their individuality, self-expression and growth. Normally a backdrop, I sensed a new reverence and appreciation for their unfathomable consciousness. This intuition of sentence made my surrounds more alive, intimate, connected 22 March 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why do I feel drawn to the trees? I sense that it is their size, towering above me, their relatively immense longevity, their strong erect trunk. They connect earth and sky, pumping water and oxygen into the atmosphere and provide homes to all sorts of beings. A different powerful energy from that of the shrubs. I can hug the trees. It is all of these things that give their perceptual difference and then perhaps it is more than these. May 18 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflections on my attraction to trees. It alludes not so much to my rationalising mind but the importance of touch, especially embracing, for a full bodied sense of connection.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Now I am beneath this healing tree with expansive views over the wild, steep, forested valleys, the forested ridges and blue skies streaked with high cirrus clouds. The wind is whispering in the trees and forest birds call around me. I feel a great sense of love and connection, I feel grounded and soothed. I sense that I feel a deep sense of camaraderie with this tree and that life at all levels is diversity within unity, that the façade of separation masks the unitary nature of Nature. December 4 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>I found solace and connectedness when sitting or standing beneath trees. This tree was high in the Barringtons, at a lookout on a trail. It was old, scarred and solidly rooted on a sandstone outcrop. There was much life on and around it, a community of dependent beings. I observed much biodiversity within and around this one tree thus reminding me of the diversity within unity perspective of ‘nature’. Looking beyond the ‘façade’ of separation was an important process of eco-consciousness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Solitude</td>
<td>This is a typical response to going for a bushwalk. I am always wary of encountering a snake and I usually tread carefully. When alone in wilder areas, I am mindful of the more serious consequences of being bitten. While so alert to potential dangers, I cannot move beyond a sensorial or aesthetic sensibility.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilderness</td>
<td>I look around at the unbroken forested mountain landscape. I don’t feel alienation or fear of the unknown out there. When I looked at the map for this area, it was labelled ‘wilderness’. This term on the map represented potential threats and vulnerability, if I should step into it. Instead of the potential threats, I now feel a natural kinship and enjoyment and deep appreciation of this ‘wild’ landscape. I feel comfortable here, more comfortable than suburbia home. I have shifted my consciousness to an expanded state of mind and I treasure this and appreciate the calmness and communion it offers. Being here alone is like being in a sanctuary, it calms my fears, voice and rational thinking. I find it easy to slip into an emptiness of mind and more purely sense the environment around me. December 4 2005</td>
<td>An example of where the reality is different from the abstraction or ungrounded imagination. Being exposed to wilderness represented a threatening situation. But visiting a ‘wilderness’ area in the Barringtons was not threatening but an opportunity to directly experience a ‘sanctuary’ away from suburbia. Being alone here, caring and fully present allowed me to slip into an eco-consciousness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Relational engagement</td>
<td>A fairly obvious reflection but I wanted to point out that developing a relational, direct connection with a specific nonhuman being was more enduring than an idealised or abstracted reflection on ‘nature’. For example, I felt more enriched from interacting with a tree or boulder or Lyre-bird than a landscape. I felt that the more specific and tangible the interaction, the more likely a sense of relating and caring would be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Solitude</td>
<td>This is a typical response to going for a bushwalk. I am always wary of encountering a snake and I usually tread carefully. When alone in wilder areas, I am mindful of the more serious consequences of being bitten. While so alert to potential dangers, I cannot move beyond a sensorial or aesthetic sensibility.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
To go beyond the habitual way of perceiving the ‘other’ takes intent, focus, discipline, there is no easy route past the conceptual constructions of our cognitive processes. I cannot wait for the ‘unenculturated’ ‘wilderness’ landscapes to encounter the ‘wildness’ of life for it is in every aspect of reality in which the essences and spectrums of nature’s wildness may be encountered with the empathic, reflective mind. To be restricted in thought and action to a cultural construct, ‘wilderness’, is to limit the search to the symbolised construction of a ‘wilder’ non-human nature. To see the map as the territory. Perhaps it would be a profound experience to fully engage with our inner wildness to allow a sense of awe, wonder, humility to fill us to depth [without relying on ‘wilderness’ as we currently interpret it to be].

This is part of my idea that habituated thinking and behaving poses the greatest obstacle to developing eco-consciousness. We tend to construct meanings of, for example, ‘wilderness’ often within a socio-cultural framework. Its not until we experience something first hand til we understand, hopefully, that the map is not the territory. I believe that ‘wildness’ is a quality of all aspects of reality, we don’t need to rely on going to some ‘wilderness’ to discover this precious wildness that we tend to overlook in our domesticated and homogenised perceptions of reality. Wildness is just as much within us, within our backyards as it is in ‘wildness’, if we chose to become more perceptive.

The old unmaintained grassy/shrubby fire trail [Carey’s Peak Trail, Barrington Tops] is the only visual sign of human impact in this part of the Park. I find the wildness of this mountainous treescape reassuring and nurturing. This is the archetypal image I get when I ponder the essence of ‘nature’. This is the far end (or near enough) of the nature spectrum – a place without signs of human culture, activities and observable impacts (as against unnoticed impacts such as past aboriginal and present European fire regimes, feral animal and weed infestation, pollutants and climate change). This is the wild end of non-human nature with human nature with its culture at the other end of the spectrum. November 14 2006

While I have spoken of ‘wildness’ being a quality of nature, of being found everywhere, ‘wildness’ still had a mysterious, unspoilt, remote meaning for me. And in the midst of the Barrington Tops I pondered what it felt like to be at the wilder end of the nature spectrum (not that humans can’t be wild!). Two words here convey meaning, reassuring and nurturing, the former indicating relief that ‘wilderness’ still exists, the latter indicating my experience of being restored by this unspoilt space.

I need to accept the ‘wildness’ within everything including myself, as an important conceptual understanding of an eco-consciousness. I do not need to go to the human constructed semantic container called ‘wilderness’ to experience first hand the ‘wildness’ of nature. In a way it can be seen as

One of the meanings of heightened eco-consciousness was appreciation of wildness in all of its diversities and contexts. There is wildness in a backyard, for example when a Tawny Frogmouth visited me one
more of a challenge to directly engage in the ‘wildness’ of the apparent familiar such as the backyard, the local bushland reserve, whatever is experientially engaged. May 9 2007 evening, and a lot more obvious wildness in regulatory defined ‘wilderness’ areas.

Wildness’ for me infers a state of autonomy, independence, true to its being, an undomesticated state untrammelled by cultural and historical prejudices and constructions. It is not an abstraction of nature but the phenomenological being of non-dual nature, an essence of a being May 9 2007 Anything that is not the creation of human activity I consider to demonstrate wildness. The opposite to wildness is domestication. A ladybird on a backyard lawn has wildness, the lawn does not (although if the lawn contains indigenous grass, it may be viewed as containing a certain amount of wildness). It’s a rather arbitrary notion depending on one’s perspective. Humans can be wild, emotionally and physically. I guess I am referring to a lack of a human socio-cultural basis of a thing, the lack of domestication. If a thing is true to its own ‘being’, its own evolutionary nature, then I am more likely to see it as wild. Pet dogs for example are domesticated but wild dogs in national parks are obviously wild. Same species, different contexts.

Landscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landscape</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is much differentiation within the closed heath community yet it is one community within a landscape of communities, wholes within wholes, diversity within unity. February 25 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking through a spectacularly flowering closed heath in Manly Dam Reserve one early morning, I broke the shackles of habitual perception to see them in a new light. As an example of diversity within unity, the heath contained whole beings such as Banksias and Leucopogons and Leptospermum shrubs. The heath was a community of wholes within a dissected landscape of other wholes. Wholes within wholes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that this locality has a collective awareness, a loving, pure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This description is generic in that it could apply to any</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Conclusion

The thematic analysis of my journal entries identified, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, four major thematic categories and numerous minor or subcategories. The latter were minor in the sense that they were smaller aspects within an overall thematic ‘family’. They all contributed to the overall meaning for each major category. I provided a brief overview for each major category and provided indicative journal quotes and my interpretations for those minor themes I considered most pertinent. In reviewing my thematic category summaries, I identified repetitive words, phrases and sentences that alluded to important experiences and processes for evoking heightened eco-consciousness. Extracting these key words or phrases was a challenge in that there were so many and many are inter-related or not always clearly demarcated from each other. Nevertheless I have selected a number of themes or meanings that correspond to my heuristic reflections upon my experiences of and my insights about eco-consciousness. I present these in tabular form. These themes, divided into content (what I commonly experienced and/or reflected) and process (how I commonly evoked heightened eco-consciousness), are listed in Table 10. I do not identify, let alone discuss every insight or meaning revealed in my heuristic reflections. I wanted to prioritise my insights and meanings to present to the reader what I considered to be the predominant themes. Going into all of the insights would have been tedious and lacking suitable discrimination on my part. I have identified these themes as ones that most capture my experiences and broad understanding of eco-consciousness, primarily heightened eco-consciousness. I discuss these themes in detail in Chapter 5 where I respond to the research questions regarding my experience and understanding of eco-consciousness and its development.
Table 10 – Meanings interpreted from my heuristic reflections on eco-consciousness development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Themes</th>
<th>Process Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal meaning-making</td>
<td>Taking a relational, respectful orientation to engaging natural settings and beings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect and/or reverence for life</td>
<td>Improving perceptual acuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of place</td>
<td>Developing and trusting intuitive capacities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuitions of spiritual reality</td>
<td>Being open minded to new experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepening a sense of connectedness with nonhuman nature (ecological self) and self (ecological Self)</td>
<td>Being reflective and reflexive during and after nature engagements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective taking</td>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration</td>
<td>Meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of a spectrum of eco-consciousness (egoself-ecoself-ecoSelf)</td>
<td>Becoming fully present in the moment of reflection and engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep sense of appreciation of nature’s existence, complexity, diversity and intelligence</td>
<td>Use memories of experiences and emotions to evoke and/or sustain durable eco-consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the social developmental context of eco-consciousness</td>
<td>Facilitating a caring, affective orientation towards being in natural settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Being alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of and respect for ‘otherness’</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being grounded and centred within ‘nature’</td>
<td>Basic ecological literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being-in-the-world – coming to be more conscious of my lived world and my Being.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of ‘wildness’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceiving wholeness in nonhuman other (beings to landscapes)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To balance the descriptive ending to this chapter, I include a beautiful, evocative poem that strongly resonates with me. It succinctly captures my experiences in natural settings, especially mountainous areas, which were relational, therapeutically and spiritually important. It conveys, for me, the nurturing and nourishing qualities of nature’s presence, especially when the experiencer is fully mindful and grounded.
My Help is in the Mountain

My help is in the mountain
Where I take myself to heal
The earthly wounds
That people give to me.
I find a rock with sun on it
And a stream where the water runs gentle
And the trees which one by one give me company.
So I must stay for a long time
Until I have grown from the rock
And the stream is running through me
And I cannot tell myself from one tall tree.
Then I know that nothing touches me
Nor makes me run away.
My help is in the mountain
That I take away with me.

Nancy Wood (1991)
CHAPTER 4 - ENGAGING NONHUMAN NATURE: TO THE EXPERIENCE ITSELF!
Close your eyes, prick your ears, and from the softest sound to the wildest noise, from the simplest tone to the highest harmony, from the most violent, passionate scream to the gentlest words of sweet reason, it is but Nature who speaks, revealing her being, her power, her life, and her relatedness, so that a blind person, to whom the infinitely visible world is denied, can grasp an infinite vitality in what can be heard.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe

Cited in Stephenson (1995)
4.1 Introduction
This chapter presents my analysis of the nature engagement and two-fold vision methods and my reflections on their contribution to my experience and understanding of eco-consciousness. It describes my experiences of nonhuman nature and the effect they had on my consciousness along with the journal themes in Table 10. This analysis provides the material from which I identify key themes of my heightened eco-consciousness experience.

4.2 Nature engagement method
The intent behind this method was to evoke a heightened state of eco-consciousness through a structured engagement with nonhuman nature using sensorial, affective and mindful approaches. It was a method that used and refined my preferred senses (sight, hearing and touch) to perceive natural settings in a mindful way that integrated sensorial and affective modes of engagement and expression. This method was based on the general way I had engaged natural landscapes in recent years. Apart from the structured approach, the primary difference was the mindfulness approach that helped gauge, without attachment, my inner responses.

During these methods it became apparent that the ‘outer’ senses of vision and hearing were complementary and reinforcing of meanings while touch, the close range sense, provided a more intimate or physically connective engagement. I found the three senses sufficient to facilitate an immersive experience in natural settings, primarily Manly Dam Reserve, from which often flowed sensations, experiences and meanings consistent with heightened eco-consciousness. The affective activity, using both sensorial and imaginal capacities, evoked an empathic, relational consciousness within natural settings. Along with the mindful hearing activity, the affective activity was the most evocative activity of the method and one that contributed substantially to my experience of heightened eco-consciousness and ecological sense of self.
I found mindfulness a very useful technique to become more present and observant of my actions and inner responses to outer phenomena as well as more perceptive and receptive of my surrounds and my state of eco-consciousness. I found it consistent with the phenomenological approach of being non-judgmentally in the moment of an experience, recording the feelings and insights that arose without censorship. It was an excellent way to minimise abstract thoughts, daydreaming, and letting go of negative states of mind and open and expand my surface level of perceptive engagement into a more receptive engagement with my surroundings. I believe mindfulness helped to evoke both an eco-consciousness and ecological sense of self by helping me to detach from habitual thoughts and expectations, as well as, eventually, loosening my attachments concerning my identity, negative thoughts about my personal and global environmental contexts and the fear of the unknown. The state of peaceful, compassionate groundedness I experienced in deeper mindfulness states made me realise how habitual or mindless I was in my normal waking consciousness. More practically for my research, mindfulness enhanced my ability to reflect upon the research phenomena. In other words, mindful observations came from my embodied, relational and open stance, as against an objectivist, disembodied ‘scientific’ or abstract position.

I now provide an overview of each of the seven activities by reflecting on the process, describing what I sensed and the meanings I interpreted. Providing reflections on my experiences may help the reader to understand not only how it proceeded but how it contributed to my experience and understanding of heightened eco-consciousness. The following activities, along with the biophysical and social descriptions, constituted the nature engagement method:

i. Fieldtrip Reflection

ii. First Impressions

iii. Sound mapping

iv. Mindful Hearing

v. Mindful Vision
vi. Touch

vii. Affective engagement

4.2.1 Fieldtrip Reflections

These short reflective narratives captured the essence of the fieldtrip in a written ‘snapshot’, rather than an in-depth review. In reviewing my entries, several observations emerge. I generally commented on the significance of the soundscape and visionscape on my experience of heightened eco-consciousness. A soundscape can be seen as a field of interactions that contains all the sounds within any given environment as opposed to the sounds of individual kinds of things (Fisher, 2002). To hear the depth and diversity of a soundscape required, as I discovered, my attention to be fully present to perceiving sounds that may arise, without attachment to any one sound source, while being mindful of my psychological and somatic responses. Both seeing and hearing were generally equally important to the perception of my environment and my shifts in consciousness. The mindful hearing method was overall the most formative sensorial influence, I believe, in developing a more connected, relational state of consciousness.

A number of entries noted my discomfort with exposed places, from a lake’s edge, to a forest clearing to a coastal headland. I did not feel comfortable in being in exposed areas despite enjoying the sensation of being buffeted by the wind. It felt a more detached, voyeuristic visual experience without any feelings of intimacy and connections to a specific object. I
generally felt less comfortable in exposed situations although these could be exhilarating in windy conditions.

At times I was exposed to the ‘wild’ elements of wind, rain and sun, which at times emphasised not only my vulnerability but also the vastness of nonhuman nature and my physical insignificance. I expressed more comfort and nurturing and engaged feelings when enclosed or surrounded by vegetation. This preference for intimate engagements with nonhuman nature is clear throughout my writings, especially so in the instance of my last worksheet, Week 26b, where I moved from a very windy outcrop on a coastal headland and into a small clearing in the dense heath, hidden and sitting down.

A satisfying session despite cold, blustery winds. I developed a soft nurturing feeling or sense of space once immersed in heath. I felt a visual and physical intimacy, an enclosed, protected, quiet, private sharing with non-human others. This facilitated an expanded sense of self and awareness of the diversity of subjects around me, triggering feelings of appreciative joy and comfortableness with nonhuman other. An enjoyable engagement.

29 June 2007

In reflecting upon this particular experience, I realise that my physical position, such as standing, sitting or lying down influenced my perception and consequently responses and consciousness. My preference for enclosed, green spaces was not surprising given that I found being immersed, alone, a restorative, connecting experience. I discovered that being physically closer to nonhuman beings, whether by touching, sitting beneath shrubs or lying on my back beneath a towering spotted gum or close inspection, would not only improve visual perception but often deepen my sense of connection with the place and/or the subject of my visual focus.
I expressed here and elsewhere a sense of claustrophobia within my suburban, domestic reality along with a sense of alienation from nonhuman nature. This feeling of disconnect and claustrophobia was a common feeling as well as a motivator to immerse myself within natural settings. I express my need for freedom in the following entry.

A reasonably hurried morning walk a short distance from No 3 carpark. Felt a bit trapped and stifled with my suburban routines and parental duties and having not had a nature connection for a while. This session was surprisingly richer and engaging than I thought it would be. The diverse flowers, birdsong and diverse vegetation captured and engaged me in an on-going sense of appreciation rather than a more esoteric deep eco-consciousness state. That’s fine, the engagement experience can have more superficial benefits, a replenishment for the ego and soul.

24 March 2007

In Week 12 entry, I also state that I was fully engaged and delighted by the diversity of birdcalls and vegetation, leading to a continuous sense of enjoyment of the fieldtrip. I noted that I did not enter into some deeper state of eco-consciousness, which upon reflection was an interesting clarification. While I wanted to distinguish between a surface level aesthetic appreciation and a ‘deeper’, altered state of eco-consciousness, upon reflection I recognise that I was experiencing an initial heightened eco-consciousness. I found this initial state to be more aesthetically, outwardly oriented with a high valuational perspective. This mode of awareness I felt opened me further to feelings of wonder, joy, mystery, curiosity and a sense of place. The clarification was my way of pointing out that the nature engagement method led where it did, and not where I necessarily expected, as I was prone to have earlier in my research.
4.2.2 First Impressions

I recorded my initial impressions of a session’s setting prior to the activities. I wanted to describe my feelings and meanings of a place upon arriving at it, before any sensorial activity was undertaken. The summary of my first impressions is found in Table 11. I note the following observations from this table. These provide some insight into my expectations and first impressions that initiated the method:

- In about 2/3rds of my entries I expressed positive meaning in being away from my suburban environment, my routines and people. This is not surprising given I looked forward to visiting these areas. A positive first impression helped frame the experience of the session.

- Only in several sessions did I express a restorative (or potential for) meaning in my initial encounter. This characteristic was common through my worksheets but not however in my first impressions. I suspect that experiencing a restorative effect requires an immersive experience of sufficient duration. Given that the first impression is an aesthetic or surface appraising process, I am not surprised I did not express a restorative feeling more often.

- Most of my entries recorded a biophysical description of the first encounter with the location with only 4 entries referring to feelings such as welcoming, nurturing and intimate. This is not surprising given the first impression for me is dominated by visual and auditory stimuli. I entered the session setting and described what I saw and heard and the feelings these evoked.

- A common theme in the psychological impression subcategory was the catalyst of a sense of calmness and

[Figure 16 - Manly Dam at sunrise]
groundedness. This indicates that I could feel these within the first few minutes on commencing an method.
Table 11- First impression summary

Key:
Familiarity:  1 – high 2 – moderate 3 – nil to little
Naturality:  1 – high (no or minimal observable ecological human changes) 2 – moderate (some ecological changes, significant clearance, mostly natural state, canopy present, few weeds and/or NP picnic area) 3 – low (mostly cleared, little indigenous vegetation)
Meaning = what was important to me of the impression (s) of the setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Vegetation</th>
<th>Familiarity</th>
<th>Naturality</th>
<th>Impression</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Manly Dam N3</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>O – Gentle, safe, familiar</td>
<td>Relief to be away from my suburban context and be alone in green space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>West Head, Ku-ring-gai Chase NP</td>
<td>Open forest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>O – safe, familiar  S – visual (flowering Xmas tree) and hearing (strong whooshing seabreeze) E – simplified picnic area</td>
<td>• Relief to be away from my suburban context and be alone in green space  • Appreciation of carefree, relaxed summer feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>Manly Dam creek</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>S – creek bed overhung by trees E - challenged by territorial water dragon A – wary, curious S – visual (water dragon) and hearing (wind in canopy) E – tall eucalypt forest with closed heath understory</td>
<td>• Intruding on others territory  • Assertiveness of water dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>Gloucester River NP</td>
<td>Tall Forest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>O – wild, ‘pure’ nature A – love, nurtured P - calmed</td>
<td>• Loving engagement in wild nature  • Nurtured in pristine, soft, enclosed space  • Integrating ego-self and eco-self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a</td>
<td>Manly Dam outcrop</td>
<td>Woodland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>O – open, exposed, barren area in very familiar landscape S – visual (expansive vista over Reserve)</td>
<td>• Sense of space  • Sense of place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b</td>
<td>Balgowlah urban</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>O – enclosed, suburban and gentle space E – sparser gully vegetation and heath</td>
<td>• Ecotonal space between bush and suburbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bushland</td>
<td>Closed Heath</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Tall Forest</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a Manly Dam N4</td>
<td>O – diverse heath community A – nurturing, soft feelings E – diverse vista of closed heath, rocks and occasional trees</td>
<td>Relief to be away from my suburban context and be alone in green space</td>
<td>Sense of restoration within green space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a Manly Dam N3</td>
<td>O – open, exposed and impacted by water skiers S – V and H P – disappointed by human intrusion E – simplified vegetation strata</td>
<td>Summery lakeside impression, Escape visually from suburban structures and interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a Manly Dam N3</td>
<td>O – open, exposed and simplified vegetation community P – calm, grounded state E – simplified vegetation strata</td>
<td>Relief to be away from my suburban context and be alone in green space</td>
<td>Summery feeling Sense of spaciousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Gloucester River NP</td>
<td>O – undisturbed wild area of river, rock and forest S – visual (tall stringybark trees) and hearing (rapids/river) E – wild, riparian, diverse P – relief, calming, familiar connecting, childlike excitement, tranquil, soothing A – loving, joy</td>
<td>Beautiful naturalness Nurturing, sensuous place Acceptance into nature’s being Evocation of caring Potential for eco-self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Manly Dam creek</td>
<td>O – forest with dense understorey E – diverse, flowering shrubs S – visual dominated P – anxious to arrive, calmed and grounded by end A – appreciation, enjoyment</td>
<td>Relief to be away from my suburban context and be alone in green space Calming and grounding self Appreciative of healthy, diverse vegetation and habitats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13a Manly Closed</td>
<td>O – stillness of thick bush contrasted with</td>
<td>Have my own space in bush</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dam N2</td>
<td>West Head</td>
<td>West Head</td>
<td>Manly Dam trail</td>
<td>Manly Dam lakeside</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>heath</td>
<td>Closed heath</td>
<td>Closed heath</td>
<td>Closed heath</td>
<td>Closed heath</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21a</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O – intimate, welcoming embrace of waterfall</td>
<td>O – intimate, welcoming embrace of waterfall</td>
<td>O – a harsh, exposed and quiet ridge space</td>
<td>O – peaceful, open lake vista</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O – a harsh, exposed and quiet ridge space</td>
<td>O – a harsh, exposed and quiet ridge space</td>
<td>O – fresh, early morn green, nurturing bushland</td>
<td>O – fresh, early morn green, nurturing bushland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>S – visual primarily supplemented by hearing water and birds</td>
<td>S – visual primarily supplemented by hearing water and birds</td>
<td>S – visual</td>
<td>S – visual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P – calmness, intimate nurturing space for being</td>
<td>P – calmness, intimate nurturing space for being</td>
<td>P – protected, nurtured by being embedded in green, connectedness</td>
<td>P – protected, nurtured by being embedded in green, connectedness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A – relief, joy</td>
<td>A – relief, joy</td>
<td>A – quiet joy</td>
<td>A – quiet joy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E – diversity within unity of waterfall (rocks, water, vegetation) creating habitats</td>
<td>E – diversity within unity of waterfall (rocks, water, vegetation) creating habitats</td>
<td>E – shallow or no soil layer on sandstone not conducive to substantial vegetation</td>
<td>E – diverse Manly Dam landscape heath within whole woodland community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Know space is traversed by small mammals</td>
<td>• Calming, healing space to connect with nature and self</td>
<td>• New walk, exploratory, cognitive orientation</td>
<td>• First person to touch the fresh dewy morning bush</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aesthetic appreciation of organic enfoldment and celestial state (sunset, moon)</td>
<td>• Space away from likely encounters with people</td>
<td>• Space away from suburban landscape</td>
<td>• Intimate enjoyment of landscape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aesthetic appreciation of waterfall structure and texture and sounds</td>
<td>• Aesthetic appreciation of waterfall structure and texture and sounds</td>
<td>• Early morn grounding to something beautiful and bigger than I</td>
<td>• Feeling fortunate to exist in this serene, calming space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feeling fortunate to exist in this serene, calming space</td>
<td>• Sense of space, freedom and</td>
<td>• A – appreciative of space and moon, relief to be alone</td>
<td>• P – alert, calmed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Emotional Response</td>
<td>Analytical Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 21b      | Barrington Tops NP   | Closed | 3     | 1                                                                                   | O – wildness and trees impacted by forestry clearance  
S – tall, spotted gums dominate visionscape  
E – disturbed tall forest ecosystem  
P – surface perception, affected by disturbance of forestry clearance, not connected  
A – saddened by intrusion  
E – energy difference and ecological integrity changes from undisturbed wet closed forest through to forestry coup  
P – That I am saddened and disturbed by destruction  
A – saddened by intrusion                                                                 |
|          |                      | forest |       |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |
| 21c      | Barrington Tops NP   | Cleared | 3     | 3                                                                                   | O – cleared grassy area surrounded by tall closed mountain forest  
S – visual  
E – totally cleared space surrounded by vibrant, diverse tall forest community  
P – calmed by sun and birdsong, grounded  
A – sadness and quiet joy  
E – contrast between open, sunny space and tall, dark, mystery of forest surrounding space  
P – disturbance reflects mindset that creates it and impinges on my awareness                                                                 |
|          |                      | grassy area within forest |       |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |
| 23a      | Manly Dam lakeside   | Closed | 1     | 2                                                                                   | O – open, watery, spacious vista beyond the enclosed heath vegetation  
S – visual dominance with important subtle water/bird sounds  
E – diverse, healthy heath diversity contrasted with ‘barren’ lake surface  
P – calmed by water rippling at feet, grounded on rock, aware of a few recreationists in distance  
A – quiet joy, sense of connectedness  
E – enjoyed boundary conditions between heath and lake  
P – enjoyed intimate, connecting sounds of frog, ripples, wind in heath and birdsong  
P – enjoyed being away from suburban vista and energies                                                                 |
|          |                      | heath  |       |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |
| 23b | Manly Dam lakeside | Open grass | 1 | 3 | O – a flooded lake surrounded by islands of dark green  
S – visual (swollen lake)  
E – significant rainfall event leading to high lake level, submerged wetlands  
P – overwhelmed by swollen lake, small and humbled, feeling of newness  
A – awe, unsure, quiet | • Power of storms and heavy rain  
• Visually and psychological importance of storms impacts |
| 24 | North Curl Curl Headland | Closed heath | 1 | 1 | O – open grey and wild ocean expanse beneath cliff-top  
S – visual and hearing  
E – coastal headland ecosystem drenched by rain and run-off  
P – attention immersed in wildness of vista, enjoyment of wild, wet weather impacting upon senses and body  
A – excited joy | • Being exposed in a open, exposed space connects me with the wildness of weather and ocean  
• Spaciousness and solitude of greyed out vista  
• Sound of crashing, surging waves hypnotising me, seductive  
• Bonding with sounds |
| 26a | North Curl Curl Headland | Closed heath | 1 | 1 | O – a grey expanse of ocean and cloudy sky with crashing waves  
S – visual (ocean expanse) then hearing (crashing waves)  
E – coastal headland ecosystem  
P – calmed, seduced by whooshing, crashing, surging waves beneath, centred, small, grounded on outcrop  
A – quiet joy | • Spaciousness and solitude of greyed out vista  
• Hypnotic rhythms of crashing, surging waves, seductive |
| 26b | North Curl Curl Headland | Closed heath | 1 | 1 | O – immersed within a green windswept heathy community  
S – V and H  
E – high quality closed heath surrounding my sandstone patch | Reprieve from strong, buffeting winds on exposed headland  
Earth, little me, infinite sky and crashing, surging ocean around me  
Enjoyment of sitting on wet rock with |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of Space</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4/08  | McCarr’s Creek, Ku-ring-gai Chase NP | Closed heath                    | 2       | 1       | P – nurtured, protected from wind, sunset sky giving sense of spaciousness above, grounded and immersed with nature space  
A – relief, quiet joy, protected, appreciative of heath  
An inviting space for getting grounded, revitalised and contemplation |
| 8/08  | Gloucester River NP              | Tall forest                     | 2       | 1       | O – relief to be back into mountain wilds  
S – visual (tall forest and flowing river)  
Reconnect with mountain wilderness |
| 18/08 | Ku-ring-gai Chase NP            | Low woodland                    | 3       | 1       | O – private, safe, enclosed space  
S – visual (sandstone escarpment and enclosing trees)  
P – relief to be alone in heathy woodland  
Private, enclosed space in nature |
| 45/08 | Barrington Tops NP              | Tall closed forest              | 1       | 1       | O – relief to be in mountain wilds  
S – visual (tall forest) and hearing (water and wind in canopy)  
T – desire to connect with place  
A – joy and love  
Reconnect with mountain wildness  
Anticipation for restoration and connection |
4.2.3 Sound Mapping

The sound mapping activity was the first activity, after the meditation, where I mapped the type, direction and approximate distance of sounds around me over a fifteen-minute period. It was, as Fisher (2002) states, a way of becoming present and familiar with the place, as well as attuning my hearing to what was to be heard, instead of ignoring or being unaware of sounds. I tend to tune out many urban sounds, they become part of the background sounds of which I am barely conscious. I would take this kind of listening with me into natural settings and it would take some time to bring into my conscious awareness the sounds I encountered, ‘we hear and react to sounds in nature without being conscious that we are hearing what we are hearing’ (Fisher, 2002:235). Not being fully present and conscious meant that I was being mindless rather than mindful, inattentive to the sounds around me. This activity was almost an extension of the preceding meditation in that my focus, on absorbing and identifying each sound, helped me to fully situate or centre my attention within a place, and therefore become more conscious of the soundscape.

I recorded all sounds I heard, whether or not they were typical of the setting. As Fisher (2002) explains, typical sound sources need not be frequent, just part of context of the setting. I included not just sounds but noises\textsuperscript{17}, for example, the dull roar of a plane flying over the Barrington Tops, given that it is part of my social and historical context. Some of the sounds became more important or significant for my state of mind when I later conducted the mindful hearing activity. I was relieved to not be unduly sensitive or annoyed by various urban oriented noises at Manly Dam Reserve but I did find the drone of planes in the Barrington Tops intrusive. I accepted that there would be a variety of human noises within the suburban context of Manly Dam Reserve, it was part of the suburban context and I

\textsuperscript{17} Noise may be defined as any unwanted sound and further, according to Mace, Bell, & Loomis (2004), visitors to natural areas will be sensitive to low levels of human generated noise.
tended to focus my attention on nonhuman sounds. I think this alludes to the importance of expectations, psychological sensitivity and physical context in terms of how unwanted noises impact on perceiving the soundscape.

I divided the soundscape into an inner zone (within about five metres), adjacent zone (between 5 and 50 metres) and an outer zone (usually at least 100 metres and beyond) during my analysis. I found that proximity of the sound source was a useful way of segmenting the soundscape and to identify which distances were most influential overall in influencing my sense of place. My sense of being away from society was mainly affected by the outer zone sounds, where at Manly Dam Reserve tended to have consistent suburban generated noises. The outer zone sounds were therefore significant for me in terms of characterising the soundscape as predominantly suburban or ‘wild’.

Despite my predominantly naturalistic descriptions, many of the sounds evoked various feelings, as identified in Table 12. I noted seven broad impacts on my consciousness: meditative, alertness, connectedness, spiritual, sense of season and place, aesthetic appreciation and awareness of my solitude. Some sounds characterised the type of place (urban/wild) such as construction noise and yapping dogs while others such as cicadas indicated a particular season (summer). The most common response was psychological, primarily by way of a restorative state by, for example, feeling calmed or entranced by various water sounds. Several sounds I associated with a transcendent reality, for example crashing waves, a gurgling, splashing river and a high-pitched hum I regularly heard in quiet moments in the bush. I felt nurtured and healed of existential doubt and negativity with these constant, entrancing sounds. They helped me in terms of my eco-consciousness by ‘presencing’ my focus, ridding me of negative thoughts and emotions and opening me up to the beauty, energy, spontaneity and peacefulness of the setting. Most sound sources, regardless of inner, adjacent and outer zone origins, kick started, so to speak, my heightened eco-consciousness. Soundmapping can be viewed as a transition zone between the type of normal consciousness I brought in and the
relational, grounded consciousness that evolved and deepened during the course of the method.

The meanings I took from this activity were:

- It helped me become familiar with a place.
- I gained a sense of the place’s character through the type and distance of its ‘voices’.
- I experienced a sense of restoration and becoming centred, especially from the sounds from the inner and adjacent zones, for example waves lapping at my feet, seabreezes whooshing in the canopy overhead.
- It represented a transition process towards a more intimate, deeper mode of engagement but remaining in a ‘normal’ aesthetic state of consciousness.

Table 12 - Sound mapping overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on consciousness</th>
<th>Sound Source</th>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meditative state</td>
<td>Raindrops falling onto Casuarina forest floor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Centring and restorative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crickets</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Centring and restorative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water lapping on shore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Centring and restorative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wind in branches above me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Centring and restorative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wind in my ears</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Centring and restorative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wind in trees/shrubs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Centring and restorative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waves crashing onto shore</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Centring and restorative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waterfall</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Centring and restorative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cicadas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Centring and restorative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| State of alertness      | Falling branches | 2    | Wariness |  |
| Waterdragon             | 1    | Wariness of being bitten |  |
| Falling branches        | 1    | Wariness of being struck |  |

| Spiritual connectedness | Bush hum (high pitched barely audible hum when bush is silent) | 1    | Symbolism: deeper vibrational reality within sensorial observable reality |  |
| Waves crashing onto shore | 2    | Symbolism: edge of deep unconsciousness rising up onto the platform of ‘normal consciousness’ |  |
| River/creek             | 1    | Symbolism: endless spring of life sustaining life |  |

Key: 1=inner zone 2=adjacent zone 3=outer zone X=no meaning interpreted
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of season</th>
<th>Flies and bees flying around</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Summer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pulsating, constant drone of cicadas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of solitude</td>
<td>My footsteps</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Valued aloneness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic appreciation</td>
<td>Bird calls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bird flying over me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frog calls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Quiet joy of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of place</td>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barking dogs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bird calls</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Various urban sounds</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fish jumping out</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sense of space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passing cars/ motor boats</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model boat</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.4 Mindful Hearing
This activity was usually the highlight of each field trip in terms of my degree of satisfaction with the process and the depth of my responses in terms of my state of mind, sense of self and connection to both the physical and non-physical dimensions of the natural environment. Taking a mindful disposition took practice and discipline so as not to get attached to my responses or the more melodious sounds. This required bringing my focus back to observing my feelings and emotional responses rather than being my feelings and emotions, otherwise I would get lost within the sounds themselves and neglect to be conscious of changes in consciousness and bodily states. To do this I would first enter into a meditative state to centre myself and purposefully become fully present in my lived-world. The deeper the meditative state, either for this activity or at the beginning for each method, the more likely I was to allow my ego-self to become more diffuse or transparent, allowing my Self/witness/seer to shine forth. I was not thinking of the places, people and times of this activity, I was listening intently, absorbing it, as well as detachedly curious of my felt responses. I discovered that the quality of my being present, as well as my detached observation of my responses, and the responses themselves, deepened or became clearer with this
mindfulness approach. The following entry from Worksheet 4/08 explains the processes I used:

As I ease into slow, rhythmic, deep breathing, I begin to feel my body and mind relax and still, and ground into this place. My body tingles as I listen to the bubbling creek softly flowing beneath. The soft, tinkering gurgling water evokes a nurturing feeling and so I feel myself soften into a presencing mode. ...I bring myself back to my breathing, reminding myself to be more mindful of my responses rather than lose myself in mindless auditory hearing. The calmness evolves to a peaceful groundedness and a conscious reconnection with place and self.

26 January 2008

This quote identifies the importance of conducting a short meditation preceding the hearing activity and the need to be alert to becoming lost in the entrancing sounds around. It is my experience that bringing awareness back to a rhythmical, deep breathing helps to refocus attention back to my inner state and responses. In being mindful of my inner states, and not getting lost in these, I felt grounded and centred within, both critical experiences of a deeper heightened state of eco-consciousness. It was easy to become entranced by beautiful sounds and my challenge with this and other mindfulness activities was to remain alert to being distracted. I have summarised my experiences and meanings of this activity into a tabular format (refer to Table 13). I now provide a brief discussion of some of the more relevant observations in terms of my eco-consciousness development:

- **Key sounds**: these were the sounds that had the most impact on my state of mind and sense of self and place. I observed two broad categories of sound sources, one that was mostly of a consistent, background, diffuse nature such as the whooshing sounds of wind in trees, rhythmical, surging waves crashing onto the shoreline, cicadas pulsating/humming or a river gurgling and splashing nearby. The others were from specific, point-like sources such
as individual birdcalls. Although birdcalls could be considered a background sound, I found that the soft, consistency of wind, cicadas and water had a meditative, restorative effect upon me. I could observe myself enjoying the freedom and movement and healing that these sounds catalysed. Specific sounds such as birdcalls evoked a curiosity about the identity and activity or reason behind the sound and as such, was a more cognitive response. If it was a beautiful melodic magpie call, for example, I tended to feel a bonding or relational sensation.

- **Mindful response:** as implied above, I tended to feel soothed, nurtured by the diffuse, soft, on-going sounds and tended to experience joy and loving appreciation with the birdcalls. These feelings and emotions were often expressed as dynamic movement intra- and inter-subjectively. This could be bi-directional, that is, a sense of reaching out or being encompassed. For example, the pulsating roar of cicadas often tended to overwhelm my senses, evoking a tingling up and down my spine and elicit a presencing, meditative state. I tended to feel psychologically encompassed by the on-going, diffuse sounds and felt myself reaching out to the point sound sources in the soundscape, whether due to curiosity or desire to connect. Becoming mindful of these responses provided a detachment, an arms length perspective from my responses. I did not get lost in my entrancement of joy, I did not feel mindlessly engaged in them however enjoyable they were. I sensed an alternative perspective towards my self, there was my consciousness of the outer and inner worlds of awareness, and then there was another level of consciousness (Self?) observing my responses. The two modes of consciousness, environmental awareness and mindful consciousness, became integrated but operating at different levels and purposes. I found it a powerful way of gaining perspective and control over the dominance of thoughtlessness or attachment consciousness I associate with daily, normal waking consciousness. Practicing mindfulness hearing helped not only deepen heightened ecological consciousness but also durable eco-consciousness when I practised mindfulness in my normal waking life.
• **Meaning:** there were many meanings I interpreted from reading my worksheet summaries and these are listed in Table 13. Many of the meanings I interpreted from my responses tended to be oriented towards deepening my state of consciousness, developing a broader or ecological sense of self, experiencing my ‘Being’ beyond my ego-self and appreciating the role and dynamism of consciousness. The responses to the birdcalls were generally meaningful in relation to enjoyment and developing a sense of place and connection with the often unseen sources of song. They provided my auditory field a depth or layering and complemented my visual engagement with the setting.
### Table 13 - Mindful hearing summary

Key: GR=Gloucester River, BM=Barrington Tops MD=Manly Dam Reserve, WH=West Head, Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Primary sound sources</th>
<th>Key sound</th>
<th>Mindful Response</th>
<th>Key Descriptors (sentences, phrases from worksheet entry)</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>MD – No 3</td>
<td>Cicadas Wattlebirds Wind in trees</td>
<td>Cicadas Wind</td>
<td>The low, soft and pulsating pitch of the cicada hum stimulated a trance like, relaxed mental state. The wind whooshing rhythmically around me felt soothing and nurturing. The wind and cicadas stimulated a languid and diffuse state of mind</td>
<td>I felt encompassed by the [tree-wind’s] whispering, whooshing sound.</td>
<td>That background sounds are important catalysts for shifts in states of consciousness, especially low pitch or soft pulsating sounds such as wind in tree canopies and the hum of cicadas. They evoked a heightened eco-consciousness and eco-self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>MD – No 3</td>
<td>Wind in trees Cicadas Magpie</td>
<td>Wind in trees Magpie</td>
<td>I found the soft whooshing of the windsong gentle, encompassing and soothing. I felt joy, appreciation of the magpie song, I was for a brief time totally absorbed in its beautiful singing.</td>
<td>I feel enclosed, wrapped up, nurtured by the windsong. I felt my ears reach out to the bird to form a communion.</td>
<td>That ‘windsong’ evokes a calming, restorative effect on my consciousness. I enjoyed the feeling of freedom and movement I associate with wind, in the trees. I enjoy being encompassed by the whooshing sounds. The magpie song was meaningful in that it brought my attention totally into the here and now, flooding my awareness with appreciation and joy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>WH – Ku-ring-gai Chase NP</td>
<td>Cicadas Gurgling creek</td>
<td>Cicadas</td>
<td>I feel myself getting hypnotised by the pulsating, rising and falling of loud cicada drone. The hum reverberates in my head, tingles spread down body.</td>
<td>I feel it diminishing my sense of boundary. The interface between skin and environment [becomes] diffuse, consciously permeable. The cicada songs extract childhood memories of hot, long summer holidays.</td>
<td>The din and rhythm of the cicadas shattered the silence I was searching for but surprisingly I felt a hypnotic immersion into a place where my sense of self became unimportant and less noticeable. Beneath the din was the tinkling sound of a slow running creek, which became more noticeable as I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Deep resonations trickling into my consciousness
Nattering conversation, it speaks to me. (water in creek flowing by me) deepened my connection to the place.
Two continuous, rhythmic sources of low pitch or pulsating sounds can co-create an deeper consciousness and ecological sense of self.

| 2b | MD – wildflower trail | Ravens Wind | Ravens | The ravens slow, elongated ‘craws’ evoked memories of country visits which led to an inner sense of spaciousness and timelessness, a freedom away from my physical and psychological urban confines. I feel that I am beyond the urban confines of the dam |
| 3a | MD – N3 forest walk | Waterdragons Wind in trees | Waterdragons | I was initially feeling wary of snakes until a very curious or territorial water dragon approached me, quickly and closely. I felt a surprise, alert, a threat response within, tingling wariness. Sense of vulnerability and wariness. (Snake) My feelings of wariness highlighted the need to feel safe and comfortable for heightened eco-consciousness to develop. |
| 3b | GR NP | Lyrebirds River rapids Falling branches | River | Regular gurgling, splashing sounds helped me to become still, calm and tuned into the ambience and energies of the riverscape. While the lyrebirds calls and crashing branches elicited curious, searching responses, the gurgling river moulded the flow of my conscious into deeper pools became more entrancing and connecting lulls me into a quiet meditative state just be in the moment the water flows into my consciousness I found flowing water to be highly conducive to deepening consciousness and grounding my being in the moment. I interpreted a symbolic connection between water and consciousness in terms of flow, directed (by channel and intent) and non-local qualities of both, potentially. |
| 4a | MD – N3 | Wind in trees Cicadas Wind across | Wind in trees | The whooshing, rustling, roaring sounds of gusty southerly winds represented movement, change, They symbolise change, movement, freedom Sounds of wind in landscape elicits stillness of mind, feelings of freedom and being in elemental nature. It is |
| 4b | MD – N3 | forest trail | Magpies Eastern Whipbirds Cicadas Bush hum | Cicadas | While I feel joy from the diversity of birdcalls, accept the suburban noise, it is the hum of the cicadas that lulls me into calmer, meditative, present state of consciousness. | It encloses me | The pulsating and varying cicada hum/drone offers an encompassing soundscape for meditative being and evoking heightened eco-consciousness and less static, rigid sense of self. |
| 6a | MD – N4 | heath trail | Superb Fairy Wrens Wind in trees Cicadas | Cicadas | With my focus on the wrens song with the wind and cicada hum in the background, I felt a loving appreciation of this place. The focused hearing combined with the diffuse hearing of familiar sounds evoked a sense of place and peacefulness. | I am part of the nature I am hearing. The whooshing ebbing and flowing of a strong summer sea-breeze lulls and entrances my mind. Its soft flowing whooshing catalyses a meditative effect whereupon my mind slows and opens to the sights and sounds of the here and now. | The high pitch birdcalls evoked curiosity, then recognition and then an empathic appreciation of the bird. The meaning in this is the experience of communion with an ‘other’, at least for the brief time I am focused on the sweet melodic chirps. The hearing of diffuse, less pronounced sounds such as wind is more meaningful for my state of mind and sense of being-in-nature. |
| 7a | MD – N3 | Motor boat Waves onto shore Cicadas | Motor boats | I expected the boats to be there and so was not too disappointed about the human dominated soundscape. I enjoyed the crash of the waves against the rocks nearby, and along with the steady, pulsating rhythm of | The soft, pulsating cicada hum is lulling. Rhythmic, washing, softness, water meets rock. | That while mechanical noise can be disruptive at an initial, surface level, by re-focusing on the rhythmic, resonating sounds of moving water and droning cicadas. I can still evoke a sense of connection and appreciation for place.
| 8a | MD – N3 | Bird calls | Wind in trees | Cicadas | I was delighted by the variety of birdcalls, imagining their movements in the dense bushland. Felt joy, a sense of communion as we each did own morning routine. When my focus was broken by urban noise, I found myself missing the Barrington mountain wildness with its nonhuman soundscape. Behind the calls was the rhythm of the windsong and cicada hum. | The birdcalls entice me into their sentient, little world. A feeling of sadness arises with this missing and disconnect with the wild. I ponder the associated questions: who am I? Where do I belong? Where is home? | There is something profound about the sound of water meeting rock or land in a variety of pitches and periods. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | GR NP | River rapids | River | Soft, gushing, lively river sounds dominates this soundscape. I sense its playfulness, its restorative, cool fingers massage my being. I feel a fullness in my chest. At one point I felt absorbed into the rivers being, like an imaginal space opened up and swallowed me. | I feel my heartspace full, still and caressed by these watery fingers. I am absorbed into its being, further embedding my mind and heart within its being. Already calm, I am lulled into a meditative trance of thoughtless being. | Birdsong invited me into the bush in a receptive disposition. To be receptive while listening is to facilitate a passive, mindful orientation to listening to allow space to be filled, rather than searching for sounds. I missed the physical ‘wildness’ despite observing and hearing the ‘wildness’ around me. |
| 12 | MD – N3 | Bush hum | Forest trail | Birdcalls | The bush hum is regular source within any natural soundscape. I felt it resonate with deeper aspects of my being, a primal, reminder of a non-physical energy source of all beings. The variety of birdcalls | The bush hum is continuous, barely discernible high pitch tonal sound. I intuit that it represents a unifying background sound of the being-in-the-bush soundscape. The bush hum is meditative and | There is a strong therapeutic outcome of mindful hearing, its level in part dependent on the clarity or quality of perceptions, state of mind as well as openness and receptivity. The wildness of the place provides an important context to the soundscape. One of the skills of this mindfulness process is to be aware of inner responses and states without plunging into inner chatter and analysis |

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164
| 13a | MD – N2 closed heath | Crickets Currawongs wing beat People, boats Few birdcalls | None | As I sat in the bush hearing the sounds of people and nonhuman nature, I sensed the weekend flavour of this soundscape as well as the contrasting quality of sounds between the two. In the dusk, I sensed a diurnal rhythm of day and night, a quietening of the bush, a stillness within me, my mind felt lulled into silence. | I hear human activities beneath me, people walking and talking, cars driving by, a speedboat roaring in the distance. It contrasts with the quiet, dusky rhythms of the bush sounds where I hide and deeply feel. | I enjoyed being above the human traffic below, needed the separation as well as the bush immersion. I could still hear the humans but the quietening of the evening bush was immediate and tangible. An important engagement experience in terms of evoking heightened eco-consciousness with human sounds around me. |
| 15 | WH – Ku-ring-gai Chase NP | Water splashing | Waterfall | I feel joy from the contrasting sounds of the splashes and rumbling within the waterfall. Deep and light, playful sounds of water streaming over rocks. I could feel the reverberations through my chest. The water sounds helped make permeable my sense of self, a soulful quality. It stimulated stillness within my being. | The waterfall presences me within this serene, beautiful sandstone grove. Sounds of the falling water resonate deeply within me, beyond the surface hearing that hears. Falling, flowing, tumbling water is an effective cue for a deepening and expansion of consciousness and being. |
| 16 | WH – Ku-ring-gai Chase NP | Bush hum | Bush hum | I was absorbed in the meaning and impact of the bush hum. I described it as the primordial fabric of the soundscape, often hidden behind the source-based sounds around. It did require focused hearing at times. I felt that it connected my sensorial hearing with my intuited sense of Being. | A high pitched hum everywhere. Beyond the obvious surface sounds of the bush, there is a deeper underlying formative energy. The other nature sounds such as birdcalls are secondary but give character to this ‘natural’ environment. | The birdcalls evoke a sense of being-in-nature Sense of groundedness. Sense of place. Bush hum evokes a reminder of an underlying, non-physical basis for everything we perceive. |
I become aware of the uncomfortable dualism of self and ‘other’, of being a human visitor, not intruder, into this heathy, sandstone ‘hard’ landscape.

As I meander along the track, the soundscape educes an inner calmness to reflect the outer calm of the bush, it infiltrates my Being. I feel less strange. I feel I can commune with nonhuman other. I enjoy the aesthetic diversity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18 MD</th>
<th>Birds</th>
<th>Birdcalls</th>
<th>While often I would feel my hearing reach out into the world, this time I felt that the bird calls were reaching into me while I meditated in the bush. A more receptive orientation to hearing. I felt a sense of quiet joy and appreciative respect for being able to enjoy and love the sounds of nature. The wind whooshing in the treetops evoked a calmed, soothed and mindful state of consciousness. I also felt an almost excited expectancy for the next birdcall, a delight at the whip of the Whipbird.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bush hum</td>
<td>Wind in trees</td>
<td>I found it a joy filled experience to listen to other fauna, not just their melodious songs but that they exist, that I exist embodied from which I can marvel at existence. It did not have to be. It could have been non-existence. I listen to the bush primordial hum, a high pitch hum within which I feel embedded. The wind …provides an underlying flowing …tangibility to the soundscape, its ebbing, pattering, whooshing music is calming, soothing, helping to quieten mind and deepen consciousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoyment of birdsong, hum and wind. Being more receptive, gracious of these ‘songs’ can bring an existential, spiritual meaning to the hearing. Appreciation of being an embodied person. Solace in the fact that I exist. Appreciative of birdcalls. Sensing the inner stillness of my being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>MD - roadway</td>
<td>Magpie, Lorikeets, Noisy Minors, Ravens</td>
<td>Birdcalls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21a</td>
<td>MD – southern lake edge</td>
<td>Birds, Planes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The birdcalls [provided] a wholesome, friendly flavour. It helped to ‘presence’ me into the immediacy, sensuality of the sensed world.

I hear the mournful cry of a lone magpie. It pulls my attention from the visual intimacy of a foggy morning and catalyses a warm, empathic feeling within. The raven’s drawn out craw hangs balancing in still airs, more amusing when others return the droll craw in response.

I felt that the soundscape helped to revitalise my perception of a very familiar place. It added a depth, richness that dominated my overall perceptions. For a very visually oriented person, the soundscape was often more important to connecting and understanding the environment.

The meaning related not so much to the beautiful chorus of birdsong and wind but to the unheard songs of the rest of life. Awareness of what is also brings about an awareness of what is not perceived and of how limited my perception is.
sensed the ecological meaning of their calls. I enjoyed their melodies, the tingles up my spine from a nearby whipbirds cracking call and a trance-like feeling with the pulsating drone of cricket and frog choruses.

| 21b | BT NP | Lyrebird | Various birdcalls | Bush hum | I felt a quiet joyful appreciation for the melodious, loud, resonating mimicking calls of a Lyrebird. Further along the path into the valley, it was quieter and I was comforted to hear the bush hum. It helped me to presence myself and therefore connect my ego-self with my eco-self. | I felt immersed, transported by the hum, it feels otherworldly, comforting, presencing me in the here and now. I feel it permeate me to the depths. The bush hum is non-directional, everywhere equally. It feels like it’s the signature sound of the landscape and yet it is beyond the physical. | The melodic calls of the lyrebird provides an intense surface level listening experience while the bush hum evoked a feeling of deep connectedness and spiritual context to my being-in-the-world. | 21c | BT NP | Mountain quiet | Occasional birdcalls | Crickets | None | It felt strange to not only hear no human sounds but so few nonhuman sounds as well, very quiet. It had an immediate stilling effect within me. At dusk, I felt lulled, soothed by the constant soft chirp of crickets around me as well as the breeze in the trees. I could just discern the pitch of the bush hum with relief. | I find the bush hum comforting in an ontological way, a subtle but foundational beingness of this soundscape. Without any prominent, continuous sounds, the background subtler sounds became the focus and evoked a grounding stillness – the bush hum, the soft whooshing sounds of wind in treetops, the cricket chirping. | 23a | MD – northern lake edge | Playing children | Distant bird calls | Ripples | The lakes edge was relatively quiet, with the soft sounds of ripples on the shoreline and falling water drops from the heath behind me | The quiet space around me felt tangible. I could sense the stillness between the sounds. Sense of caring and gentleness. |
Traffic hum creating a sense of calmness and soft diffusion of self. While the outer sounds of people were discordant with these, it did not affect me. I recognised water conveys sound more readily and I enjoyed the softness of wind and water. I still felt exposed and not embedded within the space.  

<p>| 23b | MD – No 4 lake edge | Wind Waterfall | Wind | While there was a dull roar of a nearby waterfall, I appreciated the gentle tinkering, lapping sounds of the wind on the swollen lake surface beneath me. The regular wind and water sounds evoked a feeling of simplicity and spaciousness. Within the context of huge storms the days before, I felt a smallness within, humbled by the peaceful soundscape. | The only regular sounds are from wind and water, a basic elemental soundscape, simplicity, spaciousness. | A simple soundscape can be as profound as a diverse one in that it requires more patience and subtlety to listening. Listening to wind and water was soothing and connecting, evocative of primal meaning as well as heightened eco-consciousness. |
| 24  | North Curl Curl Headland | Waves on rock platform | Waves on rock platform | I felt immersed by the crashing sounds of the waves, embedded fully within the vast powerful oceanic soundscape. The regular thud of crashing waves complemented the lighter whooshing sounds of water over rock platform. It felt ominous at times. | I'm at the boundary between two worlds, the exposed spacious ocean and the familiar safe, enclosed headland. The sounds from both help create a calm, humbled, connected feeling within. | Being in the elements of wind, rain and ocean felt liberating. I felt a sense of freedom from suburbia as I immersed within the loud, crashing soundscape. |
| 26a | North Curl Curl | Surf along beach | Surf along beach | I appreciated the light, playful splashing sounds of falling water | It resonates within, at times it fills me, pouring into me. I am it. The | Again in letting go and being open to the power of the messages of nature’s |
| Headland | Falling water off the headland nearby. With the constant surge of the ocean, I felt soothed and nurtured in this place. I feel softer in my being, entranced by the sounds of water | whooshing waves, the regular crash of waves at different points along the beach creates a pulsing, whoosh pattern. I feel deeply touched. The distracted surface me dissolves away. My self peaks out. | soundscape. I felt my eco-Self behind the veil of my ego-self. The reverberating crashing waves and whooshing sounds immersed my hearing in an oceanic world. I felt a primal connection, an altered state of eco-consciousness. I felt appreciative to the of the sense of unity evoked by the watery sounds. |
| 26b North Curl Curl Headland | Wind across ears Wind in shrubs Hum Peregrine falcons Wattlebird | I felt buffeted by the wind, the sound was associated by a very physical presence. I was on an exposed headland. I felt vulnerable and chilly. When I moved into a closed heath patch, I felt protected and was able to hear more of the subtle soundscape, including the high pitch bush hum. The heath patch felt like an island of relative quietness evoking greater sense of intimacy with the headland. | With regard to the primal hum, I feel relief and joy. It symbolises the underlying oneness/unity of life and behind the soundscape, the sound of pure being. It is subtle, contrasting with the dominating crashing and whooshing. I am enclosed by this island of quietness. The soft whooshes and crashes help to soften my boundaries. The calls of wattlebirds connect me with organic life, a reminder of my organic being. The two falcons soaring above me remind me too of my earthy, animal nature - the act of looking up alters my perspective and inner feeling. Being out in the elements totally wrapped up by the sounds and energies of nature can dissolve the personal, cultural constructs of self away to facilitate a childlike engagement and presence in the world. Knowing that the bush hum is always present, its perception dependent on the state and intent of the listener. Earthy connection Sense of freedom. |
| 1/08 WH, Ku-ring-gai Chase | Cicadas Motor boats Wind in | I felt wrapped up by the thick pulsating drone of cicadas. My skin tingles. Lulling and hypnotic | The omnipresent pulsating hum enclosed and wrapped me up. Being connected Restoration |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Soundscapes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/08</td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>Whooshing wind feels comforting. Splashing of waterfall evokes gentleness and love. It begins to rain, soft, comforting pattering upon the leaves and rocks around me. The wind comes in stronger gusts, whooshing in the canopy above, I feel enclosed and protected here in the overhang. I feel a loving stillness of mind and being. A sense of loving appreciation for the setting. Inner peace. Solitude. Being away from suburbia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/08</td>
<td>MD N3</td>
<td>Cicadas provide the soft, pulsating ceiling of the soundscape. Whooshing wind is soothing and centring. Wattlebird evokes a sense of appreciation of its being. Cicada hum is a sound of summer. The whooshing wind is stilling, it washes over me, soothing and centring. I feel freedom yet wrapped up. I feel less lonely with the birdcalls. Sound of summer. Restoration. Loving appreciation for nature. Sense of place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/08</td>
<td>McCarr’s Creek, Ku-ring-gai Chase NP</td>
<td>Gurgling, tinkering creek evokes a feeling of being nurtured. All the constant diffuse sounds make me feel enclosed. I feel myself soften into a presencing mode. I sense my enjoyment of being here alone. I feel enclosed by the soundscape. The soundscape feels more tangible than vibrations in air, as if it has a multilayered textural aspect I can touch. Sense of caring and gentleness. Appreciation of being alone, of being away from suburbia. Restoration. Groundedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Soundscapes</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/08</td>
<td>GR NP</td>
<td>River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/08</td>
<td>GR NP</td>
<td>River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/08</td>
<td>Topham Track Ku-ring-gai Chase</td>
<td>Wind in trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>Waterfall Wind in canopy</td>
<td>Waterfall Wind in canopy</td>
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<td>----</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45/08 BT NP</td>
<td>Wind in canopy, Bush quiet, Birdcalls, Falling leaves landing on forest floor</td>
<td>Appreciation of waterfalls soft, continuous sounds, it helps to quieten my busy mind by filling me with splashing sounds. Tingles up spine, along skin when the canopy roars with gusty winds, feel invigorated. Wind evokes memories of freedom and space. Relief to be alone, away from humans. Deep sense of space, place and freedom.</td>
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4.2.5 Mindful Vision

The objects I closely observed consisted of trees, rocks, leaf litter, rivers, creeks and occasionally fauna. While I was mindful for most sessions, being able to stay fully present to both the observation and my responses to it without getting into analytical mode was challenging for me. There were many times when during the activity I became lost or focused on the outward describing process, rather than turning one eye inward, so to speak, at my inner states. I did however bring my focus back to be able to record my responses (refer to Table 14). The vision activity occurred when I was already in a state of heightened eco-consciousness, so I was not in a position to determine its effectiveness for evoking eco-consciousness. I was however able to maintain this state through the vision activity, especially when I experienced awe, wonder, humility and joy.

There were five types of responses to my observations. As can be seen from Table 14, the meanings I had from this activity were dominated by aesthetic (sensorial enhancement) and cognitive orientations (ecological awareness). There were ten overall meanings of which the dominant, in terms of frequency, was ecological awareness (for example, observations of vegetation communities, leaf litter, lichen and rocks), with physiological appreciation (trees and fauna) a distant second. Grounding earth connection, existential reflection and aesthetic entrancement (lake, river, waterfall) were third most common meanings.
I tended to take a naturalist stance when describing something because I was intent on describing its appearance such as its structure, patterns, shape and colours. Given the dominance of my aesthetic and cognitive responses, this activity confirms my suspicion that seeing is a sense more pre-disposed, than touch or hearing, towards an objectivist position of separation, detached description and measurement. Despite this, there were many instances where seeing something beautiful, evocative or intricate would catalyse strong feelings, even emotions. These included a sense of wonder, awe, joy and/or love, all feelings that I associated throughout my research with evoking or deepening heightened eco-consciousness. These strong feelings were most commonly associated with a close focus on one thing like a leaf or fern or bark on a tree. Being absorbed by the colours, patterns, forms, the light of the sun on its surface, the soft whooshing of wind through the canopy, heightened the aesthetic experience and led to a recognition of the quality of its Being, its otherness from me and any human interference. This is borne out in the case of when I closely observed the scars on the Scribbly Gum tree the subject of my two-fold vision method. The vandalism degraded the tree and I felt demeaned and almost violated by this act of mindless maliciousness. I felt diminished by the vision activity in this instance. Another point regarding vision is the converse, a wandering gaze away from the focus on a subject to its much broader biophysical and social context. This would often be a landscape and within Manly Dam.
Reserve where many sessions were conducted. This would introduce human artefacts such as roads, cars, electricity pylons, motor boats, houses and even a dam and I would quickly lose the intimate, solitary relationship with the being that had been my focus. At these moments I became aware of the importance of otherness, of being wrapped up in intimate relational moments and the significance of a focused mindful vision in bringing me into closer relationship with nonhuman other.

My descriptions of my visual focus were of a general nature for areas or spaces. I would call it more like visual impressions with associated affective and spiritual reflections rather than detailed describing of every colour, object and form. I wanted to capture an impression and my inner responses rather than fall back into my more habitual technical vision with its objectivist, measuring orientation. The following is an example of a field description:

---

I sit on a dry section of sandstone rock with wet sand and leaf litter scattered around me, the scattered remains of run-off from rains over the past several weeks. I feel small, enclosed by close shrubs. I look up and out to the shrubs and blue sky. I feel protected here, a greater degree of visual intimacy. My vision goes from a space of sensitisation to the atmosphere and back to the particularities of my surrounds. In this space I can recognise and appreciate the diversity within unity of this space, a communion of beings. Each shrub is very different in terms of their leaves and flowers yet sharing a similar structural form and biological needs. I see different shades of green which I find healing. Layer upon layer of shrubs ring me, I’m at the centre of this visual field, in a maze, a nested holonic pattern. They frame a blue-white flecked sky. The visual intimacy quietens my perception of ego, I feel my Self peer through to play with this visual field.

29 June 2007
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176
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Aesthetic</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Ethical</th>
<th>Transpersonal</th>
<th>Meaning/Insights</th>
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<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Casuarina forest floor</td>
<td>Leaf litter</td>
<td>ecological</td>
<td>Appreciate - patterns</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Decomposition of organic matter</td>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>Tread lightly</td>
<td>Sense of connection</td>
<td>Ecological awareness Earth connection</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>Woodland canopy</td>
<td>Sky/limbs</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – patterns, colours, perspective</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Nurtured embeddedness Earth connection</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Creek/Riparian vegetation</td>
<td>Kingfishers, dragonflies, skinks</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate - colours</td>
<td>Observe similarity to kookaburra</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Physiological appreciation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Christmas tree</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Beauty - flowers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Ecological awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>Creek/Riparian vegetation</td>
<td>Water dragon</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – physical form</td>
<td>Visual receptivity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Physiological appreciation Sensorial enhancement – by allowing object to reveal itself</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moth</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – camouflage of moth on rock</td>
<td>Visual acuity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Receptive engagement</td>
<td>Sensorial enhancement Ecological awareness</td>
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<td>3b</td>
<td>Gloucester River’s edge</td>
<td>Still water</td>
<td>ecological</td>
<td>Appreciate – subtle colours, stillness</td>
<td>Decomposition of organic matter</td>
<td>Quiet joy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Evoked inner calmness and reflection on my bodily demise</td>
<td>Ecological awareness Existential reflection</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Granite boulder</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – hardness,</td>
<td>Indicator of volcanic origin</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Humbled and appreciate its</td>
<td>Existential reflection</td>
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NB. X = no interpretation or response made
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<th>smoothness, durability</th>
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<td>4a</td>
<td>Sandstone outcrop</td>
<td>Rock ledge</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Ecological awareness</td>
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<td>Sense of connection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Physiological appreciation</td>
</tr>
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<td>6a</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Leaf litter</td>
<td>ecological</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Amount of dead organic matter in undergrowth</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Death and renewal theme</td>
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<td>Scribbly Gum</td>
<td>Scribbles</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – types of scribbles, patterns on bark</td>
<td>Dependence of moth on tree, life-cycle</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Physiological appreciation</td>
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<td>8a</td>
<td>Scribbly Gum</td>
<td>Trunk scars</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – colours</td>
<td>Impacts of human vandalism</td>
<td>Sadness and disgust</td>
<td>Its wrong to vandalise</td>
<td>Sense of connection</td>
<td>Conflicting human value</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Gloucester River</td>
<td>Rapids</td>
<td>sensuous</td>
<td>Dynamic structure of rapid</td>
<td></td>
<td>Joyful</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Recognition of interdependenc e</td>
<td>Ecological Self Aesthetic appreciation</td>
</tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Sydney Reg Gum tree</td>
<td>Fallen bark</td>
<td>ecological</td>
<td>Appreciate – diversity of forms and colours</td>
<td>Recognition of exfoliated bark ecology</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Ecological awareness</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>13a</td>
<td>Forest at dusk</td>
<td>Understorey</td>
<td>ecological</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Recognition of importance of herb/shrub undergrowth for small mammals</td>
<td>Happiness to know of mammals presence</td>
<td>Respectful of others rights and lives</td>
<td>Sense of connection and comfort of small fauna being</td>
<td>Ecological awareness</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sandstone outcrop/water fall</td>
<td>Lichen Outcrop</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – diversity of forms and colours</td>
<td>Variety of lichen species growing and breaking</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Ecological awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sugar ant nest</td>
<td>Nest</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Smoothness and extent of nest deposition area</td>
<td>Appreciated orderly, methodical depositing of sand by ants</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Tread carefully and lightly</td>
<td>Respect for ants/ nature</td>
<td>Ecological awareness Nature respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Scribbly Gum</td>
<td>Scribbles</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – types of scribbles, patterns on bark</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Physiological appreciation</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Spider web</td>
<td>Dewy spider web</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – delicate watery beads on webs</td>
<td>Recognition of intelligence of spider web</td>
<td>Joy of beauty and design</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>I sensed the sentience intelligence of spiders</td>
<td>Physiological appreciation Aesthetic appreciation</td>
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<tr>
<td>21a</td>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>Waterbird paddling along lake</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – ripple patterns from bird</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Loving appreciation</td>
<td>Ripples of my actions spread out</td>
<td>Stillness of lake had calming, centring influence</td>
<td>Aesthetic appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21b</td>
<td>Tall closed forest</td>
<td>Old, tall tree</td>
<td>ecological</td>
<td>Appreciate – size, age, bark patterns</td>
<td>Link between aspect, community and lichen on trunk</td>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Old growth forestry is unethical</td>
<td>Sensed its presence beyond bark Felt that existential smallness</td>
<td>Physiological appreciation Ecological awareness Earth connection</td>
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<tr>
<td>21c</td>
<td>Mountain gully forest</td>
<td>Brown barrel tree</td>
<td>transpersonal</td>
<td>Appreciate – size, age, bark patterns</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Awe and humility</td>
<td>Biophilic caring</td>
<td>Sensed its sentience and being Humbled by my relative</td>
<td>Physiological appreciation Ecological awareness Earth connection Ecological Self</td>
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<tr>
<td>23a</td>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>Lake surface</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – patterns, colours, perspective</td>
<td>Hidden world beneath surface reflections</td>
<td>Slight anxiety relating to the hidden world beneath reflections</td>
<td>smallness</td>
<td>Recognition of many worlds in front of me beyond my vision</td>
<td>Aesthetic appreciation Discomfort of being a spectator. I feel trapped in an aesthetic voyeuristic objectifying mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23b</td>
<td>Lake (flooded)</td>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Overwhelming visual vista of flooded lake</td>
<td>Merging of shore and rocks alters visual perspective</td>
<td>Awe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Existential smallness</td>
<td>Aesthetic appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26a</td>
<td>Coastal headland</td>
<td>Storm run-off</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – ocean vista, water/rock polarity</td>
<td>Erosion of sandstone by run-off moulds earth, creates beach</td>
<td>Joy with sense of freedom</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Existential smallness</td>
<td>Aesthetic appreciation Earth connection Mystery of life</td>
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<tr>
<td>26b</td>
<td>Coastal headland</td>
<td>Closed heath</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – shrub diversity, colours, closeness</td>
<td>Diversity of shrubs creates habitats and microclimate</td>
<td>Intimate joy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Visual intimacy leads to softening of ego self</td>
<td>Ecological awareness Earth connection Ecological sense of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/08</td>
<td>Waterfall</td>
<td>Spider within flower of Hakea shrub</td>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>Appreciate – spiders colour, web</td>
<td>Delight</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>I sensed the sentience intelligence of spiders</td>
<td>Physiological appreciation Aesthetic appreciation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/08</td>
<td>Casuarina forest floor</td>
<td>Leaf litter</td>
<td>ecological</td>
<td>Appreciate – textures, patterns, hues</td>
<td>Curiosity Decomposition of organic matter</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Tread lightly</td>
<td>Sense of connection Evoked inner calmness</td>
<td>Ecological awareness Earth connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/08</td>
<td>Creek</td>
<td>Small pool</td>
<td>ecological</td>
<td>Appreciate – protected space overhung by ferns, stillness</td>
<td>Decomposition of organic matter</td>
<td>Quiet joy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Evoked inner calmness and centredness Sense of being</td>
<td>Ecological awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Biological</td>
<td>Sense of self</td>
<td>Aesthetic appreciation</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/08</td>
<td>Road up from Gloucester River</td>
<td>Tall trees</td>
<td>transpersonal</td>
<td>Wonder at tall, enclosing trees</td>
<td>Appreciate hues of green and brown</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Inspired</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Spiritually revitalised by majestic trees</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/08</td>
<td>Road up from Gloucester River</td>
<td>Wild dog scat</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Ecological impacts of wild dogs</td>
<td>Wariness</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Dumping dogs spoils ecology and bush experience</td>
<td>Fear of death</td>
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<td>18/08</td>
<td>Heath</td>
<td>Banksia flower</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Appreciate – golden colour, pattern</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Wonder</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Intelligent design</td>
<td>Physiological appreciation</td>
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<td>45/08</td>
<td>Tall closed forest</td>
<td>Large, old eucalypt tree</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Impressed by height (50m)</td>
<td>Insects living on and under bark</td>
<td>Wonder</td>
<td>Humbled</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Sense of being present and grounded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.6 Touch

Touching rocks, bark, leaves, water, trunks, shrubs, rotting leaves in creekbeds and moss during my nature engagement methods was connecting and nurturing for me to varying degrees, depending on my state of mind and the type of object. I enjoyed touching, of coming physically close with trees, rocks, the earth, rivers and waterfalls. While my writing did not usually convey this, there was always a degree of sensuality, appreciation and restoration to nonhuman other when I touched purposefully with care. Perhaps I did not write this down because I took these experiences for granted or I was not being sufficiently mindful. Occasionally I did express an experience of intimacy and restoration.

I entered this fieldtrip at a rocky, heathy landscape at West Head depressed and so remained throughout the walk. Given what I perceived as a dry, harsh, dull landform, and the relatively quiet soundscape, I was not surprised that I looked for an intimate acquaintance with a being, in this case the smooth, soft trunk of a Scribbly Gum tree. I found solace by embracing the tree. Intimate touching of any natural object felt comforting when I was feeling sadness, despair or anger. Touching with caring intent was upon reflection an important way to not only

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A new walk but familiar terrain and a flat depressed state of being. My state has a large bearing on my ability to evoke eco-consciousness. I was emotionally flat throughout the method. The highlight activity was touch – it felt soothing, intimate, nurturing. It allowed me to escape my depression, at least while I held the trunk of the Scribbly Gum.

22 April 2007

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I entered this fieldtrip at a rocky, heathy landscape at West Head depressed and so remained throughout the walk. Given what I perceived as a dry, harsh, dull landform, and the relatively quiet soundscape, I was not surprised that I looked for an intimate acquaintance with a being, in this case the smooth, soft trunk of a Scribbly Gum tree. I found solace by embracing the tree. Intimate touching of any natural object felt comforting when I was feeling sadness, despair or anger. Touching with caring intent was upon reflection an important way to not only
connect, to evoke or deepen a heightened eco-consciousness but a way of restoring peace and a sense of groundedness with something greater than I (this experience could occur within or before a state of heightened eco-consciousness).

A tactile engagement often led to a more intimate, relational experience of a place, not just with a being. Touching one thing, such as a tree or rock, brought me closer to that object and opened me up to feeling that many other objects could evoke similar positive feelings. A caring, sincere touch, even a hug, could evoke a sense of sacredness and communion. From this perspective, touching evoked, on occasions, the most profound experience of the method. I mostly touched with my fingers but occasionally I stroked leaves across my cheeks which felt more sensitive and delicate. In one session, I used my feet to do the touching. The skin on my feet is as sensitive as my cheek, so my feet felt sensual and acute to the sensations of the creek I was wading through, as in part, described beneath.

I focus my awareness on my feet as they slowly push through the shallow creek, the sandy-clay silt oozing, spreading through my toes, a satisfying sensation, evoking a childlike carefree, sensuous memory. It evokes a sense of groundedness and embedding. I enjoy the cool, soft water flowing past my skin. At times I feel energy tingling up my legs and spine. The rotting leaves and sticks on the creekbed feel soft. I bring my awareness back to my breath, and my feet, observing their rhythm and the watery sensations. Through feeling with my feet I can get a sense of this place. I feel very present, more immersed in this place through my feet sensations. I am being-within-creek, a different phenomenological experience to surface touching experiences.

26 January 2008
This quote expresses an example of my mindfulness, of being aware of both the phenomenon encountered, my perceptual response, my intuited meaning from that response and bringing awareness back to my breathing so as not to get lost in my responses. This quote also implies that an immersion into water of a sensitive part of me was an effective way to more sensuously experience this place, rather than relying on fingers for touch as is normally the case. There were other sessions where I plunged my whole body into the small rapids of Gloucester River and beneath a waterfall at Barrington Tops. These totally immersive experiences were even more effective for being in the moment, being present to just the cold water pushing and massaging my whole body. I felt re-sensitised, re-invigorated and absorbed into the flowing waters. I view it as a physical metaphor for an eco-self, of feeling that I was part of another aspect of nonhuman nature, as can be interpreted from a selection of my worksheet for this experience.

I feel encased in this strong flow of mountain fresh water, cool, energising, indeed joyful! I sense the rising energies of reinvigoration. There is nothing else in this series of immersive moments. I am naked beneath the pounding waterfall, feeling a bit of the mountain wildness. In the immediacy of this watery immersion, there is only the subjective experience of being-in-the-moment, a relational connected stilling consciousness emerges with a thrill and smile.

8 November 2008

Most of my descriptions, however, were physically oriented, focusing on texture, shape, density, wetness, pliability, energy, thickness, temperature. Like sound...
mapping and vision, I tended to use more naturalistic or ‘objective’ descriptions to describe what I was touching. Occasionally I used more affective, metaphysical or relational language, as indicated above which indicated that these activities evoked a strong sense of connection. Some of these expressions are paraphrased beneath:

- **Sydney Bloodwood tree**: with eyes closed, I felt the soft crumbly wet bark. I felt the trunk. I felt encompassed within its area, its extensive roots and branches. It emitted a loving, non-judgmental presence. Touching with hand and heart opened up a conscious connection of empathy. 1/1/07

- **Forest Oak tree**: stroking the fine, soft leaves across my face felt sensual, caring and nurturing. Felt caressing and more engaging, like many fingers lightly stroking me. My face feels more vulnerable, intimate portal into my Being. It evoked a joyful experience. 24/3/07

- **Scribbly Gum tree**: Holding my cheek against its smooth bark felt intimate and bonding. The tree became less the ‘other’ and more part of my field of being. I felt a loving, caring energy arise within me. This sensual experience of touching emphasised how distancing vision is. 22/4/07

- **Hawkesbury sandstone boulder**: I sit on a sandstone rock, several tonnes of quartz that has existed for millions of years. It feels rough, uneven, cool, hard yet my soft skin rubs off quartz grains. I enjoy the solidity of this ancient being. It represents a form of sentience that vastly outlives me, evoking a feeling of humility. I recognise, through this portal of touch and humility, that I have entered into a communion with nature on this rock. 14/5/07

Based on the examples of my experiences with touch, I hope that I have conveyed the significant potential of this sense to develop close connections with nonhuman
other and facilitating or sustaining a heightened eco-consciousness. Touch is one of my inner senses, I am touched by an object, it becomes literally connected to me and I cannot honestly maintain a sense of detachment from it. It is immediate and physically tangible unlike sight and hearing. The intent behind the touch, the capacity to retain mindful disposition and the mode of touching is, as I have experienced, critical for the depth of experience and meaning gained from it.

### 4.2.7 Affective Engagement

Engaging with nonhuman nature with a focus on allowing feelings and emotions to naturally arise was generally the most profound and rewarding of the nature engagement activities. It regularly took the longest time to complete of any of the activities as I dwelt, mindfully meditated upon the object or landscape of affective focus. The objects were diverse: trees, riparian areas, mountainous terrain, lizards and exposed rocky areas. In reflecting back about my choice of objects, I am a little surprised that it was so varied and that there were quite a number of exposed areas chosen given I rarely felt being nurtured in such open places. Whether it was in an open or enclosed vegetation community that I was undertaking this activity, tuning into my emotional and feeling states by reaching out relationally to the trees, rocks, birds, rivers and vistas tended to evoke a feeling of being nurtured, restored, stilled and connected. By the time I did this activity, I was well within a heightened state of eco-consciousness and this activity, being at the end and sustained over some reasonable time period, often deepened my consciousness and consolidated my diffuse sense of self.

In most areas I experienced positive feelings such as joy, love, humility and calmness. The few times where negative states of mind were experienced where I brought into the method sadness and anxiety. The affective activity generally evoked restorative experiences, by which I refer to letting go of negative states of mind, feelings of being overwhelmed by life, physical pain in lower back, eyes and joints and/or relief of being away from the restrictions and pressures of suburban life and habitual routines. Even if the activity did not fully achieve restoration, I felt
that in just mindfully acknowledging a negative feeling or state, I could more easily recognize them as energy flows or blockages, not ‘me’. This allowed me to detach what I considered to be ‘me’ from them and therefore freed me to Be. The affect, in helping to acknowledge and/or express my feelings, positive or negative, helped me to let go of my negative states of mind, my habitual states and enjoy more fully the tranquillity and beauty of my surrounds.

While each of the activities of the method contributed to evoking heightened eco-consciousness, this activity was a powerful catalyst or process for consolidating or deepening eco-consciousness, primarily, I suspect, due to the arising and releasing of emotions and positive relational caring experiences being powerful influences on my consciousness. Table 15 provides an overview of the significant processes I used to evoke a mindful affective interaction with nonhuman other. I include the consequent experience or meaning.

I provide an overview of my worksheet entries in Table 16. I include descriptions of actions and approaches I took in creating a physical, mental and affective space to engage nonhuman others and meaningful quotes from each worksheet.

Table 15 - Overview of approaches to evoking an affective response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process (approach to evoking an emotional/feeling response)</th>
<th>Meaningful experience (effect of the approach)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create safe, comfortable spaces with caring or empathic orientation</td>
<td>Comfortable, loving appreciation of a place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically embrace/touch natural objects of attraction, where appropriate</td>
<td>Intimate interaction and sense of bonding or communion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully allow emotions to be acknowledged</td>
<td>Mindfulness of emotions and their sensations as they arise. Sense of release and freedom from conscious and unconscious negative states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with nonhuman nature about personal/ecological issues</td>
<td>Releasing sadness, anxiety, grief. A sense of confiding and eventually an emptiness of negative feelings and thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualisation of healing power of natural settings</td>
<td>Developing broader perspective of human/nature interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allowed ‘negative’ states to be acknowledged and released Feeling healing energy (tingling sensations) flow through body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-directional vision (receptive/passive vision and intense, empathic reaching out viewing)</td>
<td>Passive reception of images and warm loving engagement with subjects of attraction Alteration of my consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach out empathically and gratefully to landscape and/or specific objects</td>
<td>Inclusive communion, beings become Beings (that is, intuit that physical beings have an essential, non-physical quality or Being), nature is part of Nature (Nature referring to all seen and unseen dimensions of reality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representational observation (that is, consider what objects of attraction may symbolise)</td>
<td>Existential humility of my short life (for example, in response to a granite boulder by a river, it represented an enormous life-span)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge personal space between oneself and ‘other’</td>
<td>Comfort, safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for help to let go of control/familiar ways and how to best connect with my surrounds and/or core self</td>
<td>Sense of release,emptiness and humility Feeling loved Manageable self-doubt (at times I doubted my commitment to connect to nonhuman nature at sufficient depths)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be exposed to elements (for example, high winds, driving rain, summer heat, cold temperatures)</td>
<td>Sense life’s resilience, feeling of vulnerability Feeling freedom, vibrancy and alive Respect for life’s intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visually penetrate dense vegetation</td>
<td>Soft desire to enter, leave egoic self behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciate nature’s beauty and intelligence</td>
<td>Appreciation of being alive to experience Sensing of Earth consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become familiar with local natural setting/nonhuman other</td>
<td>Intimacy facilitates deeper awareness Sense of unity with the nonhuman aspects of the place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience day/night transition</td>
<td>Calming and growing sense of being-in-the-dusk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that all ‘things’ have some level of sentience through to consciousness</td>
<td>Sense of reverence and respect for aspects of nonhuman beings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closely observe patterns, shapes of nature things</td>
<td>Aesthetic appreciation becomes reverence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining being water falling over a waterfall</td>
<td>Sense of letting go of egoic certainties Sense that the soul is the bedrock of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become enclosed by vegetation</td>
<td>Nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage natural settings at different times of the day and year</td>
<td>Awareness of different fauna movements, impacts of changed solar intensity and weather on experience of natural settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow times to wonder about existence, to appreciate that I exist</td>
<td>Sense of perspective, sense of awe that there is existence at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be in a place, not busy doing</td>
<td>Sense of place energy, feeling of dwelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hear the call of the inner wild</td>
<td>Desire to return to nonhuman engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach with child-like openness</td>
<td>Sense of curiosity and mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be fully present, not lost in abstract, detached from the here-and-now</td>
<td>Increased awareness of inner and outer worlds Humble, relational intensity to experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Sydney Bloodwood tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>Forest Oak tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eco-crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Riparian area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angophora bakeri juvenile tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>Water dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>Gloucester River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a</td>
<td>Exposed rock platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b</td>
<td>Closed forest gully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Woodland/heath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a</td>
<td>Scribbly Gum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>Scribbly Gum scars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Gloucester River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Forest/heath gully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13a</td>
<td>Full moon/dusk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Waterfall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Exposed heath track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18b</td>
<td>Forested gully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Open forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21a</td>
<td>Lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21b</td>
<td>Forested mountain ridge-gully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26b</td>
<td>Gap within Closed heath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/08</td>
<td>Gloucester River riparian area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/08</td>
<td>Mountain valley heights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/08</td>
<td>Heath ridgetop escarpment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45/08</td>
<td>Mountain tall forest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.8  Reflections

I conclude this review of the nature engagement method by reflecting on how it contributed to my experience and understanding of eco-consciousness. The method represented a structured process for deepening my connection with nonhuman nature based on perceptual, contemplative and affective approaches. My focus was not just about conducting the activities, but importantly, capturing in written form my experiences, insights and meanings associated with these activities in order to thematically analyse later. The worksheets were developed for this purpose as a way of methodically capturing these. I deliberately restricted my writings to two pages in order to place a spatial limit on my writings so I would be forced to be focused with my expressions. Even so, the worksheets took up to two hours to complete and contained up to 1,000 words (refer to Appendix 2 for an example of a filled-in worksheet). It then took up to four hours per worksheet to transcribe, closely read and enter key phrases into the thematic analysis program.

This method was highly effective in evoking a heightened state of eco-consciousness. I understand that the manner in which I approached each engagement - my clear intent, open, enthusiastic state of mind and non-judgmental, respectful disposition - helped to create the psychological conditions to shift and expand my consciousness and sense of self. I came to feel grounded with the method space and centred within me. Generally, I would enter into a natural setting with ‘normal’ waking consciousness (habitual thoughts, negative feelings about life, positive expectations, planning, scenarios of possible outcomes, thoughts of my loved ones) and through a series of activities, starting with meditation and soundmapping, would gradually shift my consciousness towards a more present, grounded, connected and relational mode, a heightened eco-consciousness.

The method was developed with a holistic, transformational purpose in mind and I feel that this holistic orientation created the desired effect in me. I viewed it as holistic in that I sought, and mostly gained, a cognitive, affective, somatic and
transpersonal understanding of a method setting. From another perspective, I view this method as holistic as it combined, to varying degrees and times, analytical, intuitive and imaginal modes of facilitating and/or interpreting settings and experiences to offer a more thorough nuanced understanding of eco-consciousness. Through these types of experiences and understandings, I feel I gained a more conscious, rather than intuited or taken-for-granted, understanding of a consciousness associated with a deep valuation, identification and respect for nonhuman nature.

This holistic method was a psychologically rewarding engagement process for numerous reasons described in the preceding pages. As a method that contributed cognitive, affective and transpersonal development within natural settings, it holds much potential for others wishing to facilitate closer connections with nonhuman nature. Some of the overall benefits I experienced included:

- raising my awareness of surrounding ecological communities, biological diversity and ecological and fluvial processes;
- helping me to appreciate and understand the value in the ‘otherness’ of nonhuman beings;
- recognising the importance of restoration and grounding for harmonising my frustrations, negative emotions and sense of self;
- helping me to not only question who I am but experience an expanded sense of self with nonhuman other;
- identifying and respecting both the differences and commonality between me and nonhuman other;
- facilitating intimacy between myself and nonhuman ‘other’;
- consolidating an appreciation of nonhuman nature’s intelligence, intrinsic value and creativity;
- evoking respect for life, wonder at existence and humility in my being;
- experiencing awe, wonder and reverence at both the perceptually obvious and obscure aspects of nonhuman nature;
initiating regular sessions of perspective taking, in other words, allowing me the opportunity to be reflective and reflexive on my life, my sense of self, my feelings about the environmental crisis and my research.

One of the important by-products of conducting this method was that I was able to release any negativity I may have brought into the method. While my negativity, that is my despair, anger, powerlessness and sadness as a result of observing an eco-crisis unfold, has significantly diminished towards the latter stages of this research, when I began I was feeling this negatively more acutely. As I conducted the initial twenty-six sessions, I recognised a lessening of my negativity, at least what I was conscious of. I believe doing these methods helped with this. I found it difficult if not impossible to dwell upon a negative feeling as I became centred and grounded, fully present in the natural setting. Quite quickly, perhaps by the time of my sound mapping activity, and definitely after my mindful hearing activity, I would have let go of any negativity and be awash with positive feelings, and importantly, perspectives on the issues and challenges in my suburban lived world. This therapeutic quality of developing eco-consciousness while not altogether surprising is I believe an important experience and implication from this method.

One of the insights I had after I had undertaken these methods was the importance of facilitating and being mindful of each of the perceptions, reflections and feelings that arose in order to enrich the memories of the fieldtrips at a latter time. This realization only became noticeable when I identified the importance of having strong memories of such experiences when attempting to visualize a nature engagement session. This was, as identified in the following journal entry, an important process in nurturing my durable eco-consciousness.
Finally, I ask how would I have improved this method? While I was overall very satisfied with the structure, flow and outcomes of this method, I do recognise that it, like anything, can be improved. How I improved it would be dependent on what I wanted to get out of a process for altering consciousness. I would spend more time on the ecological literacy preparatory and operational stages, that is learning more about the ecology of the place I conducted methods within and do a better job at plant and habitat identification in the field. This would enable me to understand more of what is actually happening, ecologically, in a setting and feel more familiar with the flora and fauna there. I would also like to deepen my capacity for mindfulness, and do it more consistently with my vision method. I would certainly like to include the other two physical senses, smell and taste, in some practical manner. Perhaps learn about bush tucker before conducting methods. While these may not be needed to evoke a heightened eco-consciousness, it would provide another way of getting to understand the environment.
4.3 Two-fold vision method

The two-fold vision method was substantially different from the previous method and completely unfamiliar to me. I developed this method based on the approaches of a number of writers but particularly the seminal work of Bortoft (1996). I undertook this method with uncertainty and ignorance about its likely effectiveness in evoking eco-consciousness. It was an experiment to assess the potential of this method for facilitating heightened eco-consciousness and how it differed as a process to the more familiar nature engagement method.

I conducted this method upon a Scribbly Gum tree, a Tawny Frogmouth bird and a waterfall riparian area in Manly Dam Reserve. I wrote my observations, feelings and insights in the field on a worksheet I designed for this method (refer to Appendix 3). As usual for my outdoor activities, I took my digital camera to record the subjects. I also took a drawing pad. Once arriving at the destination, settling down and entering into a focused, grounded state through a brief meditation, I entered into two modes of consciousness, an analytical and intuitive, imaginal mode. The analytical mode was very familiar given my orientation towards analytical observation and my technical, analytical professional background. I described the obvious parts of the whole object, its morphology and expressions. My intent was not to go into too much detail of describing or drawing the parts but to be totally focused within the process to elicit both analytical and meditative engagement with the object or place and evoke a deeper state of consciousness through the process. I found the process of intense visual analysis for substantial periods sufficient to experience many characteristics of eco-consciousness, as discussed above and in Chapter 5. The imaginal second stage consolidated and deepened my sense of connection and understanding of the object.

Overall I found this method highly challenging and rewarding in terms of the rational and intuitive understanding I gained of the objects/subjects. The process evoked a deep sense of connection with the object under observation. I found that
this was not so strong with my engagement with the Tawny Frogmouth as my time with it at Manly Dam Reserve was so brief and opportunistic, whereas the Scribbly Gum and Manly Creek waterfall were stationary features. I took longer to complete each worksheet than I anticipated, although I was never satisfied that I had comprehensively completed a worksheet as I knew I could have included more analytical information, more relational, imaginal expressions and/or more accurate impressions in my drawings.

The imaginal, intuitive activities were more difficult and not having any drawing skills, I did not feel as engaged or confident with the imaginal and drawing aspect of this process. While I enjoyed the challenge, I was always frustrated at not having the ability to capture the image to my satisfaction. I was satisfied with most drawings in terms of their capturing the overall form of the subject. If I were to do this method more or if this method was the primary sensorial method, I would seek tuition in drawing or painting skills. The artistic aspect was for me secondary to both the analytical description and the relational, intimate engagement with the subject.

Despite the substantial length of each method, anywhere from 1 ⅓ to 3 hours with the average being two hours, I was very happy that I was so focused in one place on one subject for so long. It became a meditative method where I not only lost track of time but ceased to be concerned with the reality beyond the field of my perceptual and imaginal, intuitive engagement. One of the most useful aspects of this method was the substantive degree of immersion into the process. This led not only to a more detailed impression of one object or place but a deep sense of appreciation, being grounded and inner centredness or deep calm. I went beyond a ‘surface’ or aesthetic interaction with the tree, bird and waterfall to a more relational engagement which evoked a deeper sense of connection and respectful appreciation for the inner and outer qualities of this subject. I felt this was an essential quality of an ecological consciousness and sense of self.
The two-fold vision method is a more intense, psychologically immersive method than the nature engagement method due to its more focused, one-to-one, analytical and imaginal activities. The two-fold vision process required greater sustained concentration for long periods on one subject. As new tools within this context, it took practice and discipline to stick with it. Although I did not complete enough methods to become proficient, I did become more comfortable and accepting of it as a wonderful, contemplative way of engaging nonhuman other and subsequently developing a more connected state of eco-consciousness. It is in the process, rather than the written words or object per se, that I find so useful, that takes me away from the surface to the ‘depths’ of the object and thereon to deeper levels of perception and consciousness.

I now briefly discuss each of the three objects and the results of conducting the two-fold vision process with them, including the drawings. I will not discuss the analytical descriptions beyond an introductory description, as it my overall impressions of the process for each I want to convey.

4.3.1 Review of Worksheets: The Scribbly Gum

I had observed this tree over many years at Manly Dam Reserve. With its graceful poise and scarred trunk, as well as situation within the picnic area adjacent to the reservoir, it usually caught my attention and I thought it appropriate that it should be my first object to practice this new technique. I identified the tree as a Scribbly Gum but recognised that it was different from the other Scribbly Gum’s nearby. The vegetation community in this area is *Eucalyptus haemastoma*-*Eucalyptus punctata*-Corymbia gumniferum forest. This tree appeared to be a hybrid between the common *Eucalyptus haemastoma* tree and the more restricted *Eucalyptus racemosa* which is found along the central

Figure 25 – Scribbly Gum
coast of NSW but not in this area. The latter grows in more dense, silty soils although it can be found in sandy soils like the former is. It is not uncommon for hybridisation between similar species to occur. This tree is less than 15 metres tall with cream-mauve smooth patches of bark, candelabra shaped with dark green ‘clouds’ of leaves in the canopy. The most striking aspects were its white, ‘reaching’ limbs, red stained and scarred trunk and overall graceful form. I enjoyed identifying it given its mixture of features, which appealed to my analytical, labelling predisposition. It did not have the leaves of a *Eucalyptus haemastoma* but it had the flowering and bark characteristics. It was a challenge which I enjoyed researching.
Figure 29 - Scribbly Gum Worksheet No 2 (consisting of two images)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK: 8</th>
<th>DATE: 19/2/01</th>
<th>TIME START: 9:25</th>
<th>END: 11:55</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOCATION: MD No 3 Scribbly Gum</td>
<td>WEATHER: Fine, mild, calm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PHENOMENON OBSERVED:** Scribbly Gum tree

**ANALYTICAL MODE**

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS:** Green, white, reaching tree, 'porous', with skinny, classic eucalypt shaped, aesthetically pleasing

**DESCRIPTION OF WHOLE:** A multidimensional candleabra shaped eucalypt tree with mottled cream maroon coloure trunk. The trunk deviates slightly but naturally off centre at chest level then curves gradually back to the centre alignment at 3/4 up. Bark has cut or slits showing down in panels. The impression of this tree's structural form is one of balance, health & vitality. The primary & secondary limbs radiate out & up in graceful manner that gives balance to the tree. The canopy is made of a series of dense, green clumps (clouds) of drooping small curved leaves.

**DESCRIPTION OF PARTS:**

- **Leaves:** Out of reach - closest ones (2cm) are halfway up. I rely on binoculars to observe as well as photos. They are generally narrow (2cm), thin like parchment paper, not stiff like E. pauciflora leaves, gently curved to fine sharp point. Long stalk (2cm) + initial leaf genuss evenly spread from midvein (which doesn't protrude). Most leaves approx 10cm long, some to 15cm, some shorter than 2cm. But 99% like E. racemosa.

- **Buds:** On long stalk (2cm) near 2.3mm wide, up to 12 buds per stalk, radiating up & out from stalk terminal, a yellow cap 2.3mm wide, rounded stalk of buds approx 1cm, but less than 2.3mm deep. Found on terminal branches, close together, numerous gives green leafy clumps a yellownish, spotted appearance.

- **Bark:** Mottled patches, irregular shaped, distributed mostly v. light with white sheen appearance, some have dark grey sub patches. Most 95% scabie on the dominant cream bark. Four of 67 sap slits down trunk came from circular through deep gorges into bark. They look like bloody dried wounds.

**BIOPHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

| LANDSCAPE: | Open Forest |
| SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: | Eucalyptus, Kanangra, Open Forest |
| VEGETATION TYPE: | Common Species: F. intermedia, E. pauciflora, E. gunnii, E. pootsia, C. eugenia, L. intermedia |
| FAUNA: | Birds, Water Dragon |

**CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT**

| SIGNS/ACTIVITIES (IMMEDIATE): | Recreational |
| ACTIVITY INTERRUPTIONS: | YES |
| IF YES, WHAT TYPE: | Recreational |
INTUITIVE MODE

Visualisation/ ESJ process: I wanted to capture the very basic form of the tree, without unnecessary detail. I carefully observed the line of the main trunk - traced it for my deep-sky photo that I captured to the left to the middle when I turned back to align with the background. I drew an image of this curved balancing alignment in my mind along with her primary branches. I wanted to capture its structural essence.

Creative representation process: I approached this sketch with the structural form in mind. I still wanted to be accurate within the trunk curved alignment - 6 or so primary branches emerging from the trunk. I wanted a more simple pictorial representation of the whole gesture of the tree; a balanced reaching, rising transcending form. I really got focused on this gesture, forgot time in my focused appreciation of its lines.

Internal/ external relationships:

I strongly sense how the whole reaching gesture of the branches+trunk comes from its own sense of the parts reflects the whole, graceful curves, rising gesture. The primary+secondary branches off the trunk feel like expressions of the trunk; all branches are dimensions of the trunk. The tree is essence trunk or stem, radiating up+down, out+within.

Time-life of phenomenon: The tree has numerous battle scars from encounters with various humans, much earlier in its growth phase. Some level of healing while wrapped around it causing linear scars. So these scars, along with the dark earthy linear grooves tell a story of the past perhaps it evolved before, given its uniqueness, etc. Hybrid perhaps it was planted. But its uniqueness, scars give it an interesting history out of which it survived, prospered and rebalanced its life of growth. This history symbolizes a genetic interaction between humans + nature, its prospered other conservation became primary.

Intuitive/ imaginal process: It is the tree's aesthetic balance that strikes me today. The self-correcting curvature of the trunk as it grows inclines into the sky. I feel its intelligence + awareness of its surroundings. It self-correcting realignment to the centre. Its essence feels like...well it's self-possessed + intelligent. I think its roots spreading across the trunk + bending sandstone rock, slowly feeding absorb nutrients just like the branches. Reaching out into the air to absorb energy + air. I feel its flow of energy bridging air + Earth. To create a dynamic, flowing curved structural form.

Affective states: A sense of strong relational connection that comes thru a naturalistic study of this tree, evoking appreciation + recognition of its awareness + form. I feel a deep sense of appreciation, the stillness that comes from a cognizant, aesthetic + living interaction with it.

Reflections:

I was pleasantly surprised by the success of this exercise. I didn't expect much, certainly nothing new. But in approaching the observation initially with the idea of simplifying my impression of the form, I began to observe the living idea of ascendency of forms can lead to overall balance in the whole, or how the tree curved + curved back to a centre alignment with the base. How the branches radiated out upward to give symmetrical balance at the side of the central alignment. Curves, curves, curves might be too simplistic. On a mindful note, I was totally focused during both periods of observation, engaged, not aware of the 2 plus hours that slipped by. I had a sense after the first to break it up, relax + get into more flowing mode.
Of the three objects, I found this one the most satisfying in terms of getting to understand the two-fold vision process and what I learnt about it. The surprising aspect of doing it three times was that I enjoyed doing it three times, that I noted different aspects of it each time and that its dominant features were appealing not only from an aesthetic but from an internal/external relational perspective – in other words, I enjoyed the symbolic similarities between the bark and the landscape and the trunk and the leaves. My three sketches of the tree (see Figures 26, 27 and 28) reflected my desire to simplify its form and accentuate the inner qualities that I intuited from my ‘extra sensory imagination’ activity. I went from a sketch capturing some detail of the tree and its surrounds, to a ghostly looking outline of the grasping limbs (shown in the sketch below) through to a final sketch indicating spiralling lines through its trunk and limbs, symbolising the flow of energy and water from earth to sky, sky to earth. In Figure 28, my intent was to capture its structural essence without distracting details. For this sketch and the others, the extra-sensory imagination process created a meditative, empty state of heightened receptivity and openness. I found it to be a process for creating a ‘holding’ environment within which to allow the entities essence (ur-phenomenon as Goethe called it) to enter into a dialogical relationship within me. In this way it allowed a deeper level of relational knowing beyond the descriptive interpretation of the previous analytical mode of consciousness.

I felt that undertaking the method three times was sufficient to develop a rational and intuitive based understanding of the tree. I noted in the third session that it was more interesting and intense than I had expected as a result of this absorbing, intense process and my interest in its ecological and cultural expressions. I was absorbed in the process giving me a relational and empathic perspective towards the tree, which are essential qualities of ecological consciousness. I think it is also a matter of when one dwells relationally (as against detached or aesthetically) within a space or with a fellow being for a sufficient period, then a more intuitive understanding can arise, one that personalises or makes personally tangible inter-
subjective qualities of a direct nonhuman engagement. Each of the three sessions with it ended with a deep sense of groundedness, appreciation of its ‘Being’, a sense of personal identification with it and meditative, present and connected mode of consciousness. I summarise my impressions and interpretations of the tree in Table 17.

Table 17- Summary of Scribbly Gum engagements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Overall impression</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First impression</td>
<td>‘grasping’, ‘reaching’ tree</td>
<td>White candelabra form appealed to me. Metaphor for my grasping for meaning, symbolic of a reaching hand. Symbolic for me of earth-sky, feminine-masculine integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships (internal/external)</td>
<td>colour, texture and scribbles reflected the local environmental features e.g. ochre stains on bark reflected the ochre iron stains along local sandstone ledges and creeks curve of trunk/branches reflected in curve in leaves</td>
<td>Enjoyed how red ochre stains, bark and scars symbolised landscape, embedded meaning of landscape interconnection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective state</td>
<td>Appreciation, loving, relational, quiet joy</td>
<td>Enjoyed dwelling upon tree’s graceful form and other features, as well as its history, physical context and energies. This aesthetic flowed into a personalised or relational orientation from which I felt empathy, respect and love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>Confusion and then relieved to clarify its identity Significance of external/internal relationships was rewarding Enjoyment of mixing analytical with intuitional modes. Intense focus of engagement</td>
<td>Appealed to my investigative, analytical mind. Discovering its hybridised nature was satisfying Fascinated by correlations between bark textures/colours and landscape. Appeal of two-fold process Two modes brings greater depth to perception, impacts upon state of consciousness and phenomenological understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.2 Review of Worksheets: Tawny Frogmouth

The Tawny Frogmouth is a nocturnal bird found throughout Australia in woodlands and forests. While it hunts insects, arthropods, spiders, frogs and small mammals at night, it is not an owl, which are of the Strigiformes order. It is a night bird of the Coraciiformes order and is related to kookaburras and kingfishers. Having seen numerous kookaburras and kingfishers, I attest to this similarity, particularly the body shape. Its morphology (beak, talons) and ecology (nesting, roosting and food sources) is different from owls. It is not easy to spot, even during the day, given its still, camouflaged, rectangular body. It tends to perch on a limb of a tree or shrub throughout the daytime with minimal movement. I have observed a pair perching on a tree limb and they did not move for the hour I was watching. Other birds did not appear to notice them. They are the masters of avian camouflage. The following two drawings represent my visual interpretation of them (refer to Figures 31 and 32).
Two Fold Vision Worksheet

WEEK: 12  DATE: 9/15/01  TIME: START N/A  END
LOCATION: N/A  WEATHER: N/A

PHENOMENON OBSERVED: Tawny Frogmouth

ANALYTICAL MODE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: A still shadow emerging from a tree limb. Out on a limb between the falling sky light and dark forest. A feathered presence with tree. Stillness, patience, focused being of the night.

DESCRIPTION OF WHOLE:

Tawny Frogmouth are around 41 cm long, with a wingspan between 65-75 cm and weight of up to 800g. It has a head grey plumage with streaked greenish dark. Slender beak, pointed, and short, with a bicuspid edge. The eye is positioned at midpoint between top and bottom of head, within anterior third. This brownish banding is more obvious at the rear of the neck. The distinctive crest of feathers, held about, is seen perched in a tree. The bill is curved at mid-point slightly and has a wide gap. Full rotation of head observed, well almost 360°.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTS:

Head: relatively small, narrow, indistinct with soft grey plumage, forming a peak area. Light grey, small, soft feathers, forming back-wards. The eye is positioned at midpoint between top and bottom of head, within anterior third. Has brownish banding at crown, similar to it relative, and a contrasting white.

Beak: robust, with head to give thick, squareish shape, with feathers medium to long, dark grey, in a overall pattern, with scattered streaky dark lines across. Billed. Billed long, darker feather along inner lips, white patch along length.

Breast: consists of soft, downy, light grey feathers, running down to tail feathers, some dark patches beneath neck. Breast feather, more directly, than streaky patterns butt, backward feathers but not. Tail feathers, similar to kookaburra, tails.

Feet: narrow, small talons, relatively weak looking, four fingers spreading out, for perching, rather than catching large prey.

BIOPHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

LANDSCAPE: drowned HSS Valley
SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: reservoir
VEGETATION TYPE: open forest
COMMON SPECIES: E. ebena, E. hom E. hom A. cost

ASPECT: N/A
GEOMETRY: HSS
COMMUNITY: Sydney, Red Gum, Subbubs, Gum, Forest
FAUNA: flying foxes, fruit bats, brush-tailed possums, long-nosed bandicoot

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

SIGNS/ACTIVITIES (IMMEDIATE): above
read
SIGNS/ACTIVITIES (LOCAL):

ACTIVITY INTERUPTIONS: YES
IF YES, WHAT TYPE:
INTUITIVE MODE

Visualisation/ESI process: Having observed the bird in the field by my photos, I felt familiar with it. It made the visualisation easier. I find visualisation requires a real, focused effort for me. It’s not a natural thing to do – in terms of a specific, detailed imaginative representation of an object. But for a camouflaged bird, it was fine. I visualised the bird's first with its distinctive eyes, its fluffy crested feathers on its face and neck, its camouflaged brown and tan plumage, and my imagination. Its body is camouflaged with mottled patterns, not bound to its intricate web of feathers which are buff brown with thin lines of brown. Its overall shape is fluid, balanced. Easier to hold the visualisation tree.

Creative representation process: Visually they imagine its unique features as dark grey-brown linework, mottled patterns, and bound on its face with its breast feathers which are buff brown with thin lines of brown. Its overall shape is fluid, balanced. Easier to hold the visualisation tree.

Internal/external relationships: I sketched it using charcoal from my photos and from my visual impressions. I was surprised how easy it was to sketch it to capture its form and features. It flowed, the detail of feather patterns was lost, and the branch. This might depend on its presence in my cognition, camouflaged, still being. It blends, with the tree, a branch, due to its featherless patterns, its short, straight beak, its grey feet, its brown. Its grey-crested underside, its dark face, its buff brown, its lozenge-shaped feathers, its buff brown, its buff brown, its buff brown, its buff brown. Its lozenge-shaped feathers, its buff brown, its buff brown, its buff brown, its buff brown.

Time-like phenomenon:

I have not seen this bird as a child or in my life, although I have seen it often. I can imagine it within a small flock of chills, with its large, black, eyes, a feeling of a feeling, of a feeling, of feeling, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being.

I imagine the birds from a small flock of chills, with its large, black, eyes, a feeling of a feeling, of a feeling, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being.

I observe the birds from a small flock of chills, with its large, black, eyes, a feeling of a feeling, of a feeling, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being.

Intuitive/imagination process: I observe the birds from a small flock of chills, with its large, black, eyes, a feeling of a feeling, of a feeling, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being, of being.

Affective states: Approaching it slowly, silently, each time, I get a feeling of every part of my spine, entering into it, I am aware of the sensation, but I am aware by its close, of its presence. It looks into my eyes, but suddenly, it looks away, as if dismissing me as a threat. I believe its features, full of admiration for its perfect evolutionary recall, form, and patterns.

Reflections:

It may not be from the earth, but it is wonderfully evolved. It is beautiful, with its beautiful wings, its beautiful eyes, its beautiful beak. It is beautiful, with its beautiful wings, its beautiful eyes, its beautiful beak. It is beautiful, with its beautiful wings, its beautiful eyes, its beautiful beak. It is beautiful, with its beautiful wings, its beautiful eyes, its beautiful beak. It is beautiful, with its beautiful wings, its beautiful eyes, its beautiful beak. It is beautiful, with its beautiful wings, its beautiful eyes, its beautiful beak. It is beautiful, with its beautiful wings, its beautiful eyes, its beautiful beak. It is beautiful, with its beautiful wings, its beautiful eyes, its beautiful beak. It is beautiful, with its beautiful wings, its beautiful eyes, its beautiful beak.
I chose to study this bird because I had regular, synchronous encounters with it at Manly Dam Reserve. I also attached significant symbolic meaning to it, as a nightbird with similar qualities to true owls. I also wanted to know what differences there were between a tree or place and an animal that could move freely around. My summary of my worksheets are found in Table 18. The first session occurred when I encountered one late dusk into the dark of early evening while the second occurred late afternoon in broad daylight. Trying to analyse its features was tested by the lack of light (I relied on torchlight) and knowing it could fly off at any time. I attempted to absorb a sense of being present with the bird. In this session, I took photographs of it for later reference and analysed its form and features. I completed my impressions and descriptions in the two-fold vision worksheet later at home, with the help of photos. Certainly, from this perspective of a quick encounter, there was a significant difference in observing the Tawny, a being that could fly off at any time (and did), especially at night, and more earthbound subjects. This affected the duration and intensity and eventually satisfaction with the two-fold vision method. The Tawny sessions were enjoyable but not as satisfying as the Scribbly Gum sessions, but more engaging than the more diffuse waterfall sessions. Undertaking this method with an animal that can quickly move away is difficult or problematic, especially if the intent is to evoke an altered consciousness that requires a series of contemplative, focusing and imaginal activities to achieve, in my experience. While I cannot say I developed an eco-consciousness within these two sessions, in terms of an altered consciousness, I did experience some of the characteristics (connectedness, wonder, appreciation for its unique, intrinsic nature, appreciation of its ‘otherness’) of an eco-consciousness state during my brief time with it.

My overall impression of the birds that I observed for this method as well as the many other times was of an extremely well camouflaged, silent being that emerged from trees and merged into the bush and night often beyond my sensorial capacities. It appeared as a silent, patient sentinel, a plant-bird, a mixture of both bird and tree-like appearances. I viewed it as a well-adapted night predator. I was
intrigued by its amorphous body and was focused more on the whole body than any of its parts. The whole morphological form was more significant than any of its parts. I found this metaphorically significant as representative of a unifying, integrated theme that I intuited in my interactions with nonhuman nature. The bird needed to be unnoticed, to merge with trees and my analytical and intuitional observations pointed towards the significance of its aesthetically ‘unremarkable’ form. As I commented ‘its fundamental symbolic meaning is unity, it becomes one with the tree limb, it merges with the tree’.

I enjoyed and respected the Tawny’s symbolic qualities that I projected upon it: calmness, wisdom, insight and patience. Because of its embeddedness upon trees and within the woodland, I enjoyed my encounters with them as a symbolic representation of not only some of the qualities I aspired to and respected but as a catalyst for an ecological consciousness through the process of analytical and intuitional observation. This consciousness had a different feel or flavour to my experience with the Scribbly Gum, a consciousness arrived at through a brief, relational and aesthetic encounter and later remembered during the analytical and visualisation activities. It was during my direct, quiet observations of the Tawny within two metres of where it was perched that I felt a strong recognition of its intrinsic value, as a nightbird species and as an individual living being pursuing its own predisposition. I not only enjoyed my regular encounters, my close presence to it but through the two-fold process entered into a more participatory approach to understanding it.
### Table 18 - Summary of Tawny Frogmouth engagements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Overall description</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First impression</td>
<td>‘feathery oneness with tree’ ‘camouflaged’, ‘stillness’</td>
<td>The first visual experience was dominated by its camouflaged merging with a tree limb. This impression remained strong throughout the sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships (internal/</td>
<td>Feather colours, patterns similar to mottled browns/creams of trunks/branches</td>
<td>Its indistinctiveness is critical to its survival. Its shape, colour and stillness reflect its habitat, its relationship with the tree limbs it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external)</td>
<td>Motionless, grey body in the dusk light merges with the dead Banksia limb, lifeless form</td>
<td>merges with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curve of beak similar to curved talons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective state</td>
<td>Appreciation, awe, enjoyed it allowing me to come close to it</td>
<td>Outside of my appreciation for its ecological, morphological and symbolic qualities, I enjoyed being able to get close to it without any signs of stressing it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>Respect for its physical features, solitary independence and calmness</td>
<td>Appreciation, respect and enjoyment of my interactions in and outside of these sessions were important outcomes for me. Its symbolic qualities were almost as important as observing its physical characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoyed its symbolic qualities for learning and being: calmness, stillness, mindfulness, holistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.3 Review of Worksheets: Manly Creek Waterfall

Manly Creek flows from the north-west to the south-east of Manly Dam Reserve and it is its damming from the 1890s that formed the reservoir. Once used as a water supply for the Manly District, it is now managed for recreational, commercial and ecological purposes. It is surrounded by protected eucalypt forest and woodland with closed heath understorey. There is low and medium density development in its upper headwaters. The water quality is generally good although there are occasional nutrient elevations typical of urban streams. I conducted three sessions at the main waterfall that is approximately half a kilometre from the western end of the reservoir. This waterfall is approximately 4 metres high in a shape of a horseshoe with dense riparian vegetation along its edges, except along the edge of the falls (refer to Figure 34). While there is a walking track along its southern edge, I was the only person there during my sessions, which helped maintain my focus. I conducted three sessions here and made three drawings in each of my visits (refer to Figures 35-37).
Figure 38 - Manly Creek Waterfall Worksheet No 1 (consisting of two images)

Two Fold Vision Worksheet

WEEK: 24  DATE: 31/1/07  TIME: START: 11.25  END: 12.50  WEATHER: fine, clear, breeze higher ups
LOCATION: Manly Creek, Manly Dam  MAIN VIEW: waterfall + pool
PHENOMENON OBSERVED:

ANALYTICAL MODE
FIRST IMPRESSIONS:
A circular fusion of water, earth, vegetation and sky coalescing into one unified waterfall space
DESCRIPTION OF WHOLE:
The highest and broadest waterfall on Mainy Creek, is a hypnotic space of circular fusion of the elements where the waters fall over smaltes to a round, dark blue green hued pool beneath. The sandstone cliff arcs from east-west in a 25mass curved embrode above this rippling space. Above are tall graceful peppermints and scrubby, forming my immediate visual boundary, within the enclosed space hang black wattle trees, ferns, beneath along the water's rim are the boulders, debris, rocks + water. A beautiful softy splashy space of natural fusion

DESCRIPTION OF PARTS:
The falls drop over the lip of the sandstone bedrock, a thin layer of flaming silver aloha, top coalescing into long, interrupted, linear streamers that give shape to the waterfall's specific form. The falling stream in grey-white, becoming a vibrant scottish blue, as it impacts the sandstone ledge + boulders beneath. It then frothes and/or mists subtly flows down rock + into the dark deep blue/black inches of the still pool.

The sandstone bedrock rises almost 5 metres above the pool surface, it gives shape to this water space. Horse-shoe shaped it dips gradually from north to south, until it reaches the lower level of the creek stream but its southern extent. The cliff is covered by grass, giving it a black timbered colour. It is cracked textured, mostly covered on its sides by various ferns. The lip of the cliff is clear, abrupt, distinct, level with the water over 1/3rd of its exposure to the 3rd corner

BIOPHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

LANDSCAPE: fully riparian
SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: waterfall pool
VEGETATION TYPE: riparian forest
COMMON SPECIES: Black wattle, ferns

ASPECT: north
GEOLGY: Hawkesbury sandstone
COMMUNITY: Peppermint gum forest

FAUNA: small canopy + shrub birds

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

SIGNs/ ACTIVITIES (IMMEDIATE): nil
ACTIVITY INTERUPTIONS: yes  IF YES, WHAT TYPE:

SIGNs/ ACTIVITIES (LOCAL): Track
INTUITIVE MODE

Visualisation/ESI process: I visualised the complex interplay of the visual field. I focused on the actual scale, looking down. I realised that this is one of the most delicate, yet powerful, acts of perceiving nature. Being aware of the vegetation with their subtle shapes. Too much detail for the observer.

Creative representation process:

A very challenging task is to capture the complexity, rhythm, or feeling of the space. But difficult but given it a go with an initial draw of the cliff, using digitised images, adding the cliff, vegetation, and some dramatic lighting. Provided a more detailed visual basis to address the space's character. The most detailed view, represent the space as it appears.

Internal/external relationships:

I do not limit my conception of the actual scale to just the visual scale. The visual scale is the actual scale that gives form to a specific quality within the visual field. The various details within this visual field are not truly related to the interactions with water over various time periods - e.g., streams of water over millions of years of vegetation growth, etc. The cliff has horizontal features, and the water's vertical direction, flowing water, creates movement for visual processing at different scales. The perspective is from the cliff face, looking out to see, as if it were a view from a height, experiencing the scale of the space.

Time of representation:

I observe the height of the sandstone cliff in the water, experienced by the massive energy of millions of years of weathering processes. I observe the large scale of the cliff face, at the same time, a long time ago from the tower. I'm much up of the cliff. The scale has evolved the cells back in these massive, perhaps much smaller. The others of some massive, interrelated, sequential, spatial, artistic nature, and the cliff is part of this process. The cliff's visual experience the scale, which is a very large experience. The cliff is part of this process.

Intuitive/imaginal process:

I feel immersed as much by the visual, enclosed vision of colour and shapes, form as it is by the local sounds of current wind gusting at water's open rocks + ledge. Without a distinct, apparent gestural direction, I sense a unity of being (rocks, water, trees, etc.) that co-exists within a place and beyond this place of fusion. The visual scale is the obvious sensory gesture of this place, the branching connection of water's edges between the cliff's visual meaning and ambiance, itself enclosed by sculptural rock and the deep cliff, expansive banks, beneath which are currents of a space. The cliff has a demarcation and unfolding land that plays with the sea, bringing views.

Affective states:

I feel a sense of deep, close, in confronting, existing with this nature, dynamic, overwhelming. There is a soft natural visual activity experience here. Along with the self, nature, being connected, sense, energy of the visual elements. Space (although it is not). In

Reflection of the process:

I am released of part, anger, sadness, filled with peace of this transcendental being in with without enclosed, empty space. In being enclosed by overwhelming vegetation with strong visual boundaries of this space. I feel smaller yet aware of my presence, wrapped up in a communing of beings that give form, character, to this space.

This was a much needed form of activity, had been feeling very about not feeling to do it again, it was also a challenge to do a place, like this with so many strong elements, each of which could not be the subject for study. It flowed (without intuitive observation) better than I expected. Despite the hard work, observing position, I still left this work much has not been fully each of the elements parts, not interesting, all the parts contribute to the form, quality of the visual space well, with water, both, now, over prominent time to the form, quality of the visual space with water, both, now, over prominent time to the form, quality of the visual space. I felt a sense of place, on, that is different, yet part of the overall sense of the space along the scale.
It was my impression of reading about two-fold vision and other similar types of phenomenological investigation that most subject matter were single objects, such as particular plant, rock, animal or some other specific thing. A place such as this waterfall has many ‘things’ that could be the subject of exploration, so I knew that it would be a significant challenge before I started to use this method on complex space constituted by many such individual objects. As Cameron (2005) discovered as well:

Place is not so much a phenomenon as an infinitely nested set of phenomena … each of which could be the subject of the sort of painstaking observations that Goethe undertook (Cameron, 2005:4)

I found it difficult to relate to so many aspects of the waterfall such as the falls, the cliff, fallen rocks, fallen branches and trees in the pond, the pond itself, the vegetation overhanging the pond. I think the depth of inter-subjectivity is negatively affected in that the many aspects or subjects of this place diluted or distracted me from a more intense one-to-one relationship, that is, myself and a specific object like a rock or tree. I found this engagement different to the interactions with the Scribbly gum and the Tawny Frogmouth. The energies and intuitive understandings of this waterfall led to a different experience of the process and sense of relatedness. I was able, however, to relate intimately to the waterfall space and found it an enjoyable, learning and revitalising process. Would I conduct a two-fold vision method on a landscape again? No, I think the importance of this approach is to connect through imaginal processes, not just relational or affective means which I did here. It is much easier, more ‘effective’ to select a single specific object to visualise and enter into an imaginal space that a place of nested phenomena.

It was a testament to the diversity of the visionscape, and the diversity of the two-fold activities, that my final session went for over two hours, longer than the
previous two sessions. I found it useful to conduct three sessions at the waterfall because I would observe different aspects of the waterfall each time, confirm my interpretations or impressions from the previous session and engage with these, thereby evoking a richer interpretation of the place. An overview of my worksheets is found in Table 19. As a result I feel that the two-fold process can be seen simply as a structured form of relational exploration that requires analytical and imaginal modes of consciousness and engagement, which as I found for these sessions evoked not only a feeling of groundedness but a deeper sense of place and being-in-space. Becoming so focused over several hours was meditative and conducive to feeling a oneness experience, a sense of being a part of this place, an experience that is critical to deepening states of consciousness. The two-fold vision process helped re-orient my perspectives towards nonhuman other by removing me from my normal socio-cultural contexts and immersing my being, my focus within a structured, explorative process with nonhuman ‘other’.

Falling or moving water is a favourite phenomenon of mine, especially in natural bushland. I generally enjoy the sounds and energies of the place more than the sight of the waterfall or creek. I love to soak up the feelings and energies of these places. I observed and felt the contrast of states and energies of the waterfall and the pond beneath. I looked at the water falling over the relatively soft sandstone cliff and imagined how the water over millions of years had given form to the cliff and the space around. I capture the intuited essence of this waterfall in my description of it:
**I sense the overall being of this space as a flowing, streaming dynamic of water and energy in its various manifestations – the waterfall, pool, vegetation, within the soil, over the rocks and cliffs. Water, seen and unseen, links everything, facilitating this communion of beings, reflecting the restorative experience for me. ... The sensing of its holonic quality facilitated a deeper stillness within that spoke to me of a deeper state of being, away form my normal doing, surface orientation.**

23 July 2007

In imagining the movement of the waterfall back up the catchment over millions of years and letting this speak to me of all the life forms that had existed in its being, I felt humbled in my ‘littleness’ and the brevity of my physical existence. I sensed a smaller, less significant sense of self to the point of being less aware of my self boundaries. In other words, I moved towards an ecological sense of self as I have discussed it in Chapter 5. This was the primary benefit of the imaginal and creative activities for this method, that by immersing myself, my imaginal and physical vision of the riparian space, I was able to deepen my awareness of the surface and inner qualities of the place and evoke a deeper eco-consciousness and ecological self.

**Table 19 - Summary of the Manly Creek waterfall engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Overall description</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| First impression          | ‘A circular fusion of water, earth, vegetation and sky coalescing into one unified waterfall space’
                            | ‘nurturing green around’, ‘an intimate space of organic and inorganic fusion’                                                             | The visual impression was dominated by the equal integration of water, rocks, riparian vegetation and sky. I found solace, healing and psychological significance to being as well as seeing these aspects. I generally find green to be healing, nurturing and helpful in bonding to a place |
| Relationships (internal/ external) | Bi-directional flow of energy between the overhanging vegetation and the waters and silt | It was useful and rewarding to observe the ecological interactions within and outside of the waterfall space, as well as seeing it within the |
of the pond
The waterfall and pond have holonic qualities, that is, the space is a system of dynamic containment yet part of the horizontal/vertical/temporal dimensions of the whole catchment
Fallen tree in pond slows creekflow and helps give shape and character to the pond
The waterfall is an expression of a the whole water cycle as well as a reflection of the cliff, vegetation and geological-climatic-evolutionary processes over immense timescales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective state</th>
<th>Appreciation, nurtured, happiness, bonded</th>
<th>The walk into the waterfall place and its beautiful, peaceful qualities initially facilitated the positive states which was supplemented by the connecting qualities of the two-fold process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>A focused, mindful process which allows for a more presencing, healing engagement While the waterfall and pond dominated my senses, I sensed the energies and integrative gestures of the place: water, air, earth, vegetation as one unified space</td>
<td>My reflections indicate the importance of the two-fold approach to engaging ‘other’ in a surface/inner manner. The type of process deepened my understanding and appreciation of the waterfall area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.4 Reflections

The two-fold vision method provided a process that allowed me to more intently perceive the world around by combining two complementary modes of perception, the analytical and the intuitive/imaginal. The imaginal included using imagination, visualisation and creativity (sketching) to seek and convey a sense of the object beyond its surface characteristics. It was by being fully cognitively and affectively engaged with the tree, bird and waterfall that I came to establish a sense of connection with them, from which flowed a surface understanding of their characteristics and qualities and then, through the intuitional mode of perception, an intuitive perception of their essence. Through this process, I came to value them and understand why I valued them. This suggests that this method helped me become more conscious of their being, more empathically relational and a stronger valuation of them through a refinement of perception and intuition. To become more conscious of the ecological, biophysical and inner qualities of an object is to be consistent, I believe, with developing a heightened state of ecological consciousness and an ecological sense of self.

My interpretations and cognitive, affective and spiritual responses during the methods facilitated a highly meaningful, fulfilling experience that I would recommend to others. I view the process of combining the two modes of consciousness with a meditative, mindful approach as a way of fully engaging with nonhuman ‘other’ as well as a way of harmonising and moving beyond the ego consciousness that I arrived with for each method. The waterfall sessions required that I walk through beautiful bushland for twenty minutes, within which time I had slowed down my thinking, released my negativity and was already feeling relaxed and more grounded. It is the limiting conceptions of self and ‘other’ and my world, along with the psychological and emotional imbalances, that skews my perception...
and interpretation of my world. An important aspect of this method was letting go of my ego dominance and allowing a more open, non-judgmental, empathic engagement with the engaged ‘other’. This method allowed me to immerse myself in natural settings, allowing nonhuman ‘other’ to become better known or at least more fully experienced. The two-fold vision method not only evoked deep states of eco-consciousness but also precluded thoughts of time, negative feelings and habitual suburban thinking.
CHAPTER 5 – UNDERSTANDING MY EXPERIENCE OF ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS AND ITS DEVELOPMENT
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot Little Gidding, *Four Quartets* (1943)
5.1 Introduction

This chapter responds to the research questions relating to my experience of and understanding about eco-consciousness and its development. In responding to the questions, I reflected upon all my chapters, as well as my journals and worksheets, to get an overall feel for how and where I had ‘travelled’ in my quest to understand eco-consciousness as a phenomenon. This reflective process also represents the final creative synthesis stage of my heuristic immersion into the research questions. The creative synthesis stage arises out of the preceding heuristic immersion stages (outlined in Section 2.4.1) and provides the opportunity to integrate key experiences and meanings into an overall understanding of the lived experience of dwelling upon the research questions.

My primary finding was that my experience and understanding about the phenomenon revolved around two broad aspects to eco-consciousness development: heightened states and durable level of eco-consciousness. When I confirmed my research topic in 2006, I naively assumed that my focus would be on evoking a short-lived state of consciousness, understanding how and why it could be developed and discuss its potential for education. It seemed obvious that my interest in human-nature connections should be focused on the actual experience and meaning of the connection and the subsequent type of consciousness. It was the shift in consciousness from a normal waking one to a more expanded, caring and centred eco-consciousness that I thought constituted the development of eco-consciousness. This was largely the case, putting aside my journal reflections on the need to translate heightened into a more durable level of eco-consciousness, until an ‘eureka’ moment early 2008. This moment occurred when, following my analysis and reading of a seminal paper by Christopher (1999), I realised that my whole life story, particularly in the years preceding this research (refer to Chapter 1.3 for this), was consistent with other environmentalists experience of developing a day-to-day eco-consciousness, as described by Christopher (1999). Having discussed in my journals, as can be observed in Chapter 3, the importance of translating heightened states into something more durable, longer lasting within
my social context, I was elated and relieved to broaden my understanding of eco-consciousness development. Both are the two sides of the eco-consciousness ‘coin’, both are necessary and crucial in my understanding of this phenomenon. This chapter therefore represents my understanding of durable eco-consciousness and my key meanings of my heightened eco-consciousness following experiential engagements within natural settings.

Prior to discussing durable and heightened eco-consciousness development, I briefly discuss my interpretations of the key terms behind this research: nature, ecology and consciousness. Nature is the overall biophysical context for my exploration, ecology and consciousness make up the term, eco-consciousness. I believe it is relevant to discuss how, at the end of my journey, I construct their meanings and how these meanings can be viewed as consistent with my approach to exploring and understanding eco-consciousness and its development. This discussion is framed and preceded by an account from my heuristic journal of a significant event I experienced during my research. It relates to an encounter I had with a Sooty Owl within the wilds of ‘nature’, the mountainous ‘ecosystems’ of the Barrington Tops. It provides an experiential context for the concepts of which I seek to construct meaning.

5.2 Death in the wild: an experience of heightened eco-consciousness

Like sleep, I find nonhuman nature to be an escape from humanity and urban mundanity. It is an escape from the mindscape of busy-ness and cultural obsessions. It can transform consciousness if you allow it. Well at least for me. When I went to sleep, in the wildness of the Barrington Tops in November 2006 during one of my regular escapes, I did not expect to be confronted by violence, mayhem and death. That I did was a reminder of my being-in-the-wild and all the nested baggage I brought into the wild. This is my story of an owl, its struggles, its death and the conundrums and meanings it evoked.
The void is shattered by the unintelligible. The abyss of this unconscious state is pure black and that is only upon reflection. For at the time, there is no existence. This is the dark void of hope where deaths entrails consume any vestiges of life, except dreams. There is just the infinite nothingness of dreamless sleep. But life can emerge anywhere, in this case through the portals of my ears from the outside realms. The unintelligible noise bored into my death state like a screaming steam train. It ripped my slumbering self out of the void and threw me back into the physical realms of the wildness.

Loud, piercing, raging calls outside my tent ripped me from my slumber and sleeping bag and to the portal of my tent. What were those persistent, angry sounding, snapping sounds flying past my tent? Its 5.30am and only the soft hue of the early morning pre-dawn welcomes me to another world. I blearily peer out. Not 15 metres in front of me lies the contorted figure of a dark, large bird. It has the large round white face of an owl. It stands in a drunken pose on the mottled grass, staggering, wings extended and bent down as if to support a failing, punished body. An owl! I waken quickly as one, two then four kookaburras swoop down to peck it. They all make quick, cackling calls. They emit harsh sounding threatening calls in their swoops upon this injured owl. The owl is hit on the head and falls down, stone cold motionless. The kookaburras continue to swoop it for some time after its fall. Some make sickening contact, others miss their mark. I am stunned by the violence, the unrelenting vicious pursuit by the kookaburras. I too am struck motionless by the unfolding death. This is not what I could have foreseen, not what I expect from my benevolent, nurturing perception of nature, at least coming from a city abode.
During my stunned observation of the attack, I am confronted with the conundrum of whether to intervene and rescue the owl from further attacks or let nature takes its course. I am not in the humanised nature of suburbia, I am in the wilds of the mountains where human perceptions of law and order, ethics and fairness are only known to, or potentially known to, human visitors. After 10-15 minutes, the kookaburras desist and establish a cordon around their vanquished enemy. Tense, alert birds perched on surrounding tree limbs, calling to each other in what could be interpreted as tribal glee. The owl is motionless. I walk over to it tentatively, wary of the kookaburras should they decide to swoop me. I prod it gently with a stick, it opens its eyes and stares up at me, gives the stick a weak nip and then lays its head down again. It lies still, too still, in the wet, dirty feathery abode. It has little blood to indicate injury yet it looks close to death, its half open eyes and lifeless body covered in morning dew and dirt, visited by leeches and blow flies, deaths vanguard claiming their territory. I feel saddened, pity for the owl. I observe its features closely for quite some time. Its eyes remain closed and it appears dead. I decide not to move it. I return to my tent to reflect on this experience. I am slightly shocked as I have never seen kookaburras attack another bird, a snake, yes, but never a bird.

In the tent I consider what I have witnessed. I feel disappointed in not protecting the owl, perhaps I should have stepped in. I did not. Rightly or wrongly, I remained an observer, empathic and awed but remaining inactive to protect it. Now my thoughts were about whether to rectify the perhaps ‘wrong’ decision and take the injured bird to a vet in the closest town, the closest town being over an hours drive away. Presuming it was still alive, presuming I could find a vet on a Sunday morning in sufficient time. I toss, discard and return to this option numerous times as I lie in my sleeping bag.
A half hour passes and the sun has arisen from its nightly voyage beyond the mountain peaks. The new light slowly brightens my peaceful campsite. I am alone here on the verge of the unseen wildness. It is quiet, only the occasional kookaburra call, some rustlings of a feeding Bush Turkey and Lyrebirds and the twittering conversations of Superb Fairy-wrens. It is a peace that belies the violent scene I have witnessed. The story is not over though. I hear the angry, loud cackling calls of swooping kookaburras again and I wonder why they are bothering with the dead owl. I step outside the tent and observe the owl struggling to stand up, using its wings as crutches, one leg dragging behind it. Incredulous I walk over to this tenacious bird of prey, this time prey of the kookaburras. Wary of the kookaburras, I scan their roosts but they retain their distance. It has dragged itself a couple of metres before collapsing again. It looks up at me with its deep, bottomless, round black eyes. It feels a profound or deeply connecting moment. If it could speak I imagine it would ask me ‘what do you take away from my struggles and death?’ From this dying body, I walk away leaving it to the buzz of expectant blow flies. The question gnaws at my conscience.

I reflect on my inaction, my lack of attendance to its needs, as well as the piercing gaze of the dying owl as I prepared breakfast. I felt guilty for not saving it, for not taking it to a vet, for not doing anything. I felt helpless. My sense of powerlessness, futility with life and death, of my spectator role in environmental destruction, have come in the guise of a Sooty Owl laid down by the beaks of other birds. One fights futility because it picks up the ego like a rag doll and shakes it around with disdain. I feel drained and uncertain. Did I do the right thing by
'nature’ I ask myself in cyclical bouts of doubt. Prominent in my existential doubting is the self-consoling reasoning that I felt I had no practical alternative than to allow the event to continue to its own natural curtain fall without the hand of ‘Man’ interfering.

But the owl was not dead several hours after its fall to earth. It continued to struggle awkwardly across the grass where it had rested. It struggled onto its one remaining working leg using its wings as crutches and dragged itself a couple of metres. I was moved by this lonely, tenacious feathery figure trying to find a way to survive. The kookaburras had left the area. A currawong swooped it but I waved it away. Oh how death could be so slow! I wished it a speedier death, not maliciously but just wishing it could be out of its apparent misery (do owls feel misery?). If not misery, then pain.

I now wanted to hold it, at least show some care. I gingerly picked it up. I don’t believe in picking up wild animals and had resisted so far to hold and nurture this owl, despite its obvious needs and tenacity. I picked it up and felt I had to do something tangible to help it. I knew this action was for me, my conscience, my insecure feeling of being futile. I knew it was not going to survive but I felt I had to reach out. I wanted to find a place which would help it keep upright, with the vain hope that it could extend and strengthen its wings. It opened its eyes and stared into me. Eye contact can be an intimate, direct, honest way of connecting. I felt touched to my soul by its dark empty eyes, round bubbles of black on a buff, cream round face and hooked beak. Not so much
the eyes but what it spoke to me and of me. I could sense its energy slipping away and I wanted at the very least, for my benefit of course, to find it a comfortable protected final resting place. I waved the blow flies away as I wandered across the camping area looking for the most suitable spot to lay it to rest. I decided that being a forest bird, it should be near the start of the dense wet tall forests framing the camping ground. I placed it carefully on grass just in front of the tree line and stood over it in a prayerful stance. I recognised the meaningfulness of this event. It was not only the symbolic meaning that I knew had its own story for my research but the intimate connection we eventually made before its death. I imaginatively expressed my respectful appreciation for its lesson, for its being and expressed my love and farewell, and walked back to my tent.

The owl occasionally held its head up weakly and looked at me every so often while I prepared breakfast nearby. It died some time later. It died over two hours after it had been attacked. I didn’t time its passing. I felt a silent, empty space behind me grow and pass. Its passing left me sad and lonelier. I felt a sinking feeling, an emptiness within my throat and heart space. It wasn’t just a Sooty Owl, I saw it as an owl-being who had lived its life and through its prolonged death provided me with an existential intimacy with ‘nature’. My sadness blended with a sense of appreciation and connection with the owl. It symbolised wisdom and journeying into the unconscious.

5.3 Meanings from experience: nature, ecology and consciousness
This is a story of relevance to this exploration of eco-consciousness in a number of ways. The death of this beautiful owl deeply affected me and my perspective towards ‘nature’. The Sooty Owl experience helped to focus my attention towards understanding nature, ecology and consciousness, terms I used habitually without full clarity and acknowledgment of their contested meanings. This experience occurred in ‘nature’, within a web of ‘ecological’ relationships and processes and brought, through focused perception, a more relational, participatory and empathic state of ‘consciousness’, a heightened eco-consciousness. As I reflected upon
ecological consciousness and my interactions with ‘nature’, I realised that my experiences were mediated through my social and cultural lived world within a historical era dominated by rational, industrial modernity, and more critically, an accelerating global ecological crisis. It appeared to me, therefore, that to define something in terms of a de-contextualised statement of ‘objective’ meaning was to simplify a complex process of giving meaning to a term or concept.

de Quincey (2002) states that ‘definition’ means to delimit, outline, circumscribe, put a boundary around, in other words to freeze it in a moment and minimise the multiplicity of meanings. I wanted to emphasise the process underlying meaning-making, consistent with an interpretivist paradigm. I therefore seek in this section to construct meanings of the key terms – nature, ecology and consciousness. Defining something conveys a sort of objectivity and uncontested authority. Construction refers to any interpretation of reality that claims to represent reality (Soule & Lease, 1995). Constructions, individual and collectively owned, can said to be objective or subjective. In subjectively constructing the key terms, I am selecting interpretations that are consistent with my memories, meanings, feelings, experiences during this research in order to arrive at an understanding of each term (Simmons, 1993). In the following sections, I outline my interpretations of these concepts with the acknowledgement that I do not include a literature review for each term due to the restricted scope of this chapter. Each term is a field in itself; all I can do here is convey my understanding of each.

5.3.1 Nature

Nature is one of the more complex, ambiguous words in the English language (Milton, 1999; Soper, 1995) yet its complexity is concealed by the ease and regularity with which we put it to use in a wide variety of social and cultural contexts. Rust (2004) states that if the current environmental crisis for humanity is fundamentally based on how we have come to relate to and perceive nature, then this provides impetus to construct an understanding of the term ‘nature’ that reflects a deeper, relational orientation. Our conception of nature will affect how
we interpret and interact with our environment, which has implications I believe for how we manage and educate about ‘environment’\(^{18}\).

The concept of ‘nature’ has been interpreted, contested and constructed in various ways, even within the radical eco-philosophies of deep ecology and social ecology (for example, Humphrey (2000)). While there is no universal, non-ethnocentric meaning of nature given the individual variations in culture, gender, experience, context and scale (Coates, 1998; Soper, 1995; Soule & Lease, 1995), there are a number of common interpretations given to nature, as indicated beneath: (Bonnett, 2004; Borgman, 1995; Cavanagh, 2003; Chambers, 1984; Coates, 1998; Elliot, 2006; Evernden, 1985, 1992; Humphrey, 2000; Lease, 1995; Marshall, 1996; Naess, 1989; Soper, 1995). Nature as:

- **divine**
- **a social creation**
- **the nonhuman ‘other’ with original independence from humans** characterised by independence, spontaneity and mystery
- **a physical entity largely unmodified or domesticated by people, for example, ‘wilderness’ areas (a contested term itself and discussed later)**
- **all aspects of reality or nature as everything including God**
- **an essence or quality of something**
- **a phenomenological experience for people, not just a physical realm including humans**
- **the conceptual opposite to culture**

\(^{18}\) Are nature and environment synonymous? Bonnett (2004) argues that nature and the environment are not synonyms and that the former serves as a normative function to how we understand and treat the latter.
• the study of the natural and biological sciences
• differing modes of being
• a cumulative evolutionary process

The term, not the territory or reality ‘out there’, is considered a conceptual container, a socially created term or a cultural construct that conveys an abstracted, detached interpretation of the world within which we exist. It can be viewed as a ‘map’ that characterises the ‘territory’ we inhabit, interpret, manipulate and that so many abuse and take for granted. Soper suggests this ‘map’ or concept has complex symbolic representations, such as friend/foe, or feminine and nurturing, and that we often speak of nature as a reflection of how we view ourselves, which in turn implies that if we re-evaluate our identity we come into a different understanding of the individually and socially constructed human/nature dualism (Soper, 1995). Nature, as a physical reality or the territory, can be seen to have its own independent existence beyond the social construction. In the opinion of many concerned environmental writers, it has been a destructive dualism and ‘convenient fiction’ to separate nature from humanity (Birch, 1993; Capra, 1996; Devall, 1988; Evernden, 1992; Fisher, 2002; Kidner, 2001; Naess, 1989).

I constructed the concept ‘nature’ in at least three inter-related ways. My three constructs are:
i. **Nature as One**: On a cosmological level\(^ {19} \), I understand ‘nature’ to be the unified but differentiated medium of physical and non-physical reality. It is everything that is, from the energy at the quantum scale to the cosmos and beyond. The physical cosmos may have a non-physical causative basis, even a spiritual or teleological basis. I view it as a conscious, purposeful and evolutionary active medium in which everything is immersed, embedded and enmeshed. Everything in our cosmos I view as being part of the differentiated wholeness or diversity-within-unity.

ii. **Nature as phenomenological experience**: On an experiential, phenomenological basis, the ‘nature’ I escape to away from my built surrounds is the ‘natural’ environment with its aesthetic and ecological naturalness, that is, it is ‘natural’ settings independent of human activity for its existence in the sense that it is not a human artefact (even though it may be affected/changed by human activity) (Soper, 1995). I refer to this ‘nature’ as nonhuman nature. As Bonnett (2004) explains, it is the realm of embodied experience in which I ‘be’. An ‘objective’ world that was here before I was born and which will exist long after I die. I see this other-than-human dominated realm as a phenomenological, sensorial world in which I, a being-in-the-world, is embodied and experience this physical world

\(^{19}\) According to Humphrey (2000), this cosmological conception of nature within deep ecology writing is not just descriptive but intended to foster an ecological consciousness on the part of those who accept its descriptive accuracy. It is, in other words, both descriptive and motivational. Fox (1990) argues that this conception of nature helps to cultivate a sense of identification with all of nature, appreciate our interdependence and evoke a sense of commonality with other beings. This is why I put the qualifier at the end of the description, differentiated wholeness or diversity-within-unity.
as the self-arising world of independence, spontaneity and mystery (Bonnett, 2004). It is a world in which I come to understand not only nonhuman other but what the other reveals about me (Evernden, 1992). This version of nature is similar to what Soper (1995) refers to as the ‘lay concept’ which is the nature of experience and aesthetic, away from built up areas within which most of us dwell. In this dissertation I reveal my experience of ‘nature’ through interpreting phenomenological experiences.

iii. Nature as a social refugium: This is ‘nature’ as a social construct. I understand it as a social ideal of ecological interdependence and wholesomeness (Bonnett, 2004) as well as a container for my values (ecocentric), aspirations (conservation and connection) and ideals (being and nurturing) (Evernden, 1992). Nature symbolises different things to different individuals and cultures such as mystery, healing, unconsciousness, femininity and danger. This construction of nature acknowledges its social basis as well as an independent reality that may act as a refuge from people and modernity.

5.3.2 Ecology
I studied ecology at university many years ago where the scientific orthodox meaning dominated. I learnt about energy flows, population dynamics, trophic levels, energy use, competition and mutualism amongst other things, and I thought this was all there was to ecology. This was scientific or orthodox ecology with its ideals of objectivism and the scientific method. This approach contradicted with my lived experience in natural settings where I naturally approached nonhuman other in a highly subjective, relational and intimate manner. Even during my ecology classes, I preferred the aesthetic, connecting experience to a measuring, distant observational stance, even though the latter was useful to understand the features and processes of a setting. Understanding the ecology of a place appealed to my cognitive side but in the process of studying a place, I often developed a sense of
place, a sense of being at home. This experience of ecology, as coming to know my biological ‘home’ is reflected by Zimmerman (2000) who argues that modern humanity is not at home, is not ‘dwelling’ harmoniously with other beings on earth because we no longer understand who we really are beyond our web of egoistic self-understanding, we do not understand our Being. It is critical for us in reclaiming our earthly home to step back from our current identity, from our current impulse for action and rediscover who we are (Zimmerman, 2000). I have, in exploring eco-consciousness, attempted to achieve this.

Our understanding of ecology is as dynamic as the socio-ecological context ecology seeks to contribute to and as Kuhn (1997) argues, is not based on any firm conceptual, ontological foundation. It is without objective foundation and is always provisional with regard to the social, cultural and historic context within which ecology is practiced. Consistent with Brennan (1988), Kidner (2001), Laplante (2004) and Marshall (1996), I identify three broad meanings of ecology: scientific ecology, expansionist ecology and metaphysical ecology. This division arises out of my reflections on how I have understood natural settings prior and during my research. My three meanings of ecology are:

i. Orthodox ecology

As a scientific term, ecology or oekologie, derived from the Greek oikos (house) and logos (knowledge) (Brennan, 1988), is generally recognised as first being used by the German biologist, Ernst Haeckel in 1869 to refer to a distinct field of scientific inquiry which investigates the total relations or dependencies of organisms with both their inorganic and organic environment, recognising that causal actions happen in both directions (Laplante, 2004; Odenbaugh, 2006; Orr, 2004). Through its relatively short life, the scientific discipline of ecology was colonised by the ‘purer’ fields of science, physics, chemistry and mathematics (Kidner, 2001). It has, despite these ‘colonisations’, come to be considered an organism-oriented field referring to investigating interactions among organisms and between organisms and their environment (Brennan, 1988). It has generally relied on
quantitative, objectivist modes of enquiry to explain processes and structures of ecological systems. It is found in standard ecology textbooks (as I learnt from at university), gives emphasis to an organism-centred, demographic conception of ecology and delimits investigations to natural (as opposed to social), biological phenomena at the individual, population, community and ecosystem levels. Orthodox ecology\(^{20}\) does not exist as a monolithic discourse (Kuhn, 1997) as it is constituted by a wide variety of subfields such as physiological ecology, behavioural ecology, evolutionary ecology, population ecology, community ecology, macroecology, ecosystem ecology and landscape ecology (Odenbaugh, 2006). Orthodox ecology’s central contributing idea can be described as being that life on Earth is dependent on the organised network of interacting autopoietic systems which tend towards stable and harmonious living systems (Golley, 1991).

\(\text{ii. Expansionist ecology}\)

Expansionist ecology is an umbrella term, according to Laplante (2004), for an interdisciplinary scientific domain spanning both the natural and social sciences, recognising the significant influence of humans on organisms and ecosystems. It includes the subfields of human ecology, conservation ecology and sustainability theory. It tends to be more synthetic in terms of

\(^{20}\) Orthodox ecology can be divided further into two broad approaches, top-down and bottom-up (Sagoff, 2003). Each approach has its uses for ecologists seeking to understand an organism’s interactions with its environment and Cooper (1998) along with Taylor & Haila (2001) provide an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of each. The more common bottom-up method (Cooper, 1998) identifies the causal relations and processes of particular phenomena in particular places. It is often used to identify the reasons for species, population and ecosystem changes and behaviours along with impacts from human activities. The top-down method emphasises theoretical principles, metaphorical analogies and mathematical models to identify general rules that govern the assembly, structure and emergent properties of ecological systems (Cooper, 1998).
integrating ecologically relevant information from various temporal, spatial and organisational levels.

### iii. Metaphysical ecology

Metaphysical ecology uses ecological generalisations such as interdependence, complexity and descriptions of characteristics of autopoetic ecosystems to suggest how individuals and society should understand, relate and act with nature. Its orientation promotes the view that humans are a part of nature, that nature has intrinsic rights that should not be unsustainably exploited and that humans are evolutionary products like any other organism of the earth (Marshall, 1996). The appropriateness of ecological knowing can be determined by its relevance to the situation under examination and its practicality and meaningfulness. From this perspective, my research is consistent with the integrated approach of metaphysical ecology with its inclusion of human knowing, activities and development as well as the interdisciplinary possibilities it offers for making sense of the world in cognitive, affective and spiritual ways. This valuational, even spiritual, orientation of metaphysical ecology is the primary construction I give to the term ‘ecology’ or ‘eco-’ in this thesis.

When I use the terms ‘ecology’ or ‘eco-’ I acknowledge the subjective (psychological, affective, valuation, spiritual), social influences and ‘objective’

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21 Kuhn (1997) argues that orthodox ecology has been used as an objective, authoritative source of explanation that has been used in a fundamentalist manner to explain ‘reality’. A belief in ‘objectivity’ is part of an orthodox belief system that excludes from ecological knowing the contribution of human emotions, intuitions and spiritual beliefs and legitimates a consensual ‘objectivity’ in scientific and social discourses. It excludes the mysterious aspects of nature, not just the non-rational aspects of human thinking such as intuition, imagination, feelings and spirituality. Orthodox ecology obscures not only the inherent weaknesses of scientism (which I interpret as an unquestioned reliance and faith in the scientific model to understand our physical reality) but also
orientations to the three meanings (orthodox, expansionist and metaphysical). Haila & Taylor (2001) argue that in thinking about the situatedness of ecological science, acquiring knowledge on ecology is itself an ecology of knowledge that is not appropriately represented by some Cartesian detached organisation of knowledge (Haila and Taylor, 2001). To paraphrase Haila and Taylor (2001), I came to understand during my research that it is more important, for me, to use an ‘ecology of knowing’ approach than to rely on an orthodox approach of collating detailed ecological knowledge of natural areas I visited. I view the phrase ‘ecology of knowing’ as indicating the multidimensional, holarchical, interconnected web of knowing modes (cognitive, intuitive, sensorial, somatic, affective, spiritual) that helped construct my understanding of my surrounds.

I have constructed ‘ecology’ in a way that while including and respecting the contribution of orthodox and expansionist ecology, gives import to metaphysical ecology, which in turn acknowledges that possibility of an interconnected, relational and sentient reality. These constructs of ecology are, I believe, consistent with a human embedded, multidimensional orientation towards nature. It is also consistent with my constructions of nature – nature-as-one, nature as a phenomenological experience and nature as a social refugium. My construction in being integrative (orthodox-expansionist-metaphysical) acknowledges my philosophical understanding of the terms as well as the way I approached my research, that in large part, clarified this understanding of ecology and nature. I have attempted to capture the flow of meanings of these two concepts, and the research context and methods, in the following diagram:

the nature of a vast interconnected multidimensional reality and the contribution that human experience can make to ecological awareness.
5.3.3 Consciousness
As I write this section, I can see the white skull of the Sooty Owl on the window sill in front of me. It is several years since I encountered this once living creature in the Barrington Tops. I observed its struggles to survive after being attacked by kookaburras and watched its decreasing ability to move and finally, lose its consciousness and then life. Once it became permanently unconscious, I recognised its death in the wilds. Once the light of consciousness was on, then it was off, totally, no dreaming sleep, just a non-conscious being of ruffled, wet feathers and beak. I had placed the owl at the boundary between the dense forest and the cleared campground. That boundary symbolised for me the ambiguous, uncertain and uncomfortable edge of meaning about consciousness. The Owl’s lifeless body lay at the boundary, as if symbolising that I too may be at some transition point or boundary I needed to pass through. Before I can move beyond this research, I need to reflect on what meaning I construe about this mysterious
capacity called consciousness, that like the death of the owl, can be there one moment, gone and irrevocably lost the next. Although I cannot do the enormous field of consciousness studies justice in this small section, the following represents a very brief rumination about the term consciousness.

I have many questions about consciousness including wondering how consciousness and self-awareness arise out of insentient atoms, molecules and organs. If consciousness is simply an awareness of things, then are not all living beings conscious at some level? Is consciousness the same as awareness? If my consciousness alters or expands in response to the subtleties of a place, how does this process alter my sense of self, the ‘I’ I take for granted? I am however uncertain whether ‘I’ or what I construe as being ‘me’, is my consciousness, or whether ‘I’ am some sort of ‘witness’ or ‘soul’ using my normal, surface consciousness as a way of engaging a ‘reality’ out there. I could attempt to develop a position on these questions but after some deliberation, concede that answering these here is not necessary (perhaps except the one dealing with sense of self) or critical for this research. I want to focus on my meaning although I will say a little about its recognised mystery and its relationship with awareness. I am not alone in my uncertainty about consciousness. As (Chalmers, 1995, 2002; de Quincey, 2005; deQuincey, 2002; Hunt, 1995; Wilber, 1998), admit, while we are highly familiar with conscious experience in our world, it is also mysterious. Chalmers (1995) argues that the term is ambiguous because it refers to different phenomena such as the perception of external stimuli, information processing, memory and subjective experience. Hunt (1995) captures the difficulty of coming to understand consciousness: ‘it is a something that is before each of us at this very moment yet not sought or noticed as such until questioned. Then, like the water in which the fish swims, it is everywhere and nowhere’ (p3). Like fish, we, as self-referential
beings, do not stand outside consciousness, we are always conscious or aware of something, at some level. This type of consciousness is in the realm of the experienced, physical reality we are born into.

Starting from the very broad, I stated that the owl appeared to have a consciousness during its struggles and then in time it died and did not display any external signs of having a waking consciousness. This perspective introduces what de Quincey recognises as the two broad perspectives of consciousness, that there is consciousness rather than non-consciousness (philosophical) and that there is a capacity by beings for internal and external awareness of changing states (psychological). These two are referred to by de Quincey (2002,2006) as:

- **Philosophical consciousness**: referring to a being with a capacity for sentience, feeling, experience, intention, knowing and subjectivity, as against non-consciousness, which is the total absence of any experience, subjectivity, sentience, feeling or mentality of any kind\(^{22}\). It is about the context of consciousness that makes possible the contents of consciousness.

- **Psychological consciousness**: which can be viewed as a state of awareness such as being awake, dreaming, joyful, fearful, mystical as against being unconscious, which is a state of consciousness below a threshold awareness, for example asleep, trance, coma, habit, instincts. It is about the contents of consciousness and about the mode of access to those contents. The light of

\(^{22}\) Here de Quincey appears to be associating consciousness with mental life which is superficial (Gomes, 2007). Gomes argues that this way of clarifying consciousness is inadequate, that consciousness should not be identified with psychic or sentient capacity or states but rather to distinguish between being conscious and being unconscious. He asks where up the evolutionary tree does consciousness arise, contrary to de Quincey who views consciousness as ubiquitous in entities that feel their own beingness (panpsychism). Gomes also asks about different forms of consciousness such as self-consciousness, of being conscious of being conscious and being conscious of inner decision-making processes.
experience\textsuperscript{23} is always on though the luminosity may vary from dim to glaring brightness\textsuperscript{24}.

The owl had both types of consciousness while it lived and none afterwards. From the owl, I return to the primary focus of this rumination, my normal waking consciousness that was the subject of my transformative eco-consciousness development. I position my normal waking consciousness and its transformation to heightened eco-consciousness within the latter orientation. I view both as states of psychological consciousness (that is, a short term subjective experience) with heightened eco-consciousness representing an expanded, less ego-restricted consciousness in which the state and contents are based on the degree of perceptual engagement, relational immersion and psychological richness of my experience of nonhuman nature. It takes as given that there is a philosophical consciousness upon which this psychological form of consciousness is made possible.

One of the questions asked above deals with whether awareness is the same as consciousness. I think it is perhaps relevant here to briefly discuss this as I find it easy to use the two interchangeably. Chalmers (2002) argues that while there may be a strong correlation between consciousness and awareness, he points out that ‘awareness’ is objective and physical, whereas states and levels of consciousness (using Wilber’s schema (Wilber, 1998) is not based on perception. There is

\textsuperscript{23} Arp (2007) critiques de Quincey’s conflation of awareness with experience when speaking about the light of consciousness being on. He argues that consciousness is ‘the experience of oneself as a being subject to past, present, and future events’ (p101) and is different from a state of awareness. He distinguishes between non-conscious awareness and conscious experience: worms may be aware but for Arp, they are not conscious. This introduces the philosophical idea of degrees of consciousness, or as Wilber says, a spectrum of consciousness (Wilber, 1998).

\textsuperscript{24} Gomes (2007) points out that one can be awake, alert and yet totally unconscious of information being cognitively processed
awareness and then there is consciousness, the two are not synonyms for each
other. I may be aware of things around me due to my perceptual capacity and
cognitive processes but my consciousness may be operating, for example, at a
restricted level so as to not be fully present and able to comprehend what is being
perceived, or to broadly interpret and recognise meanings. Awareness for me
infers a surface level of perception of one’s inner and outer environments without
necessarily being conscious, intuitively or otherwise, of the underlying currents and
eddies, the inherent and/or subjective meanings flowing behind the surface events
and ‘objects’. Arp (2007) takes awareness to refer to the processing that occurs as
a result of the interaction of an animal’s nervous system (including sensory
apparatuses) and its environment’ where the animal can react to the
environmental stimuli. I therefore view awareness to concern perception, feelings
and cognition and, consciousness to be a more fundamental subjectivity exhibiting
a level of psychological, social and spiritual development. To bring this back to eco-
consciousness development, environmental awareness, as one type of awareness,
is primarily about a perception of the state of the environment and an
understanding about ‘responsible’ actions to avoid or minimise impacts. Ecological
consciousness development seeks to include and go beyond perception and
cognitive understanding to deepen and raise the state and level of an individual’s
consciousness, their level of psychological development for example.

Based on the preceding discussion, I view normal waking consciousness as being
constituted by at least the following three perspectives:

i. A state of consciousness, in this case normal, waking subjectivity;

ii. An awareness of an autonomous self (subjective self) as it engages the
   world around and is aware of inner psychological and kinaesthetic states.\(^{25}\)

\(^{25}\) Associated with inner psychological qualities are, according to de Quincey (2002), feeling,
knowledge, intentionality, choice, self-agency, purpose, meaning and value.
This aspect of normal waking consciousness appears to be based on perception, itself an outcome of sensorial and cognitive processing of internal and external stimuli (Rodaway, 1994);

iii. Overall level of consciousness level that reflects an individual’s psychological and spiritual capacities and development.

While this view emphasises the private subjective experience of normal waking consciousness, de Quincey (2005) argues that the term originally had a more communal or collective orientation, thus giving rise to the term itself – conscienta, meaning ‘knowing with other’. As de Quincey argues, that interiority is the essential characteristic at all levels of consciousness, from sentience to unitive, and always experienced in relation to others, then inter-subjective interiority is ontologically fundamental. Hunt (1995) also argues that consciousness is not intrinsically private, but was once recognised as being primarily inter-subjective based with human and nonhuman beings. The problem of a private, neuronal based concept of consciousness, which is the foundational perspective of Western philosophy and psychology and my original meaning prior to this research, is that it has perpetuated an ideology that splits us from our world and leaves us falsely isolated and private (Hunt, 1995). This weakness, as I view it, of a private consciousness is relevant to my experience of heightened eco-consciousness: I could not maintain a purely subjective or private perspective if I wanted to come into a ‘knowing with other’. The structured exercises with nonhuman nature challenged this private orientation to consciousness by emphasising the inter-subjective interiority of heightened eco-consciousness. Whether it was a mountain landscape or tree or water dragon, I took the radical panpsychist perspective that de Quincey (2002) argues that a radical panpsychist perspective addresses many of the problems of consciousness. He explains that panpsychism is a cosmological and ontological theory that proposes that all objects in the universe possess an interior, subjective reality. In other words, all things are understood as being both material and psychic, with no separation between mind and

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26 de Quincey (2002) argues that a radical panpsychist perspective addresses many of the problems of consciousness. He explains that panpsychism is a cosmological and ontological theory that proposes that all objects in the universe possess an interior, subjective reality. In other words, all things are understood as being both material and psychic, with no separation between mind and
there was some form of sentience before me. I believe that this perspective was helpful when engaging nonhuman other. If I felt that all aspects of my surrounds had either basic sentience or some form of consciousness, I was more likely to accept and be motivated to experience a sense of relationship, even communion with another conscious being. In this way I believe that eco-consciousness, with this orientation towards consciousness, may be a useful approach for ‘knowing with other’. It helped transform my normal waking consciousness into a heightened state of eco-consciousness.

5.4 Understanding my experience of eco-consciousness and its development

This section addresses the two research questions about my experience of and understanding about eco-consciousness and its development. The primary discovery of this research was that eco-consciousness consisted of two interweaving, inter-dependent forms: heightened and durable. Each form contributed to the experience of the other. Without a durable level, experiences of heightened eco-consciousness would have been isolated to the place and time of the experience without broader social contribution and understanding. Without heightened eco-consciousness, durable levels, if possible, would have remained at the abstract, conceptual level of experience and been difficult to maintain, particularly in regard to feeling connected to nonhuman nature. Durable level of

body although the brain or body does not generate consciousness. He argues that everything has the capacity for feeling or experience. There is something about matter that moves it from within, the story of matter feeling its way forward toward ever-increasing complexity and higher levels of order and organisation, a spectrum of ontological being and consciousness.

27 de Quincey (2006) argues that consciousness at any level cannot be in the brain (although it is correlated with it), that it is not energy (energy occupies space and can be measured, consciousness does not on both counts) but dispersed across all aspects of nature at different levels of sentience and expression in a non-physical, acausal process. This belief stems in part from de Quincey asking how subjectivity could arise from wholly ‘dead’, objective, insentient matter.
eco-consciousness provides the social and metaphysical framework for bringing back into daily waking consciousness the myriad of experiential benefits or experiences I describe in the section beneath on heightened eco-consciousness.

5.4.1 Understanding my durable eco-consciousness and its development
I understand eco-consciousness development as referring to consciousness transformation over a short period of time (heightened) and evolution over extended periods through social and ecological experiences and reflexivity (durable). I wrote regularly in my journals about the need to convert experiences of heightened eco-consciousness into a more durable, ‘enlightened’ level of eco-consciousness that was part of a daily lived world. I have a choice in how I may convey my understanding, through narrating my reflections and discussing these with some reference to my story and some key literature or I could delve into the literature on the development of human consciousness over a lifetime and propose how durable level of eco-consciousness may evolve. While both approaches are appropriate, I have chosen the former in that it is more consistent with a reflective, interpretive phenomenological writing style, and essentially, a way of expressing my reflectivity about the subject and its evolution, especially in my final year. I made some very pertinent and clear entries into my journal and I have decided to include four or five entries that discuss my perspectives about durable eco-consciousness: how to translate heightened states to a durable level, what durable level means for me, what the challenges are in developing this form of eco-consciousness and how it can be sustained.
I am asking the question of translating heightened states into durable eco-consciousness. I am uncertain at this point but I do begin to consider ways to do this in my next reflection. My reference to baring the most bountiful of fruits (inspired by the Thoreau quote beneath) refers to consciousness transformation and the benefits that may arise from a more enlightened state. It requires, as I state in the next reflection, practice and discipline in normal, daily living. I recognised the importance of developing the ‘finer’ qualities of my humanity by becoming more conscious, more authentic to my inner Being and taking a caring, empathic approach to life. As Thoreau too identified, it requires ‘delicate handling’ and ‘tenderness’ to enhance our finest qualities:

The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly. (Thoreau, 1854/2008:3)

28 April 2008
Within two days of the following entry, I had identified a possible three step process for converting memories of heightened eco-consciousness into a connecting experience within my suburban reality. By intuiting a reality beyond my perceived surface reality, then imagining a more connected experience such as swimming in a cool, tumbling mountain river and then vividly visualising this scene, I can recall some of the overall sensations, perceptions, feelings and meanings that had helped me evoke a heightened state. I reflected above that if I could practice this regularly, I could bring my ‘background’ connected consciousness to the foreground, which would be beneficial for my general level of waking consciousness and sense of self. This was therefore one way in which I could use my experience of heightened eco-consciousness to elicit a sense of connection within my daily suburban life and sustain my durable level.

I have been contemplating if and how a state of eco-consciousness can be translated into a more durable, day-to-day level of consciousness. It’s a regular theme in my reflections on eco-consciousness. I am again questioning my experience and assumption that it can only be a state of consciousness within a natural setting and/or in meaningful relation to a nonhuman being. I am beginning to doubt its exclusivity to these contexts. … While I need to consider the likely techniques for evolving a level from an experience, I would suggest that, consistent with my experience this morn, intuition, imagination and memory re-collection are essential tools. … This three step process can help flavour my primary state of waking consciousness to evoke a more durable eco-consciousness. With some practice, more disciplined focusing, I would suggest that a background flavour of eco-consciousness can shift to a foreground flavour, which by its immediacy and effect on perception, interpretation (ontological and epistemological) through to attitudes and behavioural responses, can then shift one’s level of general consciousness.

30 April 2008

The following quote introduces the thesis of Christopher (1999) linking the global ecological crisis, powerlessness and reflexivity with eco-consciousness. This
reflection cannot be left without some discussion about the very influential paper by Christopher (1999) on the role and consequences of industrial modernity, the need for meaning and authenticity, powerlessness and anxiety and the development of an ecological consciousness.

I have briefly alluded to Christopher’s thesis or perspective in Chapter 1 but I want to discuss it further here because his description of the social context behind what I call durable eco-consciousness and its development is very consistent with my experience of it. The discussion that follows is descriptive and largely based on relevant literature that confirm the social basis of eco-consciousness, not only in environmental activists as was the case in Christopher’s study but my own

9 May 2008

I realised that I had focused to a significant degree on a state of consciousness in my experiential exercises but neglected to see what was right in front of me or within me. Given my social context, my prolonged reflexivity about ecological, social, political issues and its reflection of our collective consciousness, my sense of extended anxiety and powerlessness regarding personal and global concerns, I was in fact demonstrating consistency with Christopher’s thesis. It was this capacity and ability for reflexivity at the personal and collective levels which was for Christopher a necessary characteristic of an eco-conscious person. … It was not only possible but what I was experiencing. While I could experience a spectrum of heightened eco-consciousness states when engaging with nonhuman nature, I was already unconsciously experiencing a level of durable eco-consciousness in my social context through my awareness of the global eco-crisis and its fundamental causes, my ecological understanding, my sense of powerlessness about environmental degradation, my reflexivity about my social and global contexts, the intuition of a deeper aspect to myself and reality and the ability to recall memories of experiences and scenes from my structured and spontaneous engagements with nonhuman nature. I felt relieved and freer for recognising the conceptual and epistemological link between my conscious focus on states and my unconscious experience of an eco-consciousness level.

9 May 2008
experience. So while my language may be interpreted as objectively descriptive, it is consistent with my story, my understanding of my social contexts that facilitated my durable level of eco-consciousness and elicited my need to experience and understand heightened eco-consciousness. I found it a relief to understand why I had my alienating, isolated and unhappy professional experiences within a variety of workplaces, as well as frustrating activist experiences, as I conveyed in Chapter 1. I found it highly meaningful that my endless search for meaning in living in these climatic turbulent times (excuse the pun), and need for connection and meaning beyond the ‘surface’ offerings of mainstream culture and society, was shared by others. It was for me the missing link between my understanding of heightened eco-consciousness and my previous ignorance of my evolving consciousness and how I came to be where I am now.

Christopher’s thesis, very simply, is that ecological consciousness is a biological, psychological and sociological process:

Individuals do not develop an ecological consciousness by themselves. Instead, they do so as part of a collective, sociocultural, reflexive reaction to society’s increasing inability to adequately anticipate and respond to the externalities of modern, instrumental rationalization. Ecological consciousness, like modern individualism, is a sociocultural phenomenon that enables individuals to reconcile rationality with a pre-rational set of identity needs for autonomy and attachment within a changing sociocultural and natural environment.

Of course, none of this means that a culture of ecologism is destined to replace the modern culture of individualism; it only means that ecological consciousness is one attempt to respond to massive sociocultural change and a degrading physical environment. (Christopher, 1999:396)
Christopher argues, interpreting the ideas of Ulrich Beck on reflexive modernity, that environmental concern within an eco-conscious perspective does not simply arise through the rational acquisition of knowledge about and/or experience of environmental degradation. It arises when people experience a pre-rational anxiety when the collapse of ‘nature’ becomes significant (collapse that is perceptible and meaningful) to the individual’s sense of self. Beck (1995) argues that the contradictions of industrial modernity such as the unequal distribution of wealth and the externalisation and legitimisation of environmental costs from economic production has manifested in many people as a pre-rational anxiety, a ‘gut’ felt anxiety without cognitive or rational consideration. Many people have at some level and stage of their lives anxiety about the future or state of their world but consistent with mainstream social expectations, remain rational in beliefs, values and behaviour. To be rational is, Christopher argues, to be consistent to a perceived pattern of order, which may be acceptable conceptions of self or society. To be rational is to act consistently with one’s conception of self, one’s society and the order and values of that society. However, the dominance of the mechanical, technological Cartesian worldview has meant that being rational is to act consistently with a mechanical, materialistic understanding of self, society and nature. Modern instrumental rationality prioritises or values the rational, rather than pre-rational, approach to interpreting and organizing reality and is expressed in the current structure of the social and cultural institutions of modernity such as modern capitalism, industrial technology, individualistic morality and mechanistic science. These instruments of modernity have been based, according to Christopher and Beck, consistent with my experiences and observations, on an ecological alienated, materialist consciousness that lies behind much of the global ecological destruction, as argued in Chapter 1.

Christopher goes on to argue that if there is not this sense of personal threat or meaningful engagement with nature and environmental degradation, then environmental threats such as climate change will not catalyse changes in
consciousness. It is not environmental literacy that accounts for a wide-spread concern about the ecological crisis but, he argues, about people’s anxiety about the future, especially about the negative environmental consequences of the institutions of modernity. This would appear a reasonable hypothesis to explain why despite improved public awareness of environmental issues and pro-environmental behaviours over the past several decades as a result of environmental education and campaigns, this has not made significant improvements to overall environmental behaviours, as can be interpreted in the NSW Government environmental attitude and behavior survey (DEC, 2006).

It is when there has been chronic, significant levels of personal anxiety, Christopher (1999), interpreted in his study of Green activists, that some people begin to see them as manifestations of a larger social, cultural problem. They seek an alternative ontological ecological framework – an ecological consciousness – to understand their sense of self, their relationship to society and to nonhuman nature to ease the pain of anxiety, often manifesting as a deep sense of powerlessness. As I stated earlier, this is consistent with my experiences within professional and activists contexts. I felt sufficient pain and alienation to cease my environmental work and undertake this research. I have largely disengaged, as much as I can do while living in a materialist society, from the institutions of rational modernity that I have interpreted as irrational (in the sense of purposefully as well as unconsciously undermining the ecological, social and cultural support systems of human and nonhuman communities) and pathological (in the sense that individual and collective psychological pathologies and anthropocentric values and attitudes continue to undermine humanity’s future). This fatalistic withdrawal in the face of a perceived impending turmoil is also discussed by Gow & Leahy (2005) who found that despite a large proportion of their survey group being pessimistic about the future, very few were politically active and most showed significant levels of apathy, a form of fatalistic withdrawal. While my disengagement has not diminished my anxiety, it has given me the perspective to understand that eco-consciousness development is a social and biographical phenomenon. Its
development within me has been affected by disenfranchisement, disengagement and despair about the dominant social malaise especially in relation to the eco-crisis. It is easy to associate with a fellow ‘victim’ of rational modernity than the perpetrators of irrational, destructive and disempowering purposeful acts (even though at some level I am a perpetrator of destructive acts such as excessive water use or use of a private vehicle). It is not just associating with a fellow ‘victim’ but perhaps also to provide a much greater context for my own suffering, such as chronic negative states of mind, existential insecurity and life meaning. The context being the suffering of nonhuman nature destroyed and degraded by the ‘footprint’ of humanity (Roth, 1993).

From this perspective, I understand that my durable eco-consciousness has arisen through both rational means (ecological literacy, being an environmental professional) and pre-rational means (pre-verbal, imaginal and affective experiences within nonhuman nature, significant feelings of anxiety and sense of powerlessness in regard to environmental degradation, climate change and my personal and collective future). These experiences involved an ecological aspect as much as it required a social aspect. My experiences of socio-cultural organizations and situations often evoked despair, withdrawal and powerlessness, which had a restrictive impact on my normal waking consciousness and sense of self. It was natural for me to gravitate towards establishing more psychologically and emotionally close nonhuman connections as a result of perceiving the failures of industrial modernity. This coping process for dealing with my own negative states or emotional pain served a therapeutic function during my visits to natural environments, as well as the capacity to manage or deal with the much more significant pain I observed in people and nonhuman nature in the media. Durable eco-consciousness therefore requires, from my own experience, a coping mechanism and capacity to accept, embrace and let go of negative states or emotional pain stemming from personal, global issues. As Roth (1993) states:
... we need to deal with both personal and planetary pain, otherwise our efforts in either arena will not be effective and possibly counterproductive. Fleeing from personal issues [or taking the world’s problems on our shoulders] may mean we never develop the considerable skills or compassion we need to be effective agents for social change. (Roth, 1993:4)

In seeking to cope with personal and global issues and to re-define my sense of self and my place and finding a way of authentically being and dwelling, I have sought experiences that could sustain these aspirations. As Christopher would interpret, I have sought autonomy and attachment within the much greater than human context of nonhuman nature, that itself has no ‘need’ for such abstractions as instrumental rationality or a private, atomised sense of self. It makes sense why I should become so passionate about understanding eco-consciousness because I wanted, unconsciously at first, to let go of my pervasive feelings of despair, anxiety and powerlessness about my social situation and the eco-crisis and re-invigorate my sense of self and in some way, in some future time and place, help others who may be experiencing similar feelings. I cannot imagine I would be effective or feel authentic in helping others with their pain, with their coping mechanisms such as denial, consumerism, dissociations and addictions if I had not dealt with my own pain by deeply connecting with nonhuman other (heightened eco-consciousness) or understanding the social context of eco-consciousness development. My persistent reflections upon my emotions and sense of self affected by the negative consequences of industrial modernity and institutions has not only led to greater personal growth and compassion for other but understanding my durable eco-consciousness.

I have sought to reintegrate some of the psychological and ecological aspects of my phenomenological world within an eco-consciousness framework. This kind of integration, argues Kidner (2001) is important to getting beyond the dissociation between psychological and environmental problems and thereby seeing them as
one. Kidner (2001) warns that unless these experiences of transformation or altered consciousness can be sustained within the sociocultural setting of the individual, then they or their memories are likely to remain mute with little capacity for survival:

Insights and feelings, unless they coalesce to form a stable articulatory structure, have negligible power to challenge the ideological system that has proved overwhelmingly capable of digesting and destroying whatever has challenged it. (Kidner, 2001:102)

This is the crux of my challenge with sustaining my durable eco-consciousness, as indicated by my journal entries at the beginning of this section. That is, I must develop both the practical, reflexive framework and the discipline to draw upon my insights and memories of heightened eco-consciousness to sustain and strengthen my durable level of eco-consciousness. The development of my durable eco-consciousness has occurred over the course of my adult years with my experiences of a myriad of environmental positions in public and private spheres, environmental activism, deep concern about the state of the world and relational, meaningful engagements with nonhuman nature. It can be characterised by:

- a strong sense of connectedness with nonhuman nature,
- a ‘worldcentric’ (local and global perspective-taking) and ecocentric disposition,
- a conscious interest in Self-realisation,
- a strong but flexible sense of self,
- a tendency towards individual and/or community environmental activism,
- emotional sensitivity and resilience to perceptions of a global ecological crisis,
- an ethic of care and respect for human and nonhuman ‘other’,
- an understanding of the evolution and consequences of industrial modernity, and
• regular restorative experiences of heightened eco-consciousness.

The social meaning for me relates to the nature of the socio-cultural causative forces I have encountered in my life and which have unknowingly developed my durable eco-consciousness. In some ways, my reflections in this research can be seen as part of my disentangling process from the strong social influences on my sense of self, direction and meaning. As O’Sullivan and Taylor (2004) might posit, I have been attempting, especially during my mid-life transition period before and during this dissertation period, to move beyond the ‘minimal self’ based on a limited, instrumental consciousness western society has fostered. I have experienced the transformation of a minimal self into an ecological sense of self and further into an eco-Self but this has been mostly when alone in natural settings away from society. But there is a paradox in breaking free. As Devall (1988) points out, ‘in order to lose our self into the larger Self, we must become more self-conscious in the midst of techno-scientific civilization’ (p72). Similarly, to sustain a durable eco-consciousness in the midst of my suburban, materialistic reality, I need to experience heightened eco-consciousness at regular intervals, become more ‘self-conscious’, maintain emotional resilience in the face of increasing evidence of global ecological degradation and practice broadening identification with others. It requires motivation, discipline and time on a regular basis to do this.

This understanding of the social context provides a much valued broader perspective on the research phenomena. It provides me with hope that others, many others, may recognize the significance of understanding and facilitating eco-consciousness development, heightened and durable aspects, to transform consciousness and self, especially as the increasing consequences of industrial modernity become more tangible and threatening.
5.4.2 Understanding my heightened eco-consciousness and its development

Developing a heightened eco-consciousness consisted of a staged process beginning with a specific motivation to engage natural settings. While this motivation was often oriented towards conducting one of the research methods (that is, to collect ‘data’ for my research), there was an underlying motive including a desire for emotional healing, to escape from domestic surrounds, to explore a new landscape, to have a dose of nature’s beauty and tranquillity, and to get out of my self (to get away from my worrying, planning or habitual thinking). Whatever the motivation, the challenges of any session were to move beyond the objectifying rationality that dominated my day-to-day consciousness, to leave ‘outside’ emotions and states behind me on the way to the session site and to select an appropriate space to conduct my session. I knew that this rationality, my aesthetic, unreflective eye of mindlessness restricted my state of consciousness to the surface experience of things. If I did not leave my planning, worrying, daydreaming, despairing and other modes of thinking and feeling behind at home or upon entering natural settings, I risked being physically in the beauty of natural settings but not psychologically, as Thoreau, too, was concerned about:

Of course it is of no use to direct our steps to the woods, if they do not carry us thither. I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit ..... But it sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head, and I am not where my body is, - I am out of my senses.  
(Thoreau, 1862/2008:264)

As Thoreau too alluded, it was critical to be fully present in the moment of my engagement with nonhuman other. In terms of going ‘to the woods’, it was not important for my sessions to be conducted in physically remote ‘wilderness’ areas although these areas, mainly the Barrington Tops, did add an important and distinctive ‘flavour’ to my connecting experiences. I conducted most of my sessions
in my local bushland reserve, Manly Dam Reserve, a reserve surrounding a lake/reservoir used for various recreational activities and surrounded by residential and commercial development. What I found useful was to be able to acknowledge and focus on the wildness of places, as a point of contact with nonhuman and a point of perceptual and reflective focus. In recognising the wildness in my everyday surrounds, such as the ants, Golden Orb Spiders and Tawny Frogmouth in my backyard, and the Scribbly Gum tree in the Reserve (even though it had been vandalised), I felt a new world open in a way very different from just an aesthetic appreciation. It refreshed and revitalised me, as Thoreau expressed: ‘Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him’ (p274).

The critical approaches to developing a heightened state of eco-consciousness were 1) facilitating a perceptual clarity of my surrounds, 2) approaching nonhuman other with a relational sense of care, respect and freshness, 3) solitude, and 4) using mindfulness as a way of observing my perceptual and affective responses and the subsequent changes in awareness and consciousness. Using my senses more effectively, that is, understanding when to be passive or receptive and when to be more active or ‘out there’ helped in improving my environmental awareness, mental clarity and calmness. Mindfulness was, I believe, critical in not getting consumed or lost in the responses to things and transforming a nature based awareness into an expanded deeper experience of consciousness and subsequently, quite often, an ecological sense of self/Self. Mindfulness evoked an openness to the moment, a non-judgmental and non-attached disposition, from which emerged a deep sense of being centred, grounded and spiritual connection. These latter characteristics of mindfulness were enjoyable and necessary for a heightened eco-consciousness at the deeper end (this spectrum is discussed beneath).

In reflecting upon the processes I undertook for each of the three methods, I can identify five stages involved in shifting my consciousness during this method. These were:
i. walking around a natural setting to locate my preferred place for engagement;

ii. my first grounded engagement or affective encounter with a place;

iii. focused auditory activity to connect, move beyond cognitive, rational thinking and become centred (a transitional stage);

iv. intense mindfulness hearing activity that evoked nearly all of the sixteen experiential meanings listed in the next section; and

v. sustained mindful and contemplative engagement with both the setting and the altered state of consciousness.

During each of these stages, I noted a gradual, sometimes imperceptible shift in my consciousness. This spectrum of eco-consciousness consisted of the following states:

i. **normal waking consciousness** (refer to Section 5.3.3 for my meaning of this) with its mind chatter, negative states, expectations, planning, mindlessness, surface engagement and restricted sense of self;

ii. **environmental consciousness**, with its respectful, aesthetic, ecological, valational and appreciative awareness of phenomenological nature;

iii. **initial heightened eco-consciousness** characterised by inner calmness, a contemplative mind, ecological awareness, existential doubt and negative states of mind dissipate and relational appreciation of place, beings and space;

iv. **heightened eco-consciousness** (eco-self orientation) characterised by a tangible sense of relationship/connectedness/identification with and beingness of nonhuman other, recognition and appreciation of diversity-within-unity, calm, meditative mental state. I felt grounded and fully present within my surrounds. I held strong intuitions of spiritual meaning (Being) and little or no attachment to egoist thoughts/self-construal;

v. **heightened eco-consciousness** (eco-Self orientation) characterised by previous state but includes a strong sense of connection with
Being/Self/Soul, sense of communion, reverence for life, love/grace and humility.

Associated with each ‘flavour’ of this state of consciousness was a common affective state and a transitional tool or mechanism to shift to the next stage. While there were other states and approaches, in reviewing my summarising tables and discussions in Chapter 4, the following were the most reflective of each state of consciousness. The indicative states and tools for each state of consciousness were:

i. **normal waking consciousness**: (entering natural setting): relief, curiosity

ii. **environmental consciousness**: aesthetic appreciation, ecological awareness, openness to connection

iii. **initial heightened eco-consciousness**: place appreciation, mindfulness

iv. **heightened eco-consciousness** (eco-self orientation): love, indwelling

v. **heightened eco-consciousness** (eco-Self orientation): reverence/humility

The five states I associated with eco-consciousness development were not always sequential or straightforward as may be implied by the above list. It was not usually that clear cut due to numerous factors such as becoming less mindful, being distracted by people, getting hungry, going off with some daydream or fantasy or almost stepping on a venomous snake. Coping with distractions were part of the circumstances that I needed to deal with in natural settings that contained human and nonhuman actors and variables beyond my control.

Analysing my nature engagement/two fold vision worksheets and journals, I identified numerous themes relating to meaningful experiences that arose during my states of heightened eco-consciousness. The sixteen themes discussed beneath can be viewed as those that best represent my interpretations of common and/or meaningful experiences I associated with heightened eco-consciousness development, particularly at the deeper end of the eco-consciousness spectrum. They were not the only themes, not the only experiences, but what I considered
best representing my meanings, interpreted following my heightened eco-consciousness experiences. Most of these themes overlap with each other indicating that many or all were consistently interpreted for each immersive experience, whether it be during my journaling or my experiential sessions. I view these thematic descriptions as my response to the first research question, in terms of heightened eco-consciousness.

Each thematic description consists of a brief overview of my overall research experience and a discussion of relevant literature that may shed further insights. I do not view this discussion as representing a thorough literature review for a number of reasons. Each theme is a sub-field of environmental psychology, ecopsychology, eco-spirituality and/or contemplative traditions and there was not the scope to delve into the literature in any detail. Another reason for the limited literature cited is that I felt, consistent with an interpretive phenomenological heuristic inquiry, that it was more important to give priority to my own experiences and insights and to supplement these with the writings of others.

**Themes**

a) Sense of reverence and humility

b) Sense of relationship

c) Ecological awareness

d) Being/being

e) Sense of place
f) Ecological sense of self/Self  
g) Restorative/therapeutic feelings  
h) Spiritual meaning  
i) Sense of vulnerability  
j) Sense of wildness  
k) Appreciation of nonhuman otherness  
l) Oneness/communion  
m) Perceptual acuity  
n) Solitude  
o) Mindfulness  
p) Openness  

a) Sense of reverence and humility  
When fully present and connected in natural settings, I often felt humbled in my perceptions of nature’s infinite creativity, immensity (spatial and temporal) and intelligence. Whether it was a spider web, a mountain landscape, a toadstool or a soaring Peregrine Falcon, observing nonhuman other with curiosity and respect often evoked awe, and subsequently, reverence. I tended to feel this more in visiting new natural settings or the Barrington Tops where I was alone and undisturbed by human activities and I could more profoundly sense the wildness.

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28 Awe, according to Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman (2007) can be defined as an emotional response to a perceptually ‘vast’ stimuli that overwhelms the observers usual frame of reference in some dimension or domain and requires psychological accommodation. A stimulus may convey vastness in space, time, complexity and in ability, even what it implies or symbolizes. This study by the above researchers found that the experience of awe is associated with a sense of smallness of the self, the presence of something greater that the self, de-emphasis of the individual self yet increasing one’s sense of the self as part of a greater whole. It would appear then that the experience and emotion of awe, and likely wonder, is consistent with an experience I associate with an ecological sense of self.
around me. I viewed reverence to mean an honouring of an apparent purposeful, creative, benevolent force within and beyond nonhuman nature. I feel that it is more than my normal respectful approach to nonhuman nature, it is a more profound or intuitive, honouring the sacredness of nonhuman other which often translated into a sense of deep appreciation and care. This reverential perspective is consistent with, for example, the philosophy of Deep Ecology: ‘for the appreciative and sensitive mind, reverence for life appears as a natural acknowledgment of the miracle and the beauty of life itself’ (Skolimowski, 1993:24).

While reverence can be associated with spirituality, it need not be through spiritual experience alone but also through sensorial, affective experience of valuing something that passes through the filter of rational thought (Milton, 1999). I associated reverence with not only an intuitive recognition of sacredness but an expanded sense of self beyond the rational understanding called for by my habitual, cognitive ego\(^{29}\)-self. Reverence often evoked a sense of quiet happiness and freedom.

In one journal entry (20 February 2007) I reflected that an I-Thou sense of relationship with nature was an important quality of a heightened eco-consciousness, conveying a sense of the sacred\(^{30}\) and ineffable mystery of nature.

\(^{29}\)Ego can be viewed as a collection of subjective qualities such as memories, fantasies, information and images about who we are. As Devall (1988) further explains, it is what we think we are, the voice of the self and in our western society, a separate, independent persona that is conditioned by society and the environment. We often associate our ego with our physical and social characteristics and roles but the ‘self’ is more than the ego. Further, according to Devall (1988), the self can be understood as being in relation to other, as an open system in a web of mutually conditioned relationships.

\(^{30}\)Thoreau acknowledged the sacred qualities of ‘Nature’, from the rapidly disappearing forests of his time to the ‘dismal swamp’: ‘I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable, and to the citizen, most dismal swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place. There is the strength, the marrow of Nature’ (Thoreau, 1862/2008:275). I found it admirable of him to acknowledge the
Like the term ‘reverence’, the I-Thou phrase was not part of my vocabulary. I had not read, so far as I can remember, about its derivations before choosing to use it, it just arose during my reflections. I had not read Martin Buber’s book, ‘I and Thou’ (Buber, 2004), a seminal philosophical treatise on how humans relate to the world. I discuss it because I feel it represents an alternative or more meaningful representation of an honouring state. I-Thou phrase is an evocative representation of an eco-consciousness in loving awe of nonhuman other.

In ‘I and Thou’, Buber (2004) described two broad ways of relating to the world: I-It and I-Thou. There is an I-It perspective in which one view’s the environment objectively, to be used, controlled, possessed and manipulated, and as separate (Knapp, 2005). Here the ‘I’ equates broadly with the outward focused, rationalising, sensorial ego, the sense of self constituted by external interactions and relations. Barich (2008) states that this ‘I’ perceives itself as being as a totally separate individual to the subject of its perceptions, as well as being totally embedded within space-time and subject to linear causality. Similarly Blenkinsop (2005) states that the I/It relationship lacks mutuality, it objectifies and alienates the world. It, according to Walsh, Karsh, & Ansell (1994), is associated with the Descartian, objectivist, anthropocentric spirit of mastering and possessing ‘nature’. This destructive worldview requires a different way of relating beyond the subject/object dualism, beyond the I/It relationship to a reciprocal relation in which we feel ‘tenderness’ towards the other. As Walsh et al. (1994) interpret, we need, through reverence and humility, to go beyond notions of stewardship to a relationship of intimacy, communion and love, to an I/Thou relationship.

Buber believed that every individual is responsible for connecting with the divine, the spirit within all things and that by adopting an I/Thou attitude we can enter into sacredness in the supposed unattractive of places as a ‘dismal swamp’, thereby acknowledging the sacredness of all ‘Nature’.
a world of relation characterised by mutuality, directness, presentness, intensity and ineffability (Blenkinsop, 2005). An I-Thou perspective, Barich (2008) argues, allows for an open, intimate, reciprocal, relational approach to other, a relationship which is not oriented towards a commodization and/or manipulation of the other, in which the ‘I’ is conscious and honouring of its relationship with Thou. The I/It and I/Thou operate in concert and by necessity in this physical reality. However the ‘I’ is different within the I/It approach than the I/Thou approach in part because I/Thou is not within but between the self and the other, therefore making that sense of ‘I’ a mutual construction rather than an internal consciousness (Blenkinsop, 2005). Engaging with nonhuman nature is a matter of an appropriate mix of I/It and I/Thou relating which has led me at times during my exploration to feeling an inclusive communion with nonhuman others, thus facilitating an intuition of an ‘eternal’ beneath the mask of ‘temporal’ surface being. As Buber believed, encountering nature with an I/Thou perspective holds the prospect of not just sensing the divine within all of nonhuman nature but the possibility of discovering a relational, participatory ecological self where the individual becomes a person within and ‘in-between’ others (Blenkinsop, 2005).

‘I’ indicates a self-in-kinship with nonhuman nature while ‘thou’ represents the nonhuman other of my perception. I-Thou emphasises this kinship or inclusive relationship with reverence indicating the state or outcome. This sense of reverential inclusiveness is my interpretation of Buber. His use of I-Thou indicated the ability to see the other, to understand and embrace the other without giving up the authenticity of one’s being (Blenkinsop, 2005). Buber’s I-Thou/ I-It model contributes significantly to my understanding of how humans engage with the world and others because it provides a relevant interpretation of seeing the world from two broad relational perspectives. The I-It way of relating is necessary to engage cognitively and physically in the physical world, it is the way I operate most of the time, through cognitive, rational and perceptual modes of consciousness. In letting this outward or what I have referred to as surface perspective dominate our engagements, our interaction with other, it may retard deepening our relationship
by limiting the depth of engagement with other (Buber, 2004). This can, from my perspective, be viewed as the fundamental cause of environmental degradation, that is, through an alienated mode of consciousness with its objectifying, instrumentalist and resourcist perspectives towards the ‘environment’. Being able to go beyond an I-It perspective was an opportunity to engage nonhuman beings from an expanded perspective, to view nonhuman other as ‘Thou’ with a subsequent relational level of engagement. From this engagement emerged an experience and latter interpretation of reverence.

Reverence originated from an appreciative and respectful perception of a subject’s presence, beauty, complexity, simplicity and uniqueness and form or design. A sense of reverence and humility arose gradually as I became more present and focused on the subject. A sense of reverence, often felt as an empathic resonance, flowed from physical and psychological immersions in natural areas. Visiting natural areas helped me gain a valued sense of perspective on my life. To recognise that I am a small part of a diverse unfolding ecology also contributed to a sense of reverence toward nature.

b) Sense of relationship
I preface this discussion by stating that while discussing human-nature connection is relevant to this section, I wanted to focus here on my experience of relating, not justifying why close connections with nonhuman nature and biospheric attitudes is more likely to lead to pro-environmental behaviour. I concentrate my discussion on my experience of relating to nonhuman other and how this contributed to my understanding of heightened eco-consciousness. My experiences in both structured exercises and heuristic journaling were significantly affected by taking a relational, caring approach to nonhuman other. Consciously taking a respectful, caring, relational approach to nonhuman other made my experience more immersive and richer, facilitating a connection beyond an aesthetic, cognitive one that I would begin each experiential session with. I either spontaneously felt or self-generated a caring or empathic approach in order to help create a relational
perspective. (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997) define empathic concern as an emotional reaction characterized by feelings such as sympathy, compassion and tenderness. It is brought about by a perception of attachment such as kinship, familiarity and similarity or relationship: as the degree of relationship increases, the more likely one is able to feel empathic concern with the other and thus be more willing to take the perspective of the other. Developing a sense of commonality with other is important for empathic concern (Cialdini et al., 1997). Press & Minta (2000) argue that empathy is critical to the quality of our relationship with nonhuman nature. I found that caring and empathy quietened my rational, analytic mind sufficiently into a receptive state where a shared space could be created.

The feelings and emotions I experienced through this relational perspective included joy, love, appreciation, humility, respect, wonder, and freedom. Becoming mindful of these affective states and retaining this was an important part of becoming more aware of my surrounds and the process of interpreting meanings from my engagements. If, for example, I was mindful of feelings of wonder and respect at a spiders web creation, this would contribute to my overall connection and relationship with a place. This mindfulness helped me retain a non-attached observational stance on both my feelings or responses and aspects of my environment. The affective activity at the end of my nature engagement exercise was designed to allow the ‘heart’ space for positive feelings and emotions to flow in. I found that this deepened my consciousness connection and sense of relationship with others.

Milton (2002) argues that a relational epistemology is common to all human cultures that perceive a personhood in human and nonhuman beings. While such a relational epistemology to nonhuman beings has been common to many human cultures, particularly indigenous ones, Kidner (2001) and Milton (2002) argue that the dominant Western philosophy from Socrates onwards has viewed nonhuman nature as inert objects lacking interiority, to be used as resources by a superior
humanity. A relational epistemology means approaching nonhuman others as active, sentient subjects worthy of care and respect and as co-participants, not as spectators. It has been shown that when people sense a connection to nonhuman nature, this is correlated with a sense of community, embeddedness and belongingness to nature, which is linked to human well-being and pro-environmental behaviour (Mayer and Frantz, 2004). All of my experiential activities can be interpreted in this light as a way of integrating the rational and affective, my physical and spiritual interpretations of reality and the known and the habitual. Improving perceptive practices I discovered helped me to not only increase my understanding of a natural setting but helped me to care for and identify more strongly with the nonhuman beings around me. Strongly identifying with aspects of my environment evoked an ecological sense of self. This experience is reflected in the argument by Milton (2002) that identification with nonhuman nature evokes an inclination, rather than a duty, to protect nonhuman nature (Milton, 2002), especially when nonhuman nature is constitutive of one’s identity.

It is only when we come into relation with something, indeed, only when we understand, as Buber claimed, that relationship is primary that something becomes a Thou, not an It. Perhaps the value of relationship for me is that its experience helped me to disengage from my abstracting mind and be more fully present in my ‘relational field of being’. That is, in being immersed in the experience of relating or connecting, there was a shift in my sense of self from self-as-separated to self-in-kinship. This process parallels my experience of an ecological sense of self and my

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31 My language here betrays my dualising thinking. Rationality and affections can be seen as opposites but they are both emotionally constituted argues Milton (2002). If rationality is viewed as motivated thought and emotion is the essence of motivation, rationality can be seen as a feeling, as emotionally constituted. The opposition between rationality and emotion is a myth. This view has relevance for the arguments about nature conservation where accusations of emotionality are used to undermine ‘tree huggers’ and rational economic arguments are used to justify economic outcomes, based on hidden emotions. Given my activist experiences, I can concur with Milton that democracy (and most likely other forms of political systems) tends to neglect or undervalue the importance of emotions and spirituality in public decision-making.
understanding of heightened eco-consciousness development that requires coming into a meaningful relationship and on-going sense of connection with nonhuman nature.

c) Ecological awareness
I became aware of the complex ecological processes, systems and connectedness within the settings I visited. Having had ecological training and professional environmental experience, I was in a position to be curious and understand basic ecological processes and ecological communities I visited, which I believe enhanced the ecological value of my experiences, as well as my sense of place. I felt that this was an important aspect to facilitating and experiencing eco-consciousness. The ecological understanding and perceptual orientation provided the overall contexts for getting a ‘feel’ for natural settings. This is reflected in Milton’s assertion that we come to understand nature through our perceptual experience of the total environment and that a person’s perceptual skills influences their understanding of the environment and the meaning they gain from this understanding (Milton, 2002). A study of outdoor student’s experience in natural settings found that ecological understanding helped deepen (but not initiate) a relationship with nonhuman nature (Martin, 2004). This is consistent with my experience that better understanding consolidated my curiosity and provided motivation for future explorations of new settings.

My ecological understanding was not contingent on being able to identify specific flora and fauna but, rather, the general characteristics such as vegetation communities, geological features, landscape and aquatic features and the various cycles, for example nutrient, water and carbon cycles. I agree with Carlsson (2002) that ecological understanding does not presuppose knowing all the details of a system, just the essence and consequences of the processes within that system. My experience before and during this dissertation aligns with the insight by Thomashow (1995) that ecological understanding has both a cognitive and intuitive dimension: there is the formal, structured educational understanding about
ecological principles and processes and there is an intuitive, experiential path through direct, regular observations of natural processes and quiet mindful contemplation of nonhuman nature. The latter approach was consistent with the nature engagement method with its focus on mindfully observing, hearing and touching the natural settings I visited. One of the benefits of this method was gaining an ecological awareness and a sense of place, simply by sitting/standing/walking quietly and being present to what I could perceive and interpret.

My ecological understanding affected how I related to a place. Greater ecological knowledge and environmental familiarity strengthened my sense of place which led to a different quality of engagement experience. In Manly Dam I was highly familiar with the area’s ecosystems, the flora and fauna, the diurnal and seasonal variations of bird populations and the flowering of trees and shrubs, so I had expectations of a specific ecological type. My visits to the Barrington Tops, in contrast, were more open, less expectant due to less familiarity and awareness. Complementing my cognitive ecological knowledge (orthodox ecology), consistent with Thomashow (1995), was an intuitional awareness of the interconnectedness of everything around me (metaphysical ecology). This two-fold understanding affected my overall understanding of a place and my sense of connectedness and self.

d) Being/being
Awareness of Being was a rewarding transpersonal experience and a common reflection in my journals. I found it to be a significant experience of heightened eco-consciousness. Explaining my experience of Being is a challenge for me because of its intangible, almost ineffable nature. Even the great twentieth century philosopher Martin Heidegger viewed Being as almost indefinable, the most obscure of all concepts (Heidegger, 1962). In his classic treatise, ‘Being and Time’, he stated that ‘the indefinability of Being does not dispense with the question of its meaning but forces it upon us’ (Heidegger, 1962:44). The notion of ‘Being’ was ‘forced’ upon me by heightened states of eco-consciousness. As difficult as it is to
describe, I felt I needed to give expression to this numinous state as well as other understandings of being.

As a result of my experiences and reflection in natural settings, I recognise three interpretations of the term ‘Being’: 1) being as an embodied individual such as a human being, tree or wallaby for example, 2) being as a way of minimal ‘doing’, and 3) Being as a core essence of my self within and beyond temporality and causality, the Being within my being, what I have referred to as my eco-Self within the ecological context of my exploration. See Figure 55 beneath.

![Figure 55 - My interpretations of being/Being](image)

These interpretations applied at during different times or contexts of my exploration. I interpreted being to mean my first interpretation (embodied being) when in a cognitive, descriptive and/or aesthetic mode of consciousness, that is a physical ‘being’, as in a human being. My sense of self, in natural settings, varied between ego and eco- sense of self (see section (f) for my discussion of eco-self). My third meaning arose often in the second non-doing being, that is during more contemplative, relational engagements and is similar to Heidegger’s ‘Being’. Our Being is always within us, argues Heidegger (1962), accessible within the modes of enquiry that seek to understand the nature of things behind surface appearance but is ungraspable until we become concerned about Being (Heidegger, 2005). The being of a person may be viewed as the fundamental essence of their potential,
beyond what is cognitively known about him/her. Kiser (2007) further argues, in reviewing the work of existentialist Rollo May, that the ultimate purpose of therapy is for the person to more fully experience his or her own existence, their own being. They must be set free of symptoms, compulsions and free to actualise their ‘inner potentialities to the extent that one is authentically experiencing one’s being’ (p155). When I was experiencing heightened eco-consciousness and intuitively aware of my Being (and being), I believe I was connecting with this deep inner potentiality, the deep essence of my self, my eco-Self (see section (f) for my discussion of eco-Self). I felt the freedom to be. This was a form of therapy, a sense of affective and existential healing (see section (g)).

When I wrote about the importance of the experience of being, written as being or Being, it referred to both the ‘fact’ of my existence (I exist, wow!) and the sense of feeling connected with my core or non-ego Self, a Being beyond but including my narrower ego-self being: Being-within-being. My awareness of being in its three interpretations arose in heightened states of eco-consciousness as I became stilled and present to my surrounding environment. It involved cognitive and affective calmness, being physically still, feeling grounded or connected to a place or Earth while sensorially engaged or in meditative states. The deeper the immersive experience, the more likely I would feel my Being-within-being.

In being as non-doing\(^{32}\), I was not doing anything overly physical or cognitive but being still, calm and observant, which while an activity and therefore a ‘doing’ was

\(^{32}\) The Taoist concept of \textit{wu wei} is often translated as ‘non-doing’ or ‘non-action’. But as Capra (1996) explains, it can more accurately viewed as the way of non-action in which the person allows everything to do what it naturally does, to not impede the natural flow of things. From this perspective, my meaning of being as not doing is not purely about non-action but allowing an open clearing within my mind and heart to be a state of passive receptivity in engaging nonhuman other.
as close to ‘being’ or non-doing as I can imagine while in a waking ‘normal’ state of consciousness. Another way of experiencing being as not doing arose during meditative and mindful states - a deep calmness would arise within my stilled body after which I could observe in imaginal mode my body, my physical being. I enjoyed these moments of being, of being still, calm and non-doing. It was in these times I came to sense not only deep peace and connectedness but experience insights into heightened eco-consciousness. In non-doing I could step back from my ego-self and view my self and issues and sufferings from a higher or removed perspective. I could for example understand just how absorbed in mindlessness I was in daily life, rather than on being mindful of my psychological and somatic states. My experience of being as non-doing was a mindfulness meditative process of detachment and non-judgemental perception of external and internal stimuli. This state of mindful non-doing was my gateway to a deep state of Being, as well as a reverential experience of communion with my fellow beings around me. In this state, I became more aware of my embodied being within my core or eco-self Being.

Experiencing my Being and evolving a broad understanding of my three experiences of being/Being and how they relate was, upon much later reflection, an important part of my Self-realisation, my search for authenticity. Zimmerman in Fox (1990) speaks about becoming an ‘authentic’ self. He argues that we are so entrenched on the contents of our awareness and our physical, day-to-day being, that we fail to notice our awareness and I would add, our inner Beingness. It is this meta-awareness and Being that constitutes an open realm of possibilities to discover what lies beyond our ego ‘mask’, beyond the surface perceptions and mindsets enraptured by the aesthetic illusions of embodied being. As Zimmerman elaborates, alluding to Heidegger’s views on Being, if a human being is to become

I can see the similarity with Naess’s view that we should allow all things to Self-realise to fullest extent possible. I view Self-realising to be enriched by taking a position of wu wei.
authentic, a person must be open to the possibilities beyond the grasping, controlling ego, to exist to serve, not dominate. This perspective is helpful in understanding why a heightened eco-consciousness is deeper (in a transpersonal developmental sense) than a more common, or ‘surface’, environmental consciousness. Developing heightened eco-consciousness requires going beyond the cognitive, aesthetic perceptions of being (ego-self) to facilitate an ‘eco-selving’ process, as discussed previously, an awakening and transformation of Being within being.

An important aspect of my experience of Being was my experience of time. The more I was immersed in the present moment within a natural setting, the more connected I felt with a place and the less cognisant or caring of linear time I became. I became so engrossed during many of my structured exercises that I ceased to be aware of time passing. Heidegger (1962) reflected that humanity had lost the sense of Being, of being fully alive and present to the lived world of experience and therefore had become ignorant to the depths and possibilities of existence. I felt a revitalised sense of self in my experience of the latter two meanings of being, and hence relate to Heidegger’s insight on the importance of being aware of one’s Being in creating a broader concept of self and moving away from, as Hunt (1995) terms it, personal grandiosity, emotional withdrawal, personal isolation and endemic narcissism. Devall & Sessions (1985) have spoken about the similarities between Heidegger’s views on society and ‘nature’ and deep ecology. The three contributions made by Heidegger that influenced Naess were that 1) the anthropocentric trend since Plato has led to a technocentric mentality that promotes domination over nature, 2) Heidegger encouraged people to enter into a meditative thinking that would ‘let things be’, and 3) Heidegger called for an authentic dwelling on Earth. My approach to evoking a heightened eco-consciousness can be viewed as having similarities with Heidegger’s views on improving human-nature relations. It emphasised a mindful, caring approach to engaging nonhuman other and facilitated an authentic dwelling within places during the experiential and reflective exercises. Only by respecting and caring for
other beings and letting all beings realise their potential can we overcome our collective subjectivism, dualism and anthropocentrism (Zimmerman, 1994). In sensing my Being or Self through an ecocentric, ‘meditative’ and ‘authentic dwelling’ in a natural setting, I regained a sense of perspective of not only who I was beyond my embodied being/self but a sense of my deeper Being that I intuited was deeply aware of the Beingness of all the beings around me. It felt that there was not just an assemblage of entities such as trees and birds but a community of nonhuman beings with their own Beingness. My embodied self felt less significant, less tangible when experiencing this ecological self and Self.

An interesting perspective on the relationship between being/Being and self/Self is the proposition that one’s sense of self develops in an ambiguous realm, characterised by two interweaving processes: (Todres, 2000)

- The openness and continuity of the unity of Being; and
- The changing boundaries in which being as an embodied individual occurs and ways in which we define ourselves.

I interpret this proposition by reflecting that if I too narrowly define who I am, I minimise my openness to the possibilities of self growth within the ambiguity and complexity of life, and avoid or restrict challenging the apparent ‘concreteness’ of self-other boundaries. By accepting the perceived solidarity of boundaries, I restrict my perspective on how I understand myself and further alienate my consciousness and dissociate from other beings. I concur with Todres who identifies openness as a quality of consciousness, and I argue that heightened eco-consciousness requires an openness to acknowledging and exploring boundary diffusion, rather than boundary making. This alludes to my research experiences where awareness of being (as embodied individual) expanded through openness and letting go of habitual states of awareness. Hunt (1995) also believes that our ability to evoke this openness or potential for openness, allows the immediate accession or possibility for direct awareness of our Being. I find this perspective in Being as significant for understanding heightened eco-consciousness in that openness to and
calmly accepting ambiguity was an important process, on many occasions, to facilitating heightened eco-consciousness. I find life to be uncertain or ambiguous at every level, for example, my understanding of consciousness, who I am beyond my self, about my future, the impacts of climate change, and my uncertainty about life after death. Instead of fleeing to the ‘safety’ of cognitive, constructed certainty, habits or addictions, I have long since recognised that I must accept ambiguity in all of its guises and be open to the possibilities of each moment, whether it resolve or reconcile the uncertainties that may trouble me. For me the development of heightened eco-consciousness necessarily entails ambiguity in process or outcome given what I believe is the nonlinear, often synchronous nature of consciousness transformation and transpersonal processes. It requires openness and mindfulness in a way not generally practiced in normal waking life. The often ambiguous nature of self-construal and understanding being/Being in its various interpretations was encountered during inter-subjective and intra-subjective experiences within natural settings.

Cohen (1993) offers an interesting perspective consistent with my ontological assumptions on the beingness of all things, whether it be a tree being or human being. He postulates that all matter, being conscious or sentient, desires to be, to grow, survive and develop at some level in some relational way. Cohen (1993) proposes that everything attempts to fulfil its desire to be by forming stabilising, supportive relationships through natural attractions, to other beings, human or nonhuman. Using this reasoning when I perceive a lack of stability and supportive relationships within my social/ cultural world, then my sense of being connected to my core self is compromised. If, within the context of this thesis, I feel more supported, less judgmental and more meaning within nonhuman nature, then fully immersing my self within nonhuman nature offers an opportunity to experience
Being-in-being. Experience of being/Being is as a fundamental quality of heightened eco-consciousness, to Be\(^33\).

e) Sense of place

I have a strong sense of place with Manly Dam Reserve as a result of over fifteen years of visiting this beautiful bushland and lake reserve. I identify strongly with the Barrington Tops where I have camped over the past six years. The experience I felt from a strong psychological engagement with a place was calmness of mind, a strong sense of Being, groundedness, being psychologically centred and an increasing appreciation of the place including its ecological and energetic qualities. Experiencing a sense of place was an important stimulus for evoking heightened ecological consciousness. As I became more familiar with a place, the noticed visual setting became taken-for-granted and slipped into the perceptual background, noticed but not seen with the original intensity and response. As the less obvious came to the foreground I became more aware of the more discreet characteristics of a place such as subtle patterns and textures on tree trunks. Abram (1996) likewise states that as we come to frequent places, certain phenomena we have taken for granted lose their fascination and slip into the perceptual background. As my senses slowly re-vitalised and awakened in this dialectical process of familiarisation and novelty, I came to see more of what was actually there, a process that increased my ecological awareness and helped evoke a stronger sense of place.

\(^33\) Cohen remarks on the connection between ‘being’ and the original word for God, Yhwah (Yahweh), which he states means ‘The One’. According to Cohen’s sources, Yahweh is an ancient form of the verb, to be or to become. According to http://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/YHWH.html Yahweh similarly can mean Being. Cohen quotes a Zen Buddhist priest, Suzuki Roshi, : ‘God is being itself, to let ourselves be is to enter into union with God’. I connect with this statement because the subject of ‘Being’ arose frequently in my heuristic reflections in varying contexts and meanings – my Being, being-in-the-moment, beings of nature for example. I nearly always associated the experience of Being with my spiritual aspect or Self/soul/Witness and its evolution within God or All that Is.
There are according Knez (2005) three main constructs accounting for a psychology of place: 1) place attachment (an emotional bond to a place), 2) place identity (where a specific place is strongly identified with and is part of one’s identity) and 3) sense of place. This latter term, sense of place, has been referred to as where a person has a positive affective sentiment and meaning for a specific place (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999). As Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels (2003) state,

place meanings encompass instrumental or utilitarian values as well as intangible values such as belonging, attachment, beauty, and spirituality. This definition explicitly acknowledges the subjectivity of people’s encounters with place. (p87).

They further argue that place as a space of individual meaning is not simply an area with specific biophysical attributes but is constructed through social and political processes that determine, for example, what is socially acceptable behaviour for a natural area (Cheng et al., 2003).

According to the preceding literature, a place of meaning therefore involves interpretive perspectives on environmental features and emotional reactions to them. Rogan, O'Connor, & Horwitz (2005) investigated people’s sense of place in Western Australia and found that participants held complex and intimate relationships with their environments, that places held highly personal meanings, were vehicles for learning and personal growth and provided places of spiritual significance and emotional regulation. Intimate knowledge of places of meaning, that is, sense of place, and its incorporation into self-concept is a central concept in place identity (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). This proposition is consistent with my sense of
place with Manly Dam Reserve and its importance in my continual questioning and developing my sense of self.

A study by Fredrickson & Anderson (1999) on the sources of spiritual inspiration in wilderness experiences found that there is an insideness-outsideness dynamic of an authentic place experience, first proposed by Relph’s classic study, *Place and Placeness*. This dynamic refers to a process in which an individual becomes familiar with the particulars of a place to the point where there is a close identification with it, such as Manly Dam for me. As Schroeder (2007) explains, a person feels a sense of belonging, comfort and at-homeness in places of meaning. The person moves from a position of being outside the biophysical and social dynamics of a place to being on the inside (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999). Manzo (2003) states that the notion of insideness is very useful for considering positive emotional relationships to places beyond the persons residence. Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) found that it was the biophysical, social and managerial attributes of a natural setting that evoked a sense of meaning in a landscape, including spiritual inspiration. They discovered that despite the predominance of insideness, outsideness was experienced in natural areas through physical discomfort, fears of attack by wild animals and treacherous terrain and/or weather. However their study involved different groups of women in different wilderness settings and so perhaps is not as strongly relevant to single person situations such as in my research where there are no social interactions. Nevertheless, their use of the insideness-outsideness dynamic helps to explain the perceptual reasons for sense of place I felt at Manly Dam Reserve and the Barrington Tops, as against the outsideness of suburban areas and routines I was seeking to escape from. To be inside something or place of

34 There were occasions when camping in the Barrington Tops where I felt a kind of outsideness. This occurred when I had noisy campers around me and when I felt vulnerable when alone, having observed recent dropping from wild dogs. I found that negative states of mind such as annoyance,
positive value and meaning is I feel to expand my interiority or sense of self through meaningful engagement, within natural settings.

I believe developing a sense of place is consistent with the etymology of ‘eco’, which derives from the Greek ‘oikos’ meaning home. I do not believe it is too romantic or idealistic to say that having a strong sense of place or connection with a place is like coming home (or having a sense of homely familiarity) and that developing an eco-consciousness could be viewed in this light, as a way of facilitating a feeling of homeliness in natural settings. As I feel for Manly Dam, a place can become familiar and an important part of one’s self.

f) Ecological sense of self/Self

An ecological sense of self (eco-self) often arose out of a heightened state of ecological consciousness. As I commenced my eco-consciousness development, my ‘doing’, rational, surface ego-self became affected by an immersive inter-subjective engagement with natural settings, often leading to an expanded sense of self, what I referred to as an ecological sense of self or eco-self. I experienced an expanded sense of self in which I maintained my perceived self boundary, my own sense

resentment and vulnerability ripped away any sense of insideness and heightened eco-consciousness.
of individuality yet resonated strongly with the natural landscape around me, as if it were an extended part of me. The more focused or mindfully appreciative I became with a place, a space, an object such as a tree, rock, Tawny Frogmouth or spider web, the more I came to identify with the subject of my perception and become less bounded by habitual thinking and my normal waking ego consciousness. I experienced a sense of unity or kinship, an appreciative awareness of the diversity of forms and processes within the natural setting around me.

The term ‘ecological self’, according to deep ecologist Bill Devall (1988), refers to a person’s widened identification with nonhuman other, in other words, the inclusion of aspects of nonhuman nature in a person’s self-concept through a receptive relational engagement with the nonhuman other. When deep ecology theorists speak about human identification with nature, they are, says Diehm (2007), referring to a particular sense of belonging or community with the nonhuman

35 Kidner (2001) argues that the notion of resonance is useful in allowing recognition and respect for ‘other’, so that a sense of resonance with nonhuman beings can evoke a deeper, holistic intersubjectivity.

36 From a developmental psychological perspective, Spitzform (2000) refers to ecological self as our unfolding experience of self within the context of the nonhuman world. This perspective views this experience beginning around three to six months through increasing capacities to differentiate animate and inanimate objects through to exploring sameness and difference with other living creatures and inanimate objects. She proposes that the ecological self can be viewed as ‘an ongoing evolving structure of interactions with animals, plants and place’ (Spitzform, 2000:270) which develops from childhood interactions with surrounding environments to adulthood through accumulated experience with nonhuman others.
world, identification-as-belonging. Through a process of identification, we become more aware of our interconnectedness, of being embedded in nature like ‘knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations’ (Naess, 1973:95). The identification-as-belonging can be viewed as a critique of overly atomistic or individualistic conceptions of ‘self’. Diehm (2007) proffers a supplementary version, identification-as-kinship based on Naess’s writings which is not so oriented towards ‘correcting’ this unduly restricted sense of self prevalent in modernity but identifying with nonhuman other in terms of empathy and concern for their well-being. When we recognise their vulnerability, pain and feel or associate with their plight, when we recognise the indifferent conceptions or carelessness of humans towards animals, for example, it can contribute to a revised conception of our selves (Diehm, 2007).

An ecological sense of self could happen spontaneously during a bushwalk or it would arise during my structured nature engagement activities. During this experience, I felt less the intruder or visitor and more a respectful, humble member of this community. I remember the peaceful, centring feeling of joy, humility and love fill my awareness when in this psychological ‘space’, almost non-dual awareness of my environment, not a separate or distinctive I-It perspective but an I-Thou awareness. Sometimes I would feel rather a matter of fact about feeling connected (I-it), other times, I sensed a reverential or honouring feeling when particularly engaged and joyfully peaceful (I-Thou). I associated the experience with feeling safe and comfortable as well as a consolidated sense of place. The experience of identifying with nonhuman other could be quite dramatic, such as my encounter with the Sooty Owl. One of the important insights of this experience in terms of an eco-self was the levels of
identification I made with it. Based on the work of Fox (1990) and Milton (2002), I identified with it through direct personal touch and emotions (personal), acknowledged our shared reality (ontological), recognised that its beingness and death was a meaningful part of an interconnected unfolding reality (cosmological), its death (and latter decomposition) being a reminder of my existential existence (identity) and peering into its deep, black tranquil eyes I sensed something intangible that reminded me of our shared heritage (person-based).

Whether it be through identification as belonging or kinship, the ecological self represents, according to Naess (1989), an expanded sense of self in which the physical and psychological boundaries of self are experienced in a more porous, fluid way to include more of the world around. Naess states that as we deepen our engagement with nonhuman other, the individual, ego self evolves into a sense of self more inclusive of nonhuman others and places. It is through identification with nonhuman other, through recognising and respecting the rights of all beings to Self-realisation that Naess and other deep ecologists (Devall, 1988; Devall & Sessions, 1985; Fox, 1990; Macey, 1991; Zimmerman, 1994) believe that we can begin to live in harmony with life. It is appropriate to couch this by suggesting that identification and harmony may only be realised, in my experience, and as Spitzform (2000) identifies, if we are feeling safe and not overly stressed by environmental hazards and conditions such as snakes, thirst, hunger, thunderstorms, exposure to severe...

37 Fox developed a framework of nature identification (Fox, 1990) to identify ways in which we might identify at various levels of existence: 1) personal - through direct personal involvement with nonhuman other, 2) ontological – the deep understanding that all beings share this common existence in this reality, and 3) cosmological – the realisation that all things in the cosmos belong to a single, interconnected and unfolding reality. Milton (2002) extended this to include 1) identity - understanding that we and everything eventually dies and that our bodies transform into other physical forms, and 2) person-based - we tend to identify with others, human and nonhuman, when we sense similarity to us, especially the experience of pain and emotion.
elements. The writers above are laying claim to the middle ground between two perceived extremes of atomic individualism and absolute monism (Humphrey, 2000). As Naess clarifies this middle position:

We are part of the ecosphere just as intimately as we are a part of our own society. But the expression ‘drops in the stream of life’ may be misleading if it implies that individuality of the drops is lost in the stream. Here is a difficult ridge to walk: to the left we have the ocean of organic and mystic views, to the right the abyss of atomic individualism. (Naess, 1989:165)

I believe Naess is trying to retain the importance of individuality in one’s sense of self while freeing the core controlling ego-self of its reluctance to identify with others. Macey (1991) too argues that the expansion of the boundaries of self entails an expanded sense of human identity without denying the unique individuality of each person. I view walking along this narrow ridge as a useful metaphor in that ecological consciousness can only evolve if we manage to balance an organic with an individual sense of self. I have a social identity but I also have an ecological sense of self, most often through experiencing heightened states of eco-consciousness. Understanding that our sense of self, argues Kidner (2001), is construed by its contradistinction to the world as well as through its resonance with the world is important for evoking an ecological sense of self that includes an enhanced awareness of the world and of one’s self (Kidner, 2001). My reading of several deep ecological texts indicates that ecological self, as part of the Self-realising process, requires identification\(^\text{38}\), not merging, with nonhuman other (Devall, 1988; Naess, 1986).

\(^{38}\) Identification, within this context, is consistent the Norwegian ‘identifisering’ which is an active, on-going process in which one identifies with parts of nature precisely because they are of an equal status to us, possess a certain independence from us and we cannot exist without them (Rothenberg,
This personal evolution of an ecological self can be viewed as what deep ecologists refer to as a Self-realising process. It would appear that deep ecologists or at least Naess and Devall give more emphasis to ecological self process than to ecological consciousness, that the former is the primary or initial path to living in a Self-realising and ‘eco-egalitarian’ way, from which an eco-consciousness will evolve:

Exploring ecological self can be partly described as discovering a sense-of-place or an ecological consciousness. Thus the more we know a place intimately, the more we can increase our identification with it. (Devall, 1988:52)

In this research, I pursued the opposite process consistent with my experiences of engaging nonhuman nature in my past. That is, I sought to facilitate a heightened state of eco-consciousness in various natural settings. It perhaps matters little how an eco-self or eco-consciousness is evoked and in which order but I thought it relevant to point out that in evoking heightened states of eco-consciousness, an eco-self experience evolved in those moments, which is different in order from what I have read in the deep ecology literature, for example Devall (1988), Devall and Sessions (1985), Naess (1986) and Zimmerman (1994).

Deep ecologists such as Sessions, Devall, McLaughlin, Drengson and Macey quoted in Fox (1990) speak of the need to broaden our identification with nonhuman other.

1989). Identification with nonhuman other is not about merging or losing the self but decreasing egocentricity through expanding and intensifying our awareness of our togetherness with other beings. The process of ecological identification is an understanding that we are not delimited by the personal ego or body but a part of a diversity-within-unity that is life (Naess, 1989).
It is, however not about having or holding onto an identity\textsuperscript{39,40}, ecological, ethnic or social for example, but allowing the sense of self to continually evolve or to become. Sewall (1999) points out that the act of becoming what is within us ultimately comes down to attention and caring. The act of becoming arises, within my experience during this research, out of both the caring, mindful reaching out to nonhuman other and the awareness of my and other’s Being during intimate or grounded engagements. This is one of the insights and benefits of my research, that being fully present, purposively intentional on fully dwelling within a setting, I became more conscious of becoming more me, more human. Within the Otherness of my surrounds lay the realisation of my uniqueness and communion with nature. This act of becoming was experienced during my nature engagement and two fold vision sessions. An important part of this becoming was letting go of inner cognitive and emotional states that I brought into the natural areas, as well as my ego-self that wanted control and certain outcomes\textsuperscript{41}.

\textsuperscript{39} Rust (2004) similarly views one’s self as an evolving one in a lifelong process of growth, shedding and changing in relation to our socio-cultural and environmental surrounds. Lachmann (2004) too argues that our sense of self is dependent on the context within which the person lives their life, beginning in infancy and evolving throughout life, growing and expanding through a process in which earlier senses of self are not supplanted by later ones but remain and are absorbed, altered and transformed into subsequent senses of self (Lachmann, 2004).

\textsuperscript{40} Radical identification with nonhuman nature implies that what we think we do to nature we do to ourselves and this, according to Hailwood, means that environmental concern is indistinguishable from self-interest, enlightened or otherwise. Booth (1996) criticises radical identification on a number of points including that there is no need to respect the other if the other is simply part of the perceiver and that the rainforest need’s are the same as our own. These criticisms confuse identification with identity and it is identification that deep ecological theory focuses upon.

\textsuperscript{41} The widening of identification with nonhuman other occurs, writes Zimmerman 1994, through a process of self-emptying rather than self-expansion. Self-emptying simply means recognising the insubstantiality of the ego-self and the liberation from anxiety, insecurity produced by the illusion of separateness. Identifying with other is not just about an expanded sense of self but perceiving the emptiness of the constructed ego-self (Zimmerman, 1994).
Ecological sense of Self (eco-Self)

Once I was in that state of consciousness I associated with an eco-self, it was then a short transition to a deeply grounded state of Being (my third meaning in the previous section), what I referred to as an eco-Self (Self referring to what may be interpreted as a soul or Witness). By this I refer to an experience of transpersonal ‘oneness’ (discussed in the section Otherness), which flowed out of an immersive experience with nonhuman other in which I turned my gaze inward. I found the deep meditative state of eco-Self as a rather blissful state of being. Physically I felt calm, light and subject to sensuous responses from perceptual cues around me (colours, patterns, sounds, feelings, touching, smells) and psychologically I felt peaceful, grounded and centred. I felt less alienated or isolated, less focused on my physical separation from nonhuman other. My experience of eco-Self or communion was an ineffable experience of oneness but not merging. It did not arise often, it was in a minority of situations that I was able to maintain meditative focus and be totally present. Desire, focus and intuitive openness were important approaches in facilitating this experience of eco-Self or self-in-union. I see a progression from normal waking ‘atomistic’ self (ego-self), an ecological sense of self (eco-self) in direct relationship with nonhuman nature through to a

\[\text{Varela, Thompson, & Rosch (1991) argue that many reflective cultural traditions posit the existence of a transcendental self beyond the experience of the ego. They argue that Western and many non-Western traditions have either ignored it or argued that a transcendental self can never be known to experience. Varela et al. (1991) identify mindfulness meditation as a way to be more fully present in the being of mind and body in its life-world in order to bring forth this intra-subjective being. In using mindfulness and other meditative approaches during my immersive engagements, I was able to experience my Being-within-being when the ‘doings’ of my ego-self were stilled. It also represented an ecological selving process in which ego domination was usurped by experience of inter-subjective connection and communion (eco-self) and intra-subjective dwelling and connecting (eco-Self).}\]

289
transpersonal experience of soul connection through the medium of nonhuman nature (eco-Self)\(^\text{43}\). The process of identifying with nonhuman other and deeper aspects of one’s self can be described as an ‘ecological selving’ (Morris, 2002) process in which there is an outer and inner process of broadening self-concept. I have alluded to this above when I discussed my experience of my outward gaze of my eco-self gradually turning inward to an eco-Self experience. I find it a useful notion, ‘ecological selving’, as for me it infers an active evolutionary process of, through the medium of nonhuman nature, integrating the ‘selves’ of one’s Being, ego, self and Self.

g) Restorative and therapeutic outcomes

Restoration: Feeling psychologically reinvigorated and settled was the most and frequent meaningful experience when undertaking my research exercises in natural settings, whether it be for several hours or days. I attribute this outcome to several processes. Just getting away from suburban routines and built environment was liberating and refreshing. The act of walking into the bush, beginning a nature engagement restored peace of mind and connection. According to the Random House unabridged dictionary (Random House, 2006), restore is defined as bringing back to a state of health, soundness or vigor. Given the evocation of positive states of mind and reinvigoration, this term is an appropriate descriptor of the meaning I gave this experience.

Although I was more likely to feel nurtured in tall dense forests or rainforests where I felt more immersed than dry, open health communities, this was not always the

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\(^{43}\) I do not imply that this progression is easy, for as I have found, becoming more of what one truly is a struggle, ‘we have to fight hard to become who we are meant to be’ (Kiser, 2007:158). I have found in my life that there are significant barriers to coming into a deeper experience and understanding of my potential and my inner being. It is not a simple progression to achieve an experience of eco-Self but about ‘the subtle and difficult art of being’ (Kiser, 2007:159).
case. It was not the settings *per se* that were restorative in and of themselves but the psychological and affective experiences I had within them that facilitated this type of restorative experience. Restoration was immediately discernible if I reached out to ‘other’ empathically or with focused, sustained curiosity, a key process in evoking heightened eco-consciousness. The experience of restoration could both evoke an eco-consciousness state or was a meaningful outcome of a state of eco-consciousness. I interpret the meaning of restoration in several ways, including letting go of:

- negative states of mind;
- feelings of being overwhelmed by life;
- suburban claustrophobia;
- habitual thinking, feeling, imagining and responding
- physical and emotional pain.

Even if my nature engagements did not immediately help me let go of these, it provided a ‘holding space’ to gain perspective, to acknowledge any negative states and understand that I chose, consciously or unconsciously, to hold onto them. I acknowledged that these conditions as states of energy, not the me as in my core self but attachments that I could either continue to unconsciously hold onto or let flow through me. In this practice or discipline of letting go, I mindfully observed them dissipating away allowing the inner space to be filled with the peace, stillness and positive states. Plotkin (2003) argues that while we may want to be restored or healed, the healing process can be compromised by our unwillingness to question our fundamental values and assumptions of who we are and our way of life. This capacity and willingness for self-reflection is also another aspect of restoration. From this perspective, I came to view restoration as not just a matter of letting go of negative states of mind and feeling positive and reinvigorated but a process of honest questioning or reflecting upon aspects of my life that evoked negative responses in the first place.
Nature engagement has been associated with psychological and physiological restoration such as allowing directed attention to rest and restore, emotional stability, relaxation, spiritual meaning, stress reduction and mental clarity (Berto, 2005; Clinebell, 1996; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Hartig & Staats, 2006; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Korpela & Hartig, 1996; Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995; Scopelliti & Giuliani, 2004; Wells & Evans, 2003) and that natural surroundings can better aid psychological restoration than can urban environments devoid of naturally vegetated areas (Berto, 2005; van den Berg, Hartig, & Staats, 2007). Hartig, Kaiser, & Bowler (2001) similarly found that restorative experiences in nature mediated by, for example, fascination and a sense of being away from habituated areas, can help in facilitating pro-environmental behaviours. Similarly, Thomashow (1995) believes that an expanded sense of self, an ecological identity, can help repair the wounds that humans have inflicted upon the Earth. He argues that an individual must undergo a healing process in order to fully understand his or her relationship to the earth, create a sustainable psyche and engage in effective environmental action. This healing process has been labelled ‘nature-guided therapy’ and ecotherapy in which a person spends unprogrammed time sensorially, affectively and spiritually engaging natural landscapes (Burns, 1998; Clinebell, 1996).

Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) developed a theory for explaining the restorative qualities of nature. Attention restoration theory (ART) proposes that prolonged focusing or use of directed attention along with fatigue of inhibitory control (ability to resist responding to distractions) causes mental (attention) fatigue leading to concentration difficulty, irritability and increased errors. As Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) state, if mental fatigue is the overworked capacity for directed attention, then resting this requires environments and tasks that make minimal demands on directed attention. They propose that restorative natural settings provide opportunities for psychological restoration because there is less reliance on directed attention allowing the person to recover. The properties of restorative
settings are: (the first four are proposed by Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), the fifth is proposed by (Pedretti & Soren, 2006):

- **being away**: escaping the normal routines of daily life to experience peace and natural surrounds, whether it be one’s local reserve or a more remote, pristine area. It is the distinctiveness and separateness of the experience from the activity causing mental fatigue that is important, not the literal distance from home and work. Being away from the pressures and obligation of everyday life (Scopelliti & Giuliani, 2004) helps people to slow down and enjoy nature’s peacefulness.

- **fascination**: refers to the ability of the natural environment to hold one’s attention through, for example, aesthetic and spiritual appreciation. It is important primarily because it allows one to function with minimal use of directed attention, as well as evoking a sense of connectedness or relatedness to nonhuman other.

- **extent**: refers to the degree one feels engaged, inter-related with the immediately perceived elements of one’s surroundings. This facilitates a sense of being in another world, allows one to build a mental representation of the whole such as a reserve or ‘wilderness’, and an affirmation of previous understandings and a fresh source of fascination.

- **compatibility**: refers to the match between personal inclinations or expectations of the natural setting and the kind of activities supported by the setting. If one’s purpose for visiting is met by the opportunity spectrum of the setting, including environmental patterns to fascinate the observer, then the setting is compatible for restoration.

- **synergy**: refers to the feeling of embodiment and physical harmony as a result of multi-sensory experiences.

Restoration, according to Hartig et al. (2001), consistent with the above framework, tends to take place in settings involving psychological distance from one’s habitual routines, away from demands for directed attention and immersion into a compatible natural setting. Both Manly Dam Reserve and the Barrington Tops
contain the restorative properties suggested above due to their landscape, ecological and management features. I felt restored not only because of this compatibility and extent but because it allowed me to readily quieten my busy mind, termed ‘cognitive quietening’ by Kaplan and Kaplan (1989). Camping within the Barrington Tops generally evoked stronger, sustained restorative experiences because of the above properties – I was a long way from habitual routines and normal urbanised settings, wilder areas were less tarnished sources of psychological, emotional and spiritual revitalisation, the newness of the perceptual environment evoked more present engagement and as a result of this, and my need for solitude and space, I experienced synergy and compatibility with the setting. The restorative or healing experience in nearby Manly Dam for example was more to do with the psychological, rather than physical, distance from my built environment. Regardless of the strength of restoration, I found this experience highly meaningful.

The restorative quality of a green environment was investigated by Taylor, Kuo, & Sullivan (2001), in their study of the impacts of green settings on children with attention deficit disorder (ADD). Their study indicated that ADD symptoms were milder for those children with greener play settings and spending time in green settings could help these children improve their attentional functioning. It feels intuitively consistent with my nature experiences in green, leafy environments that the colour green appears to play an important role in psychological restoration.

**Eco-therapy:** Despair, anger, pessimism and disempowerment were regular visitors in my domestic life during my research and which I occasionally brought with me into natural settings during this research. They were evoked by personal and environmental issues, especially reading about the likely impacts associated with climate change. These emotions and feelings had a restricting impact of my sense of self. I felt that when I experienced anger, powerlessness and pessimistic outlook, they diminished me – I felt belittled, deflated and isolated. When I let them arise and dissipate, I did not feel affected. But when I held onto them for more than a
minute or more, I found that they restricted my awareness of my surrounds. My potential relational self that sought connection could not be realised while consciously consumed by negative states. While anger was felt as a destructive expansion of energy, I did not experience this often but instead was regularly affected in my normal waking consciousness by what I felt was a psyche-contracting despair, anxiety and pessimism.

The more restrictive my sense of self became, as a results of negative states, the narrower my consciousness became and the greater my feeling of isolation and detachment. I viewed these negative emotions and feelings as being disempowering because they posited control of my state of mind and heart with a distant reality outside my experience and control. In being negatively affected by events outside my control, I became that much more disempowered, which then deepened my psychological discomfort and suffering. Without relief, suffering was not conducive to any expansion of consciousness.

When I deeply engaged natural environments such as Manly Dam Reserve, West Head and the Barrington Tops, I held no such attachment to external issues or dilemmas and therefore felt much less likely to experience negative states of mind. Just entering these landscapes would help release negative states. Undertaking any of the three methods got my mind and heart refocused onto perceptual and affective engagements with beautiful, tranquil landscapes. This experience is consistent with my previous experiences in nature. I find natural landscapes therapeutic and heightened eco-consciousness development a very useful structured approach to initiate and sustain this healing process. It was my experience that feeling awe, wonder, incredulousness and connection such as observing a sunset, a spider’s web, listening to a magpie song in early morning airs helped release me from negative feelings as well as from habitual responses and rational observations. Eco-consciousness has helped me not only manage negative feelings or issues but conversely allowed positive feelings to mould perception and meaning making. I found that the therapeutic benefits of eco-consciousness
development arose after acknowledging and accepting my negative states of mind, detaching my sense of self from them and/or their perceived origins, not attempting to rationalise or resolve them and mindfully immersing within the natural setting. In this way, they tended to quickly dissipate and allow the space to be filled by other emotions and feelings originating from my engagement, or if in meditation, from my experience of being.

I reflected in my journals that useful aspects of heightened eco-consciousness for dealing with negative states involved the practice of mindfulness as a way of stepping back from these states and letting go of affective or psychological attachments. On those occasions in natural landscapes when I did step back from my outer responding ego-consciousness and entered a mindful awareness, I recognised the therapeutic benefits of a meaningful connection and relationship with nonhuman other, in terms of ‘positive’ emotions, feelings and perspectives. I usually felt much lighter, physically and emotionally, when experiencing eco-consciousness states due to letting go of negative attachments and feelings. Eco-consciousness development helped facilitate a ‘lightness of being’, a way of being with significantly less attachment to habitual cognitive and emotional states. It is an interesting connection to having a light ecological footprint. Being lighter applies to the inner ecology as well, in letting go to restricting states and situations in a highly complex world.

h) Spiritual meaning
Based on my experiences in natural settings, especially in the ‘wilds’ of the Barrington Tops, I view spirituality as a quality of experience that connected me with a medium of existence within and beyond physical reality, as well as a process of opening our awareness of the ultimate reality of existence. I experienced a spiritual awareness more often in natural areas, especially the wilds of the Barrington Tops and it seemed that spiritual life and untamed, elemental ‘wildness’ (and the wild within me) were complementary to each other and necessary for me. Thoreau, too, discovered this:
I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it
is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a
primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love
the wild not less than the good. (Thoreau 1854/2008:143)

A nature oriented spirituality transcends the reliance on beliefs associated with
formal, centralised religious institutions. One description that came closest to my
experience of spiritual meaning was developed by Ashley (2007) who interviewed
people in Tasmania with close associations with ‘wilderness’ areas about spiritual
meaning in ‘nature’. The following quote represents his interpretation of
wilderness spirituality, which broadly concurs with my understanding. Wilderness
spirituality can be viewed as:

… a feeling of connection and inter-relationship with other people
and nature; a heightened sense of awareness and elevated
consciousness beyond the everyday and corporeal world; cognitive
and affective dimensions of human understandings embracing
peace, tranquillity, harmony, happiness, awe, wonder, and
humbleness, and the possible presence of religious meaning and
explanation. (Ashley 2007:65)

The only points of disagreement I have with Ashley’s characteristics is the terms
‘people’, as in connection and inter-relationship with other people, and the use of
‘religious’. My experiences of spiritual meaning did not involve other people and
did not infer a ‘religious’ meaning, rather a nature-based meaning of inter-
connectedness, unity and intuition of non-physical dimensions of reality.

My visits to the Barrington Tops offered a number of what could be termed spiritual
benefits such as humility, grace, reverence, oneness, ego detachment, mental
clarity and Beingness, all of which banished any existential doubt and anxiety from
my mindscape. A study of hikers experience of ‘wilderness’ areas by Johnson (2002) identified six spiritual benefits of ‘wilderness’ as: 1) ‘the enduring’—coming face to face with ancient things and timeless cycles; 2) ‘the sublime’- the humbling of humankind by the awesomeness of the wilderness landscape, 3) ‘beauty’—a sensing of the aesthetic; 4) ‘competence’—experiencing physical trials and challenges; 5) ‘experience of peace’—opportunities for mental calm; and 6) ‘self-forgetting’—loss of identification with the ego. Although I understand what Johnson means by awesomeness in the second benefit, I think I would qualify this with reference to the immensity, majesty, isolation or wildness of the Barrington Mountain landscape. It is in my experience the ‘pristine’ immensity of ‘wild’ lands that differentiates them from the natural wilds of less remote areas such as bushland areas in urban areas. These six spiritual benefits are also possible anywhere although it is ‘the sublime’ and ‘competence’ of the meanings provided above that are more likely to be experienced in larger, remote natural areas. In my experience it comes down to openness and being present to the moment of engagement. The deeper my perception of my surrounds, the scribbly gums at Manly Dam, the lichen covered boulders splashed by the Gloucester River in the wilds of the Barrington Tops for example, the more likely I would feel a sense of spiritual connection. One of the benefits of my nature engagement activities was the heightening of my perception to reality regularly evoked a sense of the numinous, the intuition of an intelligence pervading all things and the wholeness of my reality. This perceptual approach to spiritual meaning was fundamental to the thoughts of the great physicist David Bohm:

..if people could understand the nature of ordinary experience better, they would see that mystical experience is really a heightening, and intensification, a deepening, of something they participate in. (Bohm & Factor, 1985:233)
There are, according to Daniels (2005), Plotkin (2003) and Wilber (1998), two broad realms of spirituality:

i. **Ascent** – an ‘upward’ process of deepening awareness of spirit, the unitary, eternal conscious energy that permeates and animates everything. A process of transcending egoistic desires assisted by cultivating the experience of connectedness in the present moment through activities such as meditation, prayer and contemplation.

ii. **Descent** – a ‘downward’ process into the soul within self, the soul being the unique ‘essence’ to each person representing our values, abilities and inner knowledge. This process of discovering our true natures and purposes for this lifetime can include dreamwork, ceremonies, rituals, nature engagement, conversing with nature, activities that provoke non-ordinary states of consciousness.

Daniels, Plotkin and Wilber state that a holistic approach to spiritual development interweaves the ascent and the descent pathways. The ascent pathway through meditation helped me expand my sense of self. The descent path is about discovering our deeper individuality, our soul (Plotkin, 2003). Wilber (1998) argues that while spirit may be the highest of dimensions or level of existence, it is also the ground of the entire spectrum of consciousness. This view is consistent with my experience of heightened eco-consciousness, in the sense that deeper states of eco-consciousness evoked an awareness of my eco-Self, Being, within an overall sense of being spiritually grounded in a participatory engagement with nonhuman nature. In relation to the eco-crisis, Plotkin identifies our collective alienation from our souls, exacerbated by the escapism of technological and
lifestyle distractions and addictions, as the root cause of the global crisis. From alienation from our inner nature flows often personal crises and lack of respect for human and nonhuman others (Plotkin, 2003). This perspective provides a social significance to experiencing a spirituality, a spiritual presence, in this case, within natural settings.

Despite the dominance of my rational thinking in my exercises, I often felt an underlying spiritual presence within natural settings I visited. I experienced a sense of spiritual renewal, an experience described by Thoreau (1854/1961) and Kaplan & Talbot (1983). By spiritual renewal I mean I felt that I became connected with both the natural world and an underlying spiritual ‘spring’ that flowed within and between all things I perceived.

Spiritual awareness would regularly arise when I experienced a sense of wonder and awe and/or when I felt grounded, centred and comforted after connecting affectively with the natural setting. In these deeply connected times, I strongly believed that all of the life around and sustaining me was not the result of coincidence and random chance throughout evolutionary time but had an underlying formative non-physical basis or context. I observed the incredible complexity and intricacy of life around me, its creative, embodied intelligence and infinite capacity for adaptation and resilience ‘spoke’ to me of not just in Darwinian evolutionary terms but with a Divine dialogue. Perhaps for people like myself who have tried mainstream religions and turned to a more earth-based spirituality for meaning and connection, my experience of heightened eco-consciousness can at its contemplative depths become a form of spiritual awareness. As Capra (1996) states, if an individual feels a deep connection to the world, an expanded sense of self and meaning beyond their physical, ego being, ‘it becomes clear that ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest essence’ (Capra 1996:7).

Thoreau recognised the mysterious spirit within nature. On in a trip to Mount Ktaadn in the ‘wilderness’ of Maine midway during his Walden retreat, he
experienced wonder at nature’s otherness, the overwhelming of his senses atop the mountain and the intuition of the infinite relations that sustains all life:

Not til we are lost, in other words, not til we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realise where we are and the infinite extent of our relations. (Thoreau, 1854/2008:118)

As Dean (2000) interprets Thoreau’s words, an interpretation that underscores my focus in my exploration, the mountain taught him what he clearly believed all of nature teaches if properly perceived: that each of us is a spirit in a world of matter that we have contact with through the agency of a body. This trinity of spirit, matter and body, and the ‘infinite extent’ of the relations between them, comprised for Thoreau the Great Mystery of Life.

i) Sense of vulnerability
I felt vulnerable in certain situations when visiting natural settings. Certain experiences I had such as being alone in the Barrington Tops in an electrical storm, of being buffeted by strong winds near a cliff-top edge, of nearly stepping on a poisonous Eastern Brown Snake in the mountains and observing recent signs of wild dogs are examples from my research period where I felt vulnerable, fearful or wary of danger. These situations or feelings ripped away the comforting presumption of a benign ‘nature’. While I was not actually in danger, these events were reminders that there were things in natural settings that could harm or kill me, just as the possibility exists within society. While I may have experienced some levels of exhilaration, aliveness or appreciation during these experiences, I feel the discomfort of vulnerability and my physical insignificance were important reflections on my benign view on ‘nature’. They increased the awareness of my mortality, my primal fears and helped re-align my self concepts towards an organismic or animalistic perspective, that is I too am an animal and subject to the cycles and processes of nature.
Natural environments contain many dangers to people such as predators, venomous animals, wild weather such as lightening and earth movements such as landslides and earthquakes. It is natural for most people to feel various degree of wariness of potential dangers in setting forth into natural settings, especially ‘wilderness’ areas. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) report that visiting a wilderness area can evoke strong fears of encountering dangers although they find that physical challenges and threats from fauna and landscapes can also evoke positive responses. Fear has an evolutionary, biological basis where survival is mediated by our ability to recognise and respond to dangers (van den Berg & Heijne, 2005). They found that the personality trait ‘sensation seeking’ might account for individual differences in emotional responses to risky or threatening situations. They argue that fear of nature is not tied to wilderness settings but more related to individual differences, particularly sensation seeking, in emotional responses to natural threats that are shaped by genetic and social processes. Fearful experiences may not only help teach people about themselves but help create bonds with nature (van den Berg & Heijne, 2005).

This insight about the role of personality in fear and the perception of risk in ‘nature’ is relevant to people contemplating or recommending ‘wilderness’ experiences. Fears, for example being bitten by snakes or attacked by wild dogs, affected the mood with which I interacted with natural areas and within the context of this research, how intimate with other beings and/or focused I was within settings. I am not a sensation seeker personality but rather a risk averse person. While this stops me from trekking alone into the ‘wilderness’ for days (I have walked into remoter areas for some hours), it did not prevent me doing many solo bushwalks in natural areas. One way of managing my wariness and negative

Figure 63 - Red-bellied Black Snake
imagination was to imagine having a kind of communion with the trees and land around me. As I focused on their beauty, the sense of space and peace, my trepidation dissolved away. When I was walking along a trail in the Barrington Tops in 2007 and I nearly stepped on a venomous snake, I felt fear then relief immediately when I avoided being bitten. It was not the fear of the snake *per se* which I had been wary of but the fear of death due to being so far away from medical assistance that dominated my mind afterwards. In my actual moment of fear, there was an immediate coming back to my contracted ego-self, away from my ecological sense of self I had felt during my walk. I concur with Spitzform (2000) who argues that an ecological self experience is balanced between feelings of safety and security and if these are not met, then a sense of ecological self is unlikely.

I recognised the initial stage of entering wilder areas as representing the edge of familiarity and a process of letting go of the safety net of human agency. As Rolston (2004) states, people, if they are to experience the wildness of nature, need to step to the edge of the familiar, everyday world to encounter the grander forces that transcend us and both attract and threaten. As I experienced in my nature engagements, the forests, waterfalls and elemental forces helped me to move beyond the psychological space of my society into an undomesticised space, in some cases, this was a designated ‘wilderness’ space, other times, it was the wilds of my suburban bushland reserves. The point I make is that being a risk averse personality, I tend to experience wariness in leaving the relatively moderately trafficked roads of the Barrington Tops and walking alone into wilder areas. Wariness could be managed using positive imagination and emotion such as imagining a loving connection with trees and it could also have survival and perceptual value. It kept me alert and my senses sharpened, and as I calmed and became my joyful, I would become more present to the sights and sounds of each moment. This subsequent stage of an immersive experience was the point in which a heightened state of eco-consciousness commenced.
Existential insecurity is a normal state in my life although I only expressed it several times in my journals. I felt ill at ease about the contradiction between having strong sense of meaning and spiritual existence when in nonhuman nature and a fear of the void of death, particularly prevalent in suburban reality and when I felt disconnected and isolated. Kidner (2001) argues that ontological insecurity stems from not knowing who we are and what meaning there is beyond the individual. Kidner discusses that this is a result of the colonisation of an industrialist, individualistic paradigm of our consciousness and not seeing ourselves grounded in nonhuman nature. This view is consistent with my experience of the negative consequences of industrial modernity and that eco-consciousness development can be viewed, a response and counter to this ‘colonisation’. This process is part of the sociocultural context of eco-consciousness development which is an important theme for me. Kirkman (2004) argues that our existential insecurity is a normal human predicament and that we deal with our environment with uncertainty and vulnerability, rather than certainty. We can use doubt and ignorance as a constructive force for engaging our outer and inner worlds. My insecurity may be explained by existential reasons but I think it is also influenced by not having a secure sense of self, a self that is unsure of what lies beneath the ego’s mask as well as one that is not grounded in diverse, honest and meaningful social engagements nor experiencing an ongoing sense of connectedness. The transience of life, the instability of my personal life, a deep sense of disempowerment in personal and global issues has given priority to finding meaning and groundedness in natural settings, consistent with the finding of Christopher (1999) that a deep sense of powerlessness in environmental activists led them to connecting with nonhuman nature at an eco-consciousness level.

j) Appreciation of wildness

I viewed wildness as a quality of being wild, a being or...
place which I perceived as being undomesticated, self-autonomous. As a quality that I recognised in many natural settings, it provided the catalyst for both a more profound appreciation and deeper connection with nonhuman nature processes that was an important experience and meaning of ecological consciousness. I see it as being closely aligned with a quality of naturalness, in terms of places or landscapes. Being in a wild space, a place of high naturalness with minimal human intrusions and interactions such as the Barrington Tops, was to experience the ‘wilderness’ end of a wildness spectrum. This extensive, spacious, remote area evoked a valued sense of space, spiritual connection and freedom as well as a reminder of my evolutionary heritage, ecological dependence, personal insignificance and the therapeutic potential of wildness. This sense of spiritual connection in the ‘wilderness’ reflects, argues Kaye (2002), the unmet needs of suburban, consumer, alienated culture, as well as revealing the deeper, archetypal aspect of us that industrial modernity has obscured or precluded. It is perhaps not surprising given my suburban upbringing that I seek and find spiritual connection in the expansive wilds of the Barrington ‘wilderness’. ‘Wilderness’, as the immersive, vast expression of wildness, provided a ‘holding’ environment for me to enjoy liberation from suburban, domestic contexts, to leave habitual thinking behind and feel the freedom to silently be. At some point during the immersive experience, I came to feel a part of this ‘wilderness’, as if the wild space was breathing within and through me.

I observed ‘wildness’, found meaning in wildness from my backyard in suburbia through to ‘wilderness’ areas with its relatively vast autonomous areas encompassing me. From this perspective, I agree with Evernden (1992) position that wildness is nonhuman nature’s most important feature – it cannot be encompassed by human horizons and is indifferent to human judgments. Like McKibben (1989), Evernden (1992) states that the primary meaning of nonhuman nature is to be found in its independence from us. Similarly, this wildness quality, that was part of my heightened eco-consciousness development, represented this necessary state of independence.
Wilderness, what I view as the most expansive physical manifestation of wildness, is a contested concept with many literal and metaphorical meanings with a rich linguistic history going back at least to the thirteenth century (Washington, 2006). The contested nature of the wilderness concept is a subject in its own right which I cannot do justice to here. The apparent dominant view is that it is a problematic concept on several fronts. The idea that wilderness represents a landscape that is pristine, untrammelled, wild and free of human agency is contested on empirical and philosophical grounds, elaborated by Keeling (2008). In a sentence, his argument is that there is no place on Earth that is completely free of human agency and idealising a pristine nature free of humanity enshrines the untenable human/nature dualism. Hailwood (2000) argues that the ‘wilderness’ concept has served cultural ends, a reference to a specific ‘untouched’ landscape representing specific values for people and as such, suggesting an extension of culture into the physical world. This is not valuing ‘wilderness’ landscape for its own autonomous, independent nature as other but for its instrumental value, whether it be for recreational space or a cure for alienation.

\[44\] Gelbspan (2005) argues that just because humans have touched every part of the globe does not mean that nonhuman nature has lost ‘her’ wildness. Indeed nonhuman nature may literally be more wilder with the prospect of catastrophic climate change which may produce ‘wilder’ outcomes in the destructive sense. As Gelbspan states, ‘rather than marking the end of nature [in responding to McKibben’s fear of the passing of wild nature in The End of Nature], the accelerating pace of climate change may mark the resurgence of nature as a far more threatening and hostile force’ (Gelbspan, 2005: 189). This form of wildness was not what I experienced or contemplated in natural settings but it does provide another perspective on the wildness of nonhuman nature.

\[45\] Washington states that, in reference to the common understanding of wilderness, ‘instead of focusing on a negative ‘absence of humans’ or the fallacious claim of ‘human exclusion’, we should focus on wilderness as the positive presence of the nonhuman’ (Washington, 2006:303). This he argues does not exclude humans, especially indigenous peoples who have lived for millennia in ‘wilderness’ areas, but it is a place ‘where the nonhuman comes first, then that only excludes humans (and human activities) that are incompatible with the nonhuman’ (Washington, 2006:311).
I regularly visited ‘wilderness’ areas, legally denoted and/or as representing large, natural, remote areas with minimal human intrusions. It was not the experience of ‘wilderness’ that was crucial in my eco-consciousness exploration but rather the recognition and appreciation of the ‘wild’, which could be found anywhere from ‘wilderness’ areas of the Barrington Tops, to Manly Dam Reserve and my backyard. It was in acknowledging and coming into relationship with the wild that brought deepened connection and peace. In the experience of valuing wildness, I felt somehow more mentally and spiritually clear than in my social contexts. Perhaps this is what Thoreau alludes to in his claim ‘in wildness is the preservation of the world’ (Thoreau 1862/2008:273). Perhaps the experience and valuing of wildness has therapeutic potential for people seeking a re-invigoration of existential meaning or a way to cope with a loss of deeper connection and peace of mind. As Thoreau stated, ‘we need the tonic of wildness’ (p213).

‘Wilderness’ is derived from the old Saxon/Celtic words ‘wyld’ meaning wild, ‘deor’ meaning animal and ‘ness’ meaning nest, lair or territory (Hendee, Stankey, & Lucas, 1990). I have sidetracked around the philosophical contestations and conservation aims and benefits of wilderness areas to focus on ‘wyld’, which for my focus is of more relevance to my psychological and physical contexts than the physically, legally oriented ‘wilderness’ concept. Experiencing wildness is as close as the unchartered domain of one’s psyche, the back garden or the local bushland reserve with its indigenous flora and fauna. The intermittent attainment of balancing the wild within and the wild without is, according to Nicholsen (2001), an essence of feeling vibrantly alive. Sensing this wildness within and around me freed me from relying on a more typical ‘wilderness’ experience, one that tends to be confined to remote large islands of ‘unspoilt’ tracts of land. While a ‘wilderness’ experience can be more intense and engulfing psychologically and physically, the recognition of wildness is more useful and convenient to connecting with and appreciating nonhuman nature anywhere. ‘Wilderness’ is, as I have already alluded, is the remote aspect of wildness.
k) Appreciation of nonhuman otherness

I viewed nature’s otherness to include everything that is not human and its artificial extensions. I recognised at least two aspects of otherness. There were other subjects such as wildlife and vegetation with their own a) intrinsic value, b) perspective and relationship with their environs, c) unique sentience and purposes, that I could relate to as an embodied being and at times feel a sense of kinship or communion. The other aspect involved natural landscapes such as mountain ranges, coastal headlands, lakes, rivers and hills. I felt a much greater sense of distinctiveness subsumed by these relatively massive features. The otherness of nonhuman nature was an important meaning stemming from my mindful reflections upon and engagements with natural areas. This sense of otherness, this respect and wonder at their uniqueness became especially noticeable during my nature engagement sessions. Whether it was a scribbly gum, majestic spotted gum, soft, moist moss on basalt riverbed or a Powerful Owl, I appreciated the way they had adapted to their conditions and how they were perfect in their form, structure and role in their community. It provided a reminder of my ‘alienated’ social context and my yearning for a more connected, ecological context. As Milton (1999) similarly argues, nonhuman nature’s ‘wild otherness’ provides the broadest context to human life.

In a paper discussing the philosophical and valuational aspects of nature’s otherness, Hailwood (2000) argues that recognising and valuing nature’s otherness, that is, nonhuman nature’s autonomy, distinctiveness from and indifference to humanity, is important for respecting and protecting natural areas. He concludes that despite the intellectual fragility of the otherness concept in regard to the influence of human culture on landscape and where nonhuman nature begins and ends, the otherness of nature does confer value to nonhuman nature, value that is non-instrumental but not intrinsic due to the conceptual necessity of recognising the relational connection between nature and humanity. Kidner (2001) likewise argues that difference or otherness is an equally important ecological quality as
commonality, continuity and holism. Difference makes possible the structures and patterns of nature and to seek an ecological self that merges the sense of self with nonhuman nature is elusive and unnecessary. Rather than merging, ‘we need to restore a subjectivity that is dynamic, oscillating between the poles of separateness and relation’ (Kidner 2001:247). This oscillation metaphor is similar to my experience of eco-self which represented an expansion of my sense of self within a immersive space but did not mean an undifferentiated merging. It was, as he quite correctly surmises, an oscillation between difference and commonality, a subjective, inner version of the diversity-within-unity perspective of oneness.

Psychological well-being, according to Fisher (2002) and Kidner (2001), requires differentiation from others, a clear sense of one’s boundaries while developing meaningful relatedness to these others:

... for a meaningful world is one defined by contrast, difference and mystery as much as by harmony, similarity and empathy. (Kidner 2001:250)

Differentiation, a process I discussed in my journals, is not about separateness or splitting off from others and its destructive consequences but refers to an empathic, relational, sharing disposition towards others while maintaining respect for differences between nonhuman others (Fisher 2002). We need to acknowledge the differences and similarities, acknowledge that difference is as important ecologically as commonality is and the intricate dance and flow of energy makes notions of static identification redundant (Kidner 2001). Hailwood (2000), Kidner (2001) and Fisher (2002) argue that our individuality develops in conjunction with relatedness and is best supported by seeing ourselves as differentiated beings grounded in a sense of wholeness within an interconnected, interdependent reality. As Fisher states:
A good relationship process is one that emphasises relationships to others so that intensified separateness does not maroon but establishes the self as ever more unique and yet more fully bonded to non-selves by chains of interaction, kinship, dependence, cooperation and compliance. (Fisher 2002:123)

I agree with Booth (1996), Fisher (2002), Hailwood (2000), Kidner (2001) and Plumwood (1993) when they argue that a strong sense of nature’s distinctness and independence is required to appreciate its own intrinsic value, and to connect with it (Hannis, 1998). Chirban (2000) too argues that there needs to be a balance between ‘being’ and ‘separateness’ and that the we must maintain strong (and I would add flexible) self boundaries that protects and defines the person, otherwise the person can lose a sense of self in a oneness experience. She believes that this experience can help the ‘private’ self become stronger, more resilient and durable. Similarly Booth (1996) states that understanding the self-within-whole does not need to mean glossing over the differences, we can be highly individualistic people and still see ourselves as inseparable from nature like indigenous peoples around the world. As Hailwood concludes:

... focusing on unities seems to undermine the sense of apartness crucial to the notion of otherness. Respecting this otherness involves holding on to the fact of nature’s independent existence’.
(Hailwood, 2000:363-4)

I) Sense of Communion
Although I did not experience a oneness experience, in the sense of a loss of any sense of separateness with other, a merging into oneness, with nonhuman nature in my research, I did experience at various engagements a sense of communion with specific settings and/or beings. My sense of communion, however, appears consistent with how Chirban (2000) describes a oneness experience: the loosening
of the self’s boundaries that results in a self enhanced by increased vitality, an energised spirituality, deeper dimensions of intimacy and more intricate integration. What I label communion, someone else may interpret as oneness. The following quote was meaningful in that it closely approximated my experiences of closely observing the Tawny Frogmouth’s at Manly Dam Reserve in 2006 and 2007. This quote addresses the apparent but illusory paradox of experiencing otherness and oneness/communion at the same time:

When I look into the eyes of a wild animal, my humanness shows me the difference between us; and simultaneously, my physicality shows me how close we are to being the same. Oneness and otherness are both powerfully present. Similarly, in a wild place I can feel its mysterious untamed otherness and yet also feel so intimately connected to it that I feel fully part of it. Any apparent paradox in such an account of encountering nature is a feature of the experience, not a fault of the description. (Hannis, 1998:13)

This is similar to Kidner’s description of identification with nonhuman other discussed above, that it is a dynamic oscillating state of differentiating and identifying with other. Close observation of the Tawny Frogmouth created an intimate, shared atmosphere conducive to a respectful dwelling within its world. I looked into its eyes, it observed me and I felt the oneness characteristics outlined by Chirban previously. Another aspect of this notion of oneness or communion, as I prefer to label this experience, is the pre-reflective moment during intense perceptual and affective engagements when I recognised an intersubjective, intermediate space growing between my embodied being and the other, such as the Tawny Frogmouth in Manly Dam I often came across during my research. This space grew more tangible the more I suspended my perception of my self-boundary. I view this shared, exploratory space as the vector or medium for perceptual and symbolic exchange, the space for experiencing a common union (communion).
Oneness experience, according to Chirban (2000), is catalysed by a sense of timelessness, being in the present moment, a shift in consciousness and an experience of unity with another. Most of these were meaningful experiences of heightened eco-consciousness for me, particularly when experiencing an ecological self/Self but I would place them under another label, communion rather than a more mystical sounding ‘oneness’ experience. Communion, for me, implies a greater intersubjective relationship than the latter’s implied inner subjective focus. Chirban argues that healthy or progressive oneness experience, characterised by process rather than content, energises and fuels the self’s progressive development, in comparison to a regressive oneness fantasy which is motivated by a longing for objects, states and feelings in the past and in which meaning-making is experienced outside of the moment. By the nature of my personal characteristics and my experience of communion during my research, I did not long for ‘infantile nurturing’ or some mystical merging experience. I was not seeking oneness in its merging implication, just a deep sense of connection and an experience of feeling grounded and centred. The communion experiences of suspending my skin boundary and my self-consciousness, to varying degrees, spontaneously arose in the present, mindful moment of an immersive engagement. My experience of communion within the wilds of the mountains and other places were uncommon yet highly meaningful, spiritual experiences. It was revitalising and strengthening of my sense of self and being.

m) Perceptual acuity
My whole approach to exploring eco-consciousness was based on ‘awakening and recovering the fullness of [my] sensory, sensual and perceptual capacities’ (Sewall, 1999:14). Even my heuristic reflections were based on engaging perceptually with my natural settings first and then writing about my contemplative and affective responses. I wanted to use my senses more acutely, to see and hear and touch more of the world, not to continue seeing, hearing and touching in my relatively less observant habitual ways. If I were to evoke a state of heightened eco-
consciousness, I not only required greater sensorial acuity but importantly, a mindfulness approach.

My sensorial engagement focused only on three out of the five physical senses – vision, hearing and touch. This was my bias in that smell was not a ‘strong’ sense for me, I did not find it as diverse as the diversity of sights and sounds in the bush and apart from flowering acacias, crushed eucalyptus leaves and organic, earthy aromas of the soil and humus, I did not record any smells. Taste, for perhaps obvious reasons, was not an attractive or useful sense to use in the bush (except in tasting the nutty sweetness of flowering banksias). Vision represented more than just observing the world around me. I viewed my world consistently with the perspective of Saint Bonaventure, a medieval mystic-philosopher: the eye of flesh (the phenomenological world), the eye of reason (the conceptual world) and the eye of contemplation (the world of spirit and Being). For example, in viewing a Golden Orb Spider on its golden complex web, I admired the colour and pattern, the ecological niche that it had created between two trees to best catch small insects and the remarkable inherent intelligence and sentient quality of its being. I believe that developing these ways of seeing is useful in understanding and relating more fully to our environment, at least it was for me although I do acknowledge that my existing knowledge (ecological) and beliefs (sentience in all aspects of reality) were part of the seeing. When my attention was on consciously relating to some being nearby, on being open and grounded and being mindful of my psychological and emotional states, I felt more profoundly affected. I sensed a relatedness, a sense of Being, even a communion with the ecological community I was present to. So the quality of my perceptual attention determined the quality of the experience of nature engagements. As Sewall (1999) similarly argues:

... attention is the true power of vision. It is the capacity to join inner and outer landscapes, to bring the contents of the mind and the things of the world together. ... Attention...inevitably determines the quality of our interaction (Sewall, 1999:111).
It was my focused perception that led to a greater clarity of senses and experience of my expanded self. Sewall comments that a fundamental spiritual practice is to become awake to reality and cease delusion. From this perspective, it required that I be fully present to what actually was before me.

Perception requires, according to Rodaway (1994), mental insight using sensory information, memories and expectations. Rodaway argues that perception is derived from Latin, *percepire*, meaning ‘to take hold of, to feel, comprehend’ and it is the efficiency of our sense organs and mental processes which in large determines the type and level of engagement with the environment. This reasoning is consistent with my approach in my nature engagement method in the way I undertook it one sense at a time, my intention was clear and a mindfulness helped with establishing a clear mind. I was attempting to make my senses and mental processes ‘efficient’ in order to perceive my surrounds. Rodaway also states that perception is individual and socially derived. It is a learnt skill. We see, hear, smell, taste and touch the world through the filter of our biographic, social and cultural milieu (Rodaway, 1994). My biographical filter had an analytical and affective orientation to understanding natural settings. I began the nature engagement and two-fold vision methods with a brief analysis of my surrounds or the object then focused on one sense at a time to give it full attention in order to be more open and focused on what was to be perceived. In practicing a highly structured, sensorial and mindful exercise over an extended period, I became not only more ‘efficient’ with my perception facilitating perceptive and meaningful engagements with nonhuman other. My structured nature engagement exercises therefore were a particularly effective for evoking and understanding heightened eco-consciousness and its development.

n) Solitude

The word ‘solitude’, according to Plotkin (2003) and www.etymonline.com, comes from the Latin *solitude* meaning loneliness. I however interpret solitude to mean
being alone, away from the company of other people rather than loneliness, as in missing human company. While I can feel loneliness when alone, I generally feel comfortable with my own company. My experience of solitude, whether it was measured in hours or days, was generally positive and restorative. It first and foremost meant freedom and being unencumbered by normal, suburban life and another person’s differences and presence. It meant that I had the space and clarity to reflect not only about the research but also upon my self and my consciousness, especially after undertaking my various experiential exercises. Plotkin (2003) argues that solitude in nature helps to remove oneself from the world of ego and helps in preparing to encounter one’s soul/Self. My experience of solitude was consistent with this outcome. Without human distractions, heightened eco-consciousness arose relatively quickly when immersed physically and psychologically in quiet natural settings, as did a release from ego concerns and negative states of mind. My literary inspiration, Thoreau spent most of his time alone at Walden Pond. Like he, I have on many occasions felt more lonely within social settings than in the wilds of the mountains.

I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. …. Solitude is not measured the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows. (Thoreau, 1854/1961:178)

Camping alone in the mountains and my experiential activities alone in Manly Dam Reserve were times for renewal and reconnection. I do not think it would have been as beneficial if I had been with company, although it depends on the like-mindedness of that company to mine. My visits to the mountain wilds enhanced or deepened my experience of solitude. I think not having human company was necessary for me in experiencing a heightened state of eco-consciousness. While I could connect and enjoy any nature experience with company, being alone
provided a more intense exposure to the environment in terms of not being
distracted by another’s presence and my attention being able to be focused on the
surrounds and my responses. Evernden (1992) found that many environmental
writers only realised the significance of nonhuman nature when in solitude. It is, he
argues, only when there is an ‘absence of the demands for social consensus can the
uninterpreted other be encountered and the emergent self escape constraint’
(p113). Solitude for me does not necessarily require going within ‘wilderness’
areas, just a space in a natural setting where there is no direct interaction with
other people and where there is freedom to experience an unencumbered
embeddedness within nonhuman nature.

o) Mindfulness

In this theme, I include common meaningful experiences that derived, in many
situations, from my mindfulness approach and/or meditation. These were being
present and becoming grounded. Entering into a state of heightened eco-
consciousness often stemmed from experiencing an open, respectful, appreciative,
empathic non-judgmental stance towards my environment. While it was not strictly
bracketing in the phenomenological sense, it was not dissimilar in that I held an
open, uncritical observational stance. I was purposefully being mindful. As I
interpret Varela et al. (1991), I was not being mindless, unaware, numb, cocooned
in wandering thought, pre-judgments and ‘solipsistic ruminations’. As they
describe, the whole point in becoming mindful is to enable the mind to be fully
present in the world, in one’s actions so one’s behaviour becomes progressively
more responsive and aware and not conditioned by grasping, egoistic volitions:

Thus the first great discovery of mindfulness meditation tends to be
not some encompassing insight into the nature of mind but the
piercing realisation of just how disconnected humans normally are
from their very experience. Even the simplest or most pleasurable
of daily activities ... all pass rapidly in a blur of abstract commentary
as the mind hastens to its next mental occupation. (Varela et al., 1991:25)

Being mindful in my exercises would usually lead to a deeper sense of connection, an awareness of my being in which I was not consumed by analysing, rational thoughts nor emotions nor time travelling into memories of the past, fantasies of the future and away from the immediacy of the present moment (Brown et al., 2007). I felt a more mindful state of mind where I would entertain minimal abstractions away from the current moment, feel a dissipation of negativity and feel a greater sense of equanimity. The rational-intuitive dualism did not feel as dualistic, they felt more spontaneously accessible. I was also able to more easily enter into a mindful state, becoming aware of the modes and focus of my awareness. It was in this mindful state that I could reflect just how much on autopilot I was on in my life, which certainly is not what I consider to be fully alive. As Thoreau commented:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life ...I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life. (Thoreau, 1854/1961:118)

I find this remarkably observant and relevant to mindfulness. To live deliberately I interpret as living life mindfully. Similarly Kabat-Zinn (2005) warns of dying without actually fully living, without waking up to our lives while we have the chance, of the mindlessness of our lives and our habitual, automatic, conforming lives. Our collective waking state of consciousness, he argues, is severely limited and limiting resembling an extended dream rather than being fully present. He advocates that we fully come to our senses, to wake up to the fullness of who we are by pursuing a mindfulness path. As Thoreau stated:
To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake, how could I have looked him in the face? (Thoreau, 1854/1961:117).

A key consequence of mindfulness practice is the realisation that most sensations, thoughts and emotions are transient (Baer, 2003). As Brown et al. (2007) argue, becoming mindful allows the practitioner to understand that all perceived phenomena are insubstantial in nature; thoughts and feelings are not accurate reflections of reality. It is through mindful nonattachment that helps to reduce emotional reactivity and facilitate equanimity. I tended to feel this most when doing the mindful hearing exercise. In practising receptive and active listening with mindful openness, I could observe both my mind chatter, my responses to the sounds and the growing sense of emptiness of my Being.

Mindfulness is, according to Dunn, Hartigan, & Mikulas (1999), different from relaxation despite similarities from an external observer. They demonstrated that it is different from concentration meditation, the sit down type I have practiced over many years. Dunn et al. (1999) found that mindfulness meditation is a qualitatively different state from concentration meditation, where there is a learned focusing on one object or process, in that while the brain is calm and relaxed, producing more delta and theta waves, it is also at the same time awake and alert, producing more alpha and beta activity. I found it different from concentration mediation which is what I used at the beginning of each experiential activity. I found it helped to increase the breadth and clarity of my awareness, through a non-judgmental, non-analytical mode of perception. I came to recognise just how much I took for granted with my familiar surroundings or how I assumed the typical plants and rocks and landscapes held little of interest.

Mindfulness has a number of purposes including as a method for relaxation, a way of tolerating avoided thoughts and feelings, of recognising states of mind and making it easier to respond and as an attitude of acceptance and a suspension of
judgment (Childs, 2007). Related to my reflections on ‘being’, mindfulness facilitated the ability to shift between different modes of mental functioning – from ‘doing’ to ‘being’, the latter allowing a fuller experience of the present rather than being focused on specific features or actions of the present (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002). Becoming present to the moment, dwelling with mind and heart within a place in the natural environment was the catalyst for being ‘present’, being in the here-and-now. Becoming mindful was also critical to becoming grounded and calm. I believe heightened ecological consciousness was based on the quality of mindfulness. It allowed me to be less time aware but more aware of both the surface aesthetic and deeper levels of meaning during sensorial immersion, as I have alluded to in my mindful hearing activity in Chapter 5. As Childs (2007) appropriately surmises, mindfulness is a mode of being which has qualities of wholeness, intimacy, sensory richness and dilation of time. There becomes less a separate self than one composition of self and world. (p370)

I felt a deeper sense of conscious immersion and oneness with life when I was fully present and grounded. I view being fully present as having my awareness focused in the moment with minimal thoughts or feelings external to the space of engagement. I interpret being grounded as feeling settled and connected to a place. It is the opposite to how I and many others often feel in living our busy daily

46 Zimmerman (2000) states that humans can be viewed as the silent, open realm in which Being takes place. To Be we need to be present and being present requires a clearing or opening within us. But we are so consumed by the contents of our awareness that we fail to be conscious of our awareness or openness. If awareness is constituted by the open realm in which things can be revealed (Zimmerman, 2000) then I would argue that becoming present within mindfulness is essential to revealing the experience of not only engaging other beings but our own Being beyond our skin and neuronal bounded ego-self.
lives, ungrounded in the sense of losing connection with purpose and meaning and often leading to alienation and despair. Varela et al. (1991) talk about the groundlessness of our culture, just as Zimmerman (2000) discusses Heidegger’s views on the homelessness of humanity and the need to not find new ground but to understand this groundlessness, embrace it mindfully and move beyond it include spontaneous compassion for self and other.

Relevant to my mindfulness approach, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) wrote of the term ‘flow experience’ in which a person experiences a temporary loss of sense of self where the distinctions between self and other break down and the person becomes immersed in the present moment, leading to a more self-actualised state of existence when experienced regularly. Csikszentmihalyi, according to Boniface (2000), characterised ‘flow’ as a rewarding, often exhilarating feeling of creative accomplishment, heightened perception and functioning. During my experiential sessions, especially in the mountains and with the Scribbly Gum tree, I had what could be termed a ‘flow experience’. I was totally focused on the activity at hand, was not focused on my being but the flow of the activity, felt contented and happy. I felt present and grounded, and time became an irrelevant consideration. Each moment felt extended. The flow of time became glacial in my heightened state, hinting at eternity behind the façade of sequential time. It underscored the influence of my focus of sequential time on how I experienced my life, a life often caged by minutes and hours and days, rather than the natural cycles of the earth.

Time can be symbolised as a river or stream in which we flow with, never realising that eternity lies beneath its currents: ‘Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it but while I drink, I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away but eternity remains’ (Thoreau, 1854/1961:128)

**p) Openness**

Facilitating an openness of mind and heart allowed me to more honestly engage with my surrounds and it was this feeling of almost pre-reflective openness to possibilities that I sensed and enjoyed. It was a pathway to becoming present,
grounded and mindful. Openness is in my experience of parenting and being with children, a child-like quality - children tend to be curious and open with their environment, so long as it is perceived safe. I became more open and curious, especially about the more discreet structures and processes in natural settings. It often facilitated a sense of wonder and appreciation for what my habitual gazing omitted from my perception.

Openness and receptivity is required, according to Heshusius (1994) to allow a participatory mode of consciousness - one that seeks an unconditional acceptance of and curiousity about nonhuman other. If we are to honestly understand ourselves in relationship to nonhuman other, we need at least temporarily to let go of our egocentric thoughts and strivings, our self-absorption and engage the ‘other’ without wishing to appropriate it (Heshusius, 1994). From this argument I suggest that it is important to view this mode of consciousness as either consistent or a pre-cursor to eco-consciousness. If my aim is to replace an ‘alienated’ mode of consciousness and way of making sense of the world with a participatory mode, then it requires that I let go of a socially mediated abstraction of an isolated self, to be open and receptive to a non-judgmental intersubjectivity with nonhuman encounters and facilitate a mindful attention on my somatic, affective and cognitive states. Openness to the possibilities of richer, more honest engagements is the other side of the coin to openness to being fully present and grounded within self and place. My richest experiences of heightened eco-consciousness has arisen within openness, where I have imagined the energy and consciousness of the other interacting with mine at some level, real or imagined while to being open to what is present within me and my perceived reality. This experience is echoed in Heshusius explanation of participatory consciousness, that to foster a participatory quality of attention, it is not so much a matter of reaching out for some ‘thing’, whether it be tree or an ideal, but a matter of whether we can let go of something (Heshusius, 1994), namely our egocentric selves, knowing and alienated consciousness. In letting go, I felt I could more fully be with something and it is within this precious space of open ‘Being’ that a heightened eco-consciousness arose and deepened.
5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed my understanding of eco-consciousness and its development as well as the three key terms that underpinned my exploration: nature, ecology and consciousness. I have discussed the broader social context for the development of my durable eco-consciousness, including the consistency of my life experiences (refer to Section 1.3) with this broader context. This discussion helps to explain why I was passionate in exploring eco-consciousness as a phenomenon (of the late industrial modernity as I later found out) and the beginning of a reflexive modernity. Understanding the development of my durable eco-consciousness as a reflexive response to the negative consequences of industrial modernity helped to explain perhaps why I had alienating, isolating professional experiences in the environmental area, the lack of a shared ecocentric value discourse within the institutions of modernity I engaged and why I sought so consistently a sense of ontological meaning and personal autonomy in nonhuman nature over many years.

While my experience of heightened eco-consciousness was meaningful and significant in terms of the psychological benefits and the phenomenological insights I gained about it, it was its contribution to an evolving durable eco-consciousness that I came to view as its broader significance for contributing to a ‘heightened consciousness’ (Gore, 2008). In reflecting back over my nature engagement sessions, it appears that most of the time I experienced initial states of eco-consciousness with my focus on a contemplative, perceptual engagements before this gave way to a more heightened eco-consciousness (eco-self) state where I felt strongly a part of my surrounds, a strong sense of place and space. The process of heightening eco-consciousness involved a widening and deepening of my sense of connectedness and identification with both the place and specific beings and processes within that place. In other words, heightened eco-consciousness and ecological sense of self/Self were intimately related. As Fox (1990) would say, I realised that I and everything around me were not just inter-connected at various
levels but part of an unfolding reality. While my sense of self fluctuated in terms of my awareness of my embodied being and my Being due to variations in my states of consciousness during engagement activities, I never considered that I would or would need to lose my sense of individuality. I recognised the importance of identifying with nonhuman nature, for both the value of the identification process and the caring, relational ‘flavour’ I would take away with me during my return to suburban reality. As Humphrey neatly encapsulates this experience:

The person who has achieved ecological consciousness must recognise themselves as part of a single unfolding reality and yet retain a sense of their own individuality. They must remain individual and yet incorporate ‘all life’ into their sense of self. (Humphrey, 2000:254)

I understand that heightened eco-consciousness has a holonic property in that each of the states of consciousness along the spectrum discussed early in Section 5.4.2 includes the characteristics of the previous ‘lower’ states as well as including the basis for experiencing ‘higher’ states. When fully mindful, I experienced being fully present, grounded and centred. The experience of being present-centred, aware of my Being-within-being, grounded within a participatory sense of place and aligned within my ‘authentic’ self were the indicative characteristics of a relatively infrequent and less sustained, but precious, eco-Self state of consciousness. This state was the jewel I dared hope to find in the wilds of natural settings and my awakening heightened eco-consciousness.
CHAPTER 6 – REFLECTIONS UPON MY JOURNEY
AND FUTURE USES FOR ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS
DEVELOPMENT
I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. ……. The surface of the earth is soft and impressionable by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now.

6.1 Introduction

In the introductory quote, Thoreau expresses his desire to leave his cabin by Walden Pond after two years of solitary living and his wish to avoid the pitfalls, the ‘beaten track’ of conformity and habitual thinking that prevents people, and potentially himself when he returns to society, from developing a richer perception and understanding of reality. His reasons to leave are relevant to both my research and my journey beyond this self-study. I interpret his expression ‘surface of the earth’ as a metaphor for an aesthetic, surface oriented consciousness, which is so impressible by the feet of ‘men’. He expresses his intent, even hope of travelling on a sailing ship, not within the confines of a cabin but before the mast on the deck, where the view is clear and free of clutter and obfuscations. I believe he is inferring that his consciousness has changed during his time at Walden, that he does not want to go back to the conformity, tradition and habitual thinking: ‘I do not wish to go below now’. Likewise, I leave this inquiry process. I want to avoid falling back into habitual conforming ways and seek my ‘mast’ and ‘deck’ upon which to take my transformed understanding into the world beyond the confines of this research.

In this concluding chapter, I reflect back upon the key understandings about and the value of this inquiry into eco-consciousness and its development. I also want to briefly reflect on the interpretive phenomenological heuristic approach used to undertake this exploration. I then identify some potential uses for eco-consciousness and make my concluding comments about this research.

6.2 Reflections on research outcomes and value

I have to some very significant degree outlined in Chapter 5 the research outcomes in terms of my understanding about my experience of eco-consciousness and my understanding about how eco-consciousness evolved within me. To re-iterate, the major research outcomes were the discovery of two aspects of eco-consciousness: heightened states and durable levels. I would also argue that the other major outcome was the unique process I engaged with to arrive at this point of discovery and interpretation. The interpretive phenomenological heuristic inquiry approach,
relying substantially on a mindfulness stance, provided the epistemological
framework for exploring the phenomenon and subsequently the process for self-
discovery and transformation. I discuss this approach in the following section.
What I would like to focus on in this section is the overall value of this exploration
into the ‘wild’ eco-consciousness landscape.

Over the past three years, I have sought experiences and meanings through a
conscious, relational and participatory engagement with nonhuman nature. I have
gone to the ‘wilds’ of natural areas, from suburbia to designated ‘wilderness’ areas,
in search of experiences that would evoke insights into eco-consciousness. I have
for the most part undertaken these dozens of journeys alone. In retrospect,
standing here at the ‘pinnacle’ of my scholarly understanding about my experience
and understanding of eco-consciousness, I can see the many trails of intellectual
pursuits winding, often precariously, up the foot slopes of this ‘mountain’. While
many of the individual trails may have wandered into blind gullies and cavernous
ravines, they have all contributed to reaching this ‘point of d’appui’\(^\text{47}\) (Thoreau,
1854/2008:70), this point of support and departure to the future, of which I explain
beneath. This encompassing perspective of being able to re-interpret my research
journey is one of the values of arriving at this summit. This perspective helps me to
understand just how far I have travelled in this research and what I have brought
out to offer the world.

I sense a certain degree of self-empowerment in arriving at this point of
understanding of both the phenomenon and just how far I have travelled. This
empowerment means that this mid-life re-examination of who and where I am has

\(^{47}\) ‘Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of
opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, ... till we come to a hard
bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality, and say, This is, and no mistake; and then begin,
having a point d’appui...' (Thoreau, 1854/2008:70)
created my current situation in which I can begin to lead my life and more consciously create my own reality, rather than be led by life. Cavell (1981/2008) reflects on Thoreau’s call for each person to find their own ‘point d’appui’, a solid ground of support and personal meaning from which to see beyond the illusions of life and seek our own reality: ‘be it life or death, we crave only reality’ (Thoreau, 1854/2008:70). Like Thoreau, I sought a retreat from humankind to reinvigorate my sense of self, my ecological self, or natural self as Thoreau would call it. I needed to create a solid personal ground of understanding (eco-consciousness) to not only free myself of my ‘civilised’, habitual self but to create a framework for consciousness transformation that could be of value to myself and others, and satisfy my urges for a more connected, saner reality in ‘nature’. The real value, therefore, of this research, beyond the thematic understandings and experiential processes, is that through an authentic retreat into ‘nature’ to discover my particular ‘point d’appui’, it may through post-doctoral sharing and development provide a beacon of real hope and value in a world so ripe for a ‘higher consciousness’.

6.3 Reflections on the research approach

This has been a highly meaningful, immersed and intense engagement with eco-consciousness as a phenomenon. I believe that the interpretive phenomenological heuristic inquiry approach of this research was highly appropriate and effective in responding to the research questions. It provided the self-reflective, experiential methodological framework for evoking and arriving at a more thorough and nuanced understanding of both my experience and the development of my eco-consciousness. The nature engagement and two-fold vision methods developed under the interpretive phenomenological approach allowed me to see behind the appearances of my surrounds, to observe and reflect on my ‘natural attitude’ or normal habitual thinking and fully immerse my being within the lived-world of my nature immersion sessions. As I had previously experienced deep psychological connections with nonhuman nature within natural settings over many years, it was my challenge in attempting to understand this experience to be open without
prejudice or restricting expectations. I needed to make the familiarity of a relational, expanded eco-consciousness open within each lived nature engagement and to become more aware of the meanings I gave to my pre-verbal and written interpretive experiences.

The nature engagement and two-fold vision methods, by incorporating mindfulness and meditation (and visualisation/imagination in the latter), allowed me to reinvigorate and open up my perceptions of the natural environment, use non-sensorial means for interpreting nonhuman beings, become more aware of my staged deepening and expansion of consciousness and sense of self and arrive at significant meanings through rich, ‘dense’ written descriptions in my worksheets. I was able to go beyond ‘the surface of things’ (Thoreau, 1854/2008:69) to describe the lived-through quality of evoked eco-consciousness experiences and emerge at the end of this intense research transformed in both my understanding about the phenomenon and in my sense of self. This, I believe, could not have happened if I had approached the phenomenon from an abstract, detached orientation. Phenomenology requires a conscious immersion into the lived, personal experience of a particular phenomenon, an intentional act of attaching or becoming, as van Manen (1990) would describe, that lived world of the phenomenon. My experience of interpretive phenomenology is consistent with this requirement (I did attach and, at times, become the lived world of natural settings I immersed within), as well as the priority I gave from the beginning of this research on subjective meanings. I did not want to have the experience of eco-consciousness without being able to interpret and give importance to my meanings. Despite my previous reference to this quote in Section 2.3.1, I refer to the quote by T.S Eliot who similarly stated:

We had the experience but missed the meaning and approach to the meaning restores the experience. (Eliot, 1944)

The staged heuristic inquiry process provided the backbone or continuity and framework for maintaining my focus on living the research questions in my daily life.
for over three years. Being a form of interpretive phenomenology, it was complementary to my experiential methods in that it allowed me, especially during the immersion stage, to write my reflections about the research questions both separate from or during my experiential sessions. When undertaking experiential sessions in natural settings that evoked heightened eco-consciousness, I was able to subsequently reflect on these experiences further in the field using my journals. In this way, consistent with the intent of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990), I could maintain attention and concentration on the phenomenon as well as the connection, relationship and intense engagement with the natural world. I was also able to reflect upon eco-consciousness outside of these experiential sessions, most effectively when I went for a bushwalk and allowed my self to slip into a state of heightened eco-consciousness.

I found the heuristic immersive process to be a self-referential, dialectical engagement with the phenomenon that allowed me to be reflexively ‘wedded’ to the question of my experience and understanding of eco-consciousness development for long periods. It allowed me to engage in a process of cyclical reflection and interpretation resulting in an emergent understanding of eco-consciousness. I found it to be an inquiry process well suited to solitary, contemplative practice that allowed me to go beyond a rational, abstracting interpretive process, as needed. On many occasions I would sit down or walk along a track, put ‘out’ the question or become aware of what was happening within and around me, and be prompted to write. In my solitary, self-reflective approach, I felt I was being consistent with Moustakas’s original self-immersive orientation to heuristic inquiry. Heuristic inquiry for me was a process involving minimal social interaction, sustained periods of self-reflection and strong self-motivation and independence. Importantly for this type of autobiographical exploration, it allowed me to go beyond the phenomenological imperative of describing essences and themes and retain, as Moustakas (1990) argued, the essence of the researcher in the experience. It was not only my intent to holistically describe the phenomenon as experienced, not just emphasise the ‘I-who-feels’ perspective of heuristic inquiry.
(Sela-Smith, 2002) but include my story of personal transformation through indwelling, tacit knowing, self-dialogue and surrendering to the questions over several years of engagement. This latter quality can be viewed, from a deep ecological perspective, a part of my on-going Self-realisation, a part of the process of growing into my Self, which includes strengthening my identification with nonhuman nature.

One final reflection about the research process concerns the use of a mindfulness approach throughout the research, not just restricted to the experiential sessions. I discussed in the previous chapter the important benefits of mindfulness I experienced but also its consistency with the interpretive phenomenological approach. By this I refer to the importance of not only acknowledging inner states, for example assumptions, fears and biographical predilections, but maintaining an open, uncritical, moment-to-moment observational stance towards inner and outer experiences. I would argue that in going to the experience itself, mindfulness provided the tool to maintain openness, presence and empathic detachment (in the observational sense). I think that using mindfulness was the critical difference, from less aware forms of observation, in increasing awareness of my responses, interpretations and meanings stemming from the inquiry process.

Mindfulness, by helping to relax, detach and shift mental states, improved my perceptual acuity and sensitivity to emotional states and bodily feelings. I found it empowering in terms of being able to release negative states of mind and establish a powerful reflective coping mechanism for detaching from habitual thinking, reacting and behaviour. Mindfulness was the seminal tool for this inquiry for these reasons and was to a very significant degree, the basis for most, if not all, of the sixteen key themes of my experience and understanding of eco-consciousness. In improving my perceptions and capacity to not get lost or seduced or overwhelmed by emotions, feelings and events, it helped improve my environmental awareness and significantly contributed towards my experience and understanding of heightened states of eco-consciousness. It provided me with a heightened
perspective towards my Being, my sense of self, my habitual responses to social issues such as the global ecological crisis, and the almost depressing realisation of the mindlessness and ‘surface’ consciousness that dominates so much of my life.

6.4 Future directions: potential uses for eco-consciousness development

This section identifies potential applications for this research. I have to now ‘go far, quickly’ and identify ways in which eco-consciousness development may challenge ‘the ruts of tradition and conformity’ to those who may be interested in considering the benefits of eco-consciousness. While I may have satisfied the requirements of a heuristic study in terms of explicating my lived experience of this form of consciousness, the interpretive phenomenological approach gives me the opportunity to briefly identify its social potential. It is therefore not necessary to leave this exploration at a description of my experiences and meanings of both aspects of eco-consciousness development. I want to complete this study by discussing, as an ecologically and socially embedded researcher, potential applications and implicate future research directions. This addresses the ‘so what’ question. Understanding the need to discuss the social potential of my eco-consciousness development is reinforced by the following statement by Dryzek who discusses the importance of change at the societal level:

Why does social structure matter [in terms of addressing global environmental issues]? The main reason is that macro consequences (in terms of policies, institutions, and events such as revolutions) are rarely if ever a simple extrapolation of micro causes. …… So even if there were large-scale conversion of individuals along the lines sought by green romantics [development of an ecological consciousness], it is quite possible that nothing at all would change at the macro level. If there is no structural setting, which facilitates the articulation of frustration with the old order, the construction of solidarity against that order, and action based
on that solidarity, then the old order will survive. Mass psychological and cultural changes can have macro-level consequences, but they are never a simple reflection of micro-level transformations. (Dryzek, 1997:170)

Psychological and behavioural changes can, as Dryzek argues, be negated by a host of factors including biased electoral systems, market systems that reward and reinforce materialistic and egoistic behaviour, social structures that isolate individuals and privatise their concerns, employment structures and commitments that make it hard for people to have time for political action. In considering Dryzek’s view about the essential need for systemic change, or from my research orientation, the process of ‘systemising’ consciousness transformation, I briefly identify some potential uses of my approach to eco-consciousness development, uses that I view as a prelude to identifying systemic relevance and opportunities.

My approach to asking the ‘so what’ question is to ask for what purposes would an individual or a group want to use the approaches, methods and concepts developed or used in my research (hereafter referred to as my eco-consciousness development (ECD framework). My ECD framework consists of an interpretive phenomenological-heuristic approach, specific perceptual and reflective methods, tools and skills, and knowledge. Refer to Appendix 4 for a list of these. As I experienced a range of psychological benefits from conducting my experiential and reflective sessions in natural settings, as well as reflecting upon my life and industrial and reflexive modernity that framed my life, then perhaps other people may similarly want to experience these benefits. If so, perhaps the first place to start in identifying potential reasons or purposes for using and adapting my ECD framework are the motivations for experiencing heightened eco-consciousness and/or developing a durable eco-consciousness. I identified several broad motivations underlying my reasons to experience and understand eco-consciousness development. These were:
i. Psychological

- Emotional – need for comfort, healing, coping, deal with avoidance, despair, anger and life dissatisfaction;
- Feelings – address sense of alienation, anxiety, claustrophobic feelings, overwhelmed by personal issues and future threats (especially climate change);
- Cognitive – address ignorance of ecological qualities of a place, improve eco-literacy, understand one way to transform consciousness;
- Spiritual – deal with existential issues and my need for spiritual connection;
- Self-realisation – self-reflection, expansion of sense of self;
- Curiosity – about a place, nature beings, the unknown landscape.

ii. Physical

- Bodily revitalisation;
- To manage/ limit pain, stress or discomfort;
- Exercise;
- Perceptual acuity.

These were the underlying motivations for wanting to visit natural areas during this research. Many of these overlap. Mostly I would hold a couple of these motivations in any one session. These motivations would then, mostly unconsciously, create the purpose or desired outcomes of developing heightened eco-consciousness. These are listed in the following diagram (refer to Figure 65).
Figure 65 - Potential social uses of my eco-consciousness development framework
These purposes can equally be seen as desired outcomes. I briefly explain each of these purposes beneath:

- Nature awareness: to increase ecological understanding and awareness of ecological concepts, values and ethics, as applied to a specific place;
- Place exploration: to explore, connect with and come to know a specific place or feature;
- Restorative practice: to experience the restorative qualities of nature;
- Behavioural change: encouraging pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour through a facilitation of connectedness, reflexivity and concern;
- Spiritual connection: to experience spiritual/energetic qualities of places, to connect with eco-self/Self and Earth;
- Eco-therapy: to cope with negative psychological states and improve coping capacity to deal with personal/global issues and threats;
- Perspective taking: to facilitate acknowledgment and empathic understanding of other’s perspectives (beliefs, values, issues and consciousness), imagining perspectives of nonhuman other;
- Consciousness transformation: experience altered states of consciousness, progress evolution of and understanding about personal consciousness.

\[48\]

As I discovered with my ECD framework, an eco-therapy purpose would use heightened eco-consciousness as a form of coping mechanism as a process to increase a person’s sense of control over their lives and responses to threats. As D. Shapiro, Schwartz, & Astin (1996) state, the feeling of control of one’s internal psychological environment (cognitions, beliefs, thoughts and emotions) has been demonstrated to be important for psychological well-being. They argue that control related desires (for example, control over others, over nature, over wealth distribution) have been channelled into both creative and destructive outcomes. This is highly relevant for my understanding of eco-consciousness if I view its evolution (durable) and short-term experience (heightened) as my need to re-assert some level of personal control over my life, my sense of self and over my despair, anxiety, anger and sense of powerlessness.
These purposes would help determine the adaptation and implementation of the ECD framework for use by individuals seeking self-guided or instructed outcomes or by groups such as learning/ educational organisations. Eco-therapy was perhaps one of the primary outcomes of my heightened states and which contributed to my overall durable eco-consciousness. By this I refer to a range of psychological benefits listed in the motivations previously. Consistent with my experience, the therapeutic outcomes from the type of nature engagement I had developed, helped, in my view, to improve my capacity and ability to cope with and have some sense of control over negative states of mind (sadness, despair, powerlessness and anger). In my inquiry, these negative states stemmed from my perception of the dire state of the world as well as difficult personal situations. Homburg, Stolberg, & Wagner (2007) identify the global ecological crisis, of which climate change is prominent, as stressful to many people who perceive it is as actually or potentially threatening, damaging or depriving. They identify the need for people to develop positive coping mechanisms to 1) moderate between actual/potential impacts, their appraisal of these and the physical and psychological consequences and 2) foster pro-environmental behaviour. Without a coping mechanism, stress will continue to affect them. An eco-therapy use of my ECD

49 I asked myself whether I should use the term therapy given, as I stated previously, it was a medical oriented term, in my experience. Not being a psychologist, I felt I should not use the term but then I reconsidered this stance. According to Devereux (1996), the term ‘therapy’ evolved from a group of Ancient Greek words including *therapeuein* (to take care of), *theraps* (attendant) and *therapeia* (attendance). Instead of a medical or psychological formal basis, it originally referred to attending or attendance. This accorded to a significant degree with the overall approach to my experience of eco-consciousness in that I simply brought my attention fully and as unmediated as I could back to the present moment, when engaging natural settings. In dwelling-within-nature, I was attending to nonhuman other around me, and to my state of mind, being and body (mindfulness).

50 I acknowledge the practice of various forms of eco-therapy such as adventure therapy (Beringer & Martin, 2003), nature-based therapy (Berger, 2008; Berger & McLeod, 2006) and eco-therapy (Clinebell, 1996)
framework can be viewed as a potential coping mechanism, as I have alluded to before. There are perhaps other motivations and purposes for using this ECD framework that I have not identified. I have only identified those that were relevant to my exploration.

I have identified, as can be seen in Figure 65, a number of broad individual and collective applications, based on reflecting on my professional and personal experiences. These applications can be viewed as future research directions in terms of applying my ECD framework to these contexts. In terms of environmental non-government organisation’s (NGOs), I know from personal experience from local and state-wide activist experiences, and the literature, for example, Kovan & Dirkx (2003) and Thomashow (1995), that activists regularly, and sometimes acutely, experience negative states such as anxiety, sadness, frustration and powerlessness in their environmental ‘battles’. An eco-therapeutic oriented ECD framework would be highly relevant and useful to activists trying to cope with negative emotions. A family oriented application may revolve around families wanting to explore a specific interesting setting by focusing, for example, on mindful perception or fun sensorial, imaginal games, as I have done on occasions when camping in national parks. Having been involved in my own small business, I can recognise that this framework may hold potential for self-employed individuals such as psychotherapists, life coaches and counsellors to use as part of their suite of therapeutic tools in meeting the psychological needs of their clients. Many corporations have become environmentally conscious, concerned about their triple bottom line (TBL) - financial, social and environmental performance - and use personnel development and training to achieve TBL outcomes, within which my ECD framework could be adapted into workshops. Finally, various public institutions such as education departments, natural resource and local councils have a variety of approaches to environmental education, of which an ECD
framework may be of relevance. I would argue that this framework provides significant potential for addressing the need for greater relational engagement with nonhuman nature for environmental education\(^{51}\) and increased acknowledgement of the therapeutic aspects of natural settings for outdoor and adventure education (Beringer & Martin, 2003).

In these ways and perhaps other ways not yet considered, I believe the seeds of discovery of the ‘two-fold’ nature of eco-consciousness can be sown to germinate where and when the conditions arise. It is but one form of consciousness, but, I have argued, an important one in a troubled world needing a transformation of consciousness, as I have argued in Chapter 1, and connection to our inner and outer ‘natures’.

### 6.5 Thesis conclusion

I arrive at the end of this exploration with a sense of humility, uncertainty and knowing regarding the phenomenon that has filled my life for these past three or so years. I feel humbled more by what I do not know about the complexity of eco-consciousness than the small measure of understanding that has come my way. In experiencing an expanded, emptied and deepened consciousness birthed through a mindful, perceptual and affective engagement with nonhuman nature, I feel I have travelled some way into the wilds of a ‘higher consciousness’ (Gore, 2008) landscape. I have sought experiences of eco-consciousness and have been left, if

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\(^{51}\) Environmental educators such as Ashley (2005), Ballantyne, Connell, & Fien (1998), Ballantyne, Fien, & Packer (2001), Bonnett (2005), Hinds & Sparks (2008), Kidner (2001), Kowalewski (2002), Martin (2007), Maiteny (2002), Nagel (2005) and (Rickinson, 2001) argue for balance in the way we educate. They argue that the excessive rationality, ‘head’-based curriculum approaches need to be balanced with an affective, relational approach that immerses the learner in the experience of nonhuman nature with their senses fully engaged in order to develop emotional bonds, valuation and identification with nonhuman ‘other’.
not, transformed, then a little bit wiser about what this consciousness means to me, and what it may contribute to concerned people in other times and places. I discovered numerous themes of meaning during my structured and reflective engagements and now look forward to carrying this experience and understanding forward into my social contexts. Despite my uncertainty of how I will or must proceed with this transformed understanding, I proceed with a resolute knowing that I have discovered, or rather, given voice to something of significance in our troubled world. It is my authentic story, and like any story, contributes to varying degrees to the collective understanding of this phenomenon.

It has been a mid-life experiment of regaining perspective and meaning through the lens of a consciousness intimately connected with the ‘mirror’ of nonhuman nature. I have been able to differentiate the phenomenon into two contexturally diverse yet complementary expressions: heightened and durable eco-consciousness. Each sustains and draws meaning from the other and my life is richer for the personal and social understanding they have brought me through experience, reflection and contemplation. Interpreting the meanings from each during my research has provided me with both the relational, sensual and spiritual experiences of nature immersion as well as the biographical and social re-contextualisation of eco-consciousness development in my life. One of the primary challenges I wrote about in my journals was to bring the wonderful, uplifting experiences and meanings of heightened states into my normal waking consciousness to remind me of an enduring eco-consciousness within. I believe I have achieved this integration, as can be interpreted within this chapter.

At the end of my research, I found it ironic that the self-aware, waking consciousness that, so I have come to believe, distinguishes human beings and other higher order mammals from other animals, is the thing that alienates me from human and nonhuman other. My own consciousness with its westernised, individualistic, surface/outward, ‘doing’ orientation often alienates my self from both nonhuman other and my more expansive Self, my Being. I cannot hear the
whispers of my Being if my ego-self in my embodied being is talking too loudly and focused externally. I feel saddened by this but also hopeful, in the sense that it is under my capacity to take responsibility for integrating normal consciousness with eco-consciousness. I have done this here, as my research has demonstrated.

Becoming mindful, I argue, of the limitations and divisiveness of normal waking consciousness, as well as recognising the potential and need for integration with a more expansive, ‘higher’ consciousness is critical for individual and collective consciousness change. The important thing is to become more mindful of the dangers of habitual consciousness, its individual and collective consequences and to have experiential, reflective opportunities to discover connection, communion and meaning in safe natural settings from suburbia to ‘wilderness’ areas.

In my discoveries of self and other in the wilds of eco-consciousness, I have stumbled upon, as if for the first time, the spiritual depths that lie behind the everyday sights and sounds of habitual, surface perception and normal, waking consciousness. These depths have provided a richer, nuanced dimensionality not only to the physical world around me but the inner world within. I have experienced an ecological sense of self and Self and come to understand their inter-dependence with heightened states of eco-consciousness. Prior to my immersive research experiences within natural landscapes and with the beings of nonhuman nature, I did not fully understand that to some very substantive degree, I had been lost for so much of my life amongst the surfaces of my perceived reality and entranced by the pleasures and pains of my controlling ego-self. Indeed, I had not realised how completely lost I was, how much I needed to find my bearings in life until I arrived at the end of this research and learnt what my mindful, immersive experiences within ‘nature’ had taught me about the ‘infinite extent’ of my relations. I am reminded of the words of wisdom of my fellow ‘nature’ wanderer, Henry David Thoreau:

   Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not til we
are lost, in other words, not til we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations. (Thoreau, 1854/2008:118)

As much as Thoreau ‘went to the woods ... to live deliberately, to front the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach.’ (Thoreau, 1854/2008:65), I went into the wildness of Manly Dam Reserve, Barrington Tops and other places to lose myself, my ‘civilised’ self, in nature’s teachings so that I could discover my lived experience and understanding of eco-consciousness development. Similar to Thoreau, I immersed myself within nonhuman nature over an extended period to restore a relational, caring and mindful perceptual embrace of ‘nature’s’ otherness and wholeness. Connecting with nonhuman nature was not a matter of escaping humanity and any crisis of meaning or environmental ‘bad news’, not just of developing a process for connecting with nonhuman nature and my Being, not just my ‘point of d’appui’ but of seeking a way to bring back something of value to humanity in a time of rapidly unfolding crises. Perhaps in the ending of my exploration into eco-consciousness lie the seeds of a New Beginning.
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APPENDICES
Appendix 1: Nature engagement worksheet

WEEK: DATE: 
TIME: START END

LOCATION: WEATHER:

**BIOPHYSICAL**

LANDSCAPE: ASPECT & SLOPE:

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: GEOLOGY:

AQUATIC: VEGETATION TYPE:

VEGETATION COMMUNITY: COMMON SPECIES:

HABITAT DIVERSITY: FAUNA OBSERVATIONS/SIGNS:

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PLACE:

**HUMAN**

SIGNS/ ACTIVITIES (IMMEDIATE): SIGNS/ ACTIVITIES (LOCAL):

ACTIVITY INTERUPTIONS: Y/N IF YES, WHAT TYPE:

**PERSONAL**

MENTAL STATE:

PHYSICAL STATE:

EMOTIONAL STATE:

**ACTIVITIES**

1. meditation
2. biophysical observations
3. soundmapping
4. mindful hearing
5. mindful vision
6. mindful touching
7. affective exercise

FIELDTRIP REFLECTIONS:
Appendix 2: Example of a nature engagement worksheet filled out in the field

Nature Engagement Worksheet

**WEEK:** 45  
**DATE:** 8/11/08  
**TIME:** 10:15 - 12:30

**LOCATION:** Jerusalem Falls, Sleeping Tops N.P.  
**WEATHER:** overcast, windy, cool, humid

**BIOPHYSICAL**

**LANDSCAPE:** mountain, ravine, gully  
**SIGNIFICANT FEATURES:** tall trees, waterfalls

**AQUATIC:** creek, waterfalls

**VEGETATION COMMUNITY:** tall, closed forest

**COMMON SPECIES:** eastern hemlock, sugar maple  
**HABITAT DIVERSITY:** high: minimal recent disturbance, tall trees, dense litter

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PLACE:**
- enclosed, nurturing space under tall protective trees
- relief to return to earth
- a familiar place of connection
- a feeling of peace and safety
- a reminder of self in nature
- a space to escape from humanity
- a feeling of peace and quiet

**HUMAN SIGNS/ACTIVITIES:** trail, lookouts, structure, several walls

**ACTIVITIES**
1. meditation
2. hearing exercises
3. vision exercise
4. touching exercise
5. affective exercise

**FIELDTRIP REFLECTIONS:**
- my first exercise in many months was a rewarding experience
- a heightened sense of self and grounding
- I experienced moments of exhilaration and joy, a sense of connection and expanded sense of self
- a relief to get away from humanity, a reminder of peace and quiet
- thinking and being in a mindful, peaceful state
- why did I need so much to be quiet, to feel at peace with myself?

**SENSORY DESCRIPTIONS**

- The soundscape was dominated by the noise of the cascading waterfall and the rush of water. The sound was constant, providing a grounding presence.
- The small birds, buzzing all around, added to the nature of the soundscape.

**MINDFUL HEARING**
- I became aware of the sounds around me: the rustling of leaves, the gentle hum of insects, and the distant sound of a waterfall.
- I took deep breaths, feeling the air fill my lungs, relaxing my body and mind.

**MINDFUL SENSES**
- I focused on the texture of the leaves under my feet, the coolness of the water, and the warmth of the sun on my skin.
- I noticed the sensations of movement, freedom, space, and the animated streams of movement.

- I was filled with feeling, images, and thoughts. I noticed my thoughts and feelings, but I did not allow them to control me.
My vision: I stood alongside the trunk of a large old eucalypt tree peering up its trunk to the canopy. Sunlight filtered through the leaves, and I felt a sense of peace and tranquility. The trees were tall and majestic, their leaves rustling in the wind. I felt a sense of connection with the natural world, and I knew that I was about to experience something special.

The moment: I reached the top of the hill and looked out over the forest. The trees were a sea of green, and I could see the forest extending as far as the eye could see. I felt a sense of awe and wonder, and I knew that I was witnessing something truly remarkable.

The experience: I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. I felt the wind on my face, and I knew that I was about to experience a moment that would stay with me forever. I opened my eyes, and I saw a vision of a beautiful forest, filled with life and wonder. I knew that I had found a place where I could be myself, and I knew that I would return again and again.
Appendix 3: Two-fold vision worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK:</th>
<th>DATE:</th>
<th>TIME: START</th>
<th>END</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOCATION:</td>
<td></td>
<td>WEATHER:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PHENOMENON OBSERVED:

**BIOPHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

LANDSCAPE:  ASPECT:
SIGNIFICANT FEATURES:  GEOLOGY:
VEGETATION TYPE:  COMMUNITY:
COMMON SPECIES:  FAUNA:

**CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT**

SIGNS/ ACTIVITIES (IMMEDIATE):
SIGNS/ ACTIVITIES (LOCAL):
ACTIVITY INTERUPTIONS: Y/N  IF YES, WHAT TYPE:

**ANALYTICAL MODE**

FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

DESCRIPTION OF WHOLE:

DESCRIPTION OF PARTS:
INTUITIVE MODE

Visualisation/ ESI process:

Creative representation process:

Internal/ external relationships:

Time-life of phenomenon:

Intuitive/ imaginal process:

Affective states:

Reflections:
Appendix 4: Eco-consciousness development framework

This framework is an indicative outline of the approaches, methods and techniques, and concepts and underpinning knowledge I used in exploring eco-consciousness and the development of its heightened and durable forms. I would use these to help guide others in developing their eco-consciousness. They could be adapted to the individual and group context, depending on the intended use and outcome. The framework is sectioned into broad phases (preparation, action, reflection and integration) for convenience as these were the broad phases for most of my experiential sessions (prepare-do-reflect-integrate). The framework is listed under both forms although there is substantial overlap. Those activities and skills listed under durable eco-consciousness would generally not be appropriate for a one day heightened eco-consciousness scenario. Heightened approaches, methods/techniques and knowledge are meant for experiential, one-day uses and durable approaches, methods and concepts is oriented towards a more reflective, on-going process that evokes a durable level of eco-consciousness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Heightened</th>
<th>Durable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>§ Identify and survey of the area for conducting the activity</td>
<td>§ Understanding the differences between and cultural/historical basis of environmental consciousness and eco-consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>§ Choose area conducive for contemplative/reflective practice, that is 1) with minimal human disturbance and possibility for interaction, 2) that is relatively safe and comfortable</td>
<td>§ Understanding of global ecological issues, social and consciousness basis for these and our psychological responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>§ Understand the purpose, rationale and techniques of the nature engagement/two-fold vision methods</td>
<td>§ Social critical analysis such as understanding the consequences of industrial modernity, one’s role in society, environmental degradation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>§ Understand the motivations and purposes for conducting the exercise</td>
<td>§ Understand basic ecological principles and processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Perceptual engagement  
- Relational (empathic/caring) interaction  
- Affective awareness  
- Meditation  
- Ecological observation  
- Mindfulness practice  
- Creative expression  
- Worksheet writing  | - Concept review: nature, ecology, consciousness  
- Identity, or how we develop our sense of self  
- Nature identification process  
- Contemplative skills including mindfulness practice  
- Understanding rationale and ways of Self-realisation |
| - Daily mindfulness practice  
- Minimise judgment/ maximise discernment in viewing the world  
- Regular reflections about one’s self (roles, responses, experience) as it interacts within social/cultural and ecological contexts  
- Journal writing  
- Reflexivity  
- Community service practice  
- Regular experiences of heightened eco-consciousness  
- Regular perspective taking (that is, practice taking the views of human and nonhuman other to develop understanding and/or empathic disposition)  
- Undertake Self-realisation activities | - Worksheet review  
- Activity review – outcomes, insights, experiences, feedback  
- Reflections based on exercise purpose such as therapeutic, restorative and spiritual connection  | - Journal thematic analysis  
- Reflexivity  
- Identify/ consolidate experiences/images/ insights for latter recall (way of strengthening durable eco-consciousness) |
| **Integration and adaptation** | • Identify what aspects of the experience can be integrated back into daily life  
• Integration of experiences with sense of self and social lived world  
• Acknowledge and deal with inner conflicts (group discussion, ongoing reflection, psychotherapy), if they arise during exercise | • On-going review of one’s sense of connectedness, emotional resilience, contentment, sense of self.  
• Regular re-assessment of personal goals and priorities  
• Adapt exercise, activities or approaches to deepen/strengthen durable eco-consciousness |