



# Pilgrimage and the Alchemy of Transformation

- finding a way from  
entitlement to gratitude

Lucy Ridsdale  
Bachelor of Arts

Murdoch University

*This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Honours in Sustainable Development,  
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*I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.*

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Lucy Ridsdale

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Lucy Ridsdale

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Author: Lucy Ridsdale

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## Abstract

Joanna Macy proposes a 'shift in consciousness' as the third element of the Great Turning, an all-encompassing transition from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilisation. While this line of thinking is echoed in some of the literature in sustainability, there is lack of research that addresses: what exactly is 'shift in consciousness' or 'transformation;' and how it might be achieved. The literature also demonstrates a strong bias towards objective methodologies which distance the researcher from the enquiry.

This thesis seeks to address these gaps by conducting an exploratory investigation of pilgrimage as a transformative practice using a first-person introspective methodology. It has two broad aims: firstly, to explore pilgrimage as a practice that facilitates an ontological shift from entitlement to gratitude; and secondly to elucidate the complex web of factors that comprise a transformative process - here referred to as 'the alchemy of transformation.'

Having designed an heuristic phenomenological research protocol, the author walked a 1100km pilgrimage through the south-west of Western Australia as a reflective, embodied practice. Four themes - 'simplicity,' 'hardship,' 'divine communion,' and 'connection to country' - were chosen to structure the reflection and a *bricolage* of methods was used to explore and depict the author's experience. The results of the study were that this particular pilgrimage was found to facilitate a shift from entitlement to gratitude, and the four previously mentioned themes were found to represent elements of transformative process. These findings are illustrated in a graphic artwork.

The results of this research are intended to contribute a clearer and more nuanced understanding of transformation to the field of sustainability.

Key words: sustainability, the Great Turning, pilgrimage, transformation, entitlement, gratitude, heuristic phenomenology, alchemy

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<sup>1, 1</sup> Every figure and plate contained in this thesis is the author's own work.



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## Glossary of Terms

### 1. General terms

**Ontology / ontological change:** refers to 'being' and a shift in one's way of being as distinct from one's values or consciously held beliefs.

### 2. Methodological terms

**Transdisciplinarity:** is a research approach characterised by four features: "inquiry-driven, rather than exclusively discipline-driven; meta-paradigmatic rather than intra-paradigmatic; informed by thinking that is complex, creative, contextualizing and connective; inquiry as a creative process combining rigor and imagination." (Montuori 2005, 147)

**Bricolage:** refers to the use of diverse methods, approaches and analytic tools in order to "accommodate such factors as complexity, creativity, and multidimensionality." (Gidley, 2007, 10)

### 3. Sustainability terms:

**More-than-human world:** is an eco-centric as opposed to anthropocentric way of referring to the living biosphere of the planet that affirms the intrinsic value of all being (Abram 1996).

**Industrial growth society:** Joanna Macy's term for the "self-destructing political economy" based on an "economic system dependent on accelerating growth" (Macy 2007). It is a system that appropriates resources in order to maintain a "system of dominator power and elite competition; racism, sexism and classism" (Korten 2006, 25).

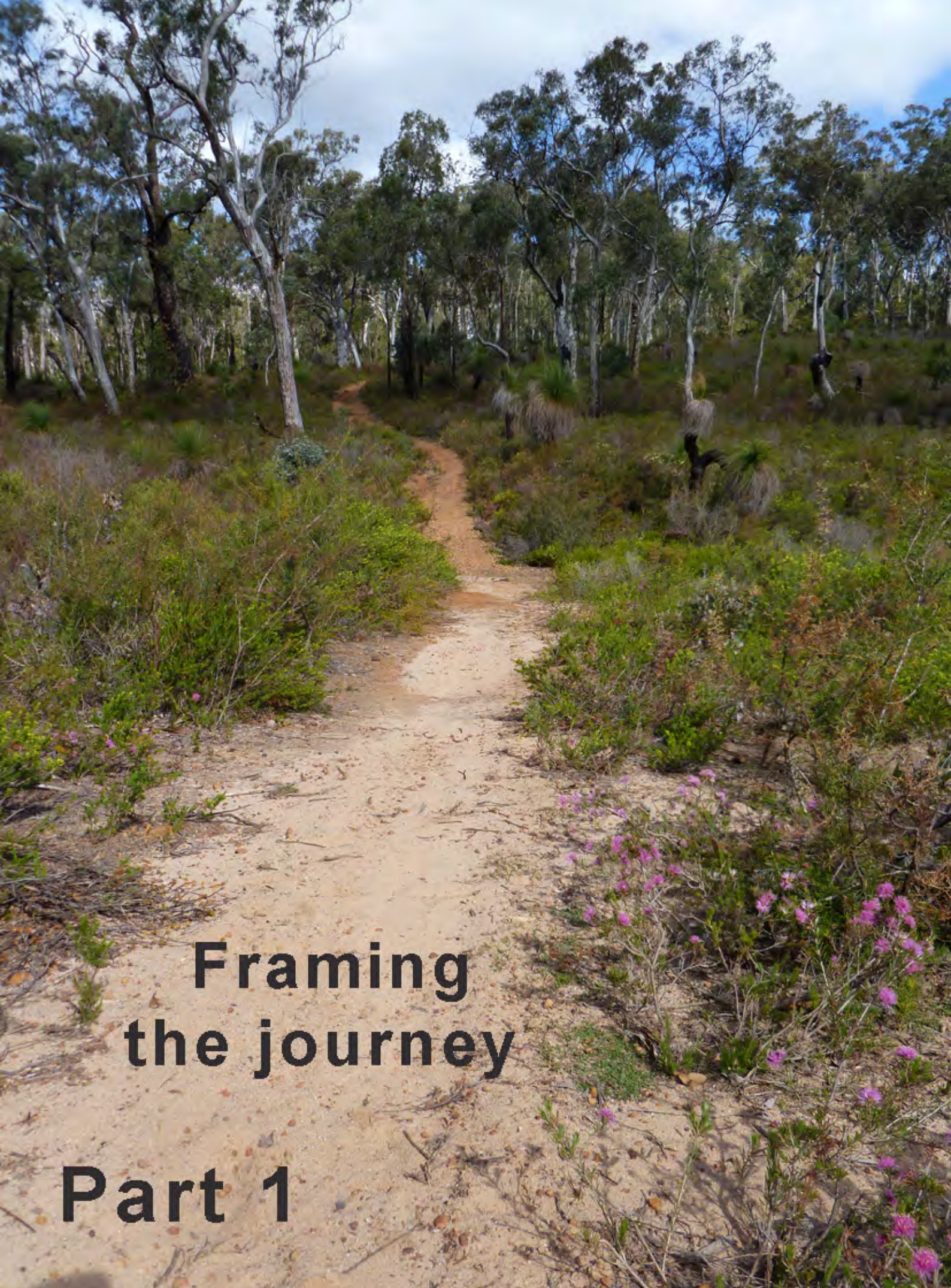
#### 4. Spirituality terms:

**Apophysis** and **Kataphasis:** refer to spiritual paths emphasising respectively "the way of darkness and the way of the light, the ambiguity of silence and the transparency of articulation" (Lane 1998, 137). Though they employ different practices and begin from a different set of assumptions, they are like two sides of the same coin and cannot be separated (Lane 1998, 77).

**Apophysis** is the way of negation - of keeping silence in the face of the ultimate unknowability of the divine mystery (Ho, 2007, 67). It is the way of renunciation and emptying of the self.

**Kataphasis** is the way of affirmation, of declarative language and the use of images and metaphors to talk about the divine mystery. It is the way of sensuous engagement with the world and affirmation of the self (Lane 1988, 241).





**Framing  
the journey**

**Part 1**





“Future generations, if there is a livable world for them, will look back at the epochal transition we are making to a life-sustaining society. And they may well call this the time of the Great Turning. It is happening now.”

- Joanna Macy<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Transition, Crisis, Opportunity,

Humanity is in the midst of an epochal transition. We are facing large-scale and multi-dimensional environmental, social, and spiritual crises.<sup>2</sup> As McKibben demonstrates, these are not future threats; we already live on a changed planet (2010, 27). There is broad consensus amongst climate scientists that our actions in just the next few years will have a great impact on the conditions of life on Earth for a long, long time to come (Lenton 2008). It is right now that we have a window of opportunity to act for positive change.

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<sup>1</sup> Macy 2009, par. 3 ([www.joannamacy.net](http://www.joannamacy.net))

<sup>2</sup> For a picture of the environmental crises, including over-population, threats to fresh water supplies, loss of arable land, peak oil, glacial melts and mass extinction, see: Romm 2010, Leiserowitz and Fernandez 2008, and McKibben 2010. For an elaboration on crises in the social realm, such as extreme poverty, systemic exploitation and political instability, see: Sachs 2005 and Stein 2010. For evidence of spiritual crises including depression, addictions and rampant consumerism, see: Bridge 2008, Scroggs et al 2010 and Leon et al 2009.

This view is shared by a vast and growing number of people. Paul Hawkin, author of 'Blessed Unrest' has listed almost two million organisations world-wide committed to social and environmental justice (2008, 2). This groundswell, arising out of what is the largest ever social movement on earth, represents a commitment to shift away from the industrial growth society,<sup>\*3</sup> and towards the life-sustaining society that Joanna Macy speaks of as the Great Turning in the quote that opens this section. Participating in this shift enacts our "capacity to anticipate and choose our future" which David Korten identifies as a defining characteristic of the human species (Korten 2006, 25).

Macy proposes that the Great Turning involves three interconnected dimensions: 1. Actions to slow the damage to Earth and its beings; 2. Analysis of structural causes and the creation of structural alternatives; and 3. Shift in Consciousness (Macy 2009b). My research is centrally concerned with this third dimension 'shift in consciousness' which Macy recognises as both a "cognitive revolution and a spiritual awakening" that is enabled by a variety of insights and experiences (Macy 2009). Deep ecology, creation spirituality and general living systems theory are listed amongst the forms that promote and enable the shift in consciousness (Macy 2009). While she notes that it involves not just acquiring new knowledge but also "learning to see in new ways" (Macy 2009), she offers neither a definition of the shift, nor a clear indication of how to proceed. I have taken this to be an implicit invitation for people to find their own way forward, and this research comes out of having followed that invitation.

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<sup>3</sup> Terms defined in the Glossary (page vi) are marked with an asterisk the first time they are used.

## 1.2 Shift in consciousness

A mindful engagement with the notion of a 'shift in consciousness' raises a number of questions - indeed opens up a whole field of enquiry - that connects this endeavour to a long tradition of human exploration of consciousness, transformation and ontological change. These questions have been integral to: the world's spiritual traditions and schools of philosophy; the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry; and more latterly, the fields of management, education and personal development. The practice of alchemy in former times was also deeply engaged in the study of transformation, on both the spiritual and the physical realms (Redgrove 1922) as will be discussed later in more detail.

Some of the questions raised by this mindful engagement might be: How is a shift in consciousness to be achieved? What does it look like? How can it be observed or accounted for? Is having a shift of consciousness analogous to spiritual transformation or other processes of deep change? What dimensions of the human person does it involve? What are the practices and conditions that support transformative processes? Are they the same, similar, or different for different people? What is the place of human agency in these processes?

This research seeks to make a contribution to the understanding of transformation<sup>4</sup> in the field of sustainability by engaging with some of these questions in conducting an exploratory investigation of pilgrimage as a transformative practice. Employing a first-person, introspective methodology, the investigation is informed by the approaches and practices of two distinct traditions of transformation: transformative education and desert spirituality. The two research aims of the investigation are: firstly, to explore pilgrimage as a reflective, embodied practice that facilitates an ontological shift\* from entitlement to gratitude; and secondly, to elucidate the "intricate web of

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<sup>4</sup> From here on, 'transformation,' and 'shift in consciousness' will be used interchangeably to describe processes of ontological change.

factors” (Lean 2009, 25) that constitute a transformative process - what I’m calling ‘the alchemy of transformation.’ ‘Simplicity,’ ‘hardship,’ ‘divine communion’ and ‘connection to country<sup>5</sup>’ are proposed as themes or processes of pilgrimage that contribute to its being a transformative practice. These themes form the basis of my exploration of ‘the alchemy of transformation.’

Heuristic phenomenology provides the research framework for this study, and the project as a whole is grounded in a transdisciplinary\* epistemology, as will be explained in Chapter Three. A research protocol was designed that brings together tools and methods of a several disciplines such as long-distance walking, reflective journaling, embodied writing and critical reflection.

The pilgrimage I undertook was a journey on foot that took me through the south west of Western Australia from Fremantle to Albany. After walking about 35km from my home in Fremantle to Kalamunda, the majority of the walk (963 km) was along a marked walking trail called the Bibbulmun Track <sup>6</sup> that stretches between Kalamunda in the Perth Hills and Albany on the south coast. I also made an unplanned deviation to walk the Cape to Cape trail (135km) which connects Cape Naturaliste and Cape Llewwin on the Indian Ocean coast. In total, it was a route of around 1100 kilometres that I walked between October 25 and December 16, 2010.

The journey was undertaken as a pilgrimage, defined as ‘a long journey on foot undertaken with spiritual intent.’<sup>7</sup> This is not a conventional definition of pilgrimage any more than the Bibbulmun Track is a conventional pilgrim’s trail. My choice to frame my long-walking practice as a pilgrimage was three-fold. Firstly, it evokes the walking practices of Aboriginal peoples in Australia - especially the Nyungar people through whose traditional lands I walked - for

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<sup>5</sup> As I explain in Chapter Three, ‘country’ is used as a proper noun in the Aboriginal English sense, however I will follow the convention to spell it with a lowercase ‘c.’

<sup>6</sup> which I sometimes refer to simply as ‘the Track’

<sup>7</sup> My definition



whom all country is sacred (Encounter 2010).<sup>8</sup> Secondly, by removing the emphasis of a 'holy destination' from my definition, I align my practice with that of the early Celtic Christians for whom pilgrimage was not a visit to a sacred site but a journey into the unknown (Cahill 1995, 151). Thirdly, it emphasises walking as the mode of travel, thus foregrounding the embodied nature of the practice. This is central to my thesis.

### 1.3 Thesis Outline

My thesis comprises three Parts that match the stages of the research occurring before, during and after the pilgrimage. Part 1, 'Framing the Journey,' comprises the first three chapters. Following the introductory Chapter One, Chapter Two provides a more specific and detailed background to the project: firstly, framing it within the sustainability literature on transition as shift in consciousness; secondly, tracing its origins to my personal history, interests and motivations; and thirdly, defining and contextualising its key ideas - pilgrimage, transformation, entitlement and gratitude - as well as alchemy as its central metaphor. Chapter Three describes the methodology which is grounded in heuristic phenomenology and employs a *bricolage*\* of methods and tools. It describes the embodied and reflective aspects of the practice and explains my choice of a first-person approach. The six phases of heuristic research are defined and mapped to the stages of my project. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the research protocol I created for the pilgrimage and a description of the methods and tools I used.

Part 2, 'The Wild, I tell you, was Beautiful,' contains the heart of my thesis enquiry. It invites the reader into my experience of the pilgrimage by presenting a range of written and visual materials including: straightforward

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<sup>8</sup> From where I stand, and walk, as a Wadjela (white person), I wish to acknowledge the thousands of years that Nyungar people have walked through this country. My walking journey is, in a sense, my way of responding to the invitation of Sandra Harben and Len Collard (2008, 7) "will you walk with us, respect us, and listen to us? If you will, together we may make the progress so many people have been seeking for so long."

descriptions; photographs and collages of images; excerpts from my journal and two large graphics (figures 4.1 and 5.1). In heuristic terminology, Part 2 is the explication and creative synthesis of the research; it comprises Chapters Four and Five. Interspersed throughout these two chapters are colour plates that combine images of the Track with haiku I wrote. These are placed here to regularly remind the reader that for all the thinking and reflection that informed the practice, it was also simply a long walk through the Australian bush that was breathtakingly beautiful, exciting in its diversity and rejuvenating to my deepest being. It is my wish, through the use of photographs in these two chapters especially, to share that beauty, diversity and rejuvenation with the reader.

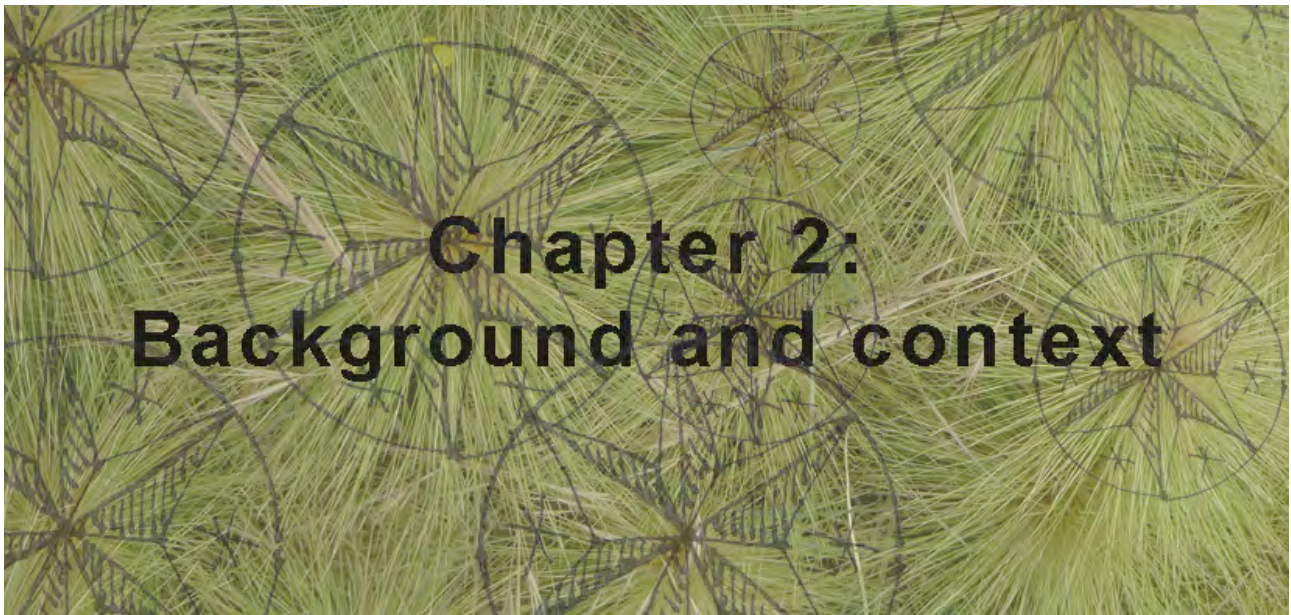
Chapter Four, 'The Bibbulmun Pilgrimage' presents a broad-brush-strokes picture of the walk. It begins with a general description of the Track that encompasses geographical, ecological and historical dimensions and makes the point that this is not a wilderness landscape nor a pristine idyllic environment, but a contested and compromised space. Following this description is a more subjective account that includes statistics from my own walk and a description of a typical day on the Track. Next, an annotated map (Figure 4.1) is presented which combines a collage of photographs and journal extracts with a map of the route. The chapter concludes with an account of my engagement with the reflective and embodied dimensions of the practice. My blog of the journey [www.wildgoosewalking.wordpress.com](http://www.wildgoosewalking.wordpress.com) , while not formally part of the thesis, complements the material and can be read as an appendix.

Chapter Five, 'The Alchemy of Transformation' presents the internal and reflective aspect of the pilgrimage. It opens with a large graphic artwork (Figure 5.1) of the same name, a visual depiction of an alchemical transformation that incorporates simplicity, hardship, divine communion and connection to country, and demonstrates an overall shift from entitlement to gratitude. A commentary follows in which the symbolism of Figure 5.1 is

explained, and insights from each theme are presented as short vignettes accompanied by journal extracts.

Part 3, 'Returning Home,' comprises Chapter Six which presents my conclusions and directions for future research. It begins with an overview of the journey from the perspective of the returned pilgrim, continues with a discussion of my overall conclusions, acknowledges the limitations of the project and outlines a number of possible research projects. The chapter concludes with a reiteration of the research aims as they connect to the Great Turning and my vision for the future of life on the planet.

The next chapter will present: the background and context to this research including a short review of the literature about the transition to sustainability as a shift in consciousness; an account of my personal interests and motivations for conducting this research; and definitions and contexts for its key ideas.



## 2.1 Transition to Sustainability as a shift in consciousness

The sustainability literature represents a multidimensional approach to the task of addressing current and emerging planetary crises. From its inception this field of enquiry has employed knowledge bases, methods and approaches from a variety of disciplines (Hadorn et al. 2006) and as such has always been transdisciplinary in orientation (Max-Neef 2005).

Much of the sustainability literature responds to some version of the question: 'Where must we direct our attention now, in order to mitigate present and future threats?' A huge amount of literature has been generated in relation to practical and structural changes (of whom I cite Pascala and Socolow (2004) on stabilising atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>; MacKay 2007 on renewable energy; and Lawson and Liu (2009) on Green space Networks in China). All of this work is vital if we are to avoid reaching even one of the tipping points that will lead to runaway climate change. Where the literature is not in agreement, however, is in regards to the depth of change necessary.

On the one hand, eco-modernist discourses offer technical solutions for ecological crises, pursuing an ideology of progress and denying the need for

any moral or ontological change (Davison 2001, 65). The widespread mentality that technology will save us is evidenced in statements such as: “The promising future that we desire can be found through science and technology, [which will guide] us to cost-effective approaches for improving environmental performance while...raising resource efficiency and profitability” (OECD 2000, 12). Other authors such as Lomborg (2010) and Heffner (2009) echo this sentiment and focus almost exclusively on technical, institutional change.

McKibben (2010), on the other hand, argues for a values shift to “Lightly, Carefully, Gracefully” (2010, 151) as a prerequisite for any practical responses to environmental crises. Gibson suggests in a similar vein that the ‘re-enchantment’ of the world is leading “people to a new relationship to nature in general” (2009, 11) and that this shift is necessary for behaviour change to take root. These and other authors propose that without a radical shift in human values, there will not be sufficient momentum for the transition to sustainability until it is too late.

A third group of authors argue that change needs to happen on a deeper level still and call for a shift at the level of our very being and consciousness.

Already in the mid-twentieth century Lewis Mumford proposed the need for “something like a spontaneous religious conversion: one that will replace the mechanical world picture with an organic world picture’ (Mumford 1964, 413). Deep ecologists Berry (1988) and Snyder (1990) as well as Macy (1993,1998) are also aligned with this perspective. More recently, Gangadean has called it “the awakening of the Global Mind” (2006, 441) and Gustave-Speth refers to it as “the rise of a new consciousness” (2010, 4). My research is aligned with these proponents of spiritual, ontological change.

While this position is represented in a growing body of literature, only a small proportion of it focuses on what such a shift entails, how it is to be

accomplished and what practices and conditions support it.<sup>9</sup> One work that does focus on practices designed to facilitate the shift is Macy and Brown's book *Coming Back to Life* (1998), though this and other similar works describe processes more applicable to groups and communities. There is very little research in sustainability on personal transformative practice as facilitating the shift in consciousness of the Great Turning. However, the fields of spirituality (eg. Slavin 2003 and Beck, 1989), phenomenology (eg. Chadwick 2004 and Depraz 2002) and transformative education (eg. Mezirow 1990, 1996, 1998 and 2000, and Dirkx 1997) do offer insights into transformation, perspective shift and embodied practice. True to sustainability's transdisciplinary ethos, it is the intention of this research to connect these areas, using the methods and approaches that best illuminate a way forward.

On a different track, reviewing the sustainability literature from a methodological perspective reveals the strong bias towards the objective methods and analytical tools favoured by scientific and social scientific approaches (as exemplified by Rosenzweig 2003, Bergmann 2009 and Gibson 2009). There is no doubt that objective research is necessary and valuable, however it does not present the full picture. First person perspectives (as demonstrated by Telles 2000 and Pickering 2010), phenomenological research (eg. Steinbock 2007 and Tilley 1994), and heuristic investigations (eg. Bloomgarden 1998) offer an understanding of the human being (including the researcher) as an embodied, experiencing, complex subject. An integration of the first and third-person perspectives is needed in the literature, as Varela and Shear point out. (1999, 2).<sup>10</sup>

My research seeks to contribute to the literature in three ways: by addressing the lack of sustainability research on reflective, embodied practice designed to

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<sup>9</sup> A typical example is Hay's paper (2010) on ecocentrism and identity, which cogently argues the need for a shift in identity from egocentric to ecocentric modes, without offering any clear suggestion for how to achieve that other than 'transformational leadership.'

<sup>10</sup> Useful work in this area has also been done by Uhl (2005), incorporating subjective experience into his work on Ecological Consciousness, and Mc Fague (1997) on mixing autobiographical genres with scientific writing.

facilitate a shift of consciousness; by employing a first-person, introspective methodology that responds to the need for subjective and experiential engagement with the Great Turning; and by employing practices and perspectives of transformative education and desert spirituality that enrich and refine the scholarly conversation on transformation.

To fulfill these aims I have designed a research protocol that employs an unambiguously spiritual practice (pilgrimage) as a way of exploring the phenomenon of transformation from a first-person perspective. As I will share in the following section, my passion for pilgrimage began almost ten years ago and this research represents the culmination of a number of research interests that have deep roots in my personal history.

## 2.2 The origins of my project

### 2.2.1 Why Pilgrimage?

*'I am a pilgrim'*

*It is the Spring of 2001 and I am sitting in my room at the University hall of residence in Clermont-Ferrand, France. I'm listening to a radio interview with a man who has just walked the Camino de Santiago across northern Spain. The interviewer refers to him as a pilgrim - a term I have never heard applied to a contemporary person. A thought pops into my mind that is as unexpected as it is exciting: I am a pilgrim! Then a second thought pops in: If I am a pilgrim, I had better walk a pilgrimage.*

*Three months later, I am setting out from Saint Jean Pied-de-Port to walk, like him, to the cathedral city of Santiago de Compostela. I have an old canvas backpack, work boots on my feet, a sleeping*

*bag, bible and journal. I am walking with Shalleen and Claire, two of my traveling buddies. We know next to nothing about the Camino except that we will follow scallop-shell markers and yellow arrows for the next 900-odd kilometres, staying in pilgrim refuges and, well, putting one foot in front of the other.*

'The pilgrim gives thanks'

Walking for forty days on the Camino turned out to be the most intensely joyful, wondrous and fulfilling time of my life up to that point, and at age twenty-two, felt like the first 'real' thing I had done as an adult. I found that I loved walking, and felt whole, healthy and full of vitality. I also discovered dimensions of hospitality, community and solitude that I had read about but never experienced before. In Sahagún, a week into the journey, I came across the saying: "*El turista exige, el peregrino agradece.*" With my rudimentary Spanish I understood it as: "The tourist demands, the pilgrim gives thanks." It struck me as a wonderfully apt description of the attitudes the traveler can exhibit at opposite ends of the spectrum.

For the rest of the Camino and indeed in the years since then, I often thought of that saying: "the tourist demands and the pilgrim gives thanks." Over time it seemed to speak not only of different ways of traveling, but of distinct attitudes towards life itself: entitlement and gratitude. My thinking led me to wonder what it was about being a pilgrim that engendered gratitude as a response to life. On a different track, I also began to wonder whether walking a pilgrimage actually caused the shift from entitlement to gratitude. What I did know, and I knew it with a knowing of my body and my spirit, was that walking the Camino de Santiago changed me, deepened me and broadened me. I made a clear decision that I would continue my life as a pilgrim, off and on the road.



Pilgrimage, therefore, has been a strong presence in my adult life both as a practice and a metaphor. To connect it to this current research I take a short detour via Dr Howard Thurman,<sup>11</sup> whom I quote: "Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."<sup>12</sup> These words have become something of a compass for me. Put simply, the answer to the question: 'Why pilgrimage?' is that walking out of my front door and all the way to Albany makes me come alive. Time alone in the bush makes me come alive. Combining walking with thinking, reading and writing makes me come alive. The challenge of translating this experience into a thesis makes me come alive. It is my firm conviction that participating in the Great Turning includes and is inseparable from 'that which makes us come alive.' So this is where I begin.

### 2.2.2 Why transformation?

Back home after walking the Camino things were different. Having grown up attending church I was familiar with the notion of 'conversion' at the heart of Christian discipleship. I was fascinated and drawn to both the Hebrew (*shuv*) and Greek (*metanoia*) terminology that described this inward movement. I was clear that 'conversion' was not a once-and-for-all matter, nor verbally consenting to something - even with sincerest conviction. It seemed to point to a sacred a deep process, a matter of the 'inner being' that belonged to a different realm from the 'me' that I had any conscious control over. In walking the Camino something shifted in my inner being and it felt shocking and beautiful and expansive and humbling and lovely. In that wake of that shift, I realised that 'conversion' or 'transformation' was not a command but a promise. And a promise of *life* in its fullest glory, mystery and inscrutability -

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<sup>11</sup> Thurman (1899-1989) was an American philosopher, poet, educator and civil rights advocate (Madsen et al. 2002, 153-157)

<sup>12</sup> This quote of Thurman's is widely used but rarely referenced. Loxterkamp (2009) attributes it to Thurman's autobiography (1981) but cites no page reference.

the promise of a life grounded in love and not fear. Without making a conscious choice, transformation of self for the fulfillment of life itself became my orientation and purpose.

In different forms and ways, that has been my context for nearly ten years and forms the backdrop to this research. All the key ideas which structure this project have their roots in personal interests of mine. I will now situate them within their respective contexts.

## 2.3 Definitions and Contexts of Key Ideas

Following the conventions of transdisciplinary and heuristic investigations, this thesis is the product of an open-ended enquiry in which I have not been limited by traditional disciplinary boundaries, but have 'followed my nose' to seek out the richest sources of literature with which to illuminate my enquiry. There are rich and fascinating bodies of literature behind the key ideas explored in this project: pilgrimage, transformation, entitlement and gratitude. It is outside the scope of this research, however, to review the literature in each of these areas. I focus instead only on texts that are directly relevant and used footnotes for additional comments.

### 2.3.1 Pilgrimage

The definition of pilgrimage used for this research is: 'a long journey on foot undertaken with spiritual intent.' I have defined it this way to foreground walking as the mode of travel and to shift the emphasis from their being one holy site which is the destination, to the whole terrain being sacred.

Almost all the definitions of pilgrimage in the literature emphasise the 'holy end point' of the journey (eg. Morinis 1992 and Eade and Sallnow 1991); many

focus on its communal aspect (such as Turner 2002 and Devereux 2006) and some remove the spiritual aspect altogether (eg. Hannaford and Newton 2008). As such, my solitary journey on foot through the Australian bush sits well outside much of that discourse. My definition and practice of pilgrimage is informed by several traditions. They are: Celtic Christianity; desert spirituality; eco-spirituality; and promenadology.<sup>13</sup> I will very briefly explain the contribution of each of these traditions to my understanding of pilgrimage.

The form of pilgrimage practiced by the early Celtic Christians was known as 'Peregrinari *pro Dei Amore*' - or, 'wandering for the Love of God' (Artress, Encounter 2007). It involved a journey into unknown territory as a form of voluntary exile, motivated by the desire for communion with God (Cahill, 1995, 151). Pilgrimage in this tradition exemplified solitude and hardship, radical trust and surrender. The solitary aspect of this form of pilgrimage resonates with my own practice, as well the qualities of trust and surrender at its heart.

Desert spirituality describes the search for unity with God through practices of solitude, asceticism, hospitality, radical simplicity and contemplative prayer (Walters 2001, 1-5). The roots of this tradition go back to the fourth century group of 'Desert Fathers and Mothers' who lived as hermits in the Egyptian desert (Merton 1960, 1-2). The spirituality of those desert hermits was to practice radical simplicity and austerity; aim for mental and emotional clarity through solitude; and challenge populist notions of self and identity - all of which are central to my practice of pilgrimage.<sup>14</sup>

Eco-spirituality is a demonstration of the spiritual connection between human beings and the natural world. It incorporates an "intuitive and embodied awareness of all life and engages a relational view of person to planet, inner to outer landscape, and soul to soil" (Lincoln 2000, 227). What this discourse

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<sup>13</sup> Promenadology is the study of walking (Staff 2007, 1).

<sup>14</sup> My study of desert spirituality has been particularly influenced by the work of Lane 1994 and 1998, Jasper 2004 and 2009, Maitland 2009 and Merton 1956, 1960 and 1974.

contributes to my research is the understanding that the whole cosmos is sacred and that "creation is a place of healing and revelation" (Whyte 1995).<sup>15</sup>

Promenadology is a very new discipline that focuses explicitly on walking. Its roots are deep, however, and there is a long tradition of human fascination with walking that Solnit's 'Wanderlust' explores in detail (2000). People have found this most simple of human activities to yield rich opportunities for reflection, creativity and a deeper understanding of the human condition (Solnit 2000, 14-29). The experience of walking and 'the walking body' as a point of connection to the more abstract notion of 'embodiment,' is central to my understanding of pilgrimage as a transformative practice.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3.2 Entitlement

Drawing on the psychology literature, Rossano (2006, 24-25) denotes 'entitlement' as an attribute of the narcissistic personality, characterised by ingratitude, self-importance and a deluded sense of self-sufficiency. He remarks that from a standpoint of entitlement one engages with the world "from a keen sense of deserving, having a right to something, or expecting that the world owes one." Elsewhere, the attitude of entitlement is linked to an "expectation of special treatment" (Exline et al 2004, 894), and a "relentless demand for immediate gratification" (Deerwester 2009, 8). It is characterised by an "unconscious, ungrateful, and unappreciative response to life" (Rossano 2006, 8). Bruckner attributes entitlement to the culture of hyper-individualism where one "attempts to enjoy the advantages of liberty without suffering any of the disadvantages." Others have expressed this even more strongly: "The most harmful form of pride is our contemporary notion of entitlement. By

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<sup>15</sup> I have been informed by Berry 1988, Snyder 1995, Plotkin 2008 and Seed 2010 in my references to eco-spirituality.

<sup>16</sup> For further reading on the walking body, excellent resources include: Kagan (2010), several programs of the Radio National programme 'Encounter' - including: 'Walking Meditation' (2007) and 'Walking the Faith' (2010) - Kornblatt (2009) and Nicholson (2008).

considering every gift as ours by right, we set no limits to our wants, impoverishing our lives in the midst of abundance” (Steindl-Rast in Emmons and Hill 2001, 9).

I propose that the industrial growth society is grounded in modes of thinking, perceiving and being that arise from a sense of entitlement. It is not within the scope of this research to make a case for this proposition, but I cite what I consider to be compelling evidence of entitlement as an unconscious frame of reference: unquestioned use of natural resources; discharge of industrial waste into the atmosphere, earth and waterways; colonialism; human trafficking; and the free-market economy. I believe that ‘entitlement’ provides a useful prism, therefore, through which to observe the present environmental, social and spiritual crises and to understand how we got to this critical point.

Entitlement is for the most part a latent theme in the sustainability literature, though variously implied. Berry (1988, 203) for instance, writes that from the perspective of the industrial growth society “every earthly being [is] reduced from its status as a sacred reality to that of being a ‘natural resource’ available for human use.” Ecofeminism asserts that a power structure of domination and repression is underpins the exploitation of women and the more-than-human world\* alike (Warren 2000, 92). From this perspective Hallen explores the concept of the “patriarchal ego which sees humans as separate from and superior to nature” (2000, 155). It is only a very small step to connect domination and exploitation to an attitude of entitlement.

### 2.3.3 Gratitude

In recent years gratitude has become a popular theme in the areas of positive psychology and self-help (eg. Emmons 2007) where it is presented as a means to “increase mental and physical health, build emotional resilience and experience greater satisfaction in life” (Fredrickson 2009). The research

presented here approaches gratitude from quite a different standpoint. The literature that I draw on frames gratitude not as a rosy outlook on life or even a practice one adopts to achieve a certain end, but as a context from which to live. Gratitude as a context for living acknowledges the difficult, painful and incomprehensible aspects of life, and still chooses to consider all of life as a 'given' - in the sense of 'gift' (Steindl 1999, 4). Leddy argues that "authentic spirituality, genuine politics and good economics arise from a spirit of radical gratitude (2004, 4)." For Bienkowski, radical gratitude orients one's life towards responsibility and contribution (Bienkowski and Ackers 2008).

Gratitude as understood in this research is considered to be an orientation to life where one chooses to consider oneself as the recipient of goodness, regardless of whether the given circumstances appear favourable or not. Macy proposes that gratitude as the "primary wellspring of all religions, the hallmark of the mystic [and] the source of all true art" (2009c, par.1) is an essential quality for the Great Turning.

#### 2.3.4 Transformation

The literature review reveals that currently available sustainability research does not address several key issues. These include: the need for a more nuanced understanding of terms such as 'shift of consciousness' and 'transformation'; the ways such shifts and changes might be achieved, as well as the conditions necessary for their achievement. For the purposes of this research I propose a working definition of transformation informed by two distinct discourses, those of transformative education and desert spirituality. Two factors inform my rationale: the substantial contribution of both discourses to our understanding of transformation, despite their radical differences; and the need for a more open definition to support the exploratory nature of my research, including an exploration of transformation itself. The following sections discuss both discourses in turn, explaining their different

approaches to transformation, the tools and practices each employs and the 'desired outcomes' of each. Following this discussion I will offer my working definition of transformation.

## Transformative Education

In the discipline of transformative education<sup>17</sup> transformation occurs through the process of enquiring into the frames of reference which underlie our ways of making sense of the world. A 'frame of reference' is a thought structure through which we filter sense impressions and both consciously and unconsciously choose how an experience is to be construed (Mezirow 2000, 16). Behind a frame of reference is a set of assumptions - "broad, generalized, orienting predispositions" through which we interpret experience (Mezirow 2000, 17). When we engage with the world this set of assumptions becomes expressed as a point of view that tacitly guides and informs our interpretations and therefore determines, broadly, how we perceive and understand the world (Mezirow 2000, 18). How this becomes problematic is in the fact that these structures for making meaning generally operate outside of our awareness and are made up of assumptions, expectations and ideals that are not consciously chosen, but rather inherited (Mezirow 2000, 18). They not only give us the world as we perceive and experience it, but also a line of action (or inaction) that we tend to follow automatically unless it is specifically called into question (Mezirow 2000, 18).

Transformative learning refers to the process of becoming aware of the frames of reference that have been heretofore taken for granted, with the view to adopting alternative frames of reference that are "more inclusive, differentiating, permeable and integrative of experience" (Mezirow 1998, 188). 'Critical reflection' is the process by which this occurs. Given that our sense of self is strongly anchored in our frames of reference, although it is essentially

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<sup>17</sup> Specifically, as elaborated by Jack Mezirow (1990, 1996, 1998, 2000) and Mezirow and Dirkx (2006).

emancipatory, the process of critical reflection can be emotionally charged and feel threatening and disorienting (Mezirow 2000, 18). Mezirow makes it clear that there are no 'better' or 'worse' frames of reference, though there are perspectives that produce a more peaceful, poised, joyful and empowered experience of life (Mezirow 1998, 188). He also points out that "life is not [just] *seen* from a new perspective, it is *lived* from that perspective" (Mezirow 2000, 24, italics in original).

## Desert Spirituality

The other tradition of transformation that informs my research is desert spirituality which has been described in brief terms under 'pilgrimage' in this section. Compared to the clear distinctions and theories of transformative education, here, transformation is not so easy to define. Jasper describes it as "achieving an intuitive grasp of one's inner self" (2004, 28) and connects it to *gnosis* - or 'knowledge' - which is above all a knowledge of the self. He also links it to the 'ascetic cleansing' of the body (through radical simplicity, austerity and deprivation) by which the inner self is also cleansed and returned to its natural virtuous condition (Jasper 2004, 27-28). Thomas Merton, author of 'The Wisdom of the Desert,' one of the seminal works on the Desert Fathers (sic), relates that the fruit of the kind of transformation they sought was *quies*, or 'rest' - which is the "sanity and poise of a being that no longer has to look at itself (1960, 8). Proper to this tradition is the understanding that transformation cannot be achieved by the will alone but is always a function of grace. Neither can it be instrumentalist in purpose. Transformation is never 'in order to' bring about something else, but represents the highest good - as perfect trust, perfect love, perfect poise - in its own right. Steindl-Rast summarises the desert spirituality perspective, stating that "One: Transformation is not an achievement, but pure gift. Two: it is not merely an aesthetic experience, but an existential one. Three: we are not being transformed into something else, but into our own true self" (1999, 36).



My intention, in framing my study of transformation within this discourse is on the one hand to balance the implied suggestion of transformative education that “one only has to follow these steps and one will be transformed;” desert spirituality is a tradition that emphasises rather the radical lack of human agency in such matters. On the other hand, it is to focus on the embodied aspect of the human being in a way that transformative education does not. As such it allows for the non-rational aspects of the self to be understood and embraced. The themes of ‘simplicity,’ ‘hardship,’ and ‘divine communion’ all echo aspects of desert spirituality.

The working definition of transformation I propose for this research is informed by these two traditions and also includes the shift from entitlement to gratitude, a central premise of this thesis. It is as follows.

Transformation is a process which results in one of the following:

1. a shift in one’s frames of reference that leads to a more inclusive, differentiating, permeable and integrated perspective.
2. a shift in being towards one’s ‘true self’ characterised by graciousness, poise and inner freedom.
3. an ontological shift from entitlement to gratitude.

### 2.3.5 Alchemy

Alchemy is often thought to have been uniquely concerned with transmutating base metals, especially lead, into gold (Holmyard 1990, 15), and that, historically, was indeed its outward aim. Following Aristotelian logic, the elements of water, fire, air and earth were thought to be different forms of the one original matter and in different combinations, to make up all the substances of the material realm (Roob 2005, 28). It was therefore reasoned that any metal could be ‘coaxed’ into a higher state of being, ie. silver or gold

(Redgrove 1922, 28) by a substance known as the 'philosopher's stone' (Abraham 1998, 145).

Alchemy was also a philosophy as well as an experimental science, however, identified with the mystical pursuit of returning to one's true nature and perfecting the human soul (Redgrove 1922, 2-3). Alchemists of this latter group spoke of their art as a divine gift which could not be learnt from books but was given by grace. Exhibiting the right mental state and inner attitude towards God - namely humility, receptivity and poverty of spirit - was therefore the first step towards successful practice (Redgrove 1922, 4). Alchemical practice, whether observed chiefly on the material or spiritual plane was an "attempt to demonstrate experimentally...the validity of a certain philosophical view of the Cosmos" [and was] concerned with the intersection of the tangible and intangible realms, the material and the spiritual, 'inner' and 'outer' realities" (Redgrove, 10).

In his research on transformative travel, Lean concludes that processes of transformation are related to "complex webs of factors that possibly cannot be fully known" (2009, 25). My interest in using alchemy as a metaphor for transformation began with looking for a symbolic way of representing and describing its complex processes that comprise multiple elements and conditions, and are subject to non-linear chains of reactions. I was also looking for a metaphor that recognised the importance of 'states of being', acknowledged human limits to effecting transformation, and allowed for a element in the system to be a key catalyst, and yet be intangible or only partially known. Alchemy fulfills all of those requirements. Furthermore, in pursuing my research, I found the metaphor not only to be congruent with my understanding and exploration of transformation, but also to offer a range of subtle distinctions that enriched and enhanced the investigation. In addition to the reasons listed above, alchemy as a metaphor for transformation is suitable in the following ways.

- The importance accorded in alchemy to experience as a source of knowledge over and above 'authority' (Roberts 1994, 35), resonates with my emphasis on subjective knowing and being personally implicated in the enquiry.<sup>18</sup>
- Alchemy as a mystical practice was concerned with the purification and perfection of the human soul, that is, the highest order of transformation. My research is likewise concerned with the transformation of the human being.
- Alchemy, being concerned with "improving or making matter more refined or subtle" (Roberts 1994, 59), echoes my research whereby critically reflecting on one's meaning perspectives, for instance, leaves one with more "inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrated" perspectives.
- Alchemical tracts are notorious for communicating in ways that are cryptic, paradoxical and highly symbolic - using language, hieroglyphs and complex pictures (Roberts 1994, 70). While I do not intend to obfuscate my findings in any way, transformation is a matter of deep interiority that is often beyond the reach of conscious thought, and therefore cannot be described literally. For this, alchemy, with its rich visual, symbolic as well as verbal descriptions of processes is very well suited.

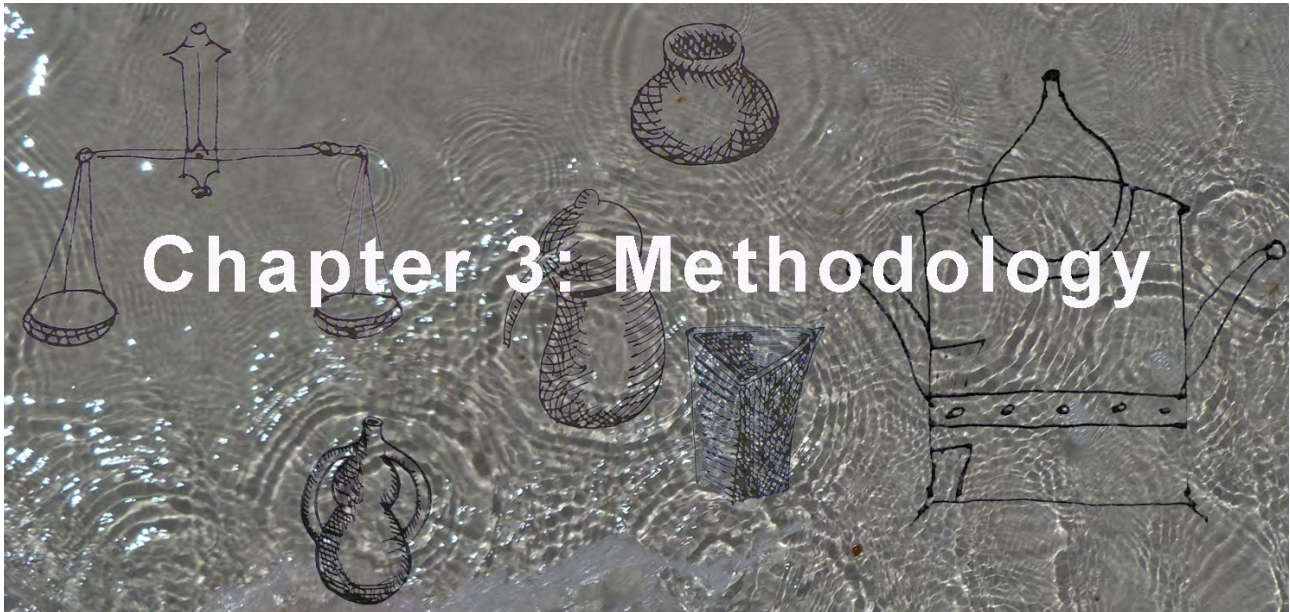
The alchemical metaphor is used in two ways in this research. Firstly and primarily, it is the basis for the creative synthesis of Chapter Five. Figure 5.1 'The Alchemy of Transformation' is a graphic artwork that represents the four themes: simplicity; hardship; divine communion; and connection to country as alchemical processes that contribute to the transformation of the 'raw material' of life. Secondly it is used stylistically, both to provide visual continuity by the inclusion of graphic elements such as alchemical symbols in the title page and

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<sup>18</sup> See Mezirow, 'Learning to Think Like an Adult' (2000, 3-33) on the importance for the maturation process, of knowing through experience rather than deferring to authority.

chapter headings; and to imbue the writing with a hint of alchemical mystery by using language evocative of its processes.

Having discussed the gaps in the sustainability literature and identified the contribution this research seeks to make, traced this project to my personal interests and commitments, and defined and contextualised my key terms, I now move to Chapter Three which will outline and explain my methodology.



The aim of this research is to explore pilgrimage as a transformative practice. Heuristic phenomenology was chosen to frame the enquiry because it has as its goal “exploratory discovery, rather than testing hypotheses” (Sela-Smith 2002, 58). As Moustakas states, heuristic research is itself a journey where “whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator... represents an invitation for further elucidation” (1990, 10). Moving through the six phases of the heuristic process - Initial Engagement, Immersion, Incubation, Illumination, Explication, and Creative Synthesis - involves following one’s “inner awareness... and inspiration” (Moustakas 1990, 11). It is an unfolding and iterative process which the researcher begins without knowing where it will end. Steindl-Rast (1999) writes that while we can approach transformation from a variety of angles, ‘approach’ is literally all we can do. “We need to cultivate openness and practice courage; this is our task. But transformation, when it happens, is pure gift” (36). Designing a research protocol that provides conditions of openness has therefore been of primary importance.

With that in mind, I devised a first-person experiential study using pilgrimage itself as a reflective, embodied practice. Between October and December 2010 I undertook a pilgrimage on foot of approximately 1100km through the south west of Western Australia, employing a *bricolage* of methods from the

disciplines of transformative education and desert spirituality. The specific research protocol will be described in detail later in this chapter, as will the methods and tools I used. A transdisciplinary epistemology informs the investigation, chosen to facilitate an enquiry-driven approach that allows for working (and walking) between and across the disciplines of sustainability, spirituality and educational psychology. A transdisciplinary framing also supports complex and multi-dimensional investigations where both reason and intuition inform the analysis (Max-Neef, 2005, 10). It is therefore well suited to my exploration of transformation.

### 3.1 Reflective, Embodied Practice

The two very different disciplines which inform my understanding and exploration of transformation are transformative education and desert spirituality. They have understandably distinct approaches emphasising, respectively, a reasoned and proactive engagement with one's structures of thinking; and a wholehearted and trusting surrender of one's agency with respect to transformation. Transformative education, as theorised by Mezirow, uses the method of critical reflection whereby the frames of reference which we use to make sense of the world are investigated. The ideal outcome of this reflection is a more "inclusive, differentiating, permeable and integrative" perspective (1990, 5). Desert spirituality, epitomised by the lives of the Desert Mothers and Fathers of the 4th-6th centuries (Jasper 2004, 23), in simplistic terms, involves the ascetic purification of the body as a means of purifying the soul (Merton 1960, 2).

In order to explore both of these approaches to transformation I devised a research protocol in which both reflective and embodied practice are emphasised. For the reflective aspect I focus on Mezirow's 'critical reflection' for which I used the tools of reflective journaling and *The Work* of Byron Katie (both of which will be explained later in this chapter). For the embodied aspect

I refer to the work of Slavin (2003, 5) on the walking body wherein Turner's words (1996, 66) are used to portray the body as "simultaneously an environment (part of nature) and a medium of the self (part of culture)." Walking as an embodied practice, Slavin argues, creates ideal conditions for reinterpretations of the self, as well as of 'space' and 'place' (2003, 1).

Turning now to the research design, I will discuss heuristic phenomenology in greater detail and elaborate upon its six research phases, in particular how they are mapped to my investigation.

### 3.2 What is Heuristic Phenomenology?

Heuristic phenomenology is an organised and systematic method of investigating human experience first elaborated by Clark Moustakas (eg. 1990, 1994). It is an open-ended and iterative process in which the perception, intuition and knowledge of the researcher guides the unfolding process (Moustakas, 1990, 10). An heuristic approach is characterised by four key features: the personal involvement of the researcher in research (Moustakas 1990, 11); the openness of the investigation (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, 18); the emphasis on the tacit, internal or intuitive aspects of the experience (Moustakas 1994, 22); and the presentation of the research as a creative synthesis which can take a variety of forms such as an artwork or poem (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, 18). The rationale for the approach as a whole is that a rigorous and authentic exploration of personal experience can illuminate social and even universal dimensions of human experience (Moustakas, 1990, 90).

The six phases of heuristic research that guide the unfolding investigation are: Initial Engagement, Immersion, Incubation, Illumination, Explication and Creative Synthesis (Moustakas, 1990, 27-32). I will briefly describe each phase and show how each fits with the three stages of my investigation.

### 1: Initial Engagement

The task of this phase is to discover “an intense interest that calls out to the researcher,” that holds personal significance and is connected to his or her whole being, passions and concerns (Moustakas 1990 27). During this time the idea will be clarified and the primary research question formed based on the intuition of the researcher.

### 2. Immersion

This is the active phase of being deeply, intentionally and wholly immersed in the ideas, practices and experiences associated with the research question. Anything connected to the question becomes raw material for immersion in the phenomenon. (Moustakas 1990, 28)

### 3. Incubation

During this phase the researcher actively retreats from intense focus on the question. There is no outward activity, seemingly no progress and apparently nothing happening. This is a crucial part of the heuristic process when unconscious connections are being made, allowing the tacit dimension to come to fruition, “clarifying and extending understandings on levels outside the immediate awareness” (Moustakas 1990, 28).

### 4. Illumination

This is the moment of insight when new dimensions of the phenomenon are suddenly visible, distorted perceptions are corrected, and heretofore hidden meanings disclosed. As Moustakas puts it: “The process of illumination occurs naturally when the researcher is receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition” (1990, 29). In this moment ideas, experiences or intuitions that have been held in tension, move to a higher-order unity: a synthesis that does not smooth out contradictions, but reframes them such that a unity of understanding can be achieved.



## 5. Explication

The purpose of this phase is to fully examine the experience that has arisen during the process thus far in order to understand all its layers of meaning. It is the process of analysing and elucidating the reflection, writing and intuitions and takes a meta-perspective on the primary experience in order to do that.

## 6. Creative synthesis

Heuristic research culminates in a creative synthesis of the experience, which depicts the various dimensions, layers and aspects of that experience - its themes, moods, varieties, inconsistencies, paradoxes and challenges. The creative synthesis "can only be achieved through tacit and intuitive powers" (Moustakas 1990, 31) and can be presented in a number of ways including a narrative piece, poem or piece of artwork (Moustakas 1990 31-32).

My research occurred in three stages: before, during and after the two-month pilgrimage. Figure 3.1 shows how these stages related to the six phases explained above.

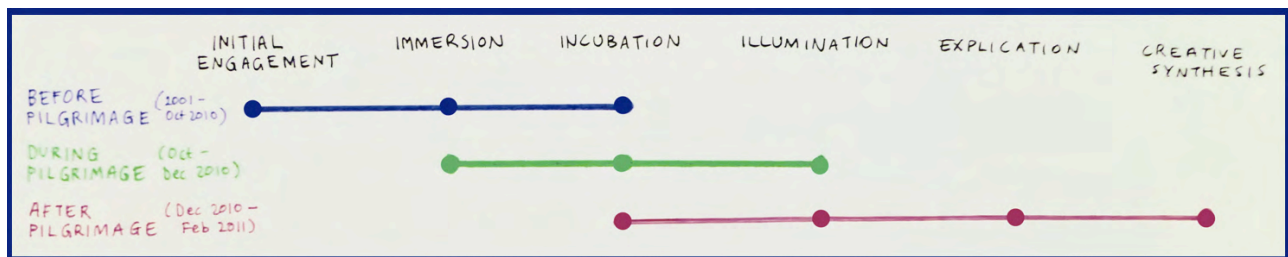


Figure 3.1: Relationship between my pilgrimage and Moustakas' six phases

The significance of the six phases is not only that they emphasise the particular modes of engagement of the heuristic approach, and highlight its unique elements (such as Incubation and Creative Synthesis), but also that they draw attention to the iterative nature of the process. For example, the diagram shows that the phases of Immersion, Incubation and Illumination occurred during at least two of the stages and interestingly, Incubation, which is one of the hallmarks of heuristic research, is common to all three.

### 3.3 first-person perspectives

Before going further I would like to make some comments about first-person experience as a source of knowledge. A first-person methodology is most appropriate for this investigation because transformation is a highly subjective and personal phenomenon. A first-person experiential approach gives access to depth and nuances otherwise not possible. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Two, this perspective is underrepresented in the sustainability literature and I am therefore interested in elaborating a methodology that may be of use to others in this field. While there is ongoing debate regarding the validity of first-person perspectives there is also a growing body of work that argues for and demonstrates their value and validity.<sup>19</sup>

The reason I am so insistent that we incorporate first-person perspectives into sustainability research is that, by definition, they implicate the researcher in the process and outcomes of the investigation. It is my firm belief that unless we display a personal and collective willingness to be wholly implicated in the 'problems' - including the entitlement culture which has engendered unsustainable modes of operation - then all our attempts to create a solution will fail. Objective, scientific research methodologies that remove the 'I' from the equation will always keep the findings 'at arms' length.' Subjective and experiential methodologies require a mindfulness of our own subjectivity and mean that we cannot as easily distance ourselves from any critique we wish to make of the world 'out there.'

Another point I would like to make about first-person perspectives relates to the subject matter of this research, namely transformation as a lived experience. I have two concerns in conducting the investigation: firstly, that it runs the risk of being solipsistic; and secondly, that it becomes an exercise in trying to demonstrate or prove that the pilgrimage transformed me. On the

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<sup>19</sup> Eg. Petitmengin and Bitbol (2009), Telles (2000) and Varela and Shear, eds., (2000).

first point, I can only say that I am aware of this potential and seek to remain permeable to views outside of my own. On the second point, I hold to the exploratory nature of the enquiry; I am seeking to investigate the questions, rather than pin down any answers. Moreover, matters that pertain to the depths of human interiority - such as transformation - reveal themselves more fully when not spoken of in direct and literal terms. That is why I express myself in both visual and verbal ways, using the metaphor of alchemy to depict the process of transformation.

### 3.4 Research protocol

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to the actual protocol for my pilgrimage and will describe the tools I used to explore and depict my experience. The walk was broken up into four sections of roughly two weeks each, corresponding to the four themes: simplicity, hardship, divine communion and connection to country. The choice and ordering of themes was grounded in my previous experience of pilgrimage which moved through different stages of reflection and deepened over time. Conventional meanings of 'simplicity' and 'hardship' are used. 'Divine communion' and 'connection to country' do require some explanation, however, though before offering any definitions I will first discuss my intention in using these terms.

'Divine communion' and 'connection to country' refer to the spiritual paths of *apophasis*\* and *kataphasis*.\* As Lane writes, they are "two ways of describing the mystery of God - the way of darkness and the way of the light" (Lane 1998, 137). For the purposes of this research, divine communion relates to the *apophatic* way in which the self experiences a stripping back, a questioning or undoing of certainties and is called to trust and surrender. Connection to country relates to the *kataphatic* way of joyful interconnection with the natural world, of experiencing one's self as belonging and affirmed as an integral part of those living systems.

As I explained in Chapter One, I use the term 'country' as a proper noun in the Aboriginal English sense of the word. According to Bird-Rose<sup>20</sup>, country is "nourishing terrain." (1996, 7). It is not a "generalised or undifferentiated type of place...but a living entity with a consciousness and a will toward life...Country is home and peace; nourishment for body, mind and spirit; heart's ease" (Bird-Rose 1996, 7). Bob Morgan explains that for him "country is fundamentally about community, culture and identity...It is about knowing who and what we're connected to...It helps us understand how all living things are connected" (Morgan 2008, 202). I use this term because of the perspective it offers of human beings deeply embedded in the life of land where they live, engaged with it in a reciprocal and caring relationship. Aboriginal people have and continue to experience their identity as grounded in country (Mia 2008). It is my belief that while non-Aboriginal Australians can connect to country, it is dependent on a particular way of relating to the natural world which may entail a shift of consciousness such the shift from entitlement to gratitude.

I have placed the final two themes in this order to counteract the (specifically Western) tendency to privilege transcendent, 'spiritual' experience as the ideal end point (Berry 1988, 210). Thematically, therefore, the pilgrimage culminates in, and points towards a body-centred, localised and immanent experience of the sacred.

### 3.5 Tools and Methods

As explained previously in this chapter my research employed a *bricolage* of tools and methods from a range of disciplines. I have divided them into functional categories: tools for engaging critical reflection; tools for exploring the four themes; and methods for depicting my experience.

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<sup>20</sup> While not an Aboriginal woman, Deborah Bird-Rose is a respected scholar in the field who has lived extensively with Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley, The Northern Territory and New South Wales (Bird-Rose 1996, 1).

### 3.5.1 For critical reflection:

- *The Work* of Byron Katie

*The Work* is a method of enquiry into one's thinking that involves looking at one thought at a time, asking four questions and applying a 'turnaround.' The questions are: 'Is it true?,' 'Can I absolutely know that it's true?,' 'How do I react when I think that thought?,' and 'Who would I be without that thought?' The 'turnaround' is applied by stating the thought as its opposite, of which there can be several variants - for example 'he should listen to me' could become 'I should listen to him;' or 'he shouldn't listen to me;' or even 'I should listen to myself'. These turnarounds are considered one by one as possibly being truer or just as true ([www.thework.org](http://www.thework.org)). The purpose of *The Work* is not to change one's interpretation of an event, one's 'story' about it, but simply to enquire into that interpretation. What often results from that process, however, is the realisation that the thought is not as true as was initially believed and maybe not even true at all. I have used *The Work* for some years now, and find it to be an excellent method of critical reflection that regularly brings clarity to my thinking and a feeling of expansiveness, peace and freedom.

### 3.5.2 For exploring the themes:

- Reflective journaling

Bolton states that "writing for reflective practice is a first-order activity" that does not record what has been thought but rather "is the reflective mode" (2005, 46, italics in original). It allows the writer to "focus clearly and minutely" (2005, 46), drawing on not only the thoughts and emotions of the moment but also deeper experience and knowledge (2005, 48). Journal writing

is “an organic exploration to support reflection” and is not oriented towards a finished product (2005, 163). As Bolton suggests, reflective journaling represents the activity of exploring and articulating one’s experience and in doing so, creating possible interpretations of it. For this research it was used it as a tool for engaging the themes of simplicity, hardship, divine communion and connection to country - a way of synthesising experience with thoughts, ideas and intuitions, in order to uncover deeper layers of meaning.

### 3.5.2 For depicting the experience:

- Embodied writing
- Photography
- Haiku

As Steinbock explains, the task of the phenomenologist is to present not a “conceptual explanation” but “evocative descriptions” where “the matters can flash forth of themselves, stirring in [the reader] the lived experience he or she is trying to awaken” (2007, 27). It was with this in mind that I practiced embodied writing, photography and writing haiku as methods for depicting my experience, allowing the phenomena to ‘flash forth’ as much as possible.

Anderson proposes that embodied writing “seeks to reveal the lived experience of the body by portraying in words the finely textured experience of the body,” and is concerned with “relaying human experience from the inside out” (2001, 83). It “affirms human life as embedded in the sensual world...and is in itself an act of embodiment” (2001, 83). This mode of expression was well-suited to my aims, because of its emphasis on embodied experience and its capacity to “evoke sympathetic resonance in others” (2001, 86) - in other words to communicate the essence of phenomena rather than merely descriptions thereof. In a similar way photography was used also to communicate the visual dimension to the walking practice and to give the audience a glimpse of the

beauty, majesty and intricacy of the landscapes and creatures encountered on the Track. Others have written haiku as part of phenomenological studies; the form is useful for pithy, concise and evocative expression (eg. Chadwick 2004, 24). Writing haiku was a method I used as another way of inviting the reader into a deeper and more intimate view of the phenomenon of walking through the landscape of the Australian south-west.

The description and explanation of my methodology offered in this chapter brings Part 1 to a close. The following two chapters comprise Part 2, entitled 'The Wild, I tell you, Was Beautiful.' It illustrates my experience of the walking pilgrimage on the Bibbulmun Track (Chapter Four) and the creative synthesis of my findings on pilgrimage as a transformative practice (Chapter Five).

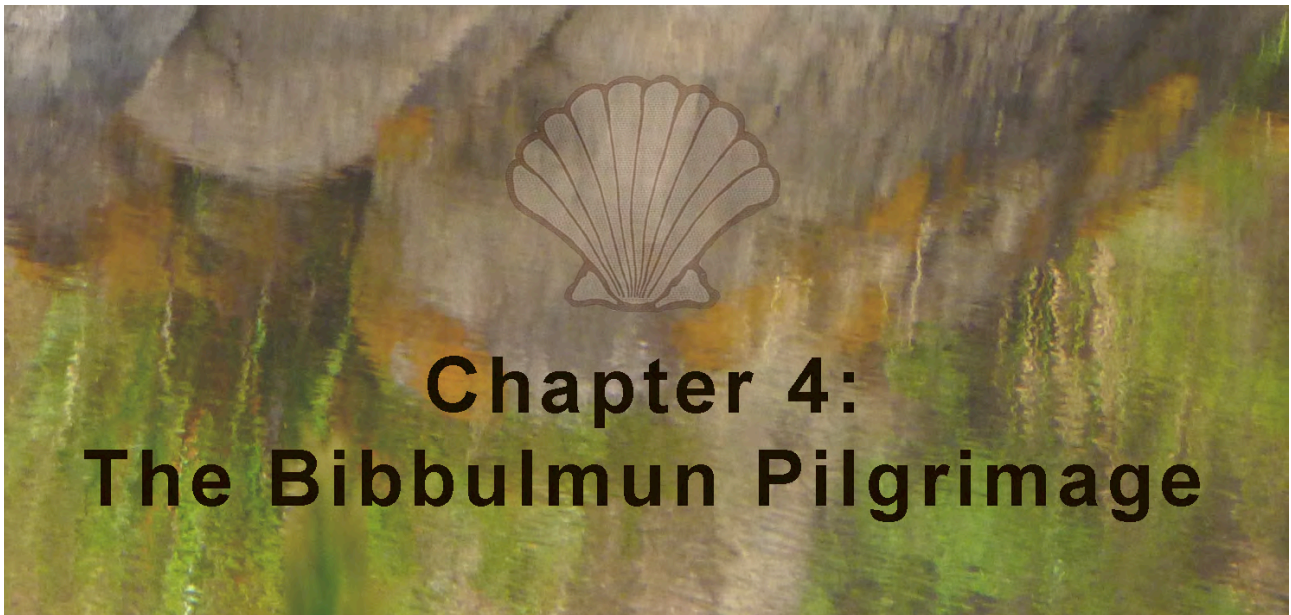


# Part 2

the wild  
I tell you  
was beautiful







## 4.1 The Bibbulmun Track

The Bibbulmun Track is a walking trail of 963 kilometres that runs between Kalamunda in the Perth Hills and Albany on the south coast of Western Australia (Baker 2010, 21). The current alignment of the Track passes through the towns of Dwellingup, Collie, Balingup, Pemberton, Northcliffe, Walpole and Denmark (see Figure 4.1). It is named after the Bibbulmun tribe, one of fourteen clans of the Nyungar people (Nannup 2008, 106) who are the original inhabitants of the south-west corner of Western Australia, and who have lived and walked in this country for at least 50,000 years (Host and Owen 2009, 38). The Bibbulmun Track passes through the traditional lands of the Whadjuk, Pindarup, Kaneang and Minang peoples as well as those of the Pibelman (Bibbulmun) (Tindale, in van Den Burg et al 2005). While the Track does not follow a particular Nyungar trail, the whole region is criss-crossed by tracks that were used by different groups for their seasonal migrations following water and food sources (Schnaars 2011).

The northern section of the Track passes primarily through jarrah forest (as in Plate 4.1) which contains a rich diversity of other vegetation such as: marri

and blackbutt trees, various banksia species, zamia palms, hakea, clematis and the ubiquitous balga, or grass tree.



Plate 4.1: Mixed jarrah forest overlooking the Helena valley in the Perth Hills

As the track moves south towards areas of higher rainfall, swamps and wetlands become more frequent. These areas are dominated by paper barks and tea tree with various species of grasses and sedges growing at the margins, as Plate 4.2 shows.



Plate 4.2: Tea tree scrub and sedges around Lake Maringup



At around the half-way point and for the next 250km, the Track passes through magnificent karri forests shown in Plate 4.3, that grow up to eighty metres tall. Tree hovea and karri hazel form a tight understory (Keating, BTF website).

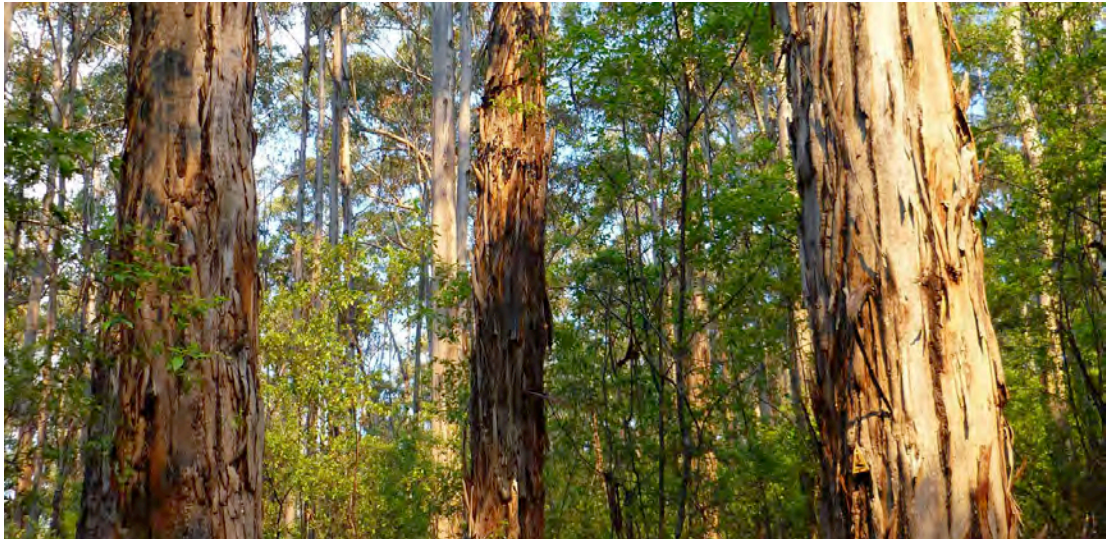


Plate 4.3: Karri forest near Pemberton

The Track reaches the Southern Ocean at Mandalay Beach west of Walpole and turns eastwards along the coast for the remaining 250 kilometres. This is a spectacular section, shown in Plates 4.4 to 4.6, that passes through a rich variety of dune landscapes, including peppermint and mallee thickets and the only extant tingle forest in the world (Keating BTF website).



Plate 4.4: The rich tapestry of dune vegetation in the Nuyts Wilderness





Plate 4.5: Coastal section between Walpole and Denmark (Conspicuous Cliff)



Plate 4.6: Canopy of karri and tingle trees, west of Walpole

In addition to these spectacular landscapes there are significant parcels of land (illustrated in Plates 4,8 and 4.9) that have been cleared for agriculture and live-stock grazing. It has been estimated that only 10% of Western Australia's old growth forests remain intact, with 50% having been cleared completely and other 40% having been logged (Margetts 1998). These figures hold true for the state's south west corner through which the Bibbulmun Track extends.





**jarrah forest noon  
volatile oils, fragrant gusts  
rise through the hot bush**





Plate 4.8: Cleared land north of Dwellingup

The Track keeps to wooded areas as much as possible which can give the walker a mistaken sense that this is untouched wilderness. The photograph in Plate 4.9 was taken on a diversion just a kilometre from the Track and shows that clear-felling still occurs.



Plate 4.9: A recently logged patch of land seen on a track diversion

This land is not a wilderness. It is land that is peopled, contested and compromised - a place where the effects of entitlement as an unquestioned frame of reference have been played out and continue to be played out. The colonial history of Western Australia began in 1829 and since that time much has occurred to exemplify this attitude of entitlement. There have been mass species extinctions, dispossession of Nyungar people from their country

(McDonald and Coldrick 2005, 34), waterways poisoned by salt and chemical runoff, damage done by feral cats, pigs and foxes, and the introduction of *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, 'dieback', which threatens some 40% of plant species in the region (Shearer et al 2007). It could be argued that in part the changes to climate and rainfall patterns (Pitman and Narisma 2004) are also related to a sense of entitlement far beyond that of Western Australians.

The south-west of Western Australia is one of twenty-five global biodiversity hotspots; nearly 80% of its 3000 plant species are found nowhere else in the world (Conservation International 2007, par 1). A paradox of Track life is to be in the presence of so much beauty and diversity, and at the same time both to witness, and to know intellectually that this life is threatened by human actions and has already been irrevocably damaged.

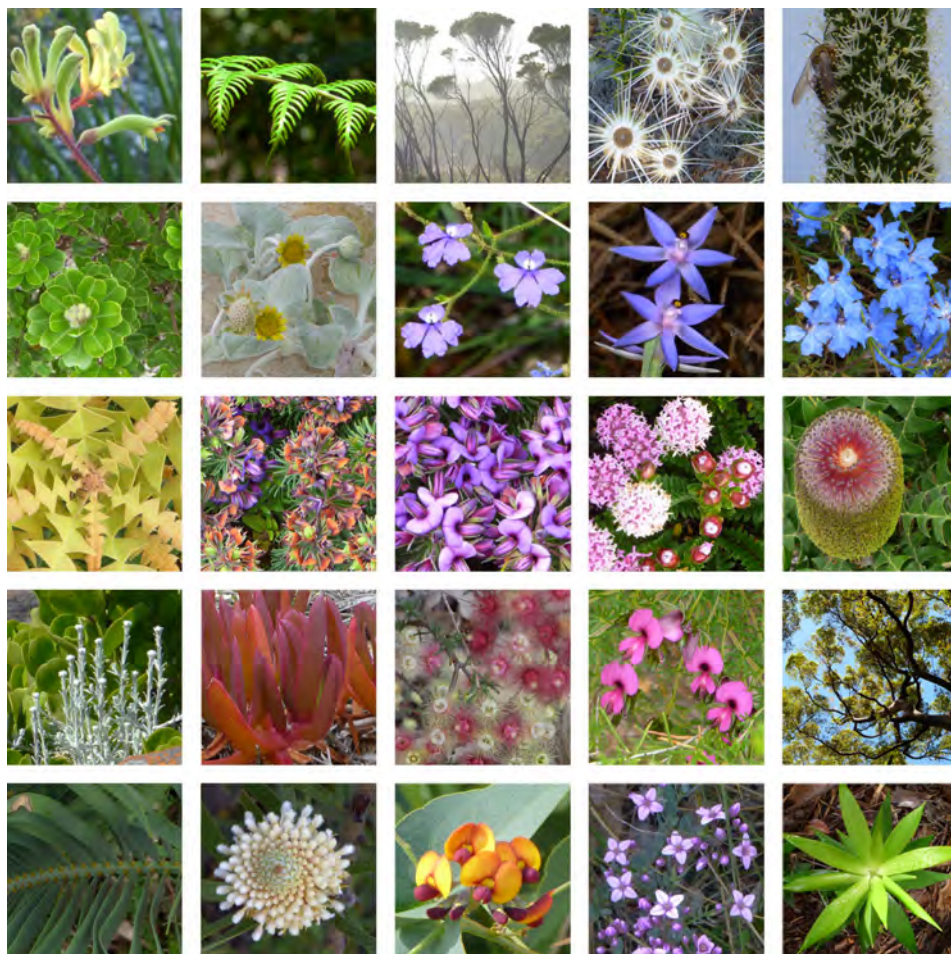


Plate 4.10: Some of the plant species found along the Bibbulmun Track



#### 4.1.1 A few statistics...

- There are forty-eight campsites positioned a comfortable day's walk apart on the Bibbulmun Track (Baker 2010, 105). They each have a three-sided shelter as shown in Plate 4.11, tent sites, a rainwater tank, drop toilet and in the northern section, a fire pit (Bibbulmun Track Foundation website - (ref)). I stayed in thirty of them, and for eighteen of those thirty nights was alone in the shelter.



Plate 4.11: Beraking shelter on the Darling Scarp

- I took fifty-three days to complete my pilgrimage and had eight rest days which means I averaged between 24.4 km/day. My shortest walking day was 13km and longest was 44km.
- I had one official food drop and had sent food parcels ahead to the seven towns on the Track; these I supplemented with local purchases. My blog post "Of snap-lock bags, nuts and noodles, pepitas and porridge" gives a full account of my Track food.
- The Track itself varies from a narrow forest trail to a wide vehicle track and passes through forests and farm lands, over granite outcrops, through gullies





- I wrote over 50,000 words of notes and sixteen blog posts, took 1100 photos, met thirty-two other walkers and 'overnighted' with eighteen of them. I sustained many blisters but no severe injuries, suffered heat stroke once, saw thirty snakes, stepped on none of them, and wore out one pair of boots.
- Animals I saw, some of which can be seen in Plate 4.13, included kangaroos, wallabies, lizards, goannas, tiger snakes, emus, quendas, native mice and feral cats. The birds I saw included black cockatoos, red-capped parrots, twenty-eights, splendid blue wrens, kookaburras and dozens I don't know the names of.

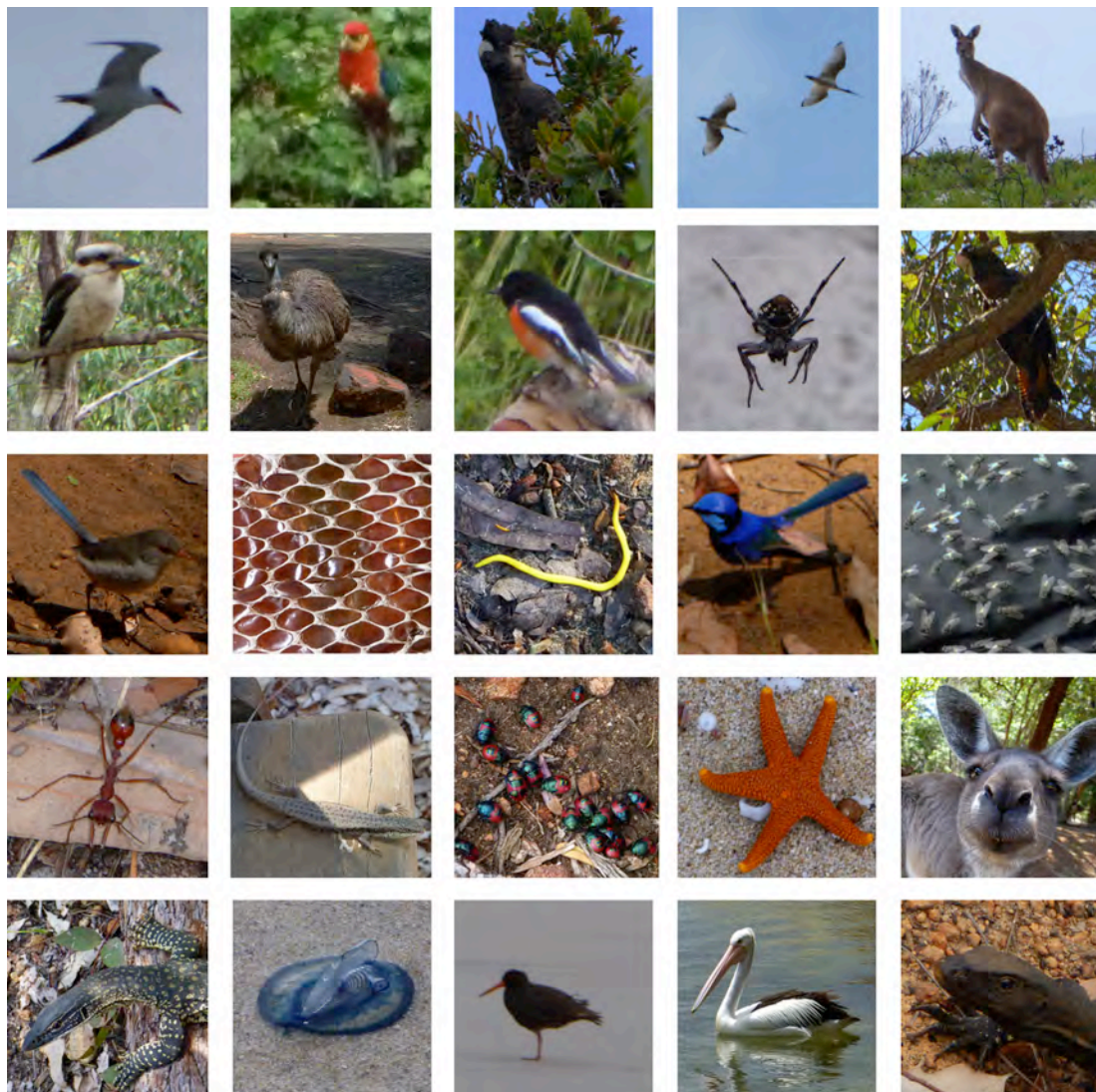



Plate 4.13: A few of the animals I encountered along the way



A vertical photograph of a dense forest. The scene is misty, with soft sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a hazy, ethereal atmosphere. The trees are tall and slender, with their branches and leaves silhouetted against the bright light. The overall color palette is dominated by greens and greys, with a warm glow from the sun.

**morning Karri prayer:  
walking through cool, green tunnels  
beneath soaring trees**



#### 4.1.2 A typical day...



Plate 4.15: Walking in the morning



Plate 4.16 Reading and writing in the afternoon

On a typical day I would wake up naturally at about 5:00am, dress, pack up, drink my horrible protein breakfast and be on the road by 6:00am. On hot days I would also drink at least a litre of water to stay well hydrated. The first couple of hours of walking were magical - a stunning time of day and also when my thinking was clearest and my mood most joyful. Once I was 'Track fit' my average walking speed was about 5km/hour and I tended not to have long breaks in the middle of a section, which meant that a 20km section would take me about four-and-a-half hours. I would often, therefore, arrive in the next hut by 10:30am or so and have the whole of the rest of the day free.

Sometime in the afternoon I would look through the 'red book' which is where walkers wax lyrical about their day's adventure, share their epiphanies or traumas, or list the rare wildflowers they'd spotted. I always read, and nearly always contributed to the 'red book', which is the main opportunity for walkers to connect with the community before and behind them. Besides the 'red book'

there is also the (arguably more important) 'green book' where all walkers must register the date and details of their walk.

During the afternoon I would write in my journal about the morning's walk, often in quite a prosaic way - the length of the section and characteristics of the terrain, people and animals I had seen, etc. - but usually this would lead to more inward and personal reflections. These were times of rich reflection and illumination.

Dinner time would usually be at about 5:30 or 6:00. I ate well, and a variety of different meals. Before I left, I had prepared lots of food in a dehydrator, both whole meals, such as dahl and rice, and also lots of plain vegetables - kale, carrots, beetroot, sweet potato, leek, tomato, zucchini - that I could add to a packet pasta or couscous.



Plate 4.17: A selection of meals prepared on the Track

Bed time would be as soon as it got dark. There was no joy staying up alone with a head torch past nightfall only to be constantly buffeted by moths and other flying insects. Being bedded down before the final glimmer of day disappeared also helped combat my fear of the dark.

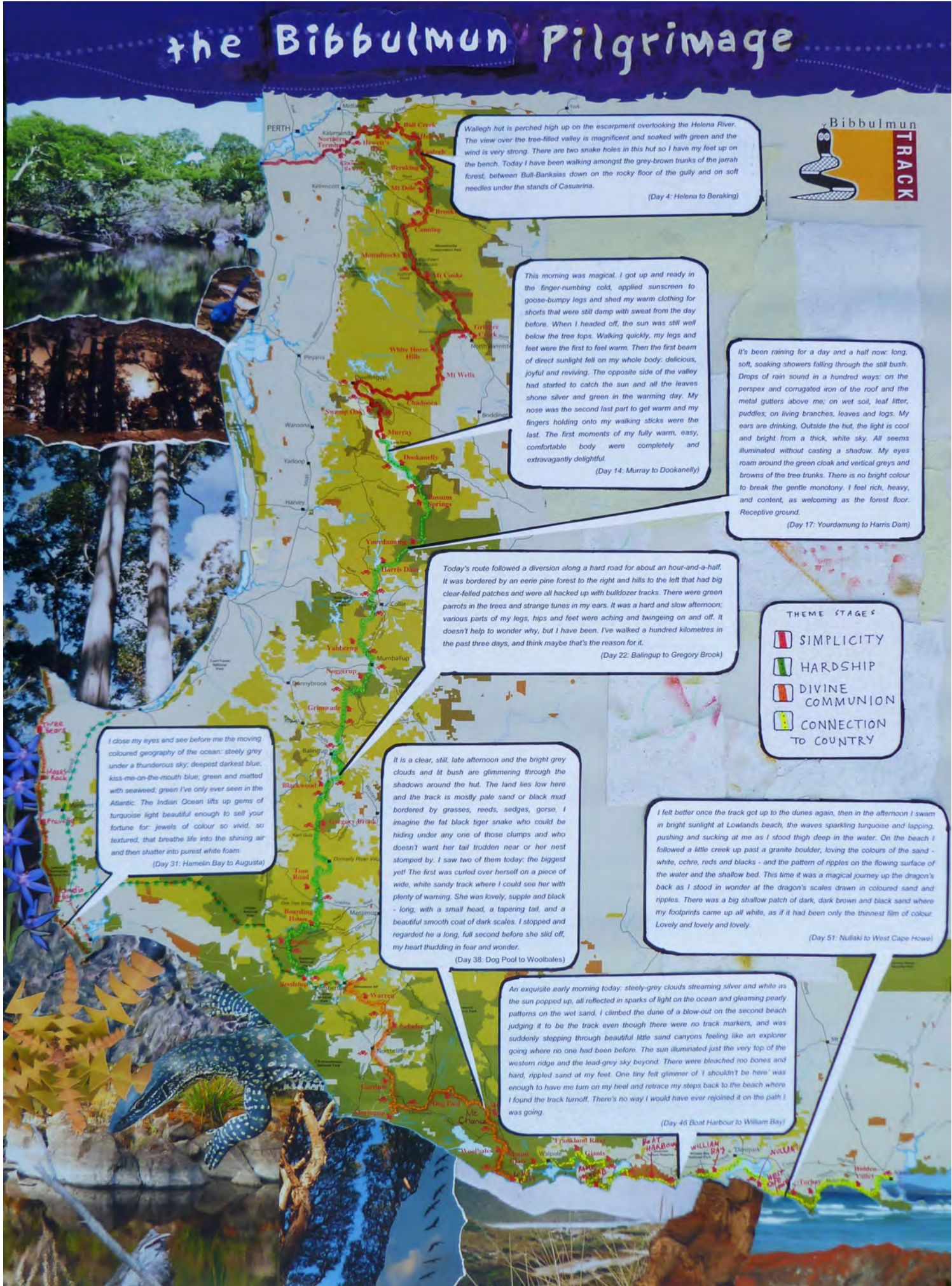
The annotated map in Figure 4.1 is an important depiction of my journey

## 4.2 Annotated Map (Figure 4.1)

This image was created to illustrate several aspects of my pilgrimage and to invite the reader a little deeper into my experience. It comprises a map of the route over a background collage of photographs, and excerpts of embodied writing (as discussed in section 3.5.3) from my journal. The route I walked is marked in colour on the map, indicating the stages at which I was engaging the four themes, and also shows the section from my front door to the northern terminus of the Bibbulmun Track and the Cape-to-Cape trail.



# the Bibbulmun Pilgrimage



Wallegg hut is perched high up on the escarpment overlooking the Helena River. The view over the tree-filled valley is magnificent and soaked with green and the wind is very strong. There are two snake holes in this hut so I have my feet up on the bench. Today I have been walking amongst the grey-brown trunks of the jarrah forest, between Bull-Banksias down on the rocky floor of the gully and on soft needles under the stands of Casuarinas.

(Day 4: Helena to Beraking)

This morning was magical. I got up and ready in the finger-numbing cold, applied sunscreen to goose-bumpy legs and shed my warm clothing for shorts that were still damp with sweat from the day before. When I headed off, the sun was still well below the tree tops. Walking quickly, my legs and feet were the first to feel warm. Then the first beam of direct sunlight fell on my whole body: delicious, joyful and reviving. The opposite side of the valley had started to catch the sun and all the leaves shone silver and green in the warming day. My nose was the second last part to get warm and my fingers holding onto my walking sticks were the last. The first moments of my fully warm, easy, comfortable body were completely and extravagantly delightful.

(Day 14: Murray to Dookanelly)

It's been raining for a day and a half now: long, soft, soaking showers falling through the still bush. Drops of rain sound in a hundred ways: on the perspex and corrugated iron of the roof and the metal gutters above me; on wet soil, leaf litter, puddles; on living branches, leaves and logs. My ears are drinking. Outside the hut, the light is cool and bright from a thick, white sky. All seems illuminated without casting a shadow. My eyes roam around the green cloak and vertical greys and browns of the tree trunks. There is no bright colour to break the gentle monotony. I feel rich, heavy, and content, as welcoming as the forest floor. Receptive ground.

(Day 17: Yourdamung to Harris Dam)

Today's route followed a diversion along a hard road for about an hour-and-a-half. It was bordered by an eerie pine forest to the right and hills to the left that had big clear-felled patches and were all hacked up with bulldozer tracks. There were green parrots in the trees and strange tunes in my ears. It was a hard and slow afternoon; various parts of my legs, hips and feet were aching and tingeing on and off. It doesn't help to wonder why, but I have been. I've walked a hundred kilometres in the past three days, and think maybe that's the reason for it.

(Day 22: Balingup to Gregory Brook)

## THEME STAGES

-  SIMPLICITY
-  HARDSHIP
-  DIVINE COMMUNION
-  CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

I close my eyes and see before me the moving coloured geography of the ocean: steely grey under a thunderous sky; deepest darkest blue; kiss-me-on-the-mouth blue; green and matted with seaweed; green I've only ever seen in the Atlantic. The Indian Ocean lifts up gems of turquoise light beautiful enough to sell your fortune for: jewels of colour so vivid, so textured, that breathe life into the shining air and then shatter into purest white foam.

(Day 31: Hamelin Bay to Augusta)

It is a clear, still, late afternoon and the bright grey clouds and lit bush are glimmering through the shadows around the hut. The land lies low here and the track is mostly pale sand or black mud bordered by grasses, reeds, sedges, gorse. I imagine the fat black tiger snake who could be hiding under any one of those clumps and who doesn't want her tail trodden near or her nest stomped by. I saw two of them today: the biggest yet! The first was curled over herself on a piece of wide, white sandy track where I could see her with plenty of warning. She was lovely, supple and black - long, with a small head, a tapering tail, and a beautiful smooth coat of dark scales. I stopped and regarded her a long, full second before she slid off, my heart thudding in fear and wonder.

(Day 38: Dog Pool to Woolbales)

An exquisite early morning today: steely-grey clouds streaming silver and white as the sun popped up, all reflected in sparks of light on the ocean and gleaming pearly patterns on the wet sand. I climbed the dune of a blow-out on the second beach judging it to be the track even though there were no track markers, and was suddenly stepping through beautiful little sand canyons feeling like an explorer going where no one had been before. The sun illuminated just the very top of the western ridge and the lead-grey sky beyond. There were bleached roe bones and hard, rippled sand at my feet. One tiny felt glimmer of 'I shouldn't be here' was enough to have me turn on my heel and retrace my steps back to the beach where I found the track turnoff. There's no way I would have ever rejoined it on the path I was going.

(Day 46: Boat Harbour to William Bay)

I felt better once the track got up to the dunes again, then in the afternoon I swam in bright sunlight at Lowlands beach, the waves sparkling turquoise and lapping, pushing and sucking at me as I stood thigh deep in the water. On the beach I followed a little creek up past a granite boulder, loving the colours of the sand - white, ochre, reds and blacks - and the pattern of ripples on the flowing surface of the water and the shallow bed. This time it was a magical journey up the dragon's back as I stood in wonder at the dragon's scales drawn in coloured sand and ripples. There was a big shallow patch of dark, dark brown and black sand where my footprints came up all white, as if it had been only the thinnest film of colour. Lovely and lovely and lovely.

(Day 51: Nullaki to West Cape Howe)



## 4.3 The practice of pilgrimage

Having shown something of what it was like to be immersed in the natural world and life on the Track, this section shows what it was like to be immersed in the practice of pilgrimage for almost eight weeks. It presents my experience and reflections on the embodied and reflective dimensions of the walk.

### 4.3.1 Embodied practice

Since my first pilgrimage on foot nearly ten years ago I have been passionately curious about 'the walking body' as an access to transformation. What I present here are a few short vignettes that illustrate walking as a transformative practice in its own right, titled: 'walking as the human speed'; 'walking and endurance'; 'walking and the freedom of monotony'; and 'walking as a path to clear thinking.'



Plate 4.18: The walking body

#### Walking as the Human Speed

Walking is the natural speed of a human being. Without wanting to enter into debate on what is 'natural,' I nevertheless assert that the human body evolved to move on its two legs through the landscape and that put simply, to spend time 'just walking' is a powerful way to reconnect to one's humanity - human speed, human rhythm, human body, human limitations, human condition. In



relation to the overall purpose of this research it would almost not be too strong to say that the entire project is about becoming more human. I believe that gratitude is deeply and intrinsically human and that the transition from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilisation is about becoming in all ways more human.

### Walking and endurance

I found that walking a long way increased my strength, stamina, leanness, lightness, muscle tone, aerobic fitness and endurance.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, as my body became more lean, fit and strong so did my thinking. As I grew in my capacity to cope with difficult terrain, hot weather, steep ascents and descents, so I found an increased mental endurance and capacity to be with difficult or uncomfortable mental and emotional territory. This is no small thing. The reflective dimension of my practice included challenging the frames of reference that underpin my sense of entitlement and as Mezirow states, “challenges and negations of our conventional criteria are...fraught with threat and strong emotion” (1990, 4). Having a greater capacity to be with something that occurs as a threat results in an increased capacity to engage in critical reflection, as the section on reflective practice later in this chapter demonstrates.

### Walking and the freedom of monotony

There was a certain monotony to walking for many, many hours, day after day after day. Indeed I have even heard the slight criticism of the Bibbulmun Track that the scenery is not varied enough. It is true enough that the landscape does not change much for several weeks’ worth of walking. My experience of

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<sup>21</sup> I am aware that this is not everyone’s experience of long-distance walking; many people end up with injuries of one sort or another. My walk, however, was thankfully free of physical ailments of this kind.



night under the stars,  
soft wind, moon, peppermint tree.  
gentle, warm embrace

this 'monotony,' however, was firstly that it was profoundly and delightfully restful, and secondly, that it left my mind free to roam inwardly, vertically and horizontally. In fact, the physicality of walking seems to occupy the body and the mind just enough to form a spacious 'container' that allows other dimensions of the self - that might be called the imaginative, reflective, creative dimensions - to become active and engaged. Urban environments can be intensely visually stimulating, and exhausting in this respect. Brother David Steindl-Rast puts it quite beautifully when he says that unless we leave the city we often have no opportunity to "reap the harvest of a quiet eye" (1999, 60).

### Walking as a path to clear thinking

My experience was that walking clarified, strengthened and enlivened my thinking. It produced a kind of grounded, almost *bodily* thinking. For someone who often thinks abstractly and in pictures, walking also provided an embodied experience of 'linearity' which assisted the process of expressing thoughts in words that, like my steps, follow one after the other. The discipline of journaling and writing about my reflections also assisted that process of translation from the non-verbal, or semi-verbal to the verbal.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Reflective practice

Moving now to the reflective dimension of the journey, to practise Mezirow's 'critical reflection' - the process of "rationally examining the assumptions by which we have been justifying our convictions" (1990, 2) - I used *The Work* of Byron Katie which is a simple method of enquiring into one's thoughts (for example: 'he shouldn't have left his rubbish here' or 'that hill's going to be a

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<sup>22</sup> There is a wealth of material on the positive impact of walking on thinking. My reflections on this topic have been informed by McNaughton (2008), Berman (2000), Koyama (1979), Slavin (2003), Plotkin (2008), Solnit (2000) and Thoreau (1862).

killer'). As explained in Chapter Three, the purpose of *The Work* is not to change one's thinking or to give up a particular interpretation of reality, but simply to bring an enquiring mind to those interpretations. What often results from that enquiry, however, is the realisation that the thought is not as true as was initially believed and maybe not even true at all. Out of that realisation can flow peace, spaciousness and joy.

My experience of using The Work during this pilgrimage was that it facilitated some significant shifts in my thinking that in turn shifted my perception - opening up a perspective that was, to use Mezirow's phrase, "more inclusive, differentiating, permeable and integrated." I share an example of this below. I have written it up as a sequence of steps that might give the impression that the process was simple, clear and orderly, but actually there were strong emotions and layers of resistance to doing The Work. As Mezirow points out, 'threats' to the way we think tend to be blocked using psychological defense mechanisms (1990, 2). It took a strong commitment on my part in order to overcome the resistance.

The incident involved me encountering a group of people riding dirt bikes on the Track leading to Balingup. There were about seven of them from a mixture of ages. I think they were fathers and sons. It is not permitted to use any kind of vehicle on the Bibbulmun Track: wheels can dig into the soil and contribute to erosion; soil traveling on vehicles can easily spread the 'dieback' pathogen; and simply, the Track was designed for walking. I spoke briefly to some of them and then went on to walk for about twenty kilometres on track that they had ridden on. Immediately after meeting and speaking to them I felt upset, angry and disempowered, and my thinking was self-righteous, accusatory and supercilious. My inner dialogue ran something like: *'How dare they be on the Track. Look! They're chewing up the soil with their tyres. I bet they know they shouldn't be here and they don't care about the damage they're doing. I wish I'd had the guts to give them a piece of my mind!'* With a bit of distance from the event I looked for the specific thoughts that were still going through my





A shallow beach creek -  
rippling, coloured sands like scales  
up the dragon's back



head, a couple of which were: 'they shouldn't be on the Track' and 'they're wrecking it.' In applying Katie's four questions and the 'turnaround'<sup>23</sup> to those thoughts I made the following discoveries.

1. I was more angry that they had disturbed my serenity than about any damage they had done to the track. Furthermore it actually wasn't the noise or fumes from the bikes that disturbed my serenity, but my own reaction to their presence. I could tell this because my serenity was disturbed for a long time after the bikes had gone. In realising this, I suddenly saw that they actually hadn't 'wrecked' the Track, and indeed the bikes only affected some parts of it; where the soil was compacted, they passed without a trace. It surprised me to what extent the thought that they had wrecked it impacted my perception. It was literally 'blinding me' to the instances where it was not true.
2. There are countless examples of me doing what I feel like without considering the impact of my actions, and also breaking rules at times. Realising that, while being slightly humiliating, was also freeing. I could feel tension loosening in my body as if I was no longer trying to justify or defend a position of moral superiority.
3. Being blameful, self-righteous and sanctimonious looks and feels ugly. It is unhelpful. My sense is that talking to them while being this way would have had a negative impact on the situation. After doing *The Work*, although they were no longer in sight, actual communication with them seemed possible.
4. It is probably exhilarating to hoon around on the Track and a really great adventure for these men and their sons. I 'entertained' the thought that maybe there wasn't actually anything wrong with them riding their dirt bikes on the Track. It felt shocking, naughty, liberating and joyful to consider that.

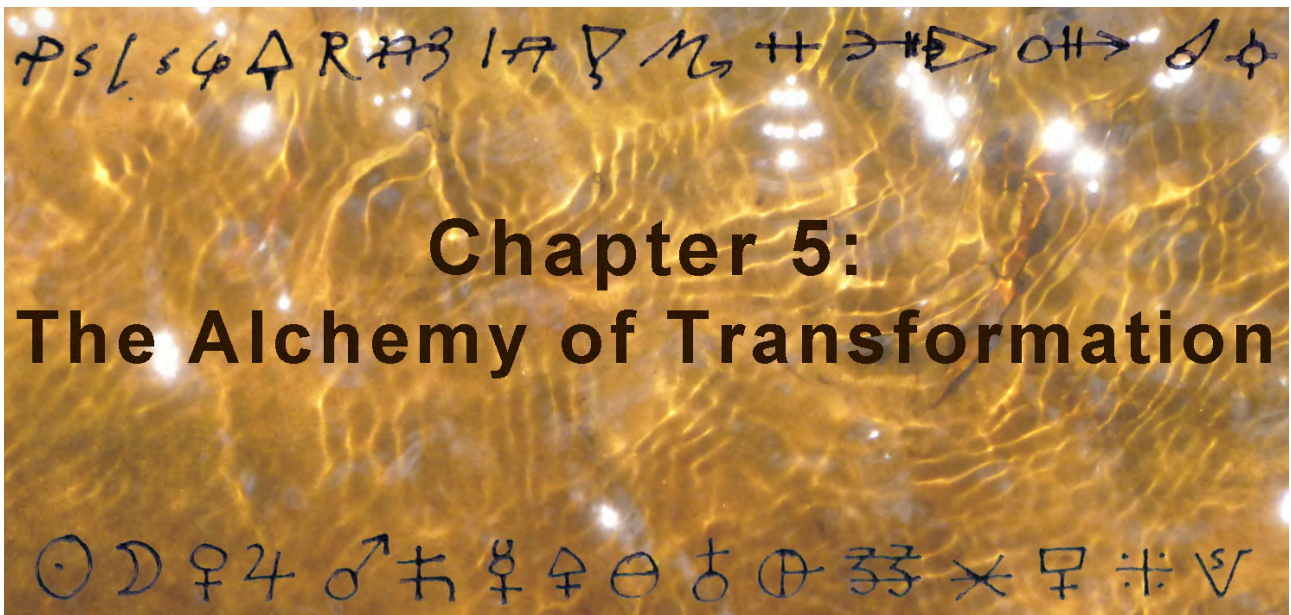
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<sup>23</sup> For a list of the questions of *The Work* see Chapter Three, and for an extensive description, see [www.TheWork.org](http://www.TheWork.org)

Suddenly I became present to the fun and freedom and connectedness these men were probably feeling, riding together through the beautiful forest. It stunned me to consider that.

Of the various times when I used *The Work* to investigate my thinking, this example produced the most palpable shift in my perception and attitude, but there were many other instances where it gave rise to similar shifts.

In addition to inviting the reader into the phenomenal and subjective experience of walking, the purpose of this Chapter was to illustrate how the reflective and embodied dimensions of the pilgrimage shaped my experience of it and contributed to its being a transformative process. Having done that I now move on to Chapter Five: *The Alchemy of Transformation*, which presents the distillation of my reflections on the four themes. My findings are depicted as a graphic artwork, with accompanying commentary.



Chapter Five presents the essence of my research on transformation. It is the distillation of my thinking based on my experience of the Bibbulmun pilgrimage as focused through the themes of simplicity, hardship, divine communion and connection to country. To reiterate its place within the broad outcomes of this research, what I've called 'the alchemy of transformation' is my attempt to understand and represent the 'complex web of factors' that figure in transformative systems. In addition to my investigation of the the four themes as elements of an overall transformative process, the findings in this section relate to my exploration of pilgrimage as facilitating an ontological shift from entitlement to gratitude. This chapter is a creative synthesis of those findings, comprising a graphic artwork (Figure 5.1) and commentary in which reflections on the themes are illustrated with excerpts from my journal.

The artwork is called 'The Alchemy of Transformation' and depicts a four-stage process in which the 'raw material' of life is changed in turn by processes symbolised by a funnel for simplicity; a fire for hardship; a dark sky for divine communion; and a golden bed of earth for connection to country. The process begins with a large and confused pile of semi-defined grey objects and vague shapes. In 'simplicity' it passes through a funnel and emerges as a small wheel of black, white and grey. This is then heated in a chamber of the alchemical vessel, representing 'hardship,' wherein the grey components of the wheel



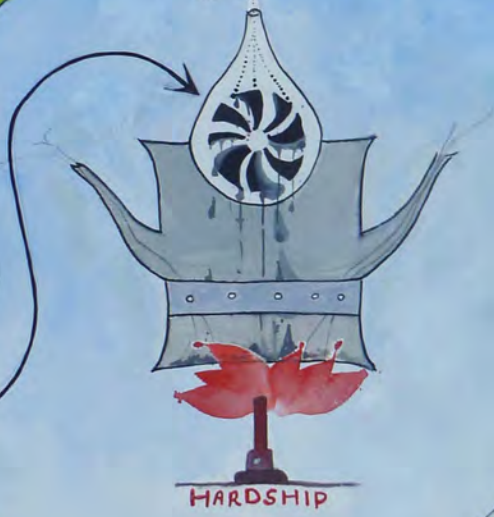
melt and fall to the chamber below, and the black and white elements rise up through the neck of the vessel. In the gradually darkening sky-space of 'divine communion' they form a spiral which consists of black and white points of different sizes, some close together and some further apart. Just as they reach the highest and darkest point of their trajectory they are sent spinning down to earth where they enter rich, coloured soil: 'connection to country.' Here they move almost invisibly between the particles to where they are reformed as a small black and white bean. The bean has sprouted; its roots are reaching down and a tiny green shoot is reaching up.

As I explained in Chapter Two, part of the attraction of the metaphor of alchemy is its esoteric quality that defies a close scrutiny of its processes by representing them in diagrams, hieroglyphs and metaphors. I have found that symbolic communication entirely appropriate for visually depicting the alchemy of transformation, yet my intention is also to have those ideas accessible to others. In the next sections of this chapter, I therefore marry the visual component with a commentary that discusses my choice of symbols and imagery and uses journal excerpts to illuminate the insights and reflections I had on each of the themes.

## 5.1 The Alchemy of Transformation (Figure 5.1)

Firstly, though, I invite the reader to look at the artwork and let it make a gradual overall impression on the eyes; to allow the gaze to roam around the picture getting a sense of its details; and to sit with it for a short while not seeking to understand it, but just to be with it.

# The Alchemy of Transformation



Ally



## 5.2 Commentary

### 5.2.1 Theme 1:



The alchemical process depicted in the artwork begins with a confused and largely undifferentiated mess of grey objects and symbols including many that can be recognised as part of life in the industrial growth society. Words such as 'me' and 'mine' indicate that this represents life through the lens of entitlement. Passing through the funnel of simplicity, the raw material comes out the bottom as a wheel of black white and grey. It is significantly smaller than the original pile and has undergone processes of separation and differentiation. Importantly, it is still composed of the same 'stuff' only separated now into its constituent elements. Black symbolises the negative pole of life - the difficult, the unknown, the painful; white symbolises the positive pole of life - the 'easy,' the known, the joyous; grey symbolises these elements intermingled in a confused way.

I have titled the reflections on my pilgrimage that belong to this stage: 'lightening up;' 'a different perspective;' and 'attentiveness' and 'indifference' as qualities of discernment.'

#### Journal Extract 1: Lightening Up

*Swami<sup>24</sup> is convinced that he'll be able to significantly lighten my pack. His base weight is about four kilos, whereas mine must be*

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<sup>24</sup> 'Swami' is the trail name of a man I met and walked with for several days on the Bibbulmun Track.

*about eleven. And he's carrying a tent and half of 'Robinson Crusoe'! We have been discussing what I'm carrying and what gear (he thinks) I could send home without compromising my safety or giving up anything I really need. I have to swallow my pride though when we have these discussions and he calls into question - usually with humour - an item I've been carrying. I'm aware that I couldn't do this process alone and need to trust his experience and knowledge. For instance, he says I don't need my red fleece jacket. I am unsure. He says if I have a base layer (woolen top), insulation layer (thicker woolen vest) and outer layer (windproof rain jacket) then I'll be toasty. I am still unsure, but I won't know until it's put to the test. I realise that the process of lightening your pack requires you to trust the process, and give up anything that doesn't pass the test of (your definition of) 'absolutely essential.' You can't say of any individual item 'it doesn't weigh much' as a justification for keeping it.*

*(Day 9: Gringer Creek to Mount Wells)*



Plate 5.1: Swami with his inspiringly tiny pack

I learned that to lighten your pack requires trust and humility as well as the faith that it will indeed make a difference to let go of certain things. In this

case I was witnessing the ease and grace with which Swami walked with his tiny pack and I wanted that for myself. He promised that I would be able to walk faster and further with the same amount of effort and a lot more enjoyment. Swami also taught me the value of lightening up in myself - of not taking myself too seriously. He laughed at me plenty and we laughed together plenty. It did me a lot of good. He talked about humour as a good 'resource' for the solitary walker and I didn't understand what he meant at the time. By the end of the pilgrimage, though, I often found myself laughing with myself. It sounds strange - and maybe it is - but it felt as if I had become great friends with myself. These insights relate to the process of letting go of possessions associated with simplifying, as well as letting go of some of the seriousness of it all.

## Journal Extract 2: A different perspective

*There's something about being away that gives me a different and more loving perspective on people, in fact, I feel myself looking at my whole life - people, relationships, events, commitments, difficulties - in a more spacious way. With my relationships, it's as if everything belonging to the mundane has fallen away, all the pettiness or annoyance. In the absence of that, there's a wholeness and a sweetness and a quietness I feel towards the people in my life. I feel each one as an entire being, rather than the sum total of 'facets' revealed in particular encounters I have had with them. I can see their burdens and joys and sadnesses and am touched by who they are. Each one is an amazing human being who is doing so much; carrying so much; doing the very best they can. I treasure this different way of seeing.*

*(Day 4: Helena to Beraking)*



tannin-steeped water,  
the Gardner winds its dark path:  
old, brown river god.





Steindl-Rast's ideas are particularly pertinent here. He says: "silence creates the atmosphere for detachment. Silence creates space around things, persons and events. Silence singles them out and allows us gratefully to consider them one by one in their uniqueness" (1999, 5). The insight expressed in extract two points to a context, not a content shift. It is my framing, or perspective that has changed. Like the incident with the dirt-bike riders I was astonished to realise that my way of seeing the world determines my experience of it. The 'other' has become a 'whole' in their own right just through my seeing it in a different way. So distance, or what Steindl-Rast calls 'silence,' gives rise to a different perspective, and one that is more generous, spacious, accepting, loving and respectful.

Gregory Bateson's stated that to bring about peaceful accord on the planet we require "ways of seeing that affirm our own complexity and the systemic complexity of the other [and which accommodate] elements of the necessarily mysterious" (Bateson 2005, 176). In a similar vein, Val Plumwood wrote, "we must attain solidarity with the other *in their difference*" (2000, 63, italics in original). The change of perspective I experienced did affirm the other as complex and mysterious, even as I felt I could see them more clearly. I also sense that it has brought me a step closer to acknowledging the intrinsic (as opposed to instrumental) value of 'others' including other (non-human) beings in the natural world. This seems to be an ongoing process of becoming more simple inside myself, which is why I placed this reflection here.



Plate 5.3: Noticing the complexity and mystery of the 'other'

### Journal Extract 3: 'Attentiveness' and 'indifference' as qualities of discernment

*I just walked from Collie to Pemberton in six days - a total of 240km. This was one of the most challenging and powerful physical experiences of my life and taught me so much: about myself; about what I'm capable of; about what inner resources I need in order to keep walking even when I am bone weary and aching all over. Doing 40km days every day for six days required incredible focus. It stripped down and laid bare parts of me that are usually hidden. I found I literally could not entertain any thoughts other than those that would help me to keep walking. The sheer difficulty of those long and hot days (sometimes I was on the road for twelve hours and more) meant there was absolutely no room for the 'inner critic' in my internal dialogue. The only voice I listened to was the one which said: "Go girl! Keep on going, you're doing just fine. You can do it!" The intensity of it narrowed me to a simple, single, laser focus of putting one foot in front of the other and just keeping on walking. Any cast of mind that did not support me in doing that was 'quietly abandoned.'*

*(Day 33: Pemberton to Warren)*

The Letters and diaries of Etty Hillesum (1996), a young Jewish woman who was sent to a Dutch concentration camp during the Second World War, were amongst my reading material during the pilgrimage and while her situation could not possibly have been more different from mine, her demonstration of transforming suffering into love has long inspired me. In 1943 she wrote: "The few big things that matter in life are what you have to keep in mind; the rest can be quietly abandoned" (281). I read this early on in my walk and it has clarified many things for me. In the case of these long and difficult days of



walking, the one 'big thing' was putting one foot ahead of the other, and attending only to that. Everything else became a detail that needed to be 'quietly abandoned'.

I believe that through this experience I 'stumbled upon' the qualities of mind that the Desert Fathers and Mothers called *agrupnia* and *apatheia* - the desert virtues of 'attentiveness' and 'indifference' (Lane, 1994). On a difficult day, I simply could not allow myself to pay attention to all the separate muscles that ached in my legs and hips and shoulders; or to 'mind' every bush fly that tickled my face and sat in the corner of my eye; or to let myself fully become aware of the fierce heat. All of my attention was given over to looking after my mind: developing ways of talking to myself; strategies for being with the discomfort; internal dialogue of encouragement, acknowledgement and gratitude. I believe that attentiveness and indifference are developed through intense experiences of 'passing through the eye of the needle,' and that they support us to simplify in other aspects of life by facilitating processes of discernment: sifting through, distinguishing and separating the raw material of life.

I now move on to theme 2: 'hardship' which actually confronted me from the very outset of the walk.

### 5.2.2 Theme 2:



A participant in a 'wilderness therapy' program was quoted (Culbert 2006, 53) as saying "I think a person really does need to be uncomfortable to change."

This relates to my discussion of hardship as a catalyst for transformation. During the alchemical process associated with this theme the material is heated in a glass vial that sits in an alchemical vessel. The grey components of the material melt and fall to the bottom of the vessel while the rest becomes vapour that passes through the neck at the top. This depicts the processes of purification and refinement and in my experience of it is associated with the qualities of resilience, compassion and acceptance of one's limits, which the following reflections are based on.

#### Journal Extract 4: Resilience

*Yesterday I walked from Fremantle to Kenwick. It was hard, hot, exhausting, painful and long. This morning I left early for what was supposed to be an easy 14km to Kalamunda. I don't know what led me to believe it would be easy. It was hot. The road was long. There were trucks. The hills rise out of nowhere. There was no shade. I felt sick. I had to sit in a bus shelter for a while.*

*I finally got to Lesmurdie and revived in an air-conditioned cafe assisted by Gastrolyte, orange juice, and lemon tart. Brain was not working very well. Feet were blistered and hurting. I had no thoughts outside of survival and escape.*

*Later, on the road from Kalamunda I managed to miss a Waugal<sup>25</sup>, and looping back on myself, walked for a while in the wrong direction. Half an hour into the section my head was pounding again. I made up more Gastrolyte, and collapsed onto a boulder at the top, then lay there breathing and looking at the sky for a while. I thought I was going to be sick, was gentle with myself, wasn't. Then the sun started*

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<sup>25</sup> Waugals are the yellow triangular markers used on the Bibbulmun Track, named after the Nyungar creation spirit who had the form of a giant serpent (Nannup 2008, 111).

*to sink down above the tree tops and it got cooler and breezy. Gradually I got better again: still exhausted but not unwell. My speed picked up a little, the road flattened out, and that was that.*

*(Day 2: Kenwick to Hewitt Hill)*

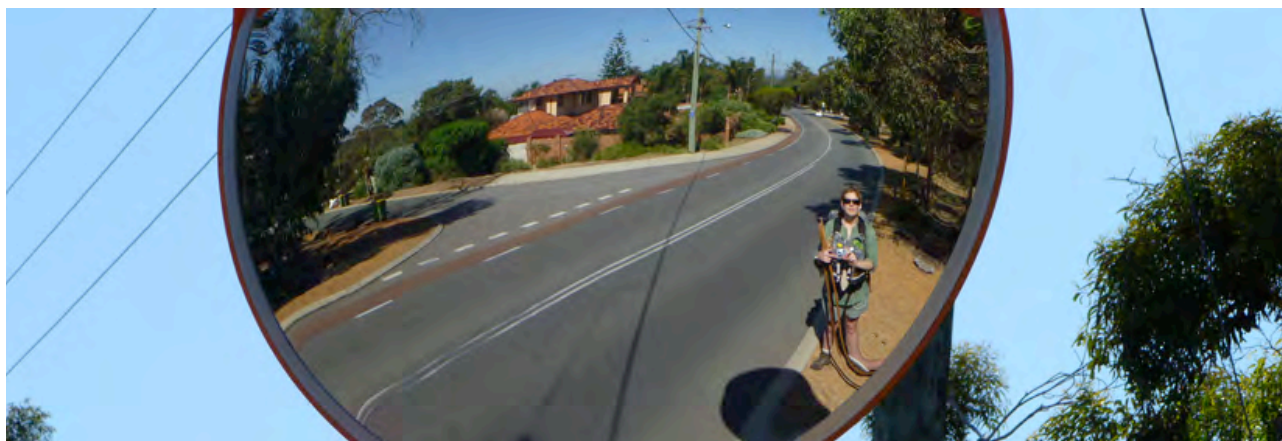


Plate 5.4: Tough first two days through the urban sprawl

Those first two days walking from Fremantle to Kalamunda and then on to the first hut on the Track were indeed a 'trial by fire.' The experience was painful, dispiriting and difficult as I lugged my 19kg pack for over thirty-five kilometres on concrete footpaths before the Track even began. This experience resonated with accounts of desert spirituality, which might seem ironic for the suburban leg of the journey. As I found, however, walking through suburbia for a day-and-a-half was indeed like passing through a kind of desert. The hardship of traversing the concrete suburban desert removed from my mind a whole lot of concerns: how I looked, for instance; or what other people thought of me. Like the dross in the alchemical vessel, those concerns slipped off and freed up other parts of myself.

This experience and others like it gradually left me with a deep and enduring sense of 'I can do it;' of resilience and resourcefulness; of my capacity to endure and to know that 'this too will pass.' I know, I really know, that if I

keep putting one foot in front of the other, I will get there. I know that I can keep walking even when I'm uncomfortable or in pain. I know the strength of my two feet on the ground; my limbs; my back that can carry a load. I know I can carry on. This mental resilience is key to the transformation produced through hardship.

### Journal Extract 5: Gratitude

*Well, something seems different inside now. After a difficult few days it's more spacious now, lighter - softer somehow. Maybe it was the healing waters of the Donnelly River on my feet and my aching right shin. Maybe it was having a cuddle with a young kangaroo today at Donnelly River Village. So soft! So sweet! So pretty! Maybe it was some gentle thinking on the road here after a troubling start on an unmarked diversion right next to a smoldering and smoking burn-off. Maybe it's the quiet magnificence of the karri or the unrelenting birdsong: twips, chirrups, whistles, melodies, whips and chimes all around me today. Maybe it was the large hot lunch today and some good writing at the General Store. I don't know. Maybe I don't care. Nothing's different on the outside. I'm grateful for the change.*

*(Day 23: Gregory Brook to Tom Road)*

The connection between hardship and gratitude is very present in my experience and very difficult to articulate - maybe because it is so simple. It is perhaps the simple influx of relief, happiness and thankfulness when one has been enduring something painful or difficult and it goes away. What I realised in the course of the pilgrimage is that 'hardship' I could bear without any problem - it was when I added an interpretation over the top, such as 'It shouldn't be like this,' or 'I've done something wrong,' or 'I might not make it

now,' that it really impacted me. As I see it, this interpretive layer is what causes 'hardship' to become 'suffering.' Over and above any physical pain, or heat stress or even fear of snakes, it was my thinking that absolutely impacted my experience.

Critically reflecting on those thoughts, questioning the assumptions they held and taking the time to notice their effect on me, was liberating in a way I could not have imagined. When I could see through my interpretation of an experience, all the dimensions of suffering evaporated leaving only the physical sensation or discomfort, a quiet mind and an immense inner gratitude.



Plate 5.5: Bathing my sore feet in the Donnelly River

#### Journal Extract 6: The gracious acceptance of limits

*The ground is hard. My feet are sore. March flies bite.  
Mosquito bites itch. The sun is hot.*

*(Day 24: Beavis to Pemberton)*

Discomfort could be thought of as the uncomfortable 'friction' between the edge of oneself and the world. From this perspective, discomfort provides a





High place, gusting wind.  
Long, green drop to the ocean.  
I dream of flying

direct sensory experience of one's physical limits. Applying the logic to one's mind and emotions as well to one's body allows us to consider that feeling uncomfortable also gives a valuable indicator for how the boundaries of the self 'rub up against' the mental and emotional worlds we inhabit. For a fully functioning, fully alive and responsive being, pain or discomfort of this kind is an alert that something needs to be attended to - whether that be a stone in one's shoe or a mental attitude that gives rise to intolerance. This alert is a very good thing.

In a similar vein, living out of doors - being exposed to weather and insects and the hardness of a wooden board through a deflated air-mattress - gives a delightful, though indeed not always comfortable, embodied awareness of the physicality of things, of the sensual world. To qualify that statement. biting insects, fierce heat and hard beds are certainly not delightful in the moment. However, I think the delight I felt arose with the gradual, deep, subtle realisation that I am profoundly part of all this: a body among bodies; an animal that is hungry, eats and defecates in the midst of other animals and finds itself prey to sanguivorous insects. Until experiencing this brief glimpse of our interconnectedness I could not have seen how deeply entrenched is the human supremacist attitude, as Val Plumwood calls it, that denies "that we humans are also animals positioned in the food chain" (2002). Becoming food for mosquitoes, march flies and ticks struck me with the reality of human 'consanguinity' with the more-than-human world. This notion resonates with the Teilhard de Chardin's visions of a 'cosmic eucharist' in which he realised the continuity between "the particular material elements and...the matter of the world as a whole" (Grumett 2005, 134) - a feast indeed "in a great chain of reciprocity" (Plumwood 2002).

The conveniences, padded surfaces, pain-killers and distractions of my home life keep me mostly removed from discomfort. Perhaps they also instill a deep-seated, if subtle separation from the world around me. Accurately perceiving and accepting the limitations of my body was part of every day on the Track. I



got heat stroke one day because I walked too quickly for too long on a hot day. That experience gave me a better understanding of my body's signals, of when I can keep going and when I need to stop. I was forced in a sense to accept my body's limits, and yet in that acceptance and the vulnerability it pointed to, arose a sense of graciousness and of gratitude.

### 5.2.3 Theme 3:



## Divine Communion

During the alchemical process represented as 'divine communion' the material rises as vapour into a darkening sky. It turns in a slow spiral, separated into clear points of white and black that are of different sizes and unevenly spaced. Just as it reaches into the darkest part of the sky and the zenith of its trajectory the motion changes and the points spin off down to earth. 'divine communion' represents *apophatic* processes: the emptying of the self; the negation of any knowledge about the divine mystery; and the way of darkness and unknowing. This is the part of the process where life is no longer contained in the vessel of what is known; the sky is dark and familiar points of reference are no longer there. The reflections I share on this theme relate to 'doubts and trust' and 'surrender.'

### Journal Extract 7: Doubts and Trust

*I'm afraid my project is failing and that the walk has been more an exercise in indulgence than transformation. I have been consistently off-theme and distracted by the thousand and one*

*things... I'm finding it so hard right now to keep my salty eyelids open. I fear it's all coming to nothing. And what has it transformed in me? Entitlement? It's too deeply rooted and I've been too cowardly and lazy to even dig it up a bit. Gratitude? Some lip-service and some desire for it, but lacking will power. This, a pilgrimage? Where's your prayer? Where's your devotion? Devotion to your whims and fancy, more like it.*

*Have I fooled everyone and myself?*

*(Day 39: Woolbales to Long Point)*

I had thoughts of this kind reasonably regularly during the pilgrimage. It was difficult, uncomfortable and confronting to acknowledge them. Being alone, I didn't have the option of seeking reassurance outside of myself. More so than dealing with the physical hardships of the walk, managing these thoughts took everything last bit of self-love, of gentle and encouraging self-talk - ultimately, of trust - that I had. In the end, what kept me in my practice and my writing was the trust that I wasn't doing it for myself alone but for the whole community of people committed to the Great Turning. In the face of persistent negative self-talk the only thing I had to hold onto was that this was my work right now: keeping on going; keeping on walking; keeping on trusting despite not knowing the road ahead and feeling particularly unconfident that the whole project wasn't a big mass of self-deluded tripe.

This experience points to the *apophatic* way where points of reference have vanished, certainties are no longer certain, and external assurances are absent. In the symbolic darkness, listening to and following the call of one's deeper self requires trust.

Journal Extract 8: Surrender

*This theme is divine communion and after five weeks out here I've got absolutely no idea what that means, what that would look like, how I would even explore it. What was I thinking! I feel dry and distracted and not how I expected to feel at this point of the walk. I'm sure I should be full of prayer and silence, of peaceful solitude and clear thinking. Instead I have had a weary, bleary day with legs that are so tired, and the ongoing filmstrip of thoughts shuffling through my mind.*


*(Later)*

*... But here I am fresh from the dam with the soft sunshine seeping through the skylight, with the water all sky-blue and reflected greens and the two eggs and the bunch of marjoram waiting for supper, and a tiny grey bird on a fine twig snapping at insects and purring through the air. This is all God, no? The soft hand of God and pure, gentle, simple presence. All of this, no?*

*(Day 34: Warren to Schafer)*

The illumination I had in my exploration of 'divine communion' was that my feelings and thoughts are not indicators of the presence or absence of God. Up until then I had secretly believed that when I felt well, happy and connected, I had got it right and God was there. Conversely, when I felt stuck, miserable and alone I thought deep-down that I had got something wrong and God was not there. It is a simple and an enormous revelation to me that the reality of divine presence has absolutely nothing to do with how I feel. It has nothing to do with reality looking the way I think it should look. This left me at peace. I found I could simply 'be with' the day and whatever it held, no longer secretly demanding to feel good all the time. This is a gift. I feel as though I'm solidly planted in myself. Home. Easy.



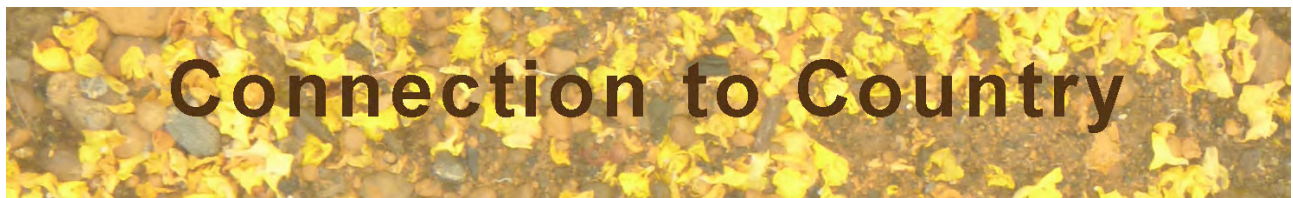


**Southern Ocean dip:  
delicious, crisp, cold salt kiss.  
Invigorating!**



Another aspect of the *apophatic* way is the undoing of expectations and the realisation that something one has held to be true is entirely untrue - in this case, the hidden belief that my feelings somehow indicated divine presence or absence. The undoing of these fundamental meanings of self and life can be extremely disorienting but there are moments such as the one recounted in *extract 8* when one seemingly jolts awake to the reality here and now of divine presence.

#### 5.2.4 Theme 4:



*Figure 5.1* depicts 'connection to country' as the process by which the elements of black and white come back together in the golden bed of soil as a small bean. The bean has sprouted and has some roots growing down and a green leafy shoot poking out above the ground. Connection to country is being planted: self as home; here as perfect. The yellow of the soil particles represent gratitude as the context in which life is embedded. The 'black' and the 'white' of life are still there exactly as they always have been; the inconsistencies, contradictions and poles of tensions within the self are still there. This is a significant point. The transformative process does not lessen or remove the negative pole of life - in manifestation in us as our shadow side. What has changed is the context, which is now golden and orange and red particles of soil that nourish, protect and anchor the life of the bean.

The process of returning to earth resonates with the words humility, humus, humanity and humour (Jimenez 2010). They share a common root *hum* which comes from the Latin *humus* meaning ground or soil ([www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com)) - which we also use in English. It can be both humbling and humiliating to

realise that much that one believed to be true actually wasn't. Yet without this *apophatic* revelation that represents a "return to the soil of your being" as David Whyte puts it (1995), there can be no planting, no germination, no growth - the *kataphatic* phase of affirmation, articulation and belonging. I have only one reflection on connection to country. It is called 'home.'



Plate 5.7: The exhilarating high places

### Journal Extract 9: Home

*Today I am high up in the dunes thick with vegetation: peppermints, parrot bush, gorse, sedges and some late-blooming wildflowers. Some of the sand is soft and eroded which makes for harder climbing, but overall it's not too difficult. The path threads up and down the dunes in the way I'm so familiar with now; the tops are a delight - utterly windswept. I break out in fresh goosebumps as blustery wind meets sweaty skin. The views up and down the coast are stunning, indescribable, silencing. To the west*



Beaten silver sky  
shot though with lead, pewter, pearl.  
Mirrored in wet sand.

*where I've come from is the expanse of coast crenelated by tiny bays and headlands next to long beaches buffeted by relentless sets of breakers. To the east are massive dark green cliffs, misty in the spray that rises through morning sunshine. I love it up here. It feels like home to me.*

*(Day 46: Boat Harbour to William Bay)*

I cannot comment on this extract. It brings its own silence and so must stand on its own as a testament to my pilgrimage - to its end point which was not at the end of the Bibbulmun Track and was maybe not even an end point at all, but a starting point. It ends and it begins in silence.

Neither is there anything else I feel ready or able to share about 'connection to country.' Moustakas warns that heuristic phases of explication and creative synthesis cannot be rushed (1990, 31). However beyond that justification, I attribute my inability to comment further on this theme to the fact that the little seedling there in the soil has not yet had time to properly grow, let alone bear fruit. My sense is that the whole journey was fulfilled in the realisation that I am like a tiny bean, a living seed planted into this exact set of circumstances and context. It is here and it is home.

I love this country, this Nyungar Boodjar and I feel a clear, renewed sense of responsibility to this country that is both joyful and solemn. Walking through this country has given me back to myself, and I am held in its embrace.

*Ngarn jerapjerap yennow Nyungar Boodjar.*

I am happy to walk on Nyungar country.

This chapter presented and discussed the themes of simplicity, hardship, divine communion and connection to country, as representing 'processes' that



combine to create 'the alchemy of transformation,' which in hindsight would be better called 'an alchemy of transformation.' The two-fold purpose of this was to shed light on why pilgrimage might be considered transformative; and in doing so to contribute to the understanding of transformative processes in general. The findings offered here represent a small step towards a nuanced, subtle and above all useful body of research on transformation as it relates to the 'shift in consciousness' of the Great Turning.

Having presented the outcomes of my exploration of the alchemy of pilgrimage in graphic and written forms, the main body of the thesis is complete. Part 3 follows 'Returning Home' and the next and final chapter presents the conclusions of my research, the limitations of the project and openings for future research.

# Part 3

# Returning Home





# Chapter 6: Conclusions and Future Directions

## 6.1 Returning Home

Certain environments call for certain ways of behaving and provide limits within which one is constrained to live. 'Track life' is a prime example of that and the findings exhibited and discussed in the previous two chapters have been an attempt to explore the ways in which that environment and those limits create a 'container' for transformative processes. As illustrated in those chapters, my experience of the pilgrimage was powerful, enlightening, restorative and salutary. Whether or not it was transformative can only truly be gauged following my return to the routines and demands of life at home. As I write this I have been back in Fremantle for eight weeks and am beginning to get a sense of which of the shifts and changes in me were entirely contingent on the conditions of Track life and which have been more enduring. I am surprised by what I have found.

What I see now, which I was not aware of at the time, is that before and during the walk (in spite of my lofty professions) I thought that the successful outcome of my pilgrimage would be coming back 'changed' and 'good.' I thought I would no longer waste water or buy imported food, or plan to travel by air, or entertain petty thoughts, or think only of myself and so on. I had



idealised transformation as being instantaneous and epochal<sup>26</sup>, and believed that in critically reflecting on the assumptions that informed my entitled perspective on the world, I would shift that point of view and emerge a new person, exhibiting (I hoped) Gustave-Speth's "new consciousness" (2009, 4). I likewise believed that the simplicity and austerity of Track life would somehow 'purify' me of my 'corrupt' city ways and I would return, ready to embrace the frugal, moderate and restrained modes of consumption that the transition to sustainability undoubtedly requires.

Neither of those outcomes have thus far been realised. Yet what has completely surprised me is a radical change in attitude regarding the apparent, or at least partial failure of my project. The following excerpt from my journal from some four weeks after my return explains what I mean.

*I feel very human, very tenderly, happily, touchingly human. How else might I put it? I am present to my smallness - the many ways that I am not in control, and that will power does not move reality in my desired direction! I'm thinking particularly of the indulgences of Christmas: the eating, drinking and partying and getting overtired; the coffee and alcohol and other excesses. The enforced moderation and healthy lifestyle of the Track which I loved, reveled in and appreciated has disappeared. Now that I am back in this environment my habits seem to have fully reverted to what they were before.*

*What surprises me, is my lack of reaction to that. I don't feel annoyed with myself, or disappointed or despairing that "it didn't work." As I said, I feel very human - that's the word that comes to mind, though I'm not even fully sure what I mean. I feel humbly connected in the knowledge that all of us are doing our very best*

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<sup>26</sup> Epochal transformation is an instantaneous, complete, 'state-change' as distinct from a gradual and incremental change (Mezirow 2006, 125)



*with what we have. The critical, judging eye is not here. It's truly lovely. In the absence of judgement I feel excited by the possibility of investing in and fully giving myself to that which I can do rather than waste energy trying to do that which seems out of my grasp.*

*January 13, 2011*

Not long after I wrote that I came across this quote from Macy which perfectly captures what I would like to say: "Feel the magnitude, the hugeness, the importance of what it is to drop the project of making a perfect self - and all the self-righteousness that comes along with that baggage. We become whole, not perfect, not infallible, not pure" (2005, quoted in Seeley 2010, 6). Perhaps the single clear shift that happened on the walk was the dropping of the project of making a perfect self.

If transformation is not about making a perfect self, then what is it about? As a response to that question I will now share the conclusions I have reached in my investigation of pilgrimage as a transformative practice and then reconnect them to the broader context of the Great Turning and the transition to sustainability.

## 6.2 Conclusions

The first of my research aims was to explore the shift from entitlement to gratitude, as enabled by the practice of pilgrimage. The second was to elucidate the 'web of factors' that constitute a transformative process - 'the alchemy of transformation.' In responding to that first aim, the findings I present here relate to how the specific reflective and embodied aspects of the practice, and how the pilgrimage as a whole, contributed or not to the shift from entitlement to gratitude.

My intention with the reflective dimension was to engage in critical reflection on the habits of thought and hidden assumptions that give rise to my attitude of entitlement. As explained in the Chapter Three, the rationale derived from three premises. These were: that: 1. entitlement is an underlying attitude that has given rise to cultures of unsustainability in the industrial growth society; 2. even though I might not have been fully aware of it, entitlement is my default context given that I am embedded in that society; 3. if I seek to shift the entitlement culture, then I should look first to identifying it and 'clearing out its roots' in myself.

What I underestimated in setting this agenda, was my own resistance to identifying the way entitlement is at play in my modes of operating and ways of being. Mezirow is correct when he says that such an enquiry is "fraught with threat and strong emotion" (1990, 4) and can trigger a range of psychological defense mechanisms (Mezirow 1990, 2). I did and do find it confronting to face my own entitlement and the habits of thinking that give rise to it. During my pilgrimage it was so confronting that I gave up. While this constitutes a failure for this aspect of the project, I believe it has still produced a worthwhile outcome. Being aware of a commonly experienced resistance towards critical reflection on one's own attitudes, is extremely useful. From this awareness we can look to identify which practices and conditions support people in overcoming that resistance.<sup>27</sup>

In acknowledging the failure of that aspect of my methodology I am not saying that the pilgrimage did not produce any shift from entitlement to gratitude, but simply that this did not occur through critical reflection. As journal extract 5 on hardship and gratitude in Chapter Five illustrated, the experience of discomfort - a regular occurrence for a walker - gave rise to spontaneous feelings of gratitude. The embodied dimension to the practice, therefore, increased gratitude as a lived experience without necessarily decreasing entitlement as a hidden frame of reference. Such a shift is more closely related to 'formation'

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<sup>27</sup> For a full account of my reflections on entitlement, see Appendix 1.

than to 'transformation' and opens up interesting research possibilities which I will outline further on in this chapter.

Figure 5.1 also illustrates my findings on the shift from entitlement to gratitude and represents how the pilgrimage as a whole contributed to this shift. The graphic elucidates the processes by which entitlement, the default context at the beginning of the process (the undistinguished 'me' and 'mine' in the grey pile), is replaced with gratitude as the chosen context (the golden bed of soil) at the end. The processes represented as simplicity, hardship, divine communion and connection to country as discussed in Chapter Five were the means by which that shift occurred. That leads to the second dimension of my research which was exploring those four themes as elements of the alchemy of transformation.

What emerged from this exploration was that simplicity, hardship, divine communion and connection to country quite clearly contributed to the transformative nature of pilgrimage. Simplicity was connected to shedding possessions, altering my perspective on the relationships in my life and developing the 'desert virtues' of attentiveness and indifference. Hardship gave rise to resilience, gratitude and the gracious acceptance of limits. Divine communion, as representing the *apophatic* way of unknowing and emptying of the self, engendered trust and surrender. Connection to country, as the *kataphatic* way of affirmation and belonging, led simply to an experience of country as home.

I will now bring my findings back to the discourse of sustainability and review the contribution my research sought to make in this area. My research aimed to contribute in three ways: by addressing the lack of sustainability research on reflective, embodied practice designed to facilitate a shift of consciousness; by employing a first-person, introspective methodology that responds to the need for subjective and experiential engagement with the Great Turning; and by employing practices and perspectives of transformative education and

desert spirituality that enrich and refine the scholarly conversation on transformation. I believe it has fulfilled those aims, even if the scope has been limited to my subjective experience and to only the third dimension of the Great Turning. The intention of this research has not been to address the practical and political dimensions of the transition to sustainability in any way - not because those dimensions are unimportant but because as Gustave Speth urges us to realise, efforts in these areas will be insufficient unless they are shaped by a new consciousness (in Kellert and Gustave Speth 2009, 4). He also quotes the renowned thinker and philosopher Vaclav Havel who declares: "the only option is a change in the sphere of the spirit, in the sphere of human conscience. It's not enough to invent new machines, new regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true purpose of our existence on this Earth (1998, 30).

I will now move on to discuss the limitations of this research and subsequent openings for future research.

### 6.3 Limitations

The principal limitations on this investigation were the time frame and word limit. Given the broad scope of the research aims, a larger word limit would have allowed for more flexibility and detail in presenting the results as well as a more comprehensive review of the sustainability literature and the literature in the fields of spirituality, pilgrimage and promenadology, transformation, entitlement and gratitude. Likewise a longer period of time post-pilgrimage for the tasks of explication and creative synthesis would have contributed to a more refined outcome.

The first-person methodology enhanced the research in some ways, but concede that it could also be regarded as a limitation. On the one hand it was a demonstration of a subjective and experiential method which enacted my



commitment to look in myself for the roots of the entitlement culture I see in the world. On the other hand, it limited the results to those which arose from my personal experience. A broader selection of first-person accounts would have enriched the findings considerably.

## 6.4 Where to from here?

### Recommendations for future research

Any of the various aspects of this research could be explored in more detail and yield useful results. The openings for future research I would like to focus on, however, are the ones that explore how transformation or 'shift in consciousness' relates to the huge and often daunting practical tasks associated with the Great Turning. By doing so, I hope to address some possible criticisms of my research as being entirely inward-focused at the expense of making any practical contribution. I suggest that future research activities could be:

- Investigating the conditions, practices and frames of mind that support the realisation of transformative insight in the ordinary routines of home life and the ongoing practical tasks of Transition.
- Looking at how personal spiritual practice (for instance zen meditation; qi gong; *vipassana* meditation; aikido; Christian centering prayer or *shabbat*) supports people in fulfilling their commitment to participate in the Great Turning.
- Exploring the distinction between 'formation' and 'transformation' with respect to the unfolding tasks of Transition, and the different methods, approaches and contributions associated with them.

- Identifying local resources such as The Bibbulmun Track that contribute to the development of 'ecological virtue' - the cultivation of personal habits that benefit the more-than-human world (Barry 2002, 5). This comes out of the realisation that walking on the Bibbulmun Track is an education in 'camp etiquette' and principles of 'leave no trace'<sup>28</sup>. Both of these concepts instill habits of courtesy, mindfulness of one's impact on others and the natural world and minimising that impact.<sup>29</sup>

For my final remarks I would like to recast my thesis in the light of my vision for the future of life on Earth. The possibility I see and the future I am committed to is a sustainable, just and fulfilling human presence on the planet. From where I stand now I can see that fulfilling my commitment to participate in that future will require everything I have and everything I am - and I may be here for another sixty or more years! I need to ponder the question: 'what will enable me and us to be in this for the long haul?' My provisional response to that and again following Howard Thurman is "to ask [my]self what makes [me] come alive and then go do that." A personal outcome of this research is the realisation that I can fully immerse myself in that which brings me alive, while at the same time connect that to my life's work and broader commitments. The challenge I see ahead is to be creative such that deep long-range action is taken inside all three dimensions of the Great Turning.

This research is the culmination of nearly ten years of exploring pilgrimage as a transformative practice. Those years have included various periods of intense

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<sup>28</sup> The seven basic principles of 'Leave No Trace' as listed on the Bibbulmun Track Foundation website ([www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au](http://www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au)) are:

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimise campfire impacts
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other walkers

<sup>29</sup> This echoes the rationale of Hallen's immersive education programmes in Environmental Philosophy and Earth Education, where students would be 'taken bush' to undergo a powerful formation - as embodied and intuitive as it was intellectual (2000 154-155).

thinking, walking and reflecting. Seeing it finished also completes a particular chapter of my life. The road ahead for me will certainly hold more walking, more exploring and sharing the practices, paths and metaphors that produce numinous, resilient thinking; joyful embodiment; and gracious participation in the Great Turning.

See you on the Track!



Plate 6.1: See you on the Track!

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## Appendix 1

### Reflections on entitlement

The following reflections emerged out of my inability to follow through with the critically reflective aspect of the enquiry into entitlement and gratitude. My intention in sharing them is that by understanding the resistance commonly experienced in looking at one's own frames of reference, we might more successfully manage and overcome it.

1. It feels threatening to attempt to uncover and disclose my sense of entitlement.
2. It is much easier to look in the direction of 'gratitude' and adopt practices of thankfulness than it is to uncover the points of view that give rise to my sense of entitlement but which I hold in secret.
3. The 'demanding tourist,' the epitome of entitlement, is only interested in engaging with the world insofar as provides personal benefits. If I am to look at how this applies to me, I will need to acknowledge how often I have this kind of instrumentalist approach to the world.
4. Uncovering my entitlement will also mean acknowledging my privileged position and giving up payoffs associated with it - or at least, no longer being oblivious to them.
5. Operating from entitlement engenders self-righteousness, blame, defensiveness, anger, superiority and moral outrage in me, when I am denied what I feel I am entitled to.
6. I have always flown the banner for what Mezirow calls 'epochal transformation' (2006 125); the flip side of that is that I have secretly dismissed gradual, incremental change (in other words *formation* as distinction from *transformation*) as an inferior objective. It has been humbling to confront my inability to engage in the critical reflection necessary to uncover my own entitlement. What I am left with is the possibility of seeking formation in the ways of gratitude. If I cannot of my own volition transform the thought structures that give me a sense of entitlement then I can at least adopt practices of gratitude, consideration of others and principles of 'leave no trace' that will minimise my negative impact on the planet and on the ones to come after me.