

From the Kitchen

17 June 2009

Circulation; a word I don't think about much, most of the time. It's on account of my cold nose and toes and fingers that it comes to mind. Because of the lack of it, the impairment of it.



I have just come back into the warmth of the kitchen. The dog and I have been exploring the local 'community forest', a leash-free area. Leash-free allows me to wander at will, without the dog restricting me. I can go where *I* want to go. I can stop and take macro close-ups of tiny mushrooms and mosses and sniff the dampness they grow in.

As the dog and I do a meandering circuit of the forest, my blood circulation withdraws from my exposed extremities. I can't wear gloves or balaclava when using the camera. The dog wears a genetically acquired thick fur coat and leggings, and even his ears look like muffs. Only his moist black nose is exposed and this he uses continually, as he circulates from compelling smell to interesting odour.

I sit down now with the dog, next to the stove, and bury my fingers in his fur. He loves the contact and I regain some peripheral circulation. I decline to do the same with my nose, not being too enamoured of his personal 'wet woolly jumper' smell.

In the forest there are other dogs and humans circulating, in twos, threes or fours. The dogs sniff each other out. The humans do the same with words. The dogs chase each other. If we were kids, we might chase each other, but that would be embarrassing now, wouldn't it?

When I was a university student I went to the occasional party. I would spend most of my time on the most comfortable chair or couch and hope for deep and meaningful conversations to come to me from those circulating and finally plonking down next to me. "Why don't you circulate more?" my girlfriend would ask. I would answer that I felt more like the rock than the stream. That's my bent – when out without the dog, or my wife, I like to sit and contemplate. Sitting in a quiet spot in the forest, or next to a creek, or on a cliff above the bay, I can be the rock and allow the birds and insects and sounds and rabbits to do the circulating.

In the quiet, ideas start circulating in my mind. I let them wash through me and over me, as the sea washes through the sponges which filter out the nutrients, without having to move themselves. I filter the ideas, allowing some to nourish me, some to inform me, and some to make me smile.

In the warmth of the kitchen I can reach the same state, with the background sounds of snoring dog and crackling firewood masking the outside world. It's easy, sitting at the kitchen table, to be the still rock, knowing the results of these scratching will soon circulate on the Internet. A wider circulation is hard to imagine. I can be the rock and create the stream. However, when I connect with the Web to facilitate the circulation of my words, I can also easily allow myself to be swept up by the stream and travel willy-nilly.

Right now the dog is doing a very good impression of a woolly rock. He is able to seamlessly switch from one state to the other. Even on energetic circulatory walks, he can suddenly drop like a stone, his tail going back and forth like a weed caught in the current, as another dog comes close and sniffs. Just as suddenly, he's back up again and being chased, or chasing. Round and round they go. It is so uncomplicated for the dog. What has us make it so convoluted?

In a Zen world, there is no difference between the rock and the stream. Are they same or are they two aspects of the same? To paraphrase the wisdom of someone from the past: you cannot step into the same stream more than once, but you can step onto a rock as many times as you like.