

Field Note #1: What Am I Doing Here?

PART ONE

“Others determine “exactly” what “you are” and used fixed names. To be yourself is to be in a process of creating a self, and identity. If it were not a process, there would be no surprise. The surprise comes along with becoming different—consciously different as one finds ways of acting in envisaged possibility. It comes along with hearing different words and music, seeing from unaccustomed angles, realizing that the world perceived from one place is not the world.”

~ Maxine Greene, Releasing the Imagination

On August 17, 1965, “Robert Kincaid, photographer-writer, from Bellingham, Washington, who drove an old pickup truck named Harry” and “Francesca Johnson, farmer’s wife, of Madison County, Iowa, long ago from Naples” fell in love. In *The Bridges of Madison County*, Robert James Waller describes each person using common monikers both to shine a light on the names and words that fix each one to his and her place and situation, as well as to show how these names and words are never entirely *who* we are when we are in the process of becoming. In this moment in the biographical memoir, Francesca and Kincaid are becoming—are in the process of creating an entirely new world out of thin air, out of possibility, and, perhaps more importantly, realizing that their perceptions of their worlds were forever changing in relation to one another:

She remembered the brandy. ‘I have some brandy. Or would you like some coffee?’

‘Is the possibility of both open?’ His words came out of the darkness. She knew he was smiling.

When we think or reflect on our growth as individuals over time—especially our literal growth from adolescence to adulthood—Maxine Greene’s words about names, creating identities, and perceptions seem obvious *and* poignant. And Waller’s are subtly prophetic: Why do I have to choose between coffee and brandy? Why can’t I choose both? Can I choose both?

As a teenager, identity is most important and is represented in a variety of ways. Teenagers make very conscious choices about clothing and footwear, brands and logos, friends and enemies, language and gesture. While it may be argued that it happens at various times in the growth of a child, in adolescence our instincts and minds are acutely alive to the need and desire to create and *re*-create our selves—something which never leaves a person as we can plainly read in the lives of Robert Kincaid and Francesca Johnson. But for teenagers the choices are often constrained or relegated to dichotomies: either brandy or coffee, but never both.

When I first began teaching secondary school, I recall being confused by some of the choices my students made in regards to expressions of identity. It was easy (too easy) for me to forget that a teenager’s choices, although conscious and deliberate, are limited because her world is small, constrained by the adults who still exert control over her and the society that (rightly) protects her as a child from too much mobility or freedom. I’m ashamed to say that it took me a few

years to grasp this and to begin to see that (part of) my job was to expand my students' worlds safely and deliberately.

I am reminded of the teacher, Don Gregorio, in José Luis Cuerda's film, *Butterfly*, showing the young Moncho the tongue of the butterfly, the proboscis; and describing the unique courtship rituals of the *tilonorrinco* bird in Australia. Moncho revels in these words and ideas and the world that is shown to him by his teacher. At the end of the film when he and other children are encouraged to throw stones and insults at Don Gregorio and other Spanish Republicans condemned to death, although Moncho does throw poorly aimed stones, his spoken insults are the words taught to him: *espiritrompa* (Sp. "proboscis") and *tilonorrinco*. I'm sure when he was teaching the boy the words, Don Gregorio never imagined that they would be used as a secret communication of love and respect at the most dire time in the older man's life. Indeed, Moncho's words and actions embody the sentiment in Herb Warren's poetic continuation of the well-known "Sticks and stones" schoolyard rhyme both when he chooses to say *something*, rather than nothing, and in what he chooses to say:

*"Sticks and stones may break my bones
But words could never hurt me"
And this I knew was surely true
And truth could not desert me.*

*But now I know it is not so.
I've changed the latter part;
For sticks and stones may break the bones
But words can break the heart.*

*Sticks and stones may break the bones
But leave the spirit whole;
But simple words can break the heart
Or silence crush the soul.*

Like Don Gregorio taking his students on nature walks, it is the job of the teacher to lead a child into the world—pointing along the way and giving language to this and that beautiful and curious thing—so that the child can cultivate an apperception of the world and imagine the endless possibilities it offers him in his life, his spirit, and his soul. It is also the teacher's job to show her students that, while choices may be limited initially, dichotomies are constructed and may (must) be dismantled—that we may safely and happily choose both coffee *and* brandy, or neither, or something else entirely. I hold these beliefs firmly now. As a beginning teacher, however, the germ of the philosophy was just beginning to grow and the pains they produced were real.

PART TWO

"Moreover, to learn to teach, one must have an awareness of leaving something behind while reaching toward something new, and this kind of awareness must be linked to imagination."

~ Maxine Greene, Releasing the Imagination

When I first began teaching, I despaired. Head in my hands often, I wailed aloud these words, "I don't know what I am doing." and "I don't know how to DO this." My partner, a seasoned teacher for the past two decades, became impatient with me because, in her mind, she felt I DID know how to DO this and that I was simply making it more difficult for myself than it needed to be. I couldn't explain to her what I was feeling though, and we argued in the way that people do who love one another very much but seem at odds in a fundamental way. Soon I learned to despair alone or with others.

Only now in recalling that time am I able to articulate what I meant by "not knowing" and it was not so much about not being prepared adequately (which is what my partner thought) but, rather, that I was having an acute "awareness of leaving something behind while reaching toward something new." And in this sense I wasn't prepared because nowhere in teacher education was this change described.

But what was I leaving behind, exactly? So many things about the world and myself and my place in it that I had thought were solid and fixed to certain names were disintegrating around me. I had thought I knew who a teacher is and what she does. I had based my definitions on my own experiences (as one does) as a student in grade school as well as in various post-secondary sites of teaching and learning. In *Practice Makes Practice*, Deborah Britzman writes that teaching is "one of the most familiar professions in this culture" because "[w]e have all played a role opposite teachers for a large part of our school lives. It is taken for granted that we all know what a teacher is and does." (p. 6)

And so, my head was in my hands because, even though I had earned my certificate to be a "teacher", I slowly began to realize that the "being" of a teacher was nowhere near *what* I thought it was or *who* I thought I was. In fact, it was actually *nothing* (literally, *no* thing) because it was just *beginning* in me. I was in process (and still am) and was not even close to being "not yet".

In my return to high school as a teacher, I was figuratively returning to an adolescence, where I was undergoing (along with my teenage counterparts) a period of growth and nourishment. This nourishment came in all forms, some more palatable than others. But who I was and would be as a teacher began, first, with a shedding of everything I thought I knew. This was perhaps the most uncomfortable: the conscious demolition and discarding of the mores of teaching and education that had been built in my mind as a student:

For those who leave this [student] world to enter teacher education, their first culture shock may well occur with the realization of the overwhelming complexity of the teacher's work and the myriad ways the complexity is masked and misunderstood. But

what occurs as well is the startling idea that the taking up of an identity means suppressing aspects of the self. So at first glance, becoming a teacher may mean becoming someone you are not. (Britzman, p. 8)

Here was the crux of the situation and the despair I felt. The reality of being a teacher in those first few months and years were disappointing. Like Francesca in Madison Country, I felt the solidity of the attitudes of teachers and teaching around me and I was “discouraged”, “compromised and alone, in spite of the outward friendliness of the community. Poets were not welcome here.” But like Francesca, my worldview shifted and changed. Like Moncho, the shift came in the form of graduate teacher education and encounters with my own Don Gregorios who illuminated a different way of seeing the world and showed me that my despair was real and that being a teacher demanded my “becoming different”:

“We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share. It is simply not enough for us to reproduce the way things are.”

~ Maxine Greene, Releasing the Imagination

I was beginning to realize I wanted to change things for the better for my students, and students and children everywhere. This is when I began, in Maxine Greene’s immortal words, to “do philosophy”. As such, part of my being a teacher on this quest is to keep the memory of discomfort close, for it is never really gone, though it has become less uncomfortable. As Robert Kincaid wrote, *“The old dreams were good dreams; they didn’t work out, but I’m glad I had them.”*

It is the memory of my past selves and discomfort that allows me boundless empathy with my teenage friends and students. And it is because of my love for them and the world that I want to continue being and becoming different—a teacher who is both open to and opens new and imagined possibilities.

Field Note #2: Change Your Life

I think I have always been an historian. As a young child, I used to comb the dirt of our small, terraced parcel in Coquitlam looking for arrowheads or bones or other archeological treasures. I wanted to make a discovery borne from careful attention. In grade 12 I took History but skipped many of the classes. Despite my poor attendance, I was still fascinated by the late 19th century and the World Wars and I continued on to university to study literature.

Initially unsure of my academic focus, I was swayed to mediaeval literature in 2nd year by the passion and expertise of a lovely Welsh Chaucer professor, and I spent most of my time reading about Courtly love, learning to pronounce Middle English as well as she did (an impressive skill in my books!), and listening to polyphonic music by *Anonymous 4*. As a young adult I was endlessly fascinated by old cities and countries and the centuries of history they contain in their artifacts and architecture. I travelled when I could afford to Scotland, England, France, and Germany and marvelled at their oldness.

In my mid-20s I spent a few months as a clerk in the Provincial Government tasked with cataloguing evidence (oral histories and artifacts) in the biggest land claim trial in BC. A couple of years later, as a telephone agent for Employment Insurance, I spoke to the residents of the same places I had catalogued—ancient lands with ancient people still living and suffering there.

In my late 20s I went to cooking school and became trained in classical French culinary arts. In my 30s I opened a small cafe and sought to cook simple French food in a space designed (as much as I could) like an *auberge* in the Provençal countryside circa the 17th century.

Much later in life, when I decided to become an English teacher, I took a 20th century Anglo-American novel course because my undergraduate work was embarrassingly bereft of more recent historical writing. In my time spent studying mediaeval literature, I felt that anything produced later than the 17th century was distastefully “modern”. As I immersed myself in the English and American literature of the interwar period—Woolf, Orwell, Lawrence, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Wright—I realized that my historical predilection possibly knew no bounds and I became enamored with *Les années folles*, the dirty 30s, the Jazz Age, and the Modern era.

The allure of the old and ancient, although the descriptors point to different points on the line of time, has always been a pull to the (hi)storied creative products of human making (relics, poetry, novels, music, story-telling, photographs, architecture and design) and that deep desire *to make a discovery borne from careful attention*.

Careful attention is what Maxine Greene calls for when in the presence of aesthetic experiences, the arts, and all the myriad ways in which arts and aesthetics are created by human beings:

*This is the starting point: the ability to feel from the inside what the arts are like and how they mean.*¹

She describes this as learning “to make sense, all kinds of sense,” “to notice what there is to be noticed,”² and, ultimately, “to make possible...the living of lyrical moments, moments at which human beings (freed to feel, to know, and to imagine) suddenly understand their own lives in relation to all that surrounds.”³

Sense-making is what it means to be alive and creating meaning from our experiences. The sense we make, the meaning we create in and of the world, for ourselves as individuals and communities is what constitutes our way of *being* as a verb. It is the *doing* of our philosophies in the least active manner—and yet *doing*, nonetheless. It is what impels us thoughtfully and with intention.

When Maxine Greene calls upon us to teach and learn from aesthetic education and to do philosophy, she does so with the hope that this careful attention to the products of human creativity, and the meaning and subsequent value we assign to these experiences, will change us and others because we have made “an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements.”⁴ “When this happens,” she writes, “new connections are made in experience: new patterns are formed, new vistas are opened. Persons *see* differently, resonate differently; as Rilke wrote in one of his poems, [we] are enabled to pay heed when a work of art tells [us], ‘You must change your life’ (1940/1974, p.93).”⁵

¹ Blue Guitar, 7

² Ibid., 6.

³ Ibid., 7.

⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵ Ibid.

Works of art that challenge us to change our lives are voices that cannot be ignored. More often than not those voices are actual voices and the narratives they tell are their own (communal) sense-making of the world. Some voices speak to us louder than others. Hemingway and Steinbeck touched my soul in places I never dreamed I had until I read their works. I am in love with Paris in the 30s and Hemingway's terse and true prose. I am like Gil Pender in *Midnight in Paris* wanting, aching to go back to a time before my own.

I felt this same feeling when reading about courtly love as an undergrad. I wanted to *be* a courtly knight—never mind that I am quite possibly the polar opposite of what that White, Christian, British, male, religious, warrior once was!

Rilke writes of the vision of Apollo's torso as a work of art that states, simply, "You must change your life."⁶ The voice is heard when the artwork calls and we heed the call to attention. Then the change occurs—sometimes overtly and sometimes subtly—and is recalled in our narrative: the piecing together of disparate parts of the sense-made experience into something cohesive that suddenly allows a deeper meaning to emerge. It is in the stories we tell of our *selves*: write, sing, draw, paint, dance, play. It is in the *creative way* we live our lives. And in this way, Art begets art.

In the preface to *The Bridges of Madison County*, titled simply *The Beginning*, Robert James Waller tells us how the book came to be. He tells us of being contacted by the adult son and daughter of Francesca Johnson and asked to write a story they want to tell him in person. He writes of their meetings with few details, but describes how the character and life of Robert Kincaid emerges from their story, Francesca's journals, and the research they do. He tells of how he began to see the images as he listened to their words. He ends this section by saying simply, "Preparing and writing this book has altered my world view, transformed the way I think, and, most of all, reduced my level of cynicism about what is possible in the arena of human relationships."⁷

Reading the story thusly affects me as the narrative unfolds. The words appear and then the images. I find I am unable to get the images out of my head and feelings out of my heart. When the book is down or put away for a while, I long to return to that time held in suspension between the small green covers. Because that's what books do: they wait patiently for us to bring their power into being and then are content to wait again when clock time demands our attentions elsewhere.

⁶ <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/archaic-torso-apollo>

⁷ Robert James Waller, *The Bridges of Madison County*. (New York: Warner, 1992), xi.

Reading this book changed me, as it did Waller, and fulfills the hope he states in the last page of *The Beginning*, that readers will experience what he has in the “indifferent spaces” of our hearts, and that we will find “room to dance again.”⁸ Indeed, “[i]t has been said that the opposite of aesthetic is anesthetic—being numb, passive, blankly indifferent.”⁹ I don’t fancy that there are indifferent places in my heart given how moved by art I seem to have been all my life. Even now: Waller’s book, the story of Robert Kincaid and Francesca Johnson, the impassioned writings of Maxine Greene all give me room to dance. Turning careful attention to works of art is not difficult nor time consuming. Even in our contemporary, over-stimulated world of efficient efficiency, there is always time—even if for a moment—to change our lives.

⁸ Waller, *Bridges*, xii.

⁹ Maxine Greene, “Imagination and the Healing Arts” accessed 22 April 2018, https://maxinegreene.org/uploads/library/imagination_ha.pdf, 4.

Field Note #4: Peregrination

When we are children we are told to be wary of strangers. That strangers want to harm us and must be regarded with caution. Who is a stranger? What does it mean to be a stranger?

In Latin, the adjective *extraneus* was used as a noun to mean stranger. Extraneous means “that is without; from without”. These senses of the word evoke multiple incarnations for the singularity of the stranger.

The stranger *that is without* resides outside of where *we* are. It does not attempt to enter or even intimate that it desires to enter *our* space. In fact, there is no contact with this stranger as it exists as a nebulous entity of internally manufactured *strange-ness*. Don't go outside/out there/there; there are strangers (out) there. This stranger is unseen, but felt, and felt often in wariness and fear. This is the stranger we are cautioned against as children: A nameless, faceless someone who defies identification. This may be why the strangers who actually hurt us turn out not to be strangers at all—at least not in the sense of identification. In fact, they turn out to be people we *know* and, perhaps, love; but within whom there resides the stranger we don't recognise until it is too late. The stranger *that is without* is both an unidentified being outside of where we are; as well, it is a stranger within who makes the person we keep close stranger to us than we might ever have imagined. Perhaps they are even strange to themselves..?

The other stranger, the stranger *from without*, is the stranger who enters into our space. This stranger is an immigrant, and emigre, a settler, an expat, a tourist, a traveller, a pilgrim, a newcomer, an alien. This stranger is a being but also a *way of being and becoming*. The stranger from without has made a conscious decision to be a stranger—either by entering a foreign space or by leaving and returning to one's formerly native space.

In *Teacher as Stranger*, Maxine Greene describes this way of being and becoming as something the teacher can cultivate in herself as a conscious practice. The stranger teacher is the teacher who constantly questions—performs a living inquiry not only of her lifeworld (*lebenswelt*) but of the systems that inform her *being* in the world. She *is without* in the sense that she is not anaesthetised into accepting anything as complete. She understands that it is inevitable that things will change and she intends to be essential in affecting and effecting that change—both within and without. She is able to stand outside of the system attempting to organize her and see it “inquiringly and

wonderingly”¹ through a stranger’s eyes. And she is able to reject the system, to live without it.

She is also *from without* in the way that we all are, despite the categories and identities we adopt. John O’Donohue in *Walking on the Pastures of Wonder* writes,

One of the sad things today is that so many people are frightened by the wonder of their own presence. They are dying to tie themselves into a system, a role, or to an image, or to a predetermined identity that other people have actually settled on for them. This identity may be totally at variance with the wild energies that are rising inside in their souls. Many of us get very afraid and we eventually compromise. We settle for something that is safe, rather than engaging the danger and the wildness that is in our own hearts.”²

The teacher as stranger does not settle for this sort of predetermination of his identity. He is energetically wild at heart and in his soul. And, even while he may be afraid or alone or lonely, he is uncompromising. This makes him powerful.

In *The Bridges of Madison County*, Robert Kincaid is described by Francesca Johnson as “powerful”³. She writes that “He was like an arrow in his intensity.”⁴ She tells of a time he said to her, “I am the highway and a peregrine and all the sails that ever went to sea.”⁵ She goes on,

I checked the dictionary later. The first thing people think of when they hear the word “peregrine” is a falcon. But there are other meanings of the word, and he would have been aware of that. One is “foreigner, alien.”...The Latin peregrinus, which is one root of the word, means a stranger. He was all of those things—a stranger, a foreigner...”⁶

Later she writes that “Robert believed the world had become too rational, had stopped trusting in magic as much as it should.”⁷ He was both without and from without—a being from an ancient ontology no longer valued by the systems of current one. Like

¹ Greene, *Teacher as Stranger*, 267.

² Maria Popova, Brainpickings, accessed 1 Jan 2018
<https://www.brainpickings.org/2018/01/01/john-o-donohue-walking-on-the-pastures-of-wonder/>

³ Waller, *Bridges*, 153.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 153/154. (original emphasis)

⁷ Ibid., 155.

Kincaid, the teacher as stranger is one who believes that there are ways of knowing and being that aren't sanctioned or held up as rational rule. This makes one able to be critical of the current ways and careful not to reproduce them. This makes one powerful. Maxine Greene counsels teachers *to be* this kind of powerful stranger. The one who doesn't settle for something safe, the one who sees her presence in the world as a call to wonder and wander fearlessly and ceaselessly because that is precisely how things change.

*Teacher as peregrine,
the peregrine teacher
who determinedly flies
an undetermined course*

*soaring on the winds of wonder.
The peregrine teacher who is
creative and generative,
making a world*

*from what she feels and sees
and experiences and senses.
She who is wide-awake
(because flying with one's eyes closed is not recommended!)*

*and unsettled...settling, perching
only for moments before setting off
once again to make the world
anew—a stranger always.*

It sounds magical and fancy and it is. It has to be.

There are countless lives to be changed, worlds to be remade.⁸

⁸ Greene, *Teacher as Stranger*, 298.

Field Note #5: Power

In Physics we are taught

$$\text{power} = \text{work}/\text{time}$$

In this equation, power is a measure of efficiency and effort as a function of work and time. The more power, the less work and time it takes to get something done, to achieve something, to finish. In this sense, we want more power and more power is better. In another, related sense, power, as conceived by Michel Foucault, has the ability to “produce forms of knowledge that legitimate a particular kind of truth and way of life.”¹

Quantity and truth, functionality and knowledge—all of these concepts are deeply woven into the fabric of education that (in)forms our lives as teacher-learners in the world. In many ways, these articulations of power comprise the *telos* of the educative course. But what if the *objective* is not the focus of the curriculum, as the system as-it-is would have us believe? What if outcomes, scores, standards, and mastery are not part of a new discourse on power? Where does this leave those for whom the power structure is all-mighty? Is it possible to speak of a situation in which there is simply no context for power? Where attentive witnessing to *being, becoming, and “going along”*² is the intention³? Where we enact a being of becoming and seek proximity with one another in the living effort of (re)creation of truth(s)? Where each and every one of us, together, acknowledges that we *are not yet*? Where does this epistemology leave the student, teacher, and academic? Or rather, and more fittingly, to what possibilities might it bring us?

On Friday I attended a lecture at UBC by David T. Hansen entitled, *Bearing Witness to Teaching and Teachers*. Dr. Hansen is a professor at Teachers College at Columbia University in New York—the same institution where Maxine Greene once walked and taught. His area of expertise is educational philosophy and his talk was about fieldwork he conducted from 2011-2014.

The idea of fieldwork in philosophy is interesting in itself. The general view we have of a philosopher is alone in a room, surrounded by books, deep in thought. That Dr. Hansen even imagined that (a) philosophy might be extracted from being with others is only incongruous to this image of the philosopher superficially. Explored more deeply, it comes to bear that, of course a philosopher would want to be in the world and with others, for that is what it is all about! Forget for a moment Socratic dialogue which obviously necessitates one person speaking to another; imagine, instead, the philosopher as an anthropologist. In this way it is laughable to

¹ Henry Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals*, p. xxxv

² Tim Ingold, *Making*, p. 1 (original emphasis)

³ I found it extremely difficult not to use “aim, goal, target, objective” in this place, preferring not to perpetuate the instrumental language of achievement usually used when discussing knowledge, knowing, learning, teaching, education. Intention, from the Latin, meaning “a stretching out” or a turning of one’s heart, mind or understanding to attention is the *ethos* I wish to keep in this paper.

picture that s/he might be able to glean any philosophy at all simply from being alone, reading books; rather than out “in the field”, amongst the “natives”⁴.

In *Teacher as Stranger*, Maxine Greene hopes to inspire the teacher *to do philosophy* which entails being with others. Indeed, epistemology (the branch of philosophy of great concern to educators), I would argue, can *only* be gleaned from being with others. Greene channelling Hannah Arendt implores us to “think what we are doing”⁵, implying that the thinking part is the philosophy and the doing is being a teacher—and that each is inseparable from one another:

*To do philosophy, then, is to become highly conscious of the phenomena and events in the world as it presents itself to consciousness. To do philosophy, as Jean-Paul Sartre says, is to develop a fundamental project, to go beyond the situations one confronts and refuse reality as given in the name of a reality to be produced.*⁶

To do philosophy requires a being and becoming *within* the moment: a looking around oneself and forward to *project* the understandings of the doing and thinking. It also requires a restructuring of power.

David Hansen’s fieldwork was an example of exactly this *within-ness* and *restructuring*. Centred around the question “What does it mean to be a person in the role of teacher?”, Hansen’s attention was directed by the concept of bearing witness⁷. As researcher, Hansen was *witness* to 74 days of teaching in various settings. He attended a primary school (K-5), discussion meetings, classrooms of 16 other K-12 teachers in 8 different schools, individual interviews, as well as spontaneous interactions and conversation. In all, he spent time in and among teachers, teaching, students, school, schooling, learning, things, acting, being, and doing. He transcribed what he attended to/witnessed and explicating his work and these transcriptions is what informed the lecture he gave on Friday. His manner and language was evocative and poetic (as philosophy should be). He seemed to be genuinely moved by his own words, at times, as he recalled the feelings and emotions of the moments he described. And what he describes is nothing short of a truth: a bearing witness to the dignity of teachers and teaching, a *re-place-ment* of meaning within the pedagogical moment that speaks to the being and becoming of teachers and persons.

At the conclusion of the lecture, the floor was open to the meagre audience and their questions. Along with me, there were approximately 15 people in attendance including the tech person(s) recording the lecture. Besides myself and a few other graduate students, the attendees were professors at UBC. What ensued in this Q&A time was no less than an academic pissing contest. It was a prime example of what Tim Ingold calls the “overwrought, puffed up and self-serving

⁴ Natives here is used tongue-in-cheek to mean all of humanity.

⁵ Maxine Greene, *Teacher as Stranger*, p.6 (invoking Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*)

⁶ Greene, p. 7

⁷ See “Among School Teachers: Bearing Witness as an Orientation in Educational Inquiry”, David T. Hansen, 2017.

phrase-mongering of so much that nowadays passes for scholarship”⁸. It was sadly—and perhaps not suprisingly—not much more than a disappointing display of exactly the kind of power Hansen’s research sought to de-centre.

In the Q&A, each academic, in turn, confronted Hansen with a “question” that largely comprised a diatribe, replete with name-dropping and quotations, and approximating nothing even resembling a question. Each person who spoke seemed only to be intent on demonstrating his and her own “power” by criticizing the methodology of Hansen’s work as flawed and, thereby fatally crippling the research from revealing any (alternate) version of truth, whatsoever. In short, each criticism did its part to invalidate everything that Hansen was attempting to do in his research. Even though he specifically addressed the core concepts of his methodology, and even though philosophy traditionally does not even use fieldwork as method, still his colleagues made it an issue: Why?

There is no question that a concept of power informs our social being with one another. Indeed, a common concession that this power is being exercised in a specific way is what underpins democratic society and ensures that things run (more or less) smoothly. And, if it doesn’t? Well, there is a price to be paid. This is conceded at the moment a person enters into the political/public arena and this is the price, some might say, of freedom. This power is closely allied with contemporary understanding of authority, meaning law, rules, order, and justice. And for those rose-tinted idealists who think there is no room for power in the democratic institution of education, I invite them to attend a research seminar.

I left the lecture feeling dejected and angry with the realization that, even here, the prevailing concept of truth and knowlege (not to mention the distasteful hubris that accompanies this sort of self-aggrandizing certainty) is being uncritically perpetuated. The audience comments were narrowminded and belied their unwillingness to surrender themselves to what David Hansen was projecting: that it may be possible to *know* one another and the world inductively by simply attending and attuning to it in a conscious way. He puts forth a poetic notion of power that subsumes no one, but rather that is in all of us, in equal measure,⁹ and that might produce a common enlightenment to knowledge and truth when witnessed. And he gently implies that our human understanding is *not yet* and that the *becoming* to a clearing is a life-long process that takes thought and action in *relation* to/with one another.

While his research isn’t ostensibly about power, David Hansen’s work addresses the concept when he invokes the truth about truth and being. I imagine that people may be threatened (ironically!) by a concept of power that describes it as not some *thing* that exists outside or above that we should all want to grab; but, rather, as an ability within us all *to be*. In this sense, power is nothing more or less than the life-force within all organisms. And we all have power as long as we are alive, doing, being, and becoming. Power is not wielded in force, except against death.

⁸ Ingold, p. xi

⁹ Can power be power if it resides in equal measure? Or does the concept of power deny the possibility of equality?

Power is within and sustains each of us as long as we continue to *go along*. Power, in this light, is neither quantitatively nor qualitatively measurable; it simply is but, still, it requires something from us. It requires *exercise*: a removal of the restraints¹⁰ from preconceived notions of methodology, physicality, work, time, quantity, and quality; so that it may be *free* to make the world anew.¹¹

If I had to guess, I would say that David Hansen's ideas scared the academics who criticised him. What he proposed was a levelling of a playing field that these people have worked long and hard to surpass. And when confronted with an idea that challenges our foundation, what else is there to do but attack. Hansen's work isn't ostensibly about power, and yet this is exactly what it was: powerful. Ideas that change worlds always are.

David Hansen is a teacher among teachers. He is a witness in the world-as-it-is, wide-awake and exercising his power *with* others to a future project—to project the future. Indeed, this is doing philosophy in the truest sense.

*Whatever the teacher's concern, it is directed at the future, at what is not yet; and in no way can the future be empirically tested.*¹²

¹⁰ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/exercise>

¹¹ See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, for this idea of making the world anew. See also Natasha Levinson, *Teaching in the Midst of Belatedness*.

¹² Greene, p. 287

Appendix 1:

Re: Your Lecture at UBC

Hansen, David <hansen@exchange.tc.columbia.edu>

To: gunita <gunitagupta@gmail.com>

Sun, Feb 18, 2018 at 11:10 AM

Dear Gunita,

My warm thanks for taking the time to write such a thoughtful, sensitive, and generous letter -- it is much appreciated, especially given the fragility, so the speak, of the current state of my work on witnessing. I agree that academia can find it difficult to 'wait', to work with the sort of 'lightness' (not to be confused with lightheartedness) that Italo Calvino among others has sought to encourage; academia usually cannot wait, and must determine things 'just so' in order to know where things stand. I respect that impulse, but it can be harmfully one-sided or unbalanced if it insists on a separation of the epistemic and the ethical.

I resonate with your poetic rendering of the good, the true, and the beautiful as a kind of guiding light in our times; nothing sentimental or romantic in a shallow sense here. It's a perfectly lovely image, and I will be thinking of it.

All good wishes in your ongoing endeavors,

David

--

David T. Hansen, Ph.D.

Weinberg Professor in the Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education Director, Program in Philosophy and Education

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email: hansen@tc.edu

On Sat, Feb 17, 2018 at 5:07 PM, gunita <gunitagupta@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Dr. Hansen,

I attended your lecture yesterday in Scarfe. However, I didn't get a chance to say anything to you after the session, so I thought I would email instead.

As a practicing teacher and graduate student who is (admittedly) very critical of teaching, teachers, school, schooling, and education; I found your undertaking to bear witness to personhood and teaching persons courageous and commendable. I had no quibbles with your "methodology" and thought it was interesting that the philosophy you were *doing* was à la minute (as we say in the kitchen), as opposed to pondering alone with your books and your thoughts. You nicely conflated the *vita contemplativa* with the *vita activa* and I can imagine a rendering of your findings in art-form: novel, poetry, both!

Academia is rife with oppositions and criticisms. We learn to poke holes and then to consider that a job well done. In the age in which we find ourselves, I am steadily coming to the conclusion that we can literally do no harm if what we create is only good, true, and beautiful. Despite different understandings of those concepts, I feel we can all agree that they are anything but detrimental. Your work was an example of that. You brought philosophy close to poetry once again and your poetic language was moving.

The Wittgenstein quotation on the handout, your intention, and the discussion that ensued following your reading reminded me of the Rilke poem "Initiation" that Maxine Greene quotes in the end of both the book, *Teacher as Stranger*, as well as the titular essay:

*Whoever you are, go out into the evening,
leaving your room of which you know each bit;
your house is the last before the infinite,
whoever you are.
Then with your eyes that wearily
scare lift themselves from that worn-out door-stone
slowly you raise a shadowy black tree
and fix it on the sky: slender, alone.
And you have made the world (and it shall grow
and ripen as a word, unspoken, still).
When you have grasped its meaning with your will,
then tenderly your eyes will let it go.*

Thank you for what you do.

Yours,
gunita gupta

Field Note #6: Rationality

*Whatever the teacher's concern, it is directed at the future, at what is not yet; and in no way can the future be empirically tested.*¹

The language I use is littered with words that come from a place that believes that knowledge and understanding necessarily follow a linear trajectory. Words like standards and outcomes, aims and goals, reason and rationale, truth and common sense. If the fundamental project of teaching is natality, I am not sure that natality and rationality are not mutually exclusive concepts. And what of art and the tacit knowledge gained from being in conversation with images, poetry, and music? What does it mean to truth and to common sense to be moved and changed, formed and transformed by films and songs and poems? What rationality can *truly* explain this?

Rational comes from the Latin term *rationalis*, of or belonging to reason and *ratio*, reckoning, calculation, or reason. If we look into the etymology of reckon, it comes from a root that means to move in a straight line. And thus we have the linear trajectory most people in this society and culture determine to be the course of human life. All of education is built upon this concept of linearity. We progress through the grades, counting upward from Kindergarten; ascending according to our physical age as we move through years of life. We follow a path or course of study, a *curriculum* that is built upon an enduring sense of forward movement from the simplistic to the complicated: Grade school is primary and secondary, or elementary and high. And higher education is higher than high and tertiary to secondary schooling. When we finish one thing, only then do we begin another...subject, project, book, unit, lesson, grade, degree. It is all so very neat and tidy. And so far removed from the actuality of human existence as to be almost deadening in its fallacy of predictability.

It seems as if the fundamental project of schooling is not a fostering of a capacity for newness in the young with the hope that they are then able to participate in the renewing of a common world. It is a fostering of the incapacity to deal with unpredictable change. If the future cannot be empirically tested why then do we inculcate in students the belief that it can be? What damage does this cause in the world? In their life-worlds when newly-empowered adults are rudely awakened to the fact of the randomness of existence? What havoc is wreaked when these adults, then, enter the political arena with the unfailing belief in rationality and thus perpetuate the

¹ Greene, *Teacher as Stranger*, 287.

system in their own life projects and the pedagogy of their progeny? Is education supposed to *reflect* the social order? Or does it seek to *renew* it? What follows in this line of reasoning? If the future is unknown, *what* do we teach in school?

There must be an answering activity if we are to perceive what presents itself to us; we must reach out toward the object of the text or the performance through an act of consciousness that grasps that which is presented. In our engagements with historical texts, too, with mathematical problems, scientific inquiries, and (not incidentally) the political and social realities we have constructed along with those around us, it is never enough simply to label, categorize, or recognize certain phenomena or events. There has to be a live, aware, reflective transaction if what presents itself to consciousness is to be realized.²

...and, I would add, if we are to be changed and if we are to change the world.

² Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 30.