Landscapes of Aesthetic Education

Landscapes of Aesthetic Education

By

Stuart Richmond and Celeste Snowber

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

PUBLISHING

Landscapes of Aesthetic Education, by Stuart Richmond and Celeste Snowber

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-1396-6, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1396-9

CONTENTS

Foreword vii

Chapter One
The Mentor as Artist: A Poetic Exploration of Listening, Creating, and Mentoring
Celeste Snowber 1

Chapter Two
On City Sights and Being an Artist: Pondering Life and Education in a Market Economy
Stuart Richmond 13

Chapter Three
The Eros of Listening: Dancing into Presence
Celeste Snowber 30

Chapter Four
Resonance and the Photographing of Medieval Architecture
Stuart Richmond 42

Chapter Five
An Aesthetics of Everyday Life
Celeste Snowber 65

Chapter Six
Remembering Beauty: Reflections on Kant and Cartier-Bresson for Aspiring Photographers
Stuart Richmond 78

Chapter Seven
Bodydance: Enfleshing Soulful Inquiry through Improvisation
Celeste Snowber 91

Chapter Eight
Beyond Rules: Approaches to the Teaching of Photographic Art
Stuart Richmond 104

Chapter Nine
Leaning Absolutes: Honouring the Detours in Our Lives
Celeste Snowber 120

Chapter Ten
Art Education as Aesthetic Education: A Response to Globalization
Stuart Richmond 131

Chapter Eleven
The Eros of Teaching
Celeste Snowber 148

Chapter Twelve
Notes on Saying and Showing, Beauty, and Other Ideas of Interest to Art and Education, with Reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein
Stuart Richmond 156

Chapter Thirteen
Living Aesthetically and the Poetics of Dailiness for Leadership
Celeste Snowber 173

Acknowledgements 190

Index 192

FOREWORD

This book is the result of a collaboration between two colleagues working in the field of teacher education and arts education and it draws on a wealth of their personal experience of teaching, art making, and individual scholarship. The authors believe that the arts can have a transformative effect on people, tapping into sources of creativity and authenticity that enrich and empower life. *Landscapes of Aesthetic Education* opens up vistas that show different ways of understanding what it means to be fully human. The term "landscape" implies a terrain that can be varied in shape and features; is able to be explored at one's own pace; is experienced through the mind, body, and senses, and may be appreciated. Aesthetic education is seen as the development of the perceptual abilities, feeling and appreciation, that are responsive to nature, the arts, and the sensuous qualities of everyday life. In the book, Celeste Snowber focuses mainly on the body, dance, and poetry; Stuart Richmond writes on art, aesthetics, and photography. The thread running through the book is visible in the educational exploration of artistic and aesthetic experience.

Arts-engaged practices not only open up spaces for personal reflection, but also create the realization that there is always more in our experience than we can fully predict, classify, or theorize about. There has been a renewed interest in creativity among students, academics, teachers, philosophers, and artists and a recognition that some things such as the aesthetic, love, and compassion must be shared and appreciated for their own sakes if individuals and communities are to flourish. In a world where there has been a growing disconnection between human beings and nature, the authors see this book as providing an alternative and more holistically motivated vision: one that reveals a love of the arts and the sensuous world and a more humane balance of intellect and feeling. Some chapters blend poetry expressively with text and others are philosophical in style. Still others are narrative, and non-linear in structure. Topics include beauty, creativity, dance, spirituality, visual art, poetry, medieval architecture, eros and teaching, ethics, mentorship, photography, Asian aesthetics, and globalization.

The authors value an embodied philosophy of education and they invite the reader to live aesthetically and in so doing gain a more intimate understanding of themselves and the world.

Stuart Richmond and Celeste Snowber
Vancouver, September 2009

CHAPTER ONE

THE MENTOR AS ARTIST: A POETIC EXPLORATION OF LISTENING, CREATING, AND MENTORING

CELESTE SNOWBER

This poetic essay explores mentoring as an act of deep listening in the way an artist must also listen in the creative process. This is done in the context of working with graduate students in a faculty of education where their research is intricately connected to both their educational practice and lives. As we are mindfully attentive to our students as they search out their questions for research, we are invited into deep listening, a process not much different than how the artist must listen to the specific words, colours, textures, and movements which express content, form, or lived experience. The artist and mentor work in the landscape of both the internal and external world, forging connections that bring passions to life. Both undergo a gestation process of attending to new life, or as the German poet Rilke (1984) has expressed, "everything is gestation and then birthing."[1]

Listening and mentoring are partners in a dance. It is not surprising that the listening and mentoring are partners in a dance. It is not surprising that the etymology of the word "mentor" is taken from the noun *mentos*, which literally means: intent, purpose, spirit, or passion.[2] I believe it is the task of the mentor to listen for the passion and purpose, perhaps not yet revealed, in the one being mentored. This is not unlike the artist listening and attending to how a piece of literature, visual art, or performance will take shape and form. As humans who have been given the birthright of the

[1] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. S. Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1984), 23.
[2] Online Etymological Dictionary, http://etymonline.com.

imagination, we are in the process of creating and recreating our lives.

The artist works with the materiality of form, whether that is sound, movement, word, or image, in order to create and recreate. The mentor also works with the human life filled with all its complexities, paradoxes and wonder to "midwife" a deeper inquiry into teaching, writing, and living. The role of the mentor is not that different than the role of spiritual director, one who sits alongside others as he or she discerns life's choices. The mentor's task is to open up a hospitable space, a tradition rooted in the practice of a spirituality, which integrates hospitality, listening, and mindfulness.[3] The educator and writer O'Reilly captures the relationship between a contemplative space and teaching when she says, "hospitality defines a space for the visitor—the student to be herself, because she is received graciously."[4]

The sculptor does not just place a preconceived image and sculpt it on the face of the marble, but sits with the marble long enough to know intimately its texture, form, and shape. With precision, skill, artistry, and intuition, the sculptor honours the marble's innate qualities and allows the image to emerge and come to life from stone. The sculptor must honour the nature of the stone and have a certain respect for its intrinsic nature in order for new form to be released. Both the mentor and artist draw on other aspects of human nature, which contribute to art making, leadership, or mentoring. The visual artist must look intently at form or the musician must listen acutely to sound, or the choreographer must feel the movement impulse. Mentoring and art making involve an invitation to put aside preconceived agendas and see and discern how a piece of art is taking shape.

The artwork often has a life of its own, and the artist's task is to listen to where it is going. As a writer, scholar, and dancer, I often marvel that a favourite chapter in a book I have written is the one I did not intend to write, or that the most exciting part of a dance is the part which emerged

---

[3] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: Directions, 1961); Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976); Henri Nouwen, *Way of the Heart* (New York, Seabury Press, 1981); Joan Chichester, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990); Margaret Guenther, *The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1992); Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996).

[4] Mary Rose O'Reilly, *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook/Heineman, 1998), 8.

only after performing it many times. L'Engle echoes the idea of the artist serving the art in her classic work, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Art and Faith*, stating, "Inspiration far more often comes during the work than before it, because the largest part of the job of the artist is to listen to the work, and to go where it tells him [or her] to go."[5] Deep listening to self, other, art, and the natural world infuse both mentoring and art making.

There is an art to listening to our lives. Research is not only an outward endeavour, but it travels in the realm of re-searching our own lives, knowledge, passions, and practice. As both a dancer/writer and academic, I have chosen methods of research, which include the personal as integral to forms of qualitative research, which draw upon artistic methodologies. I integrate autobiographical inquiry, narrative inquiry, and performative inquiry as research methodologies with my students. These approaches are incorporated within arts-based educational research methods and have had a growing interest among artists, educators, and researchers.[6]

This essay addresses the poetic as not only a way to describe the act of mentoring, but also as a way of theorizing. The arts, then, become a place not only of writing up the research, but also offer a method for deepening and shifting the perceptions and understandings of practices one engages in leadership. More important, I strive to use forms that shake preconceived ways of thinking and perceiving, which invite students to a fresh listening to their lives. This is what meaningful research and leadership asks of us—to listen to the alphabets of our lives. As human beings in a fast-paced culture, we are not necessarily trained in the art of

---

[5] Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Art and Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1980), 149.

[6] Thomas E. Barone and Elliot W. Eisner, "Arts-Based Educational Research" in *Complementary Methods for Research in Education*, ed. R. M. Jaeger, 73-103 (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 1997); C. T. Patrick Diamond and Carol A. Mullen, eds., *The Post-Modern Educator: Arts Based Inquiries and Teacher Development* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Lorri Neilsen, Ardra L. Cole, and J. Gary Knowles, eds., *The Art of Writing Inquiry* (Halifax: Backalong Books, 2001); Carl Leggo, "Research as Poetic Rumination: Twenty-Six Ways of Listening to Light" in *The Art of Writing Inquiry*, ed. Lorri Neilsen, Ardra L. Cole, and J. Gary Knowles, 173-195 (Halifax: Backalong Books, 2001); Carl Bagley and Mary Beth Cancienne, eds., *Dancing the Data* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); Liora Bresler, ed., *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds: Towards Embodied Teaching and Learning* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004); Rita L. Irwin and Alex de Cosson, *A/R/Topraphy: Rendering Self Through Arts-Based Living Inquiry* (Vancouver: Pacific Press, 2004).

deep or attentive listening.

It is through opening a hospitable space to our students that the dialogical process of listening can occur. This generative place can be one where the individual listens to the life that wants to be lived within him or her. Buechner, author and theologian, has articulated this well when he states, "The most basic lesson that all art teaches us is to stop, look, and listen to life on this planet, including our own lives, as a vastly richer, deeper, more mysterious business than most of the time it ever occurs to us to suspect as we bumble along from day to day on automatic pilot."[7] The gift of art in life is that it arrests me to pay attention to nuances and feelings that I may never have perceived, whether that is the resonances in poetic language or the colours of auburn and burgundy in a painting. Art awakens me, and once again, I am startled into the beauty of being alive.

As a dancer and writer, my task is to listen to language and movement, to hear its subtle whispers and bold proclamations.[8] The artist must learn to serve the work, to hear where it is going and respect that it has a life of its own. Not unlike listening and walking alongside students in the mentoring process, we must listen for the cues, linking them to their passions and callings. I can recall many instances of students who were embarking on a particular theme in research, which held their interest, but it did not enliven them. Subsequently, life's circumstances, whether multiple layers of grief, an illness, or loss of a job, precipitated them to investigate their particular life circumstances as their research. Here is where their passion soared, where they could marry theory and practice and explore the relationship between real-life events, and how it affected their teaching practice.

Listening to the underside of what is happening in a student's life is a sacred act, one that must take form in the soil of mindfulness and loving kindness. There are no maps for this kind of mentoring. It is only in the act of attending, and in drawing on intuitive understanding, that the mentor knows which way to direct the student, just as it is only in the practice of writing every day that the author knows which way the book will go. The practice of attending requires all from the mentor, a radical presence to the moment in order to let the individual unfold in all of his or her beauty.

---

[7] Frederich Buechner, *Listening to Your Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 57.

[8] Celeste Snowber, *Embodied Prayer: Toward Wholeness of Body, Mind, Soul* (Kelowna, BC: Northstone, 2004).

The following three poems explore the notion of graduate students' work being called forth through the process of listening. I work with a variety of graduate students who are in master's and doctoral programmes within education: some of these students are in classes I teach within curriculum studies, arts education, and educational leadership, and others I supervise in their theses and dissertation work. Some are enrolled on campus at the university, and others are in locations all over the province of British Columbia in off-campus master's degree programmes. The courses I teach vary, but the elements of research as a way of listening to one's life remains a constant. The first poem here, "Listening and Becoming," and the third, "Unfolding," are a response to the many hours of my being with individual students as they sorted out how their ideas would constitute the centre of their research. In this act both mentor/teacher and student are invited into the art of co-creating.

Listening and Becoming

To walk alongside,
and to listen deeply, in spaces
of in-between: the hints
where passion may hide
its face. To hear one's
heart in the midst of inquiry,
to feel a pulse,
and to run wild
as theories rise and fall
in the swell of practice:
teaching, leading,
facilitating, allowing
the alive space
between two
becoming more.

The poem "Listening in the World" continues the theme of listening, but it is listening as it relates to reading through a doctoral dissertation. Whether one is engaged in oral or written language, there are layers of hearing not only the words on the page, but the rivulets of meaning which rise to the surface.

Listening in the World

I hear the water beneath me
sitting on a long bench
perched on edge of cliff
overlooking the Gulf islands
on the West Coast of Vancouver.
This morning I have been listening
to a student's doctoral
dissertation on music
improvisation. I can't help
thinking that the rhythm
of the ocean's lap
is an improvisation.
The notes are not
on a scale, but there are
allegros of crashing waves
adagios of rippling
tides, splashes and trickles,
comforting tones of water.
I am lullabied in
morning winter sun,
and am aware that it is
the sounds and timbre of
ocean's score
where I enter solace.

How many people
just come and
listen at your edge?

Listening here,
near salt and sea
is no different
than listening to my students
as they listen to me
all of our words
our different worlds
wrapped in each breath
of paper and voice.

Unfolding
[*For the Prince George master's of education cohort at Simon Fraser University*]

We sat, one by
one, holding space,
sharing the passion
of ideas
roped into hearts,
exuded through teaching,
transformed through
stretching and loosening
new ways
of seeing and being
living and writing.

We met in a roaming
office, graduate students
from Northern British Columbia,
in bookstores and river walks
lounges and breakfast tables
classrooms and restaurants.
Each person a beauty
unfolding into the
marrow of their own
precious life
a wondrous re/search
into a final project,
with infinite love
each carved out
a path, a tangible
inquiry, the dance of
theory and practice.

I came away in awe,
where it is only
a space broken open,
where we can
live into the life
which is bending
towards us.

I teach to learn
I learn to teach
I open space to
be opened up,

once again to my
own life, created in
the midst of
learning together.

Mentoring is a co-creative process that is dialogical. Both mentor and student are opened into new understandings. If we "teach who we are," as Palmer, author of the well-known book, *The Courage to Teach*, says, we transform as our students transform.[9] Many of us know that graduate education extends far beyond learning content, and students live into the deep questions of life, where both words and worlds break open to them. I have often thought of how one measures the growth of other aspects of the human being that occur simultaneously as one goes on the journey of graduate training. This includes the development of other kinds of multiple intelligences and the personal growth of aspects of the soul, heart, senses and body. How does one measure the workings of the interior life? I am aware of the need to quantify and measure what is intrinsic to rigour, and even more so as I go through the tenure process, but I also challenge how we can possibly "measure" the depths one travels to in the process of mentoring.

The next poem, "Measuring Beauty," touches upon the problematic form of measuring beauty, growth, and the ineffable. It asks how one listens to and evaluates the growth of the soul. I wrote this poem returning from the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference, in San Diego, California, in April 2004.

Measuring Beauty

Bougainvillaea drop from
every corner, reds of ever hint
burgundy pink, red blood,
chartreuse bold, tomato red
spilling over green highlights.
They have no odour, yet an
order all of their own; they
deconstruct the places of terror,
military planes constantly
in the background of
AERA conference.

[9] Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of the Teacher's Life*, (New York: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

How does one measure the
beauty of bougainvillaea?
Is there a standard or model
for the growth of lush flowers,
or the life of the soul and heart
of our students, for that matter?

What I am proposing here, along with others in the educational community, is that there are many characteristics and skills that are necessary for both the leader and educator, which have been sorely neglected in the area of leadership.[10] I would argue that the aspects of loving kindness, soulfulness, and heartfulness come into play as part of the palette of what makes a thoughtful and discerning leader. To cultivate the soul takes a certain kind of rigour, which asks the individual to look at all aspects of personal growth, including light, dark, and shadow. This has another kind of rigour, not easy to quantify, but if it takes place in an environment of judgement, the soul will hide. The soul needs a certain acceptance to come out and play, to come out and work. This is a delicate balance in the environment of many of our academic institutions, corporate workplaces, and classrooms. I am reminded of a poem by the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz that captures the need for a loving environment to be in place in order for blossoming to occur.

How did the Rose?

How
did the rose
ever open its heart
and give to this world all of its beauty?
It felt the encouragement of light against its being,
otherwise we all remain too
frightened.[11]

Mentoring is listening, metaphorically speaking, to the roses in our lives. The best quality we can offer the world is to become our authentic selves and cooperate with our own natures. This process is a mindful attentiveness to the passions forming within our students and us. This takes skill and art,

[10] Diana Denton and Will Ashton, *Spirituality, Action and Pedagogy: Teaching from the Heart* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).
[11] Hafiz, cited in Daniel Ladinsky, ed, *Love Poems From God: Twelve Sacred Voices From East and West* (New York: Penguin Compass, 2002), 161.

but it also takes an intuitive rendering of the world, a deep listening. In our listening, we are sometimes asked to let go of our own agendas and plans and be startled by the wonder of students travelling down unfamiliar roads, but ones which challenge not only the mind, but the heart and soul.

I come to mentoring as an artist. I invite the reader to consider the art of listening and walking alongside students as a creative endeavour, an act of co-creation. One can lead with the heart, listen with the soul, analyze with the mind, and attend with the gestures of the body.

To mentor is

To mentor
is to open up
to the cracks of beauty
with the one/s we
walk beside.

To mentor
is to say yes
to limits and grace
shadow and light
in both yourself
and the one/s we
dialogue in silence
and sound.

To mentor
is to listen to
the stirrings within
the still voice of
emergent call—
passions found
at daybreak.

To mentor
is to be born to
humus and humility
spirit and body
in the artistry
of life and learning.

This essay has begun to make the connections between the art of mentoring and the art of listening in the creative process. The process of both mentoring and art making are practices which draw on a variety of human experiences and gifts. Central to this process is the notion of deep listening to our self and each other, and form, which is being created. As human beings, our lives are art-works, ones in an ever-changing mode of being and becoming. I invite the reader to see the engagement in the art of leadership as having connections to the creative process. In the journey of mentoring, one may begin to see the poetry in a life, and crack open to the wonder of both knowledge and wisdom.

Works Cited

Bagley, Carl and Mary Beth Cancienne, eds. *Dancing the Data*. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.

Barone, Thomas E. and Elliot W. Eisner. "Arts-Based Educational Research." In *Complementary Methods for Research in Education*, edited by R. M. Jaegar, 73-103. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 1997.

Bresler, Liora, ed. *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds: Towards Embodied Teaching and Learning.* Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004.

Buechner, Frederich. *Listening to Your Life.* San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1992.

Chichester, Joan. *Wisdom Distilled From the Daily.* New York: Harper & Row, 1990.

Denton, Diana and Will Ashton, eds. *Spirituality, Action and Pedagogy: Teaching From the Heart.* New York: Peter Lang, 2004.

Diamond, C. T. Patrick and Carol A. Mullen, eds. *The Postmodern Educator: Arts-Based Inquiries and Teacher Development.* New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

Guenther, Margaret. *The Art of Spiritual Direction.* Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1992.

Irwin, Rita L. and Alex de Cosson, eds. *A/R/Tography: Rendering Self Through Arts-Based Living Inquiry.* Vancouver: Pacific Press, 2004.

Ladinsky, Daniel, ed. *Love Poems From God: Twelve Sacred Voices From East and West.* New York: Penguin Compass, 2002.

Leggo, Carl. "Research as Poetic Rumination: Twenty-Six Ways of Listening to Light." In *The Art of Writing Inquiry*, edited by Lorri Neilsen, Ardra L. Cole, and J. Gary Knowles, 173-95. Halifax: Backalong Books, 2001.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *Walking on Water: Reflections on Art and Faith.* Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1980.
Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation.* New York: Directions, 1961.
Nhat Hanh, Thich. *The Miracle of Mindfulness.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975.
Neilsen, Lorri, Ardra L. Cole, and J. Gary Knowles, eds. *The Art of Writing Inquiry*. Halifax: Backalong Books, 2001.
Norris, Kathleen. *The Cloister Walk.* New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.
Nouwen, Henri. *Way of the Heart.* New York: Seabury Press, 1981.
O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook/Heinemann, 1998.
Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of the Teacher's Life*. New York: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*, translated by S. Mitchell. New York: Vintage, 1984.
Snowber, Celeste. *Embodied Prayer: Toward Wholeness of Body, Mind, Soul*. Kelowna, BC: Northstone, 2004.

CHAPTER TWO

ON CITY SIGHTS AND BEING AN ARTIST: PONDERING LIFE AND EDUCATION IN A MARKET ECONOMY

STUART RICHMOND

Today's global market culture infects and distorts some of our deepest sympathies and instincts—the capacity for solitude, appreciation, an authentic self and voice, human relationships, the following of genuine interests on account of their intellectual or aesthetic fascination, for example, compassion and fellow feeling, or the human urge to lie fallow occasionally, and simply while away a bit of time. Life is constant, single-minded production, 24-7. You have always to be switched on, online, devoted to your work, quick off the mark, accessible, compliant, a believer in the company mission, cooperative, uncritical (despite the rhetoric), able to promote yourself, bring in the money, and sell your ideas. In the face of the daily onslaught of media persuasion, business speak, falsification of feeling, the stealing of our right to perceive, experience, and work things out for ourselves (anything of value is already taken and packaged for selling), and the technocratic mind-set, which forces thinking into skill and problem-solving talk (is life a problem to be solved?), taxonomies, theories, appeals to science, and measurement of results (accountability) whatever the situation, the resulting insensitivity to individuality and difference, the looting of the earth, constant engine noise, not to mention the many conflicts and injustices in the world, I am constantly asking myself how best to do my job (as an art educator), how best to live in today's world.

John Berger (2003) notes:

> People everywhere—under very different conditions—are asking themselves: Where are we? The question is historical not geographical.

> What are we living through? Where are we being taken? What have we lost? How to continue without a plausible vision of the future? Why have we lost any view of what is beyond a lifetime? …To the anguished question of Where are we? the experts murmur: Nowhere![1]

For Berger, a major source of world problems is "consumerist ideology."[2] He says:

> Its aim is to delocalize the entire world…. [and] to undermine the existent so that everything collapses into a special version of the virtual, from the realm of which there will be… a never-ending source of profit. It sounds stupid. Tyrannies *are* stupid. This one is destroying at every level the life on the planet on which it operates.[3]

I trust Berger's instincts; he is a long-standing politically sensitive commentator on art and cultural issues, a novelist, and visual artist. In a suggestive comment, he says:

> An interdisciplinary vision is necessary in order to take in what is happening [in the global world], to connect the 'fields' that are institutionally kept separate.[4]

An influential pre-postmodern philosopher is Ludwig Wittgenstein. His major work on the nature of language, *Philosophical Investigations* (1974), was written as a series of numbered paragraphs rather than as a formal discursive text. He had this to say in the preface:

> After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realized I should never succeed…. my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination. And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction. The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches…. so that if you looked at them

[1] John Berger, "Introduction: Where Are We Now?" in *Between the Eyes: Essays on Photography and Politics*, by David Levi Strauss, viii-ix (New York: Aperture, 2003).
[2] Ibid, vii.
[3] Ibid, ix.
[4] Ibid, x.

> you could get a picture of the landscape. Thus this book is really only an album.[5]

For Wittgenstein, in order to grasp language in its rich irregularity, he felt he had to roam about freely. How difficult it is to use language to explore language as the fault lines keep leading us to make the same conceptual mistakes. In *Culture and Value* (1980), Wittgenstein observes: "I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a poetic composition."[6] In Wittgenstein's case, the idea is to get small, allusive, sometimes aphoristic but penetrating glimpses of a situation that may gradually open things up to view. In order to do this, Wittgenstein the philosopher had to think like an artist.

In thinking about art and education in a market culture, I would like to take a leaf out of Wittgenstein's book. I do not think any single, carefully constructed linear perspective can do justice to the complexity of the situation. Market thinking affects whole ways of life, building in us through massive advertising and propaganda, deep instrumental modes of responding and reasoning that I believe need to be countered by emphasizing qualities of the human and everyday as well as rational argument. So I'm opting for a less direct approach, hoping that a collage of personal, anecdotal and metaphorical reflections on nature, art, and teaching will convey the impressionistic feel of lived experience, illuminate critical arguments concerning identity, instrumental rationality, postmodernism, and art education, and permit the exploration of ways of thinking and valuing that differ markedly from marketing mindsets. The paper consequently has a literary form intended to engage the reader imaginatively, engender an aesthetic ethos, and open up ideas for reflection and interpretation. As Wittgenstein recognized, *showing* can sometimes be more useful than explication, even in the arcane reaches of philosophy, and for that reason I prefer to let the various episodes and passages speak for themselves. I reach no definite conclusions, believing these to be the reader's prerogative.

---

[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), vii.

[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 24e.

Everyday Aesthetics

I live on the eleventh floor in a concrete high-rise close to the city centre in Vancouver. Once in a while I get to watch a strange ballet that takes place between a bald eagle and a crow. At first I thought this was the crow's designated job of driving off the eagle. Maybe it is that. But having witnessed these encounters several times, I'm not so sure. The crow soars above the eagle then dives straight for it, sweeping away at the last second, avoiding contact. The eagle alters course a little bit up or down or side to side but makes no really defensive moves. It floats magisterially around in the sky, unbothered, not heading off anywhere. The crow returns, dive bombs, changing course at a hair's breadth, rolling over, with wings folded, without touching the eagle. I watch this performance, which seems like play, in awe of the flying abilities and acrobatics of the two creatures. My respect for the crow has gone up enormously. It is a magician of the air. Noisy and awkward on land, once airborne it is in its element. The harsh "ark ark" can put you off. But the jet-black glossy feathers and black beak have their charms given a good light. Crows are ruffians. Every night at around 8:00 p.m., small gangs fly past the apartment heading east to their nesting area ten miles out. It looks like an evacuation. They come in ragged waves, quiet now. They are survivors, but so is the eagle.

It is eagle week. As I walk over a high bridge into the city, a bald eagle suddenly soars up over the guardrail immediately on my right and buzzes me at a height of five metres. I just watch, awestruck, as the regal animal soars away. Today, returning a video, I look up to see two large blue herons sailing past side by side high overhead, the DC3s of the bird world, legs stretched out back, wide flappy wings, moving sedately and gracefully. I see them quite a bit over city neighbourhoods. It's the incongruity that is striking; that and their indifference.

It's good to get out and walk, smell the sea and plants, hear the song of the red-winged blackbird on the seawall, and sometimes the finch on my balcony hiding in the jasmine bush. Spotting the blackbird, I can't help humming the "Blackbird" tune from the Beatles. Walking in the city is therapy. I don't have a plan. Recently I read these words from the German painter Gerhard Richter (1995):

> Strange though this may sound, not knowing where one is going—being lost, being a loser—reveals the greatest possible faith and optimism, as

> against collective security and collective significance.[7]

Growing up in East Germany under communist rule, Richter has felt the need ever since to avoid ideologies. Not of course that we can ever be free of them. Another comment I like from Richter is:

> Letting a thing come, rather than creating it—no assertions, formulations, inventions, ideologies—in order to gain access to all that is genuine, richer, more alive: to what is beyond my understanding.[8]

Richter stresses the importance of self-doubt and being aware of our limitations for survival. Let's hear more about these limitations; I'm fed up with the masters-of-the-universe mentality.

There is a wonderfully exotic tree outside St Paul's Hospital. The leaves are pale green and reminiscent of maple. The bark is smooth and peeling like the Arbutus. It turns out, I learn from a plaque, the tree is a Hippocratic Plane tree (Platinus Orientalis), grown at UBC from a seed taken from a tree on the Greek island of Kos, under which Hippocrates taught medicine. Planted here in 1978, it has a sheltered position facing south and is flourishing at a height of about fifteen metres. Every time I pass the hospital I go and take a look, stand under it, feel the trunk, have a bit of a commune with it. It started life in the Aegean.

Carrying on with the walk, I pass an old wooden two-storey house with a porch supported by turned wooden columns and a carved wood frieze squeezed between new glass and steel buildings. Large trees bloom at the side and back, oak and maple, planted a century ago. Their days are numbered. There is a building boom. Rhododendrons, in front, overgrown, are in flower. I try to imagine the life of the house in days past, children playing, vegetable gardens in the back and other simple houses around it, trees planted in the boulevard. Such living near to downtown seems impossible today. I recently saw a plaque in a park honouring a man from Scotland who spent fifty years on the west coast propagating rhododendrons for the park service. Imagine spending your whole life tending a single plant. Does this take love? Walking the old city neighbourhoods, it is amazing to see how many corner shops were

---

[7] Gerhard Richter, *Gerhard Richter: The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews 1962-1993* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Anthony d'Offay Gallery London, 1995), 15.
[8] Ibid, 119.

included in city planning, many now turned into homes. A few stores survive selling groceries. Also, mature trees of many kinds form cool arbours linking foliage to form a forest canopy. Unlike bald high rises unshielded from the sun's glare, the old houses and sidewalks nestle in shade and breeze.

Clusters of tall, pencil-thin concrete buildings are redefining the cityscape, reminding me more and more of the high-density living of Asia. The old Sun Tower, built in 1912, with its pale green cupola dome and seventeen floors, was once the tallest building in Canada. On the west side, if you look up, you can see five large "muses," caryatids, beautifully sculpted in classical style supporting a cornice. There are four more on the north façade. It's easy to miss them with eyes kept to ground level. Around the city are many classy old buildings. The Sylvia Hotel, built as an eight-story apartment block in 1912 in the Edwardian Classical style, now covered with Virginia Creeper, and named after the owner's daughter, became a hotel in 1936. It has an air of genteel dilapidation and is a one-off. The James Bay Inn in Victoria, British Columbia, is another nice old relic.

When I was growing up in industrial South Yorkshire in the fifties, people had garden allotments. These are small pieces of arable land rented for a minimal charge from the local council and used for growing vegetables and a few hardy flowers. Coal miners' and steelworkers' families with no backyards could get out and grow carrots, potatoes, lettuce, gooseberries, mint and often rhubarb, which had to be kept in an old bucket to stop it from spreading. Rhubarb and ginger jam, and rhubarb wine are two underappreciated additions to the family larder. Sometimes the gardeners would put up small sheds: somewhere to sit, make tea, have a chat, idle away an hour in the Sunday morning sun. There are garden allotments near where I live now, huddled next to a disused Canadian Pacific railway line.

My grandfather kept chickens in his backyard. He was also an enthusiastic brewer of beer, especially during the 1939-45 war. But the eggs meant something special during rationing and a system of exchange of goods and services was common. The keeping of pigeons, rabbits, small racing dogs called whippets, and budgerigars was also common among working people. My grandfather died when he was my age. He had a hard job in a steel-making mill at a time when there was no national health care or unemployment insurance. It is important to remember that the universal

health care system of Canada began in Saskatchewan in 1962 through the work of then-premier Tommy Douglas.

Growing fig, olive, and oleander in pots on a city balcony in Canada takes a lot of wrapping in burlap. The oleander plant with its profusion of pink flowers and pointed leaves has an aroma of almond. The figs are edible. I think my grandfather would have been impressed. He read poetry and played the harp. My grandmother never learned to read; she was deaf due to scarlet fever, and was "in service" as a maid at age eleven. Her talent was that people loved being with her.

Writing to the English painter Leon Kossoff, John Berger (2001) remarks:

> Yes, at our age [certainly over sixty] the most important thing is to "hold things together" to "keep the experiment going." And it's (most of the time) rather difficult.[9]

I understand that. It takes me longer these days to do everyday things. The decline of powers with aging though is not necessarily an illness to be treated. Seeing the physically deteriorated Pope close to death, undiminished in spirit, carrying on with his public duties was a kind of truth telling that contradicted the eternally flawless human caricatures of advertising.

Pedagogical and Philosophical Matters

Being with university students, vibrant, full of themselves, cocky at times, is a bracing tonic. Every class is an event. You connect with some, most perhaps, but not all. The chemistry fails in some way. Maybe it is personality, that important ingredient in teaching that the research can't or won't touch. But each class has a life and character of its own. The worry for me at the beginning is whether I will be able to get in tune with it. Students are all so different. I have to leave room for things to develop in process which can be a bit unnerving but I know if I resist the urge to bring closure too quickly, resist the urge to explain everything, after some rough spots, the class usually develops some good energy. I just did a project with my summer curriculum class on "local distinctiveness." I got the idea from the Common Ground UK website.[10] The idea is to go out

[9] John Berger, *The Shape of a Pocket* (New York: Pantheon, 2001), 81.
[10] Common Ground UK, http://www.commonground.org.uk.

into the neighbourhood and identify qualities and features that reveal the unique character of place. Making photographs and drawings, collecting bits and pieces, making rubbings, writing small pieces are all encouraged. The idea is to complete an ABC poster with some image, poem, or contribution for each letter that taken together reveals an identity. It is amazing what can be found of history, fragments and remains of previous inhabitants and lives, different cultures, industries, architecture, and food. There is a richness and complexity in the community once we slow down and look. There is no beauty in a life of haste. The steady stream of well-educated young people choosing to be teachers is reason to be thankful. They know they are not going to get rich working in education. For many, this is the choice of vocation.

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1991) describes two key distinguishing features of today's society: one is an individualism that is narcissistic and inward-looking, less willing to participate in society, accompanied by a relativism in values in which personal choice is everything. A person's values tend not to be questioned out of respect for the individual, says Taylor, which is an understandable moral point, but this can become a problem if values cannot reasonably be debated or improved upon. A second problem, according to Taylor, is the dominance of instrumental, or mean-ends thinking, aided by technology. We tend to look to science to solve problems rather than reflecting on intrinsic moral or aesthetic qualities of life for guidance. Selfish individualism combined with instrumental thinking, thinks Taylor, make it difficult to take collective action on such problem areas as the environment as we become more fragmented, losing a sense of connection and common purpose. However, Taylor believes that individualism has a moral justification when the focus is on being true to ourselves, rather than on simply satisfying personal wants. Drawing on Romantic philosophy, he believes that "each of us has an original way of being human,"[11] of living our lives authentically, and, further, for Taylor:

> We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression.[12]

[11] Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord, ON: Anansi, 1991), 28.
[12] Ibid, 33.

This identity is articulated and expressed, "dialogically,"[13] that is, through various languages (art, gesture, love, words) used in relation to a context of community values, significant others, history, traditions, or what Taylor calls "horizons of significance."[14] You risk not being developed as an authentic person to the extent that you do not interact with the world, with other values: conceptions of the good, for example, or beauty. Such horizons of significance are not absolute or fixed by authority for all time, they evolve as we evolve, but they do provide a means to understand our predicament, or indeed, to take issue with elements with which we disagree. Valued ideals enable us to focus on what makes life worth living, and enable us to question, for example, the proposed building of a new parking lot on top of an old neighbourhood park. One key point: for Taylor, the arts constitute what he calls, borrowing from Shelley, "subtler languages"[15] in that they enable us to give more particular and personally felt shape to ideas through, for example, paint, or poetry, and in so doing create meaning that cannot be put in any other way. This self-expression is also at the same time a kind of self-discovery. We learn something of who we are as we begin the difficult process of assembling thoughts and feelings concerned with a reality greater than just ourselves. For Taylor, authentic self-definition involves making our own life while engaging dialogically with the broader world. Indeed, identity, argues Taylor can only be developed in this way. The idea that we can give shape to our lives, be true to ourselves in company with others and indeed that this is the only way to realize an authentic (and moral self) is a powerful image. In the west, we believe we are entitled to a life of our own, though there may be many obstacles. Many gay people have had to make a serious life choice to live openly in accord with their true identities. Women also have had to struggle to assert their rights, as have working people and members of cultural groups. At times some of the governing mores of community must be rejected.

Individual persons as persons are irreplaceable. This is their magic. In Taylor's arguments, the arts have a special role to play in developing understanding and selfhood, and for this reason alone are a crucial part of a child's education. Loving a person (*this* person) or artwork means in some degree, loving their uniqueness.

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid, 39.
[15] Ibid, 81.

In a book of short stories about people coping with the economic and political changes sweeping the world, entitled *Resistance*, by Barry Lopez (2004), I find the following: "We reject the assertion, promoted today by success-mongering bull terriers in business, in government, in religion, that humans are goal-seeking animals"[16]; "One day I realized I no longer had any desire to be recognized…. I had nothing, anymore, to sell"[17]; and "I took hope as well from the power of poetry to meet misery with compassion. Finally, I found renewal in a circle of friends."[18]

"Okanagan Lake" 2005

Entering the cool lake I become weightless
On the sandy hills forests of Ponderosa pine, bears, eagles, crows, deer,
cougar, butterflies, humming birds, owls, junkos, chickadees,
woodpeckers, coyotes, rattlers, salmonberries, honey bees, mosquitoes
Submerging in the silent cool green depths
Gliding
A fish resting on the bottom totally still
Holding my breath, finally here
Body tingling, moving easy, sun on my back
Warm now, breast stroke
Better with goggles
Going down again, just swimming
No Time.

During the summer curriculum class, the question was raised as to how classroom teachers might work to offset or balance the bias towards the instrumental, means-ends mindset that Taylor describes (Taylor is a class text). After some time, one student explained the difficulty his group had in considering the issue: "We keep falling back into instrumental justifications for everything" he said, citing the idea that poetry develops critical thinking which is useful in problem solving, "which we then realize defeats the purpose." Analogously, this was Wittgenstein's problem. He realized that thinking of language primarily as logical and rule-governed with attainable definitions for words based in essential features leads us into mistakes in analysis. Art, for example, cannot be so defined. Language is shot through with such indeterminacies. "A *picture* held us captive" he says, "And we could not get outside it for it lay in our

[16] Barry Lopez, *Resistance* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 11.
[17] Ibid, 123.
[18] Ibid, 156.