

## **INTER-LEARNING IN PLACE**

### A Semester-long Assignment/Practice

ENVS0332

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist Monk, teacher and prolific author, is attributed to have coined the term “interbeing” (see [his 1987 book](#), [a 1995 magazine interview](#), [the Order of Interbeing website](#), and [a paleontologists view of the concept's importance](#)). In his words “To be is to inter-be. You cannot just be by yourself alone. You have to inter-be with every other thing.” Similarly, to learn is by necessity to inter-learn; you cannot learn just by yourself; you learn from and with every other aspect of life.

As the semester goes along, you will come to realize and re-realize the ways in which this activity strongly connects to many readings and your partner work, but we’ll leave that unwritten for now and allow you to explore the connections.

The inter-learning activity is an opportunity to engage in multiple ways of knowing and to learn from the more-than-human world. Through regular ritual, abiding and observing in interaction with one specific place, you will be able to learn deeply from the more-than-human world. You may choose to inter-learn with a specific place or a specific other-than-human being, such as a plant, group of plants, rock, pond...you name it! But we, for this class, do not want this to be part of the human-built worldscape.

The essence of the assignment is two-fold and involves a twice-weekly (or more) visit to your inter-learning site. One aspect is the practice of at each visit performing a ritual (more explanation to come). The other aspect is ‘simply’ interbeing and inter-learning with one other-than-human through the entire semester. We ask that you take notice of and contemplate sensory information you receive from the place/plant(s). At different times you may be in silence, in conversation, in stillness, in movement; you may be in tears, you may be smiling wildly. We ask that you also take notice of your intellectual thoughts, emotions, psychological states, and your imagination and intuition. Noted below are weekly guidance to help you focus on a variety of sensory inputs.

Reciprocity is part of this inter-learning. You will give attention to the other-than-human and reciprocally they will give to you both knowledge and experience. In this reciprocity you have a chance to practice openness to curiosity, wonder, ignorance, wisdom and more. And, you have the chance to try to express in creative journal form some of your inter-learnings. Part of “your end” in this reciprocity will be the ritual practice.

Develop a simple, personal ritual that you will practice at the start of each inter-learning session (and you may wish to repeat this at the end of a session also). Themes/foci of your

ritual may be of your choosing. Some ideas are: gratitude, respect, humility, pain, grief, joy, celebration, honoring deep past or deep future...

### **How To Share Your Inter-Learning with Course Instructors**

We provide options for how, two times during the semester, you share with us what you have learned. In these sharings we would like you to *synthesize* the inter-learning experience. Goethe wrote of the problems in science and academia of analysis without synthesis, and science's mistrust of sensory experience and thus not [seeing nature as a whole](#). Much learning comes from synthesizing that which you have been learning through quantitative and qualitative observations, analyses, and experiences. These become part of who you are (inter-are). Lack of synthesis is part of the disease of reductionism. We hope that you practice deep integrative inter-learning and creatively express some of what you carry with you from this experience.

Options for sharing your knowledge and experience:

- Annotated photo/photos, drawing/drawings, collage, "sketch map," etc. – annotations should clearly and in some detail express what you have inter-learned **and** how you have thoughtfully incorporated synthesis into observations (external and internal), analyses and the like.
- Copy or scan of a journal that you've been keeping for this assignment. For each submission (mid-semester, end of semester) **add** to this a minimum of two typed pages in which you synthesize what you learn.
- Minimum four typed pages (for each submission) in which you teach the reader something of your inter-learning **and** present a synthesis of what you have inter-learned through the encounters over the course of the semester.

We expect that some of the inter-learning will be 'about you,' while, if you've been engaged in deep relationship and reciprocity, a good portion of the inter-learning will have an inter-being focus.

*PLEASE  
EXPLORE, EMERGE AND CO-CREATE.  
SHINE & HAVE FUN!*

## *The Logistics & List of Weekly Inter-Learning Foci*

Reside at least twice a week for 20-30 minutes at a specific inter-learning site. You will select the site during the first week of the semester.

For a place, "semi-natural" or "natural" is preferred to one that is hardscaped, paved over, or highly manipulated by humans, because we want to engage in deeper relationship with the more-than-human world, which scientists tell us has been in existence as a Universe for nearly 14 billion years and as Earth for about 4 billion years. For comparison, the human form has existed on Earth for about 200,000 years.

Animals and life forms in addition to plants will undoubtedly participate in your inter-learning. We ask that you choose a place or non-motile life-form, since animals are not consistently present in bodily form and may not show themselves to you when you choose to go to your location.

Mid-way assignment submission comprises 10% of your course grade.

Final submission comprises 15% of your course grade.

### WEEKLY FOCI

Weeks 1: Choosing/Being Chosen By An Inter-Learning "Other."

focus on the choosing/selecting/selection process, then explore wonder and curiosity as you become familiar with interbeing and inter-learning

Week 2: Visual inter-learning. Sight.

focus on visual sensory input; those humans who have eyesight strongly use vision as a primary sense

Week 3: Body inter-learning. Touch.

focus on an embodied experience by using sense of touch

Week 4: Auditory inter-learning. Sound.

focus on sound and all the sensations in your body and consciousness that have an auditory component

Week 5: Somatic inter-learning. Body.

focus on somatic sense

somatic sense is a general awareness of your state as an organism, your body as a physiologically functioning volume with mass; together the somatic and touch

senses are important for knowing the boundaries of our own bodies and of bodies outside of us

Week 6: Kinesthetic inter-learning. Moving Body.

focus on kinesthetic sense; movement will surely be a part of this!

kinesthetic sense is direct apprehension of movements of your musculature and skeleton and is critically important for developing your awareness of different body parts and your concept of space

Week 7: Olfactory inter-learning. Smell.

focus on sensory input through your nose and full olfactory apparatus; humans have pretty weak olfactory senses compared to many animals (e.g., dogs, most other mammals, insects) and plants (can we say they "smell" the chemicals they put in the air to communicate?), yet memory of smells is one of our strongest 'rememberings'

Week 8: Auditory inter-learning II. Focal Sound with Listening Horns.

experience a modification of the auditory inputs and sense using a [listening horn](#)

Week 9: Self-organizing, Co-Creative Open Systems.

is there a role of these systems and emergence concepts in your inter-learning?

Week 10: Deep Time.

focus on your inter-learning with an awareness of far-in-the-past and -future geo-ecological time frames

Week 11: Goodbyes.

have a wonderful parting and gratitude celebration; do celebrate the relationship you have co-created