

A Sense of Wonder: An A/r/tographer's Musings on Seeing and Being in the World

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Abstract: This paper examines ways of seeing the world differently through the eyes of an a/r/tographer (artist, researcher, teacher). It addresses how I see the world phenomenologically, pedagogically, poetically, and artistically (as a photographer), and how my seeing the world through these varied-yet-connected lenses influences my way of being in the world. The structure of the paper echoes this way of seeing through the various lenses of research, reflection, poetry, and photography.

Keywords: A/r/tography; Phenomenology; Poetry; Pedagogy; Art; Wonder

A /r/tography, phenomenology, poetic inquiry. These are terms which were new to me just a year ago when I began work on my PhD in Educational Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island, words which I would not have applied to myself. But as I immersed myself in the writings of Max van Manen, Gaston Bachelard, Carl Leggo, Pauline Sameshima, Sean Wiebe, and others, I began to see a common thread among these philosophies and with the way I had learned to see the world as a poet, photographer, and teacher. van Manen (2014) describes phenomenology as an “attentive tuning to the world” free from “presuppositions” that perceives the self, others, and the world from a state of wondering and questioning (pp. 218-220); and Leggo (2007) explains living poetically as living “attentively in the moment ... with a creative openness to people and experiences and understandings” (p. 192). A/r/tography, phenomenology, and poetic inquiry are grounded in a sense of wonder, of seeing the world differently and thus learning to be in the world more fully.

This paper is presented as a series of musings written in a hybrid form consisting of research, narrative, poetry, and photography to represent the different ways I see and exist in the world. It is intentionally fragmentary and rhizomatic as it attempts to unravel a variety of complex themes and concepts and to explore new ways of weaving and reweaving ideas and learnings together as I continue on my journey of learning and becoming. I hope that this paper opens up for the reader a space to enter into their own exploration and contemplation of the possibilities of seeing and being in the world in new ways.

Musing 1: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Differently

Yet inner work may be the most far-reaching ethical act in which one can engage.

(Fidyk, 2012, p. 356)

We are walking one of the trails through the wooded area of Victoria Park in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, our beautiful home province. As my husband and our dog walk ahead, I stop and crouch down by a fallen birch tree, its silver-white bark curling from its trunk. I lean in close with the camera, focusing to catch each spiraling strand, each subtle interplay of light and shadow, breathing in the rich scent of last fall's decomposing leaves, as I slowly depress my finger on the shutter-release button. As the dog sniffs at the base of another tree, my husband stops to wait. He is used to waiting, used to my sudden stops to capture some image, texture, colour, or juxtaposition.

Later in the evening, I sit in bed, pen and notebook on my knee, and imagine myself back in that moment—see the curls of birch bark, smell the decomposing leaves, hear the rustle of my dog’s footsteps through the undergrowth and his anxious sniffing, taste the humid mid-summer air, feel the branch brushing against my cheek and my husband’s patient gaze—and translate that moment into poetry.

Musing 2: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Creatively

*If the arts did not exist, at every moment, someone would begin to create them,
in song, out of dust and mud, and although the artifacts might be destroyed,
the energy that creates them is not destroyed.*
(Winterson, 1996, p. 20)



Figure 1. Emergence

Musing 3: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Phenomenologically

*It is not simply a challenge to write about different things.
It is a challenge to write differently.*
(Jardine, 1994, p. v)

Max van Manen (2014) defines phenomenology as “primarily a philosophic *method for questioning*, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions. But

in this questioning there exist the possibilities and potentialities for experiencing openings, understandings, insights” (p. 29). Like the artist, the phenomenologist does not question in order to ascertain factual truth, but rather to explore possible truths. In fact, van Manen (2014) notes that theoretically “phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can explain and /or control the world; rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world” (p. 66). It means maintaining an attitude of openness and wonder about experiences and the world, and reflecting through writing on those experiences and things in order to gain insights about the essence of phenomena: what it means to experience a certain thing.

Seeing the world phenomenologically is a way of being in the world, an artistic practice. Like poetic and artistic seeing, phenomenology “sees new thinking as an invitation to ‘openness,’ to be intrigued by the constantly renewing and creative impulses of the search for the experience and origin of lived meaning and the meaning of meaning in human life” (van Manen, 2014, p. 213). It “involves a different way of knowing the world. Whereas theory ‘thinks’ the world, practice ‘grasps’ the world—it grasps the world pathically” (van Manen, 2007, p. 20). As an a/r/togographer, I can sometimes feel the juxtaposition of academic research and artistic creativity in my body. As I research and write academic pieces, my creativity can feel stifled and I am constantly looking for ways to bring these two ways of thinking and writing into synchronicity. This is one of the reasons phenomenology and poetic inquiry appeal to me as both open up possibilities of thinking and writing differently, ways that invite creative thought and creative representation. Ways that allow the artist to speak.

While phenomenology might serve as both theory and methodology, phenomenology is primarily a writing activity. According to van Manen (2017): “more profound phenomenological insights may only come in the process of wrestling with writing and reflective rewriting—weighing every word for its cognitive weight and vocative meaning” (p. 823). It is through the writing that the vocative dimension of phenomenology, the dimension of human experience so essential in poetry and art, comes into play. As a poet, writing happens all the time. It does not only happen in the process of putting pen to paper but in the constant observation and contemplation of life. I am writing while I am driving or mowing the lawn or walking my dog. I am rewriting while I am cleaning the house or lying in bed unable to sleep. When I am deeply involved in the writing process, I wake with new words ready to put to page. And when words fail, I am writing in images through photography and sketches.

The quality of the writing is key in producing an effective phenomenological text. It requires an intensifying and thickening of language so that the layers of meaning become strongly embedded within the text such that the text cannot be altered without changing or destroying its sense. One method of thickening language is through poetry. van Manen (2014) notes that through poetry “the author tries to intensify the complexities and subtleties of meaning” (p. 291). Repetition, alliteration, assonance, consonance, imagery, diction, sentence structure, rhyme, rhythm—all add to the pathic sense of the text, the “epiphanic quality of language” that brings about “phenomenological reverberation” (van Manen, 2007, p. 25). Gaston Bachelard (1971b) writes that “poetry supplies us with documents for a *phenomenology of the soul*” for the language of poetry is “the language of souls” (p. 14), it is the language which is able to say the unsayable.

I sit in a circle with seven other women. Together we walk a path to each of the goddesses within – maiden, mother, and crone. Each path is different and yet we travel together. Finding the goddesses, we now sit in silence to commune each with her own goddesses, to hear the voices so often silenced by what Heidegger (2010) refers to as the “idle chatter of the they”

(p. 266) that fills our consciousness in our everyday living with others. In the silence, I hear the goddesses whispering in voices like the breath of wind through the trees. Then I begin to write:

the stillness
breathes like the wilderness
frozen lake surrounded by snow-covered trees
beneath a steel-blue sky
where even the wind breathes slow

In this stillness, I am able to hear and speak the words which are unsayable in the noise of the everyday.

in this stillness I can stand
the lingering of absolutes filling my consciousness

...
the absolute realization that the absence of sound
is not an absence at all
but an invitation into the deeper parts of myself
where the truth my truth
is waiting lingering
in the absolute stillness of silence

In phenomenology, writing is both the process and the product. The writer writes their way to insights and epiphanies but also produces a phenomenological text. And yet through the writing, the writer also “produces himself or herself. The writer is the product of his or her own process. Writing is a kind of self-making or forming” (van Manen, 2014, p. 365). As a poet and artist, writing and creating have always been about self-reflection and self-making.

Everything I experience becomes a part of my being to be brought forward again in memory and transformed as I write and create. The “data” for phenomenological research, like the “data” for poetry and art, can be found in any possible human experience. “What makes phenomenology [and art] so fascinating is that any ordinary experience tends to become quite extraordinary when we lift it up from our daily existence and hold it with our phenomenological gaze” (van Manen, 2014, p. 38). The everyday, the mundane, the ordinary becomes extraordinary, elevated, wonderful when viewed with the a/r/tographer’s eye.

Musing 4: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Artistically

Art does not imitate life. Art anticipates life.

(Winterson, 1996, p. 40)

The Photographer

My eyes seek anomalies,
search out the hidden narratives
hovering in the shadows.

In New York, the buildings consume each other.
Reflected distortions in walls of glass
create a monstrous wall of mirrors
in which I mindfully get lost.

At the Serendipity Bed and Breakfast,
a group of women sit around a wooden table
painting new worlds with words,
as I alone stand motionless at the window

attempting to tame the blur of hummingbird wing.

In the menagerie of animals
at Busch Gardens,
the laughing shocks of colour
delight young eyes,
but I cannot look away from
those of the caged silverback
pleading for release.

I sit on the sparse bed
of the London basement hotel room
gazing at the muted garden through
rain tracings on the glass.

Leaning on balcony rail in Riomaggiore,
I am drawn to the haggard face of the woman
gazing out the window across, cigarette in hand.
The wrinkles on her face tell of a life of smoke
and wine under the radiant Italian sun,
but her expressionless eyes betray her solitude,
the window woman watching over
other people's lives.

Rome reveals its secrets
in abstract etchings of cobbled streets.
History in fractured rock.
Exquisite lands beyond keyholes.

At dusk, the world takes on Picasso-esque angles;
I savour the sweet seduction
of life inverted in wine glasses.

Musing 5: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Pedagogically

*A living knowledge of teaching is not just head stuff requiring intellectual work.
It requires authentic body-work. True pedagogy requires an attentive attunement
of one's whole being to the child's experience of the world.
(van Manen, 2002, p. 49)*

In the classroom, my phenomenological eye, my a/r/tographic eye, becomes a pedagogical eye. Pedagogical seeing “is the background of our acting” (Saevi & Foran, 2012, p. 52). It “is unaware of itself in the moment of seeing, and thus must be reflected on to be consciously addressed” (Saevi & Foran, 2012, p. 55). Pedagogical seeing requires bringing children, who often “live backstage” and are “not reflectively noticed” (Saevi & Foran, 2012, p. 57) to the foreground of our thought and reflection. I teach students who, in many areas of their lives—home, school, peer group—are unnoticed or passed over for numerous different reasons. For these students, being seen, truly seen for who they are and who they might become, is more important than any other interaction that happens in the classroom. And it is an interaction that has to be natural. In order not to miss a student, I have to innately see pedagogically. As Saevi &

Foran (2012) note: “A teacher’s seeing, is an immediate, sensed and embodied lived experience that is prior to reflective knowledge ... experiencing the students is related to sensing and understanding them in a more profound and prereflective way” (p. 60). For the teacher, as it is for the artist and the poet, this deeper reflective seeing must become an innate way of knowing, and thus of being in the world both inside and outside the classroom.

My husband and I walk through the crowded hall outside the convention space. To my right, I notice a young girl sitting in a corner by a closed door. I almost walk by, but something tells me that she is in need of comfort. So I stop, squat beside her, ask if she is okay. Her tears immediately reveal that she is not. She tells me her story. Just five dollars short of what she needs to pay the cost of getting a photo with the one guest she came to the convention to see. Five dollars that I will not miss, that brings a smile and a hug from a young girl who only needed someone to notice.

Musing 6: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Hopefully

Helping someone can be as simple as opening a door.

It can be as easy as listening in a genuine way.

*And that’s the way we’ll change the world—
one person, one situation, one act of kindness at a time.*

(Wagamese, 2011, p. 51)

In a world that seems to be devolving, sometimes the only thing I can have for my students is hope. van Manen (2015) writes that “those of us who live with children cannot afford to be so nihilistic; we cannot abandon the pedagogical place we occupy in the lives of our children. Children are hope” (p. 191). And yet we must also have hope for our children. According to van Manen (2015), “Hope refers to all that gives us patience, tolerance, and belief in the possibilities for our children. Hope is our experience of the child’s possibilities” (p. 192). Hope dwells in the past, the present, and the future. It sees what the child has been, what they are, and what they might become. It also “dwells in the more distant future; in an open time” (Carabajo, 2012, p. 145). Hope opens up possibilities for our children both now and in the future. Hope allows me to see what each of my students might be and it calls for me to see the best in each of them. Hope is born of the relationships which teachers have with students, of our care and affection for our students, and of the desire for pedagogical goodness. It is patient and realistic, and it “generates expectations. Expectations, which are essentially positive, and upon which somebody else can imagine and construct” (Carabajo, 2012, p. 148). Hope imbues us with a sense of wonder, the ability to see “the everyday victories” of our students which never cease to surprise and amaze us (Carabajo, 2012, p. 144). It is often through writing that I make the strongest connections with my students as they share their stories. Often the students who are the most challenging to teach are the students whose stories break my heart. These are the stories that are opened up by my seeing as an a/r/tographer—a poet/artist, a phenomenologist, and a teacher—by my seeing the world, seeing my students, with a sense of wonder. Children “need to see and feel our wonderment” (Carabajo, 2012, p. 144) just as they need to see and feel our hope for them. I teach many students who struggle with unimaginable challenges, pain, and loss—some of whom have already lost hope for themselves. To give up hope would be to give up on these students, and that is the one thing I can never do. Hope is essential if life is to be worth living.

I am sitting in my car in the school parking lot at the end of the day. I have just finished reading a set of students’ writing notebooks. One student’s words in particular are stuck in my head and my heart. Words I have read before. Every time they cut deep. *I feel like I don’t matter.* What do I do with those words? How do I restore hope where hope has been lost? I hold the

worry with me through the drive home, through supper, through the evening. It keeps me awake through the night. In the morning, I take a blank card from the box I keep in my craft room—cards that I use to write notes of gratitude to all of my students at the end of the semester. But the end of semester is a long way off yet and this one can't wait until then. Inside I write: *You are strong. You are noticed. You matter.* I slip it in my bag to give to the student when I next see them. It is a small gesture, I know, but it is what I can do. It is my way of holding onto hope.

Musing 7: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Appreciatively

... there is much beauty here, because there is much beauty everywhere.
(Rilke, 1954, p. 33)



Figure 2. Transcendence

Musing 8: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Truthfully

Over the millenia, poets have spoken the truth as they have seen it about themselves and the world around them, and oftentimes those truths have been challenging to speak and in difficult times and places. Visionaries and revolutionaries throughout history have known of the power of the arts in general and of poetry in particular to speak the most beautiful (even if beautifully harsh) truths to the most awful of those in power.

(Prendergast, 2012, p. 489)

Forsaken

In the air, smoke, and in the distance, red-orange glow of flame,
city stippled with words, singed bits of paper falling from
the sky like ashes from an angel's forgotten cigarette.

They're burning books again, he says to no one in particular, rising from his rusted bunk to peer out the one small window at the daguerreotype-world drained of all colour, the sky, even

a mutinous grey. He watches, wistfully, a pigeon swoop past, beak clamped tightly to a renegade page which has escaped the fires. *Birds are the only ones these days*, he thinks,

with the audacity to fly in the face of tyranny. He looks back at the other three bodies huddled against the far wall of the dank prison. There had been six of them initially, each a foundling lost in the

chaos following Pandora's fateful decision. They the broken, they the anomalies, the rebels who vowed the new gods would be unroofed, their monstrous faces revealed for all to see. But the unceasing torrent

of bombastic language beguiled the masses, and they six, now four, were caught in the undertow, buried beneath the weight of lies. He returns his gaze to the outside, his eyes searching for coded signs

in the clouds, sacred symbols etched into the cobbled streets. *It's no use*, a voice behind him cries out. *They all think it's copacetic*. But the birds, he says. *The birds*, says the voice,

build their nests of words and hair and feed on the bones of the dead. All is ignorance and begets blindness. He watches as the pigeon releases the page, the words floating down to settle

against the smeared glass. *And I looked, and behold a pale horse and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part*

of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with beasts of the earth. As he looked beyond the page at the beasts walking the streets and the glowing flames plunging the world

into darkness, words falling from the sky like ashes from an angel's forgotten cigarette, he knew with a jarring finality that God had indeed forsaken them all.

(verse taken from Revelations 6:8 KJV)

Musing 9: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Poetically

*Poetry is an artistically shaped auto-phenomenology:
the poet observes everything, flowing through consciousness in a few moments.*
(Oughton, 2012, p. 75)

Seeing the world phenomenologically, pedagogically, and artistically is also seeing the world poetically. Phenomenology, teaching, art, and poetry all necessitate an openness to and a

sense of wonder of the world, and also an attention to ways of translating the world. Galvin & Todres (2009) write that the language of poetry “appears to be most adequate when attending to a continuity between the felt sense and words that can do justice to what is felt” (p. 312). The language of poetry “deeply describes existential dimensions of experience” in a way that facilitates “resonance, a sense of our common humanity with others, and an emotional homecoming” (Galvin & Todres, 2009, p. 309). Bachelard (1971a) sees poetry as “one of the destinies of speech” (p. 3) and as such “because of the privileged position which phenomenology gives the present, we have been ready to welcome with open arms the new images offered by the poet” (p. 4).

Poetry in particular enhances the vocative dimension of phenomenological writing. Poetic language is powerful. It has punctum. “A poet’s words can pierce us” (Wittgenstein cited in Zwicky, 2003, p. 55). Poetry, like art, “speaks languages that are not necessarily readily translatable” (Leggo, 2012, p. 152). It “constitutes a way to say things evocatively and to say those things that may not be presented at all” (Faulkner, 2012, p. 301). It ...

touches
with gentle fingers,
caressing connections,
compassion,
speaks sense,
wields words that don’t
require a dictionary,
weaves meanings
in and around and through,
paints its own self-portrait
in bold, bright strokes.

And poetry is inquiry: “inquiry into what it means to be human—experience, feeling, imagination, memory, desire—human in relation with the self, with others, with the earth ... The work of poetry is to deepen understanding, to provoke thought, enable empathy, and sometimes provoke action” (Sullivan, 2012, p. 94). Phenomenological and a/r/tographic insights rely on a poeticizing of language.

Musing 10: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Reflectively

*The image can only be studied through the image,
by dreaming images as they gather in the state of reverie.
(Bachelard, 1971a, p. 7)*

Seeing as an a/r/tographer means seeing the world differently. I see with the eyes of a photographer and with the eyes of a poet. They are similar ways of seeing. Similar ways of being. I am more present even when my mind is whirling with a hundred ideas. It’s a sort of subconscious attentiveness. If I have my camera, I stop at the unexpected moment of insight. If I don’t have my camera, I translate the moment in my mind through words. My walks become a collection of photographs and haiku poems creating the elusive moments of my life and my world. This is one of the challenges of phenomenology—to be able to hold that moment of time, to be able to discover the essence of the experience. While the essential structure is present in the experience itself, it is not a simple task to be able to capture that prereflective experience, for “when we try to capture the ‘now’ of the living present in an oral or written description, then we are already too late” (van Manen, 2014, p. 34). The moment of reflection objectifies the experience and turns it “from the subjectivity of the living presence into an object of reflective presence. No matter how hard we try, we are always too late to capture the moment of the living

now” (van Manen, 2014, p. 34). This is why poetry and art are so essential to phenomenological seeing and understanding.

Walking

Pine needles weeping
crystal—tiny world captured
in a bead of light.

Leaf hopping on a
sudden gust. Land frog dancing
on a concrete pond.

Like drops of ink, they
fall, one by one from the line
sketched across the sky.



Figure 3. Linger

Despite wind and frost,
despite night o'er taking day,
butterflies linger.

Pockets of sky-fall
edge the street. The wind no match
for angels' weeping.

Like a black and white
film, the snow dancing in slow-
motion with the night.

Musing 11: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Imaginatively

Art is a reality beyond now. An imaginative reality that we need.

The reality of art is the reality of the imagination.

(Winterson, 1996, p. 148)

The Empty Jar

She got her exercise digging holes to hide in,
covered herself with mulch and waited
for the daffodils to sprout from her scalp –
an exercise in beauty demanding as much patience
as perfecting the brushstrokes with which
she painted the faces she presented to the world.
Sometimes a smile, sometimes not, always someone else.
Even the mirror fell for her lies.

Thought she could recreate herself in some other image,
sculpt acceptable from the tragedy of her birth.
But the knife cut too deep and she lost more than surface.
Stored her heart in a mason jar on the shelf
between Shakespeare and Stephen King.
No longer strong enough to open the lid
and breathe its pulsing heat,
she sat in the darkness, curtains pulled tight,
watching it wither.

They found her weeks later,
perfectly preserved in alabaster,
an empty jar at her feet.

Musing 12: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Lovingly

... the arts leave an impression.

(Sameshiman, 2007, p. 17)



Figure 4. Serenity

Musing 13: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Vulnerably

If I compare my art making to teaching and I want my teaching to evoke,

I must then teach and express through the uncensored heart and body.

(Sameshima, 2007, p. 268)

Becoming a poet, seeing the world poetically, has changed who I am, particularly as a teacher. Wiebe and Margolin (2012) write that “The poetic demands the personal, the vulnerable, the magical, the relational aspects of scholarship and pedagogy” (p. 33); that it “invites, prods, and pushes us to this wholeness where we learn alongside one another” (p. 33). Living poetically is being caring and attentive and vulnerable. Wiebe and Yallop (2010) write that “In schools, hearts need caring, hearts need our attention, our investment and time” (p. 179). We care for our students wholly when we are wholly present for our students. Poetic knowing and being provide a way for me to be wholly present for my students and create a space for my students to be wholly present for themselves. Sometimes being wholly present means sharing the story of sitting with my grandmother as she took her last breath. Sometimes it means hugging a student who has lost a friend or family member. Sometimes it means quietly slipping a card to a student who is struggling. Sometimes it means spending lunch hour talking to a student who is no longer in my class. Sometimes it means crying as a student performs a poem for her peers. And sometimes it means sharing my own difficult stories with my students.

After attending the Outspoken Poetry Slam during PRIDE Week in July 2017, I was compelled to consider more reflectively the privilege that I have experienced in my life. What started as a journal entry eventually became a poem which addresses my privilege but also my victimization. Spurred by the stories that my students have been writing in their notebooks, I am

called to share my poem with my classes. I stand in front of my students, as I have done every day for the past few months, and, paper in hand, I begin to read. Reading in front of my students, even personal stories, is usually comfortable for me, but today my hands shake, my face is warm, and my voice begins to crack as I read:

Though I have been raped and kept silent about it
long enough to no longer be that girl,
I am privileged
that I healed and found myself again.

I can feel tears gathering and I fight to hold them back. Other than to my husband and my best friend, this is the first time I have spoken these words out loud. These are difficult words to say. But I know that these words matter—that I have students in my classes who have been through this and worse. I continue because

I am also privileged that
I have the honour of working with young people
who are fragile and breaking and broken
but who keep putting the pieces back together
and fighting on,
refusing to give up
because they are also courageous
and resilient and fucking amazing.

Leggo (2005) notes that “the heart of pedagogy is revitalized and sustained by poetic knowing, being and becoming” that “encourages us to listen to our hearts” (p. 454). This type of listening and knowing is essential to seeing and being poetically, artistically, pedagogically, and phenomenologically in the world, and to building relationships of vulnerability and trust with our students.

Musing 14: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Inspirationally

*The poems
are breath,
breaths of long desire
without end.*

(Leggo, 2002, n.p.)

Through the Lens of National Geographic's Greatest Photographs

(ekphrastic poems inspired by photographs from *Through the Lens: National Geographic Greatest Photographs*)

Laundry in Sicily

(Photo by William Albert Allard - 1995)

Like birds, they flutter overhead, their wings
flapping hopelessly against escape. Lined like
fish caught on wooden hooks and hung to dry,
sun-bleached white, stark against
blackened stone facades and iron
grates. Like wisps of cloud, painting
shadow-creatures on the streets below, dancing
along cobbles and in and out of doors, private lives
hung out for the world to see.

Makgadikgadi Pans, Botswana

(Photo by Frans Lanting - 1990)

Ghostly fingers reach, grasping
for hold on the shifting sands,
filtering out tendrils, like seagrasses,
tiny filigrees, stretching
each to each, too weakened by scorching sun
to traverse the widening gaps between.
Receding drop by drop - a shrivelling hand,
age-weathered, withering, curling in
upon itself. Fingers crumbling to dust
until only a memory of water remains.

Grand Prismatic Spring, Yellowstone National Park

(Photo by George Steinmetz - 1998)

Blazing eye of some primeval creature,
watching, waiting. Cloudy film of age
obscuring vision deep at the core,
yet sentient and awake.
Biding its time (for time is all it has),
bound indefinitely within earth's crust.
Patiently awaiting the next upheaval,
the final release from a curse
long forgotten, and revenge on a species
bent on destroying itself.

Dhobi Ghat Laundry, Karachi, Pakistan

(Photo by James L. Stanfield - 1981)

An unfathomable armada
moving in unison across a green sea.
Masts solid but askew supporting
sail upon sail upon sail. A fabric army –
boiled, beaten, and brought back to life –
at once benign and terrifying, threatening
to engulf, or perhaps waving
the white flag of surrender.

Perm Machines, Shanghai, China

(Photo by Bruce Dale - 1980)

Silently he works – gently, slowly – applying
one wire at a time, each clip exact, the placement
on the skull of utmost importance.
Painstakingly, he fastens the last bolt, steps back
nervously, examines every detail of each head.
Satisfied, he deploys the switch, ready
to animate his newest brides.

Dead Cane Toads, Taxidermy Shop, Queensland, Australia

(Photo by Cary Wolinsky - 2000)

No “ribbit, ribbit” from you now my princely beasts. So sad you look,
sitting there all in a row, frowns accentuated by the colourful clothespins
forever closing lips that so hopelessly awaited a lady’s kiss.

But don’t fret, my dears. Perhaps some washerwoman, charmed
by your pleading pose, will slip you into her pocket and take you home.

Jupiter’s Great Red Spot

(Photo by NASA - 1980)

Painter’s palette of primary colours, swirling and twisting
like a wet glass set on van Gogh’s *Starry Night*.

The details bleed into concentric lines around
a crimson core – trees, church, stars, sky, all
lost in the vortex, like Vincent himself,
mind turned to madness, sucked into the eye
of the storm and swept away.

Poppies, Provence, France

(Photo by William Albert Allard - 1995)

Red splotches on a green background,
like blood spatter from a gunshot wound.
Evidence of past violence, remembering, like DNA,
the details of life lost. Yellow tape edging the scene,
preserving for documentation. Silent testimony
to a crime without a witness. Nameless victim
obliterated by a faceless perpetrator. Sin
without punishment. Crimson remembrance.

Sicilian Actress

(Photo by William Albert Allard - 1995)

Black widow, she waits
in the wings, weaving herself
into a web of daintiest thread.
Pensive she watches through
charcoaled eyes, peering through the veil
at potential victims lining the way.
Revealing nothing, she steps into the light,
blood red lips set to kill.

Musing 15: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Aesthetically

*We enlarge reality through the work of art,
whether by means of painted images or the poetic word.
(Burrows, 2016, p. 44)*

My seeing and being translate through both word and image, poetry and visual art. Schneider (2006) notes: “There is a synergy from the intertextual relationship between word and image. In that greater wholeness lies the experience of poetry art: art conceived in response to a poem, or a poem conceived in response to a work of art, often called ekphrasis” (n.p.). Both poetry and visual art require a certain kind of seeing. Burrows (2016), in fact, would claim that

poetry is a visual art, as it “animates the way we learn to ‘see’ our world and come to see ‘in’ it by means of metaphor. Poems thicken our visual experience ... [and] enlarge and deepen our sense of this life through the instrumentality of metaphor” (p. 46). As a photographer, I often see the world not as a continuous movie but as a series of still images, and many of my poems are an attempt to capture in words these images.

Outside the library window
aged, flaking skin
stretches gold and grey over
slender arms reaching
for a cloudless spring sky,
spindly fingers bleeding forth
bursts of crimson life.

Art and poetry open up new unexpected ways of seeing. Through art, both word and image, “the understanding is made visible. We think we are coming to new understandings, but actually, we only think they are new because the unarticulated has not been outwardly exposed and seen from a distance before” (Sameshima, 2007, p. 267). Art goes beyond the image to create what is imaginary, open, evasive, new. Paul Ricoeur refers to artworks—including poems, stories, music, as well as visual art—as “aesthetic symbols” which “have multiple meanings which cannot be treated exhaustively at a conceptual level; they point to extralinguistic elements of human experience” (cited in Mason, 1982, p. 72), and thus art, like phenomenological writing, is able to say what cannot be said.

Musing 16: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Faithfully

When we move out on faith into the act of creation, the universe is able to advance.
(Cameron, 1992, p. 2)



Figure 5. Regeneration

Musing 17: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Linguistically

*Sometimes words tangle up your heart. They can mean so much
and on the other hand, mean so very little. You must take good care with a word.*
(Arden, 2004, p. 119)

She

She had a voice like waterfalls,
her words dancing rhythms
that dripped and splashed.

I could spend hours
soaking in the ocean of her poetry,
listening to the music of her tides,
her stories rolling over me
like waves.

How easily I get lost
in the depths of her language.
How easily I find myself
when she speaks in drops of rain.

Musing 18: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Openly

Art opens the heart.
Art shows us how to be more than we are.
(Winterson, 1996, pp. 7, 93)

How do poetry and visual art come together in the classroom? As an English language/literature and creative writing teacher but also a poet/photographer/artist, the space is always open in my classroom for other ways of representing. Both poetry and visual images become inspiration for writing and representing. Creative collections of work include exploration of themes and ideas through both word and image. My classroom walls and shelves display artwork—sketches, paintings, sculpture, collage—created by students in response to what they have read. The pages of writing notebooks dance with words and images. Bayer (2006) writes: “Art is a process in which the self confronts the inner world of subjectivity and forms it as an object accessible in the distinctly human world of culture” (p. 62). Through art, students are able to understand their emotions and to shape their worlds, and “in this way a kind of knowledge is achieved” (Bayer, 2006, p. 61). By “crossing borders between visual and verbal texts” students are able to “discover things they would not otherwise experience” (Schneider, 2006, n.p.). Education is about opening spaces for students to learn with their whole selves, and the “aesthetic literacies are foundational and essential to social intelligence and linguistic literacies” (Sameshima, 2007, p. 286). Without the aesthetic literacies—poetry, visual art, music, dance, drama—we lose the heart and soul of education and our students lose the opportunity to see into the deeper parts of themselves and to understand who they are and who they might be in a world of their own making.

One of my favourite creative assignments (though often most emotionally challenging to read) is the Creative Multi-Genre Collection. Not only does this assignment provide students with the opportunity to represent a theme through a variety of creative genres—poetry, narrative, nonfiction, visual arts, music, multimedia, etc.—but it also allows students to engage with their learning in a wholistic, embodied way and to tell the (often difficult) stories that they need to tell.

Creative Multi-Genre Collection

For this assessment, you will be creating a collection of written and visual pieces that demonstrate how you have grown into the person you are today.

Think about the character traits that are important to who you are—tenacity, perseverance, courage, compassion, patience, empathy, resilience, confidence, risk-taking, etc.

Think about the things that have happened in your life that have helped you to develop those traits—perhaps the loss of a loved one, caring for an animal, travelling, playing a sport, facing a physical challenge, facing a personal challenge, moving frequently, overcoming adversity, etc.

Choose a creative format to present your collection. This might be: a magazine, an artistic journal, a hybrid story, a brochure, a multimedia collection, a webpage, or any other creative idea.

Be creative. Be genuine. Show who you are. Tell the story that you need to tell.

Musing 19: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Trustingly

*Poetry lets the light in.
(Aitken, 2012, p. 67)*

Daisy Petals

My heart scatters like daisy petals
hoping to land on love.

The first petal is picked up by a tiny bird,
carried to babies squawking for food,
woven into a nest to hold safe
when the northwest wind tosses the branch.

The second sticks to a black wet nose,
tickling curiosity,
elicits a sneeze which sends it spinning,
pinwheel in on a windy day.

Petal three nestles into the grass,
quivering between the blades like butterfly wings,
a hand waving to a stranger in need of a smile.

A few are lost,
carried by breeze,
or crushed under foot.

The last I hold,
run fingers the length of its whiteness,
brush its fragility along my cheek,
hoping in the end
it is love I hold.

Musing 20: In Consideration of Seeing and Being Wonderingly

*Look and you will find it—what is unsought will go undetected.
(Sophocles cited in Cameron, 1992, p. 93)*



Figure 6. Perspective

We are all collections of fragments—moments and memories, people and places, learnings and experiences—that we gather and attempt to form into some kind of sense. We are always in a process of raveling and unraveling, weaving and reweaving. We are always in the process of becoming. Through that process, we learn to see differently, and in seeing differently, we also learn to be differently in the world. This paper, like me, like all of us, is a work in process.

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