

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

**Through the Lens of Tension: An Art Educator's Quest to
Understand if the Art her Students Produce has Honour and
Purpose as a Product of Integrity and Veracity**

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Doctor of Philosophy
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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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Human Ethics (For projects involving human participants/tissue, etc) The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number #SMEC-41-13

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ABSTRACT

On an early morning walk, tension became a recognised and tangible force. This occasion opened a realm of exploration culminating in my thesis—an interpretive inquiry accompanied by a series of photographic images that expresses both the provocative and enigmatic pushing and pulling forces of tension.

As both an artist and an art teacher, tension becomes for me the vehicle for questioning what elements might be needed to make art that has integrity. To this, I ask myself the critical question, through my teaching, am I honouring my students' art education? Am I ensuring that they can become discerning and enriched art makers, acting with integrity and purpose? How do I know if they have the skills to act and produce art with virtue and distinction?

Tension is my catalyst to interrogate the inner and outer dialogue that occurs when we interact with others and the self. Tension becomes the protagonist and the antagonist for change and underpins my pedagogy and art practice giving me a voice to ascertain what matters for art. If art is to have an impact and to have the voice of which it is capable, I consider that it is my role to decipher those discerning elements of tension and act on them pedagogically.

In my deciphering I follow a hermeneutics for understanding the lived experience of making art into which I enter with my students and within which I place my inquiry about my own art educator's quest to understand if what art my students produce has honour and purpose as a product of integrity and veracity. In this way my thesis becomes a phenomenological inquiry assisted by writings such as those of Robert Sokolowski, Max van Manen, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Maxine Greene, Susan Sontag, Sarah Bakewell and John-Paul Lederach. My inquiry is also supported by a range of influential artists selected from the pre-modern, modern, post-modern and contemporary art movements.

Being true to the language of education I devise a suite of *Lessons* that brings the reader on my journey through tension and how this affects my day-to-day encounters. The *Lessons* give a material form, voice and expression to the sensorial and theoretical elements of creating art that enables us—teacher and students—to act with virtue. The subsequent exhibition of my images becomes a powerful encounter shared with my partner Jimmy. These are the artefacts of my journey intensified by my own visual and creative desire to make art that communicates a story—a poignant narrative emerges with purpose under the alluring atmosphere and perplexity of the visual arts.

ABSTRACT

The artefacts of my journey that I describe become trustworthy communicators to other artists, art educators and art makers—through hermeneutic questioning, trusting the power of possibility-making, practising curiosity and virtue, listening with the greatest care, working alongside one another and honouring the traditions of art making—all in quest of coming to know and understand self. Self-understanding might be the greatest gift with which we might esteem one another in our world today.

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The background of the page is a close-up, high-contrast photograph of crumpled, translucent red fabric. The fabric is layered and folded, creating deep shadows and bright highlights. In the lower right quadrant, there is a dark, shadowed silhouette of a human face, which appears to be looking towards the left. The overall color palette is a range of reds, from deep, dark tones to bright, almost white highlights where the fabric catches the light.

PROLOGUE



PROLOGUE

The time where I decide what matters for art and for art teaching

Imagining you had a super power, what might it be? Or let me rephrase that. Imagining you had the capacity to help others understand the relational and aesthetic dimensions of the world, what would you do? Would you confront this challenge, or inversely would it register as simply being too hard? While artists and teachers are not endowed with corporeal super powers, I suggest that they do have a prevailing role to play in forging the skills of engagement and provoking new experiences in response to the world.

Why are these questions about experience, aesthetics and facing the challenge of understanding the world significant for me? As both an art educator and a practising artist I can identify and respect the encounters set before me, which means I have the ability to influence others, to help them see and understand their encounters of the

world in an artistic and imaginative way. I want to forge a journey of understanding where we can, as Les Todres (2007) says,

use much more than our thoughts when we think and how the lived body is full of fertile excess, intimate with crossings and bridges, textures and relationships that are the ‘stuff’ of understanding. (p. 14)

This is a challenging undertaking but I believe a laudable one if I am to act with distinction and embrace the enigma of making and experiencing art.

As an art educator of twenty-plus years I continue to ponder the role of art in life. I am both allured and disarmed by the visual and pervasive tension of art and the bearing it has on myself—how it makes me feel and how imagination and perception influences my artistry and my teaching. Patricia Leavy (2017) shares a similar view saying,

Art, at its best, has the potential to be both immediate and lasting. It’s immediate insofar as it can grab hold of our attention, provoke us, or help to transport us...Art also has the capacity to make long-lasting, deep impressions. (p. 3)

I consider why this is true, so I think about different elements that constitute an authentic artwork and an art practice. Deliberating such views exercises my mind and enlivens my senses, helping me to understand both the creative interpretive process and the world around me. Art brings a deeper awareness that cannot be quantified uniquely by science nor by a calculable measure but rather it reaches towards a richer, indelible state of embodiment. By adopting a phenomenological approach to my research combined with an “Arts based method [I] can capture meanings that measurement cannot” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 167). Art finds meaning through referencing a

range of elements from the cultural through to the historical. Each element does not necessarily exist as a single component but rather influences the other as part of a whole entity. This is a perspective that I consider art and art making can provide if we are willing to dive into it.

As a teacher and artist, I want my students to be able to express their ideas in a way that exalts the true purpose of art for them. Art for each of them can differ and I am reminded that the purpose of art should not be generalised, for at times we might not agree on a single definition of art. Interpreting art and its meaning adds another layer to the phenomenological enigma and challenge I see before me. I want my students to be provoked and transported into different states of consciousness. When each of my students enters my art room she can choose to respond to her ideas and imagination by making art that is pretty—for entertainment—that conforms to the conventional or is derivative of the ideas of others. But where is the challenge for the student and for the teacher in this? I would say that some teachers do subscribe to this position, but for me this is not art making that honours the virtues of either party. To approach art as part of the conventional does not provide a platform for an art teacher to gauge if what my students create has integrity and speaks to the greater virtues of art. If the necessary layer or the desire for veracity is to be present I suggest that the students need to be persuaded to confront the elements of the unfamiliar in art, to ‘be’, to ‘live in’ and to ‘live through’ an artwork. Martin Heidegger’s (1962) writing references the different modes in which we exist and encounter things and it is through phenomenological thought that we can come to understand the central element of being, the *Dasein*, meaning life or existence. To ‘be’ we must not be dismissive of our experiences, but alternatively we need to be able to dwell within them in order to make sense of what we are endeavouring to understand

and do. Bernn Jagar (2001) has written, “only a creature that knows how to dwell can paint, dance, think and write” (p. 134). To dwell implies that when we linger in our spaces and in our human existence we might come to understand and describe our thoughts and actions more readily. In this state of lingering, we are not contemptuous but rather present and engaged in the experience.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) endorses this state of being as part of aesthetic education, and as Gadamer implies, to promote understanding. He says, “understanding is not to be considered so much as an action of subjectivity, but rather as entering into an occurrence of transmission (*Überlieferungsgeschehen*) in which past and present are being constantly mediated” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 290).

I can add to Gadamer’s notions by exploring the ideas seen in the transformative work of Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner (2012). Their work sits within the paradigm of arts-based research and can be embraced as part of a robust education searching for understanding and promoting reflective practice. Under arts-based modes of thinking we can address complex and often subtle interactions. “In a sense, arts-based research is heuristic through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 3). The field of arts-based research “is an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable” (p. 1).

Leavy (2017) adds sustenance to the need to push past constraints by presenting a suite of ideas that she believes promotes creative investigation. Some of the ideas that resound with me as part of this are the opportunities to form new insights and respond

to our critical consciousness by raising awareness and empathy. These attributes are seen as benefits of arts-based research and for me, sit alongside ontological thought and enhance my phenomenological mode of research.

In regard to promoting the advantages of this model of philosophical research Leavy writes,

Like other approaches to research...arts-based research can offer new insights and learning in a range of subject matters...to tap in to what would otherwise be inaccessible, make connections and interconnections that are otherwise out of reach, ask and answer new research questions, explores old questions in new ways, and represent research differently and to board audiences. The research carries the potential to jar people into seeing and/or thinking differently, feeling more deeply, learning something new, or building understandings across similarities or differences. (2017, p. 9)

Leavy suggests that this style of research—through making and responding to art—can be evocative and provocative.

The arts, at their best, can be emotionally and politically evocative, captivating, aesthetically powerful and moving. Art can grab people’s attention in powerful ways. The arresting power of “good” art is intimately linked with the *immediacy* of art. (2017, p. 10)

My interpretations of art and the making of art are woven in and extrapolated in each of my *Lessons* as part of my inquiry. The language of art resonates and promotes these sentiments. My premise is that art that is good is emotional, evocative and aesthetic. It is governed by an intuitive knowingness that is borne from understanding the self and the art making process combined with the desire to be challenging and thought-provoking.

The immediacy of my classroom, art making and my own art practice allows for constant reflection. For my research to be successful, I consider more readily what art and life skills are desirable. I reflect on my personal pedagogy and the way I build relationships, deliver information and incite questioning amongst my students and myself. When I isolate particular characteristics, I propose that initiative, flexibility and openness, combined with creativity, might be desirable to fuel questioning and interpretation. I find some alignment with Leavy, who promotes,

Flexibility, openness and intuition, thinking conceptually, symbolically and metaphorically; ethical practice and values, thinking like an artist and the artfulness of the resulting work and thinking like a public intellectual. (2017, p. 12)

My ideas, my art practice and my teaching code are an extension of myself and are grounded in a field and methodology that is significant and that I recognise.

Hermeneutic scholars in conjunction with arts-based researchers see the value of storytelling as part of understanding. I see storytelling to be vital in two ways. I propose that an artist is a storyteller searching for a story to tell and my thesis unfolds my own and my students' unique stories. The way we share stories changes each time, as we see and bring new perspectives into play. Each time we tell a story we encourage diverse thinking and provoke questioning, enabling reflection and hermeneutic thinking. This process reflects a good art practice where we think and rethink our ideas to forge stronger work. This style of discernment and intellect sits at the core of hermeneutic thinking and embraces Heidegger's (1971) hermeneutic circle where we enter a path to seek understanding about art and life through phenomenological description. "To enter upon the path is the strength of thought, to continue on it is the feast of thought"

(Heidegger, 1971, p. 18). The hermeneutic circle suggests that, in order to discover the nature of art that really prevails in the work, “let us go to the actual work and ask the work what and how it is” (p. 18). I propose that we perceive the different elements that exist in an artwork and weave them together to locate and disclose a story. For transformative learning and teaching to occur I conceive that students need to be immersed in their own art making and art experiences at this level. The students need to see the value of ‘attending’ to their art practice and shape it in connection to their understanding of the self and as part of their own historicity and intentionality.

Artistry in action is ubiquitous and therefore has an important and distinctive role to play as we share our story bestowed with our phenomena and our feelings. Eisner writes, “...the generation of forms of feeling that have something to do with understanding some person, place or situation...is a conscious pursuit of expressive form in the service of understanding” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 7).

I subscribe to this as an artist and also as a teacher by inciting my students to push ideas that might sit on the fringe of the expected or the anticipated in order to challenge themselves and their art towards pluralism. They need to embrace the elusive and mysterious origins of art and locate their sense of self, understanding *a priori* prejudices within the ‘whole’ process. My students need to explore the details of experience as Gadamer suggests and hold a conversation with the situation in order “to bring a mode of insight into our own concrete situation” (Malpas, 2016, para. 7), which is fundamental for action. These are virtues needed to conceive new perspectives and to replace the predictable with the unpredictable.

Am I as an art educator guiding each of my students to ways to migrate towards this way of working and thinking? If I can guide my students towards this philosophical mode I have the potential to play a powerful role in their learning, giving them the opportunity to respond to, understand and reveal elements of the self in their art. This is why my research for this thesis is situated in the paradigm of phenomenological research as part of my personal educational dilemma. If I can find ways to permeate this methodology into my pedagogy, I believe I act in a manner that has honour and virtue. Accordingly, I reinstate my original dilemma more succinctly by prefiguring my prevailing quest to understand if my students can produce work that has honour and purpose as a product of integrity and veracity.

My question revolves around the active word of ‘producing’, which I feel needs to be placed into context. We can look at art and be persuaded or dissuaded by its intentionality and purpose. Discerning how we decipher art’s purpose and how skilful the actual work is becomes more persuasive when we are able to understand the artist’s process and production values. Thinking like an artist might give more weight to our empathetic views. When we can walk in an artist’s shoes, the role of producing art embraces the entire act of creating a product that becomes an extension of the self and hence more purposeful. The physical and tangible actions forged by decision-making, aesthetic wealth and dexterity become increasingly relevant and more pertinent for the authentic art maker.

When we make or produce art we use different media, materials and techniques. I see the term ‘medium’ to be important. For as Barone and Eisner say,

A medium mediates. For a medium to be achieved – that is, for a material to acquire the status of a medium – skills must be available to make that transformation possible: no skills, no technique and therefore no technique, no effect. The development of skills is necessary for making the transformation from materials to medium... (2012, p. 62)

The materials are the practical mediator applied to express ideas. They are the conduit between the artful self, the artistic ideas and the tangible work itself. The materials become the voice of the artist and are guided by experimentation, practice and decision-making, which lead to knowingness. Similarly, Leavy refers to the artfulness of the resulting work. “It is important to learn about the craft you are using, which may involve a literature review or immersion into examples of the field” (2017, p. 12). To be artful we need to look to the usefulness of what we do. Art production in my context is the coming together of an array of responses and questioning in order to produce art that is an effect of true understanding as part of our critical consciousness. This understanding embraces the use and experimentation of materials and media to find a level of mastery. To make art under the auspice of trustworthiness we need to understand art, be immersed in experiences, seek the unfamiliar to find logic, to unravel the unknown in order to find the new. We need to undertake and hold conversations with the self and the situation. The unique visual and written examples that filter through each chapter of my thesis are experiential and question technical ability, the role of perception and the aesthetics of art as part of our temporality. They are presented from the viewpoint of myself as artist, teacher and through the lens of my students. My mode of research is contemporaneous in my classroom and is part of my art making in a deep-seated way.

I have stated that I consider art to be ubiquitous in life and similarly I say the same of the emotional, visceral and physiological role of tension. Why? Because when I was considering ways to investigate the intrinsic question of my thesis I was mindful of the presence of ‘tension’. Tension in this setting moves past the common association of strain and discomfort and becomes an amplified experience that forms layers of the tactile and the sensory. I wondered how I could use tension in this context as an allegory for my inquiry and to encourage understanding. I return to the words of Todres (2007) who says, “...tension refers to how we retain the richness and texture of experiences when formulating a level of description that applies generally and typically” (p. 7). Texture becomes an “aesthetic dimension” (p. 13). Texture speaks literarily to the artist’s method—the layers of paint and contemplation that shape the surface and context of a truthful artwork. Texture also alludes to the richness that occurs when we reflect and express our experiences. Just as the layers of an artwork can be described by particular qualities, textures can also be used to describe our experiences if we choose to approach our world in a phenomenological way. Texture becomes a form of mediator between the ideas and the actions. Aligning and exploring tension as a way to evoke the notion of texture has fostered my research discoveries—resonating with me seamlessly, binding my inquiry both visually and theoretically. The feeling of tension promotes the self to be open to our differing layers of discernment. Tension also became the key theme of an art exhibition created to further explore the crucial element of my investigation and thesis.

“We can find Tension anywhere. Or rather, it can find us...tension is a ubiquitous influence on our lives.” These are seminal sentiments from the artist’s statement that accompanied an exhibition titled *Tension*, which was the collaboration of two soul mates, my partner Jimmy and myself, as we accepted the challenge of

exploring and communicating tension through words and images. Jimmy wrote a set of evocative text panels and I responded visually through colour and abstract forms. This exhibition was an undertaking and experiment that became the visual compendium of my thesis. The artwork I produced narrated tension from within the self and from our human interactions. The exhibition was an invitation to accept the challenge of two individuals—writer and artist—to respond to, acknowledge and interpret the feeling of tension, facing the familiar and the unfamiliar as part of the everyday liminal space.

I find tension is also part of my teaching as I am presented with similar encounters in my classroom. It is not a destructive or negative feeling but rather a platform that I champion in order to seek out and confront the unfamiliar and the unknown. It is the productive tension that Todres speaks of as part of understanding or the jarring sensation that Leavy references. *Lesson One* of my thesis will recount the catalyst of the *Tension* exhibition, divulging how it fed this inquiry in a ubiquitous way. Bookending this, the *Epilogue* reveals the reinterpretations of the *Tension* images one year later. To interpret and reinterpret the work is a strategic device I foster to see if lived experiences, temporality and intentionality do in fact alter my own understanding and relationship with my images and the self. It is a device I adopt to take the reader full circle in my findings and to reinforce, even momentarily, the power of description and detail to hypothesise and to illuminate the texture of my thesis. I investigate life, bringing divergence, questioning and inevitably facing the role that tension brings to art. If this approach preoccupies me in art it is sure to permeate my teaching. It is also essential to confront tension with my students to determine how effective my premise is. I need to understand if I might come to know myself, my teaching, my students and my artistry differently through a phenomenological lens.

What must not be overlooked is the process of writing and rewriting, making and remaking, thinking and rethinking as part of this interpretation. A theme in Max van Manen's (1990) work depicts how descriptions are ultimately interpretation, which is a fundamental element of a hermeneutic practice. van Manen supports his deliberations by quoting the words of Heidegger, "The meaning of phenomenology... is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this world, where it designates this business of interpretation" (van Manen, 1990, p. 25). The role of iteration and reiteration is what gives art making and subjective understanding a sense of veracity. The notion and path of the hermeneutic circle promotes awareness of the self and is what I foster in my students and myself—this is what leads to interpretation and questioning that allows for art and life to have virtue.

The idea of returning the reader to the beginning leads me to pursue Heidegger and to explore Edmund Husserl's theme of 'home-world' and subsequently Anthony Steinbock's (1995) writing where he suggests that home is the place where understanding begins and ends. Todres (2007) extrapolates Steinbock's account of the 'home-world' to be "a place where understanding begins and the place to where understanding returns... It is to forge a journey" (Todres, 2007, p. 14). They are places to which we return after we navigate the familiar and the unfamiliar, or as he refers to them, they form a state of tension that exists between the 'home-world' and the 'alien-world' to eventually arrive home. Todres speaks further by advocating for the 'home-world' to be a

grounding notion of what it means to understand in the liminal space and experience of 'home' and 'alien', it can become meaningful to talk of understanding as a journey of appropriation and transgression – an interplay of the familiar and the unfamiliar. (2007, p. 15)

Sebastian Luft (2011) succinctly explicates, “the ‘home-world’ is not one world of a single individual, but an intersubjective world, a world of tradition, culture, religion (myths), collective values, i.e. a phenomenon of generativity” (para. 14).

The nature of art making is akin to this journey, promoting the iteration and reiteration of ideas and thoughts. Ideas and encounters that stay with us as a part of our perception and our tension are the ones that we can describe as part of our temporality and intentionality holding us to the world. Sarah Bakewell (2016) refers and cites the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty saying,

...all of my actions and thoughts are related to this structure, and even if a philosopher’s thought is merely a way of making his explicit hold on the world which is all he is. And yet I am free, not in spite of or beneath these motivations, but rather by their means. For that meaningful life, that particular signification of nature and history that I am, does not restrict my access to the world; it is rather my means of communication with it. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 529 in Bakewell, 2016, p. 228)

The phenomenological attitude advocates for meaning and shaping the essence and awareness of our being or *Dasein*. These configure us and “bind us to the world and give us scope for action and perception” (Bakewell, 2016, p. 228). It is through an awareness of these layers, the tension of consciousness that we can communicate in response to the world.

While the story of tension provides the beginning and the end of my thesis, the middle uncovers tension in the classroom in unison with my own domain. I invite the reader into my world as an art educator and as an artist to reveal my art practice and to share insights into my philosophy around the paradigm and the enigma of the visual

arts, not only as a device to produce imagery but as a means to explore the world—to act with both private and public intelligence and in a phenomenological manner. I ascertain that as part of my daily pedagogy, setting out to teach my students to be both imaginative and intelligent thinkers and to foster an artistic mindset, we cannot underestimate the role of public intelligence, for when we make art in response to the world around us we will inevitably collide with consequences of public scrutiny, which can be hard to accept. It is a brave action to place the results of our artistic action into the public domain where uncertainty prevails. It is this unknown level of uncertainty that can give rise to both the vulnerable and the probable lessons of art making. To communicate an idea as part of art making is therefore bestowed with a complex compendium that requires thinking, action and an appreciation of the language of art. These experiences are rich—both practically and personally—but they are imperative and add to our perception of the world. They resemble individual lessons, individual encounters or parts that I apply to my own creativity and my rationale to ‘know’ art.

Subsequently, I use the word ‘Lesson’ as a link to education and to life. From the outset, I am conscious that this word might be seen as contrary or a dalliance as it is such a generic term. Even as I try to locate another distinctive word to conjure a similar sentiment, ‘Lesson’ manifests itself and becomes crucial to capture the essence of tension as a way to explore the paradox and virtues of art. ‘Lesson’ becomes a symbol for the transmission between each state of my art making and teaching philosophy, which is why my thesis is based on a suite of individual *Lessons* that sit as independent chapters promoting essential ideas. They blend and collaborate, bringing a visual synergy redolent of the texture of a layered artwork.

As I establish the texture of my writing I have to find a configuration to underpin my findings and my *Lessons*. I return to and consider van Manen (2016), who conceives that hermeneutic research allows the teacher to deliberate what it means to be tactful as an educator. I have crafted my own set of *Lessons* that are necessary for understanding the self in and through art. The structure of my thesis is based on the six essential elements that for me, promote truth in art as part of a discerning educator. They exist as fundamental art lessons that work as parts and in unison. They are private but at times collide, mediate and traverse tension and trace the process of art.

Here I elaborate the intentions of each of the *Lessons*:

LESSON ONE

Where I unearth tension, and find it as a friend and foe

This chapter speaks to tension and the power of the antagonist and protagonist. It shares with the reader the provocation of the *Tension* exhibition that transformed into the visual and philosophical pulse of my thesis. Tension becomes entangled with empathy and deception as part of our conscious and our unconscious actions. It unpacks how we give way to differing interpretations of tension promoted by the antagonists. It is devised to illuminate the complexity of tension as a ubiquitous force.

LESSON TWO

The moment I realise the power of a good story ... I realise I have a voice

This chapter speaks to storytelling and its power to foster the proximity between the past and the present and how we can respond to our experiences as part of art. It calls on the importance of vagueness and logic to foster awareness of the self. Through story we can distil our thoughts and locate the essence of what we are endeavouring to express as part of understanding.

LESSON THREE

The part where I understand the difference between looking and seeing

Under the pretence of doubt, I investigate the way we might come to visually express the essence of our story through art. I seek to expose a wakefulness of the struggles we may confront in order to make art that is soulful and true. While this conjures feelings of doubt, more importantly it gives rise to the potency of self-doubt to explore the world as part of the way we perceive.

LESSON FOUR

The time where I see beauty reveal its truth

This chapter is judicious in order to comprehend what turns the elements of art into art that is alluring. Learning to make and interpret artwork that speaks to aesthetic

sensibility is vital but alone is not sufficient. Through aesthetics, art needs to evoke an experience. This is where we start to consider beauty outside its traditional association and transform it into the way we might experience the world.

LESSON FIVE

Where I imagine becoming lost in the tick and tock of a clock

Time and space unfold under the guise of a paradox where both our perception of the objective and subjective meet. It is in response to the self as part of historical awareness and how time and culture shapes our historical selves. This chapter speaks to openness—to explore and to seek adventures, which are tempered by reflection. It responds to the opposing states of tension as a means to confront the world before us as part of a continuum.

LESSON SIX

Where I confront the integrity of right and wrong

As an art maker and educator, the role of ethics is fundamental to promote integrity for art. I explore the right and wrong of art and how we need to be mindful of our own actions and our impact on others. How far can we push the moral boundaries of art before we potentially cause harm? Is the blatant and the confrontational nature of art needed to create an impact, or is the clever interpretation of art and art making as part of the self, more insightful? Are the two bound in a cycle of questioning fused by our personal moral compass?

EPILOGUE

Where I decide that what I do has worth

This speaks to the culmination of the findings and adventures and is where my *Lessons* link together. I evaluate what contribution my inquiry has for myself and others as I look to investigate John Mbiti's notion of "the past lies before us" as revealed in John Paul Lederach (2005). Temporality and particular lived experiences haunt me and help me to draw my findings together. I reflect on my journey and surmise if what I do does in fact have worth in order to produce art that imbues the virtues of art. Reflecting on my own encounters and testing my theories over time I ascertain if I have changed, fostered and responded to my initial awareness of tension.

Each *Lesson* acts as a threshold or a liminal state to the next. The idea of the liminal state is prominent as it is the locus of historical existence as we become more aware of the influence of the past and the present on the self. If we align this with the spirit of Heidegger and Husserl's 'home' and 'adventure' we are both "scared and excited to enter into the unknown - one is widened and stands in wonder" (Todres, 2007, p. 16). Each *Lesson* forms part of this partnership between the self and other and past and the present, building textured lines and surfaces to evoke and capture feelings and emotions.

The themes that I pursue as part of the manifestation of tension give rise to the power of the unfamiliar—the need to embrace the undetermined. I cannot ignore my responsibility and the saturating feeling of tension. It is necessary to find a way to elucidate and mirror its push and pull. For this sentiment to transpire I propose that

tension sponsors a sense of jarring in art, which needs to be embraced to communicate and to connect to our interhuman relationships. This feeling is desirable in order to tell a personal story as part of art that beholds truthfulness and renders the “fullness or wholeness of life” (van Manen, 2016, p. 31). Consequently, I have raised the antagonist and the protagonist of art to laud this consciousness. These different ‘characters’ are intertwined into each *Lesson*, to amplify the need for uncertainty and obscurity in learning. As I confront each *Lesson*, the familiar and the unfamiliar are revealed. These are indelible threads that cross between each *Lesson*, affecting its form and shaping its texture. The tension that I identify in my own world, and that of my students within the world of the classroom, is welcomed as part of learning and understanding the qualities of art.

It is also worthy to note that in each *Lesson* ‘I’ sits within the title. Using ‘I’ becomes important so I might locate myself in a thesis written through a deliberate voice that establishes ownership of my teaching and my artistry. ‘I’ is not definitive and complete but alternatively responds to the soulful self, the subjective self and the intersubjective self. I interpret and use the word soulful in my thesis under the guidance of Todres (2007). Soulfulness for Todres “embodies the valleys of many heartfelt historical moments. It includes the many things that we are touched by in opening to ‘otherness’ and the seasons of time. Soulfulness is history and the marks of being historical beings” (p. 162). At the heart of visual work is the facilitation of reflectivity to understand the way we look and see such moments. Karen Meyer (2010) helps to orientate this position when she says, “I observe how I observe others” (p. 87). Equally, depending on the character of each of my experiences I shift between the present and past tense as a means to honour the temporality of my work. This device enables me to

usher you, the reader through my remembering as well as place you alongside me in my classroom, in my teaching and in my art making, which adds to my authorship, bringing mindfulness to the nuances of each of my encounters. Indeed, as Claudia Mitchell (2011), Norman Denzin (2003) and Susan Sontag (2017) note, “situating one’s self in the research texts—taking it personally—is critical to engaging in the interpretive process” (Mitchell, 2011, p. 11).

van Manen (1990) illuminates this further as a way to build awareness to the self as part of researching lived experiences. He describes Jean Paul Sartre’s famous analysis of “The Look” (van Manen, 1990, p. 24) as a well-known example of lived experience. He shares how Sartre describes the act of looking at someone through a keyhole is experienced in “a pure mode of losing myself in the world, of causing myself to be drunk by things as ink is in a blotter” (p. 24). This suggests, for me, that we are enveloped by our world but when we sense that we are being looked at, our mode of awareness changes. Before this we were in a state of unreflective consciousness. Alternatively, when this awareness takes hold we can individually say, “I see myself because someone else sees me” (van Manen, 1990, p. 25). To find ourselves in these different states in life we need to appreciate the power of texture and its energy to seek understanding about our own chronicle—who we are and what we do. If the reader does sense this feeling in my thesis they can appreciate the

...otherness lurking between the lines in these pages s/he should not conclude that it is a seamless and continuous entity. A narrative self can thrive on change, on growth sometimes on reconstitution or redefinition so fundamental that it may seem to produce profound dislocation, a fragmentation, even a dissolution of identity. (Barone & Eisner, 2000, p. 2)

Eisner also reinforces the proclivity of my practioner self and the importance of remaining close or locating the self in the classroom. The notion of observation as part of my research and the association to the daily school life is a device that is welcome as part of my reflective practice and is “worthy of scrutiny to see [if] education as a project is simultaneously aesthetic and institutional” (Barone & Eisner, 2000, p. 3). When I acknowledge being ‘close’ in the classroom I am conscious of my surrounds, monitoring the effectiveness of my teaching and responding to art and experiences.

My thesis acknowledges the self, as it is ultimately an ethnographic study based on observation and a narrative inquiry as a teacher and as an artist. My thesis is designed to empower readers and viewers to see parts of the world that they may not have observed. This is important to note, for my intention at the outset is to foster a narrative-based inquiry that surpasses the mere retelling of scholarly writing. Todres (2007) suggests, in the temperament of Heidegger, that this narrative style of research can be supported in two ways. First the writer provides individual occasions to

...stand before the concreteness of the experience ... and secondly the writer, offer[s] some of her own metaphors and images that reflect her research discoveries. It is believed that this may be helpful as long as it is not presented as the only possible interpretation, and that in the true spirit of the hermeneutic tradition, the writer is explicit about their own interpretative contributions... (Todres, 2007, p. 12)

This approach adds to the genuineness of my research allowing for an aesthetically rich understanding to be present. Todres refers to van Manen (1990) and describes this way of researching as the “elucidation of hermeneutic phenomenology” (in Todres, 2007, p. 13).

The different examples I use to illustrate my thinking are events that have taken place over a three-year period in the all-girls’ Anglican independent school in

which I teach. While my cohort of students is from the private sector they are not stereotypical as they come from a broad socio-cultural and economic background. They are not all versed in cultural privileges and a coalition exists between cultural groups and ideologies. My thesis is a collection of narratives used as examples that are actual encounters that I have been part of, become ‘lost in’ or ‘close to’. The idea of story becomes twofold, for I proposed earlier that the artist is a storyteller but in this context, story becomes the foundation of my inquiry. The two different contexts support one another and affiliate with my attitude, giving weight and authenticity to my work. Equally, Anita Sinner (2013) adds weight to the power of creative nonfiction, or storytelling as part of research. She imagines, “entering research practices with a perspective that stories are effective teaching tools that represent cultural artefacts” (p. 3). She regards stories as personal experiences and storytelling to be an “artful way of knowing, moving understandings from identifying research partners objectively...” (p. 3). She associates her work to Kathleen Gallagher (2011), who also argues, “story-telling is centrally important to educational research” (Gallagher, p. 49 in Sinner, 2013, p. 4). These encounters I have drawn from in my classroom and my own experiences have been part of the closeness of my day-to-day work and bring a greater awareness to the earlier words of Meyer who said, “I have observed and I have been observed” (2010, p. 87).

Art and understanding art enables us to move between time, taking on the role of a storyteller as we rethink and re-experience encounters. We are entering into Gadamer’s notion of transmission (*Überlieferungsgeschehen*) in which past and present are being constantly mediated (Gadamer, 1975, p. 290), and where, as Barone and Eisner suggest, lies in

the power to persuade an audience to rethink aspects of the social world by re-experiencing them is not merely a cognitive act. It contains powerful emotional elements that can motivate viewers and readers to replace parts of an unexamined value system with new appreciations, attitudes and behaviors...which might be regarded as alien. (2000, p. 167)

In light of this I use a range of examples in both past and present tense to support my work, to show how temporality adds to my non-fiction story and the effectiveness of my research.

Tension is the catalyst and central theme of this thesis, to challenge my teaching, myself and my relationships. Tension brings awareness to and acknowledgment of opposing forces that exist as part of the human consciousness. Through the *Tension* exhibition and the *Lessons* that are presented I reflect on this central theme and explore it through different lenses to grasp what is particular and significant to the art making method to see if what my students produce has veracity and integrity. Through my exploration, my art and my students, I use, as Gadamer suggests,

thinking, speaking, rationality and language [to] derive their contemporary meanings from the same root: *logos*. And in turn *logos* has retained the meaning of conversation, inquiry, questioning: of questioningly letting that which is getting talked about be seen... It is the coming together of language and thoughtfulness to lived experiences that...shows itself precisely as it shows itself. (1975, p. 33)

My narrative for my thesis is persuaded by my role as educator, my personal biography as a researcher, my students' work, my work, reflections, interpretation and the gathering of images under the style and method in which it is situated. Under the *ethos* of artist and teacher, I speak to how my students interpret the world through my pedagogical practice by inviting them to respond to art with detail and in reaction to

their senses. I voice my view that if I had only one wish for my students it would be to teach them to think, and as a consequence of this, to see and act differently in the world. Hence, my research is not isolated to an empirical framework but rather explored through the qualitative research of phenomenological methodology.

Art provides a voice when it is endowed with power and creative intent. The acknowledgment of tension drives my desire to empower my students, giving my inquiry significance. Alongside this is the influence of interpretation and my response to being culturally and socio-culturally aware—to present the self in exploration with, and of, others. Eisner, Barone, Todres, Sinner, and Leavy speak of arts-based and narrative inquiry, embracing the descriptions of varied encounters as they explore the nuances of different lived situations. My inquiry is also active and speaks to real and varied experiences under the auspice of scholarly intelligence. I subscribe to the thinking of Gadamer, van Manen, Greene, Heidegger, Sokolowski and others who describe and explore encounters in a phenomenological way.

I invite you as the reader to enter and confront my enigma with me—to walk with me as I explore the interhuman dimensions through the shadow of tension, my art and the art making of my students as I endeavour to reconcile how I know if what I teach and what my students produce has honour and purpose as a product of integrity and veracity.

Let us begin...

LESSON ONE

Where I unearth tension, and find it as a friend and foe

The Invitation

The collaboration

The shape of empathy



LESSON ONE

Where I unearth tension and find it as a friend and foe

We need to run towards the tension, or our life will become stagnate and toxic.

Tension is ever-present in an intersubjective world.

We can find tension anywhere. Or rather, it can find us.

(Louise Bloomfield, 2016)

Tension can be perceived and interpreted in many ways, but for my purpose I see it as two opposing forces—forces that push and pull and contradict. I see tension as the necessary evil we need to have in life. It is the friction that is needed in order for us to be aware of our being. It is the force that drives us forward in search of growth and migration towards emancipation. Tension creates us, it binds, it sparks and it encourages empathy. I propose that without tension or the awareness of tension in our lives, we run

the risk of becoming idle, harbouring self-deception and not living fully. We need to run towards the tension.

This chapter is the first of a suite of *Lessons* designed to explore tension, introduce the role of the protagonist and the antagonist, and illuminate the vital role tension played in our exhibition of work and how it became the pulse of my thesis. What becomes prevalent as this chapter progresses is the complexity of tension and how it pervades our day-to-day actions—influencing the relationships we hold with the self and with others. I propose that tension brings awareness to our experiences that in turn guides our experience of art. Chris Lawn (2006) elucidates this by referencing Heidegger’s sentiments that art is the “opening up on to the world” (Lawn, 2006, p. 89). For me, art is both part of the everyday and a language that guides us towards a sense of self awareness and a sense of release. The move towards emancipation as Gert Biesta (2011) says is

...therefore not something given by scholars, by their explications at the level of the people’s intelligence – emancipation is always emancipation seized, even against the scholars, when one teaches oneself. (2011, p. 35)

Art is a complex domain that is supported by language, entangled patterns that guide us and enable us to perceive and to be open to the everyday world in which we exist and learn. The nuances of language help us to respond intelligently to the art maker’s practice and to the human condition. As individuals acting in a phenomenological way we need to learn to interpret and describe the elements of our worlds so that we harness a meaningful way of life. Under Merleau-Ponty’s *ethos* as acclaimed by Bakewell, the character of pushing and pulling prevails—tension seems fitting. “The aspects of our

existence that limit us...are the very same ones that bind us to the world and give us the scope for action and perceptions” (Bakewell, 2016, p. 229).

Tension associates itself with simple human emotions such as curiosity, empathy and even deception. It is this connection to our emotions that stimulates the reciprocity of ideas and our imagination. It fuels doubt and draws us towards the different dimensions that shape our personal history—elements such as our virtues, our values, our interests and our experiences. Just as these elements are characteristics of the human condition, I see them as essential dynamics needed to make and to interpret the language of art. Whether we are the artist or the viewer of art, we can explore, experience, communicate and respond to the *Lebenswelt*—the ‘lifeworld’, the world in which we live that tension is a part of. van Manen (2014) reminds us that the ‘lifeworld’ is a term first coined by Husserl and is “the world in which we live in the natural attitude of everyday life” (van Manen, 2014, p. 135). Awareness of the lifeworld can be fueled by our experience within the intersubjective world, the kind of intentionality, or consciousness “that functions in our experience and of other persons” (Sokowloski, 2000, p. 146). Or as Jimmy and I wrote about our exhibition of images,

From the literal tautness of two forces fighting in opposite directions, being presented with the fragility of time, or experiencing something simply and unsettlingly out of alignment, tension is a ubiquitous influence on our lives. Within all these pieces is an additional element: the unspoken potential of what happens next. (Artist’s Statement, 2016, *Tension* exhibition)

When we create art, we commit to expressing an idea on a page and the ways we do this require thought and imagination guided by our sensory, our synesthetic and our aesthetic relations, but we need to learn the skills of interpreting, mediating and

anticipating the world for this to be purposeful. The ways we learn to perceive the world was of particular interest to Merleau-Ponty with his work in child psychology—this drove his philosophical views.

The Invitation

—

With the introduction of tension and its impact on art, I invite you to construct an image in your mind, be guided by and aware of your senses, your intuition and respond to my instructions. Close your eyes and picture a square. Imagine in the square that you are shifting and placing pleated, bound and crushed fabric into shapes. These shapes can be moulded and fashioned into concertinaed forms. The forms that take shape in your head start to resemble the topography of a sharp angular mountainside, or they are reminiscent of the bellows of an accordion—each fold has the potential to extend, compress or collapse at your hand. The light is natural but strong and adds to the sculptural embrace of each form. All these elements start to build contrast and inflict shadows. If you were to look closely into the cropped sections of the fabric, the folds might remind you of the side of a metal bolt, where the grooves are precisely carved to form the guiding thread—the spaces between each fold are getting bigger and smaller as they take form. Just centimetres north of the natural horizon line the folds of the fabric start to fall away, they collapse, they appear to be at ease and are dismissed from order. At this point an opening appears in the fabric that leads the eye into a chasm of darkness. The colour palette of the image is essentially tones of blood red but it

has undertones of the darkness used to create and provoke a further sense of mystery, perhaps betrayal or contradiction.

Take a screen shot of this image in your mind and file it away but remember it ought to be open to change each time you revisit it, bringing a new experience, new understanding, new conversations and an awakening to a consciousness, both real and perceived.

Now, suppose I gave you a camera or a set of paints and ask you to commit your imagined image to a hard copy—a product—to make it into a form of visual communication. How would you decide to build a bridge between your mind and your marks? How do you feel about your imagined image? Do you suddenly feel that you need to change elements of it to make yourself feel more secure and more at ease? Do you have the skills to communicate what you see? Can your image act as a mirror to the world? Is doubt or contradiction already casting a shadow in a darkened corner of your mind or are you alert, secure and active? Do you find uncertainty in this way of thinking and if so, does this bring you closer to the nuances of tension as a driver of change?

I propose that these are the type of questions that the artist confronts each day. It is one thing to create an image in the secure shelter of your mind, but it is another to commit it to a page where it is open to both public and private intelligence as Mitchell (2011) referred to in my *Prologue*. A blank canvas for an artist is like a blank page for a writer, and it can be a scary and confronting place to find yourself. I often ask myself on these occasions, “Where do I start?” I consider that imagining an image might be easier than the quest to translate the image into reality. The art process is intricate, and it can

leave us vulnerable and uncertain. This is the challenge of art. This is the ‘necessary evil’ that is tension.



Image: Tension exhibition, The Red Well

I surrender this image, *The Red Well* to you. I ask you to judge and scrutinise it. It is my image, based on the same descriptions that I revealed to you earlier. What you see are folded edges of fabric—composed, ordered and designed. The elements in the image create contrast—they build tension—as they unravel into hollowness. This absence carves out an empty dark space. At first glance the void looks vacant but as your eyes adjust you can start to see the subtle textured surface that outlines an internal wall. This void acts as a magnet that draws you in and becomes deeper. The light reflects and catches the edges of the folds, falling in such a way that it nudges the eye around the space. You might wonder what these shapes are and where the dark form goes. What you see is an image that has a character that is harsh, mysterious and tense. It provides contradictions, clarity, empathy, deception and acts as a lens that I can use to explore and communicate my response to tension. Tension is expressed by the interplay of colour, light, darkness and strong lines.

Consider the initial image you conjured in your mind—has it changed now that you have seen another potential interpretation or meaning of the same information? Does your image differ from mine? When an image is only in our mind it can evaporate and equally it can be conjured at any time when needed. But when an image becomes a reality, an object, a thing, it becomes open to public intelligence, conversation, dialogue and scrutiny. Eugene Gendlin (1967) speaks to Heidegger's notion of 'the thing' as an object and describes how the particularity of things,

seems to depend completely on their space and time, that each is here or there, now or then. If two things are alike, this one is different from that one only because it is here now, while the other is there, or is here later. It is space and time that make ordinary things particular. (Gendlin, 1967, p. 257)

How we see and relate to art is guided by our intentionality, and tension becomes real and expressed through the aesthetic qualities of art, such as form and technique. Technical and aesthetic control is needed for the work to be authentic and for the artist to communicate an idea, which is then open to interpretation. Questions about the self, which link to the need for acceptance from others as well as the self are also revealed. I consider these elements to be the subjective layers of interpretation that are guided by individual responses and encounters.

Just as tension has many possible interpretations and associations, so does the creation or interpretation of an image. Each time we revisit a brush stroke or see an artwork again, we see different things. Art, like life, has objective elements and subjective layers designed to add to its potential meaning.

Therefore, when we can see an artwork from both objective and subjective perspectives, it changes. The real object is wrapped with a layer of the subjective, which makes the viewers' and the artist's perception and feelings of vulnerability tangible and palpable. When this occurs, I feel my chest tighten and my blood move swiftly. This can often leave me walking away from self-exploration unsettled and with too many ideas. I am overwhelmed, my thoughts interrupted and I am almost numb. Who am I? Or as Merlin Thompson (2015) says,

we find ourselves in a situation where, notable interruptive tensions create waves in contradictory directions that both foster and undermine the individual's sense of self. Tension can take the individual away from and closer to being true to one's self. (p. 614)

Recognising Thompson's 'interruptive tension' is important for this investigation as it highlights the nature of self-exploration. "Self-exploration takes place within the messiness of comforts and tensions, alignments and misalignments, stabilities and uncertainties that come with real life" (Thompson, 2015, p. 614). When I am faced with this situation it might just be easier to ignore the blank page and the uncertainties or inner tension, but for some reason I keep returning to this absent space. As Thompson suggests, I find myself in a state of self-exploration and yet again I am aware of the prevailing and alluring impact of tension. The protagonist and the antagonist become significant to provoke these perceptions acting for change. Tension becomes both good and bad.

If we think of tension as these two forces that push and pull, we can think of tension as being good and evil. Or like the protagonist fighting against the antagonist. First, let us consider the protagonist to see if this theory might hold weight. A protagonist

has a set of characteristics. In a book or movie, he or she is a physical being, generally a hero-like figure created as a consistent character with a cause, but their role changes and develops as the story moves forward. For a good story that is interesting and captivating, the protagonist needs to be active, strong and make things happen. I consider that they also need to be imperfect. For if the hero is perfect, suspicion and suspense are killed off—the story is insignificant, complacent and even boring. The protagonist needs to have a unique voice, be compelling and have the desire to grow and be different by the end of the story. The viewer wants the protagonist to succeed.

Tension can be seen as the protagonist. It is the driver of a unique voice, which is needed for the artist to make work with integrity and purpose. I see this unique voice as being true for art so that it is not demarcated as an object that is boring and uninteresting. Art and the artistic process need the protagonist. It needs to be active and for some part imperfect to find resolve. There needs to be the desire for change.

Yet, like a captivating story the protagonist needs other characters or things to occur to enable change and for the storyline to build. These are the antagonists. They are the characters whose actions get in the way of the protagonist. But like the protagonist, the formidable antagonist has a set of characteristics too. The antagonists can be the more flexible, more nimble character in the plot and at times share common qualities with the protagonist. The antagonist tends to apply some logic or purpose to their role giving them their motivation for action. The antagonist is not necessarily seen as the ‘bad guy’ as they can have some good qualities or desirable characteristics. Because of these elements we often identify with the antagonist. With this in mind, I propose that tension is also the antagonist. Tension takes on dual roles.

Referencing the image *The Red Well*, tension is the ever-present character, however I envisage tension appearing alongside the main character as a more flexible and disarming element. They are supporting characters that can be logical, emotional, virtually shadowing one another and also the disruptive voice that enables us to be uncomfortable and reflective. It can be the agent required for change.

Being both an artist and a teacher, I find that my life is built on scrutiny, contrasting views, empathy and the feeling of vulnerability. As an artist I am endeavouring to share my ideas and experiences with others. As a teacher I am trying to incite change in my students and create visual communicators who have purpose. In both of these roles I make decisions about the way I act and the way I accept challenges. I welcome this mission and the questions that sit alongside my creative decisions. Regardless of the role I play, tension exists as part of my human interaction, which is how I learn more about myself, and my students. This deepens my personal inquiry about the world in which I exist. I acknowledge that for me, tension is all around. It is ubiquitous and plays out in my different roles.

Why is this need to express ideas and understand the self so important? For me, art and making art is a way I can come to understand my sense of self. It is also a way I can guide my students to embrace their experiences as part of authentic learning. Tension is an intrinsic element of these worlds and through it we can become more conscious of the world of others—an intersubjective world—a world that allows for openness, consciousness, empathy and deception to all take place. From my encounters, these experiences can lead us to be reflective of the self. It is when ideas are revealed through dialogue between the self, and the self and others that art can start to unravel

new ways of seeing. This is an important element in making and sharing art as part of the everyday. Art can show empathy, it can lie and speak of deceit, it can share encounters based on the intention or authentic action of the artist. The dialogue that forms between the self and the imagination, the maker and the artwork, and between the artwork and the viewer, illustrates what this communication is about. It becomes a form of reciprocity—the exchanging of things for mutual benefit. This exchange occurs through the tension that we create and the tension that finds us.

The collaboration

—

Tension was the title of our exhibition, a combination of 12 images and five panels of words created in collaboration between two creative individuals—Jimmy and myself. The exhibition was designed to be the visual component of my thesis research, to explore the art making process and the way I build and foster relationships as part of who we are and who we become. It was designed in part to explore the role of the protagonist and the antagonist in art and in daily life. At the outset, I wondered if tension was really the protagonist I imagined it to be. I wondered how it would force me to reflect on my own narrative, my ability to communicate with others and to quantify the effect I have as artist and teacher. As Kathleen O’Dwyer (2009) says,

From birth, one’s history is linked to the histories of others and these histories unfold and reveal themselves, one’s own narrative has to be continually visited. It has to be revised and refigured in an attempt to mediate one’s own identity with the radically different and changing worlds of others. (p. 20)

This was our intention as creatives—to explore our history, to acknowledge the influence of others on the self and to find our narrative. I see tension in its dual forms of protagonist and antagonist as a way to support this process.

The idea for our exhibition was borne from an early morning walk where Jimmy and I started to debate a topic on which we both had strong views. As we continued our walk and talk, things became heated and the way we communicated with each other became tense. We both wanted to be heard, to be right, to be the loudest. We talked over each other and cut each other off mid-sentence. We continued to debate the point in anticipation that the other would back down and concede defeat. This was not likely. The cadence of our discussion was imperfect—it was unresolved. Initially our banter was frustrating but we also realised that elements of this were good. Later that morning, which was somewhat quiet, I reflected on the way we exchanged our words, how we were relentless in our opinions, and most importantly the way we had not listened or been open to each other. In effect we had stonewalled the other's view. We were antagonistic and we both knew how to fuel each other's weaknesses. Our conversation was both noble and ruthless. As a consequence of this I mooted the idea of working together on a creative project as a test of our time together, our relationship, our narrative and as a means to reflect on how we reacted and responded to each other. We decided to create a project to tell a story about tension. We acknowledged that we had never created a joint suite of work in our twenty-plus years together, and we wondered what would happen to us, how would we interact and if we would cooperate, compromise, listen and be honest in our thoughts and intentions. How would we react to each other's work? How would we treat each other as we shared our intentions in search of a common outcome that was both aesthetic and authentic? Would we dance politely around one another, avoiding

critical dialogue? Would we be able to mediate and work in tune? Would we welcome empathy and deception? Would the power of each other's feedback aid our development or would it cause offence? Would we be friend or foe? It opened up questions about how we interact together in the world in which we live—the lifeworld—and made me more aware of the meaning of an intersubjective world.

As an artist, the way I respond to tension can be deciphered through the marks I make on a page. Or more accurately, the way I decided to capture the light falling on the fabric and my photographic props to evoke tension. I also felt that tension was present at this time and contributed to my actions. Yet I think that if I can learn to recognise the relationships that exist as part of this human condition, I can start to appreciate how tension can become a powerful tool for discovery and learning. If I can understand that empathy and deception can possibly be used to bring a positive perspective to an artist and the viewer of art, it could make me more aware of conscious and unconscious actions. As I worked on the images for the exhibition I was reminded that I am participating in this world of contradiction.

For Jimmy and myself the purpose of art and creating art enabled us to make more sense of our world and each other's world. We each had a natural tendency to support and promote our own ideas as a first course of action, but for our exhibition to succeed we also needed to be open to another's view if we were to work towards our primary intention of exploring tension as part of the everyday and the way we responded to it through a collaborative work.

As our project developed, we became more immersed and new dimensions unfolded. Sokolowski (2000) says that we

live in the world and almost all of our experiencing involves a dimension of other minds, a meaning that could be shared with others and that is defined by being in contrast and contradiction with others. (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 153)

If I take this sentence and refer back to our intention to explore tension in the context of an intersubjective world, creating contrast combined with the meeting of the minds is an intrinsic part of this approach. This happens when the correlation of ideas and views become shared and was intimated in the example where I asked you, the reader to conjure your own image in your mind. I asked you to think in a subjective way about objects to herald new dimensions and for opposing ideas to come into play. I asked you, as Heidegger intimates, to be open to the possibility that your work will change depending completely on the space and time, the here or there, the now or then.

When we interpret and reinterpret art imagery or encounters in life we find and build deeper and more accurate possible meanings.

The self is never a completed possession, it is never a fixed entity, it is never as self-sufficient cogito; but rather it is a living, and therefore growing, changing and responding 'becoming' which is the process of interpreting and reinterpreting itself and its world. (O'Dwyer, 2009, p. 10)

As an outcome of our conversation that morning, Jimmy and I wanted to combine our thinking. We wanted to, as O'Dwyer (2009) implies, show our "exposure to life's unceasing questions and challenges, a plurality of interpretations and answers, and an ongoing tension between what it is and what it is becoming" (p. 10). We wanted to communicate and respond to our own and each other's ideas rather than silo our own

thoughts. For our real or daily tension to be addressed and communicated in our work we realised we had to be open and aware of the other's views. We needed to compromise, and acknowledge as Merleau-Ponty conceives, to exist only through compromise with the world. It seems purposeful, "to understand exactly how compromise works" (Bakewell, 2016, p. 229). For us this understanding had to be part of our language, but at the same time it was important that we did not become submissive or smother our inner conflict. I refer again to the work of O'Dwyer (2009) who corroborates these thoughts. She refers to Paul Ricoeur's writing as an "instrument in the search of meaning and sees human experience as inherently interpretive and asserts that language is both the foundation and the form of one's encounter with reality and one's attempt to make sense of the world" (O'Dwyer, 2009, p. 1).

If we consider that art is a form of language used to express and to mediate ideas, acting as a bridge between the personal and the shared, we can consider how tension plays a role and start to unearth and translate our own phenomena as thoughtful moving and discerning individuals.

This is why it is important to consider the role of art as a language, as part of an intersubjective world because tension, conflict, empathy and contradiction are the exchange of dialogue. In support of this I refer to the work of Bonnie Litowitz (2014), who frames the intersubjective world amongst the realm of language and therefore communication. She says, "it is through language that mind is distributed, forming the basis of intersubjectivity" (Litowitz, 2014, p. 299). Her work describes language as a mediating experience. She refers to the synaptic connections that represent patterns in an infant's brain and how they relate to those in the adult brain. The symbols and

patterns that are formed interchange, connect and ‘cross-link’, which accompanies Husserl and Heidegger’s ideas about how we describe and experience a subject.

Language is at the heart of art making and seeing. Language, be it visual, verbal or written, ostensibly acts as a set of symbols that mediates experience. O’Dwyer, interprets Ricoeur’s work on mediation. She affirms that,

mediation is integral to selfhood and being. It is intrinsic to the individual’s relationship with himself or herself...and it is prerequisite to the mutuality and reciprocity of genuine relationships between the self and others. It calls for the embrace with polarity and tension within the human condition. (O’Dwyer, 2009, p. 12)

Jimmy and I did not want to compromise the feeling of tension and become passive to please the other. To do this we would delete our intention and the protagonist would become void. There was a balance required in order to fuel our questioning and to suit our provocation. Tension was needed to keep the idea alive. Jimmy and I wondered if we could interpret our authentic feelings and convey them to the viewer through our words and images while discovering and recognising the most primordial constitution of conflict or tension that exists within us as part of daily life and as part of art.

An article in *The Guardian* (2017), co-written by writer Ali Smith and philosopher Alain de Botton, discusses the role of art in daily life through the referencing of artworks that they love. Smith believes that through art we can see “paintings that call for a revolution, or promise a new heaven and a new earth, or even raise the dead” (de Botton & Smith, 2017). Smith suggests that images in art show us how to be human in an actual world that we inhabit along with all its mystery, play-acting and comedy. “...it doesn’t matter if it’s a song, a film or a painting. All works of art have the power - if

they are soulful, or profound or just very funny - to fill you with energy, optimism, hope and zest” (de Botton & Smith, 2017).

Therefore, authentic art is more than just a picture that hangs on a wall. Rather, art has the capacity to teach, to open eyes and allow the self to see others’ views and ways of living. This is what Jimmy and I deemed for our exhibition as we wanted to show the different facets of tension and how we grappled with it as part of the everyday. And in a similar way, de Botton implies that the work of artists can reconcile us with reality and reawaken us to the genuine—but too easily forgotten—value of our lives.

Art can teach us to be more just towards ourselves as we endeavour to make the best of our circumstances - a job we do not always love, the imperfections of age, frustrated ambitions and our attempts to stay loyal to irritable but loved families. Art can do the opposite of glamourise the unattainable: it can show us anew the genuine merits of life as we’re forced to lead it. (de Botton & Smith, 2017)

My reading of de Botton and Smith promotes my view that authentic art moves beyond just being a picture or an object on the wall. Art is not just about glamour, but it suffuses the everyday and helps us to find the authentic self through an intersubjective world.

I apply this idea to the different levels of tension that exist in our own lives that provoke us to respond. Exploration of the self allows us to see the world from different perspectives and enables us to look and respond to different situations. My role of teacher is not to allow the students to become too comfortable—rather I need to be one of their antagonists to propel them into exploration. If my students are to make ‘faithful art’ as de Botton and Smith speak of, they need to be challenged to find the authentic self in what they do through what Thompson (2015) refers to as ‘authentic action’.

When I hear the word ‘authentic’ I liken it to something that is true, genuine and real. But I also think it runs deeper. It too embraces tension, as it requires us to act with virtue and to think about our actions judiciously. If we are considering our place in an intersubjective world our authentic action is important. With this comes the need to consider our values, our ethics, our self-care and the care of others as elements of being authentic. Through this undertaking we must not be defined by others, but use self-knowledge to establish one’s own identity, regardless of how well or how poorly it fits with the expectations of others. This in itself brings problems as we fight with ourselves to meet what others expect. Are we authentic in our actions and do we try and meet the needs of all or meet the needs of the self? Does this bring tension? Jimmy wrote in an independent verse in the *Tension* exhibition that we are, “...falling to the demands of everyone but you”. This implies that there is a feeling that leaves us rich with emotions as we struggle between opposing ideas and thoughts. If we amplify this idea it becomes like a disagreement or conflict where we become unsettled and cause discomfort. I find there is also a more subdued or embedded level of tension that makes us uncomfortable. The antagonist returns as this quieter or cunning layer that encourages reflection and asks us to be conscious of the self—our individuality—while considering an objective perspective. Thompson’s (2015) notion of “acceptable tension suggests that this shifts our understanding of authenticity from the security of self-determination to the messy interplay involved in being ‘true to one’s self’ and ‘being in the world’” (p. 616).

The idea that tension “finds us” (*Tension* exhibition, 2016) and that “we need to run towards it” makes it an agent of change linked to discovery, fear, awareness and authenticity in a world in which we are immersed. We might consciously create tension within our self, our actions and thoughts, or we might subconsciously find ourselves

present in a tense situation. And for an art maker and educator we can create our own tension by establishing and measuring our actions as part of our life encounters. Artists produce work based on their response to the world and for us tension was the protagonist and the antagonist. Throughout the project we had to locate this awareness and find empathy, "...the recognition and acknowledgment of the other" (O'Dwyer, 2009, p. 1) in order to come to an understanding.

The shape of empathy

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Not only is tension the protagonist and the antagonist, but also I consider it to be ubiquitous, highlighting the need for empathy, the need for mediation between the self and another, as part of human experience. Jimmy used the word 'ubiquitous' in our conversations and in his writing. I questioned him on his use of it, where he explains that he sees tension as being around us—"it finds us or we find it"—intentionally or unintentionally. How we deal with it is different and it can sometimes be uneasy and sometimes playful. 'Ubiquitous' suggests that something is all around us and experienced in different forms. Tension has the capacity to influence and guide us in our decision-making. It manifests feelings of fear, mild discomfort and agitation. It provokes and draws attention to certain happenings that require us to be conscious of the events and experiences that occur in our lives. O'Dwyer again bolsters the relationship that conflict and opposition hold as part of human experience, "An inevitable tension ensues, a tension between the experience, the desire and uniqueness of the individual and the corresponding existence of the other" (O'Dwyer, 2009, p. 3). Tension carries the

unspoken awareness of conflict as part of the conscious and the unconscious and ought to be championed for difference and divergence. O’Dwyer continues, “the acceptance of difference, for a living with diversity, and for respect which honours the multiplicity of human thought and interpretation” (O’Dwyer, 2009, p. 2).

With these ideas in mind we can start to build connections with the different dimensions of conflict and consider how to fuse together the actual, the objective, the invisible and the subjective. When this occurs—when the visual, actual, tangible world and invisible worlds collide—we start to make art with meaning. Tension is the connection of these different elements, which leads me to explore more deeply the characteristic of empathy in tension as part of intersubjectivity. The need to see another person’s view, to show some vulnerability, is intrinsic to the artist and teacher and the characteristics of the protagonist and the antagonist.

And here lies the connection between intersubjectivity and empathy. If we accept that intersubjectivity presents itself when we undergo acts of empathy, we can place ourselves into the other’s shoes. In order to study this kind of experience from a phenomenological perspective, we must learn to bracket our responses and consider how to describe and experience a subject from another’s view (Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 2014). This became evident for Jimmy and I, and is also true in the context of being an authentic teacher. For example, if we take an objective stance, we see the objects of our experience such as physical things, other people, and even ideas as real and they exist because we view them as facts, rather than questioning their existence—they happen. Exploring this with a practical illustration, what looks like a paintbrush, an artwork, or folds of fabric are really a configuration of atoms and fields of force.

Science would suggest that the world we live in and perceive is only a construct made by our minds responding to our senses. We could call this the objective world, where in contrast to this we have the subjective world, which is important for openness and a wider viewpoint to guide and shape our thinking. At this time we are embedded in and belong to the experience. It is the world where we respond to the self, react to others, and where we find a kind of intentionality. In this situation, the paintbrush or the folds of fabric are not just objects made up of atoms, but they become a bridge between the artist's mind and the artist's marks, just like the folds of fabric became our metaphor for tension. Similarly, this aligns with my interpretation of Merleau-Ponty—when we think of a thing that is not there, our minds construct the imaginary thing through colour and shapes, or when we have abstract thoughts we conjure symbols and physical metaphors based on our previous experiences.

In my classroom I use the technique of describing experiences as part of building awareness and empathy in my teaching. I use this technique to guide my students to think in a phenomenological way. One of my Year 12 students is working on a suite of teepee inspired sculptural works based on her response to the landscape. The bones of the sculptures are long sticks that she sources from tree and leaf litter. Her motivation is to create work in response to her outdoor adventures. She goes bushwalking and does an outdoor education course as part of her school studies and so she finds meaningful connections with the natural environment. She enjoys the act of walking, discovering creeks, unusual plants and being surrounded by an untouched world. This is a very worthy experience for her and I can see that she is connected to her idea but she is struggling with how to communicate and translate her intentions from her mind into artistic objects. She comes to me just after the class starts and confides

that she is struggling and anxious about her work. She claims that she does not know what to do. I have spent some time wondering when this might happen, as I'd observed that her progress is slow and tentative. She appears directionless and lacks intention. She is covering her sticks with tissue paper to add texture over their natural surface. This is becoming repetitious and inconsequential, though her recognition of this is a positive step forward. With her permission, we start to move the forms she has made and place the structures into a new position in the art studio to get her to see the shapes differently and to be open to new ideas and possible ways of seeing. I need to find ways for her to consider other perspectives so that she might see her work from a different viewpoint. When I suggest that elements of her technique and the construction of the forms are a little clumsy her eyes start to fill with tears—*anxiety and apprehension are overcoming her*. I need to bracket my thoughts and find a different way to counsel her so that she can see the importance of experimenting further to find some other options for lashing her forms into their shapes. She has not considered that there might be other ways to communicate her idea. I also need to be conscious of not doing the work for her and to find some common ground and understanding of what her intentions are.

What do these shapes look like in her mind and what is her obstacle to expressing her meaning in a physical form? This is the time for exploring and intervening between her thoughts and mine. Given that the situation is tense, I suggest that we move away from the work and sit down with a pen and her art journal. I ask her some questions to try to get her to think about this situation differently. I ask her to describe to me a recent outdoor experience, to tell me about what she has seen, what she has discovered and why these elements have engaged her. She describes to me the landscape, the way she has responded to the environment and how she has unreservedly acted in that space and

at that time. I take notes as she speaks to help me see her idea more clearly and to see it from her view. Eventually we sift through the notes with a coloured pen and highlight key words and in particular things that she repeats and describes several times—aspects that are clearly important to her. From our notation we start to think about new ways to create her sculptural works. We look at patterns, rhythm, colours, shapes of the landscape and the flora. We talk about materials and how they might aid in creating symbols as part of her response—how they might reflect her ideas and become her form of language. I direct her to artists who are also curious about developing symbols to communicate their ideas about the landscape. Artists like Andy Goldsworthy, David Nash and Richard Long are at the front of my mind. I ask her to look at their sculptural forms and to find elements that engage her—things that she as a learner can borrow and modify to make her own. I wonder if she might find connections between the artists and understand their use of language. Can she see possible ways to bring a sense of self to her art project and transform her ideas into art? This particular lesson occurs on a Friday afternoon and so I send her away with some homework—to think about an experience and to bring me some notes and possible examples for plans of a new sculptural work. Only after she establishes some new ideas, explores more fully the creative process and delves into her own space as an artist can she find understanding and move past seeing the teepee shapes as simply objects and tissue paper.

All of this reminds me that tension is present—within the self, between her ideas and her artistry, and between the two of us. I need to show her how art is a visual language, show empathy to her as her teacher as part of an intersubjective world and hope that this experience might provoke her to reassess the appearance and intention of her objects and move forward.

Litowitz (2014) and O'Dwyer's (2009) interpretation of Ricoeur connect empathy to the human condition as part of intersubjectivity, describing it as a ubiquitous human phenomena. Empathy is used to designate an imaginative reconstruction of another person's experience. If we relate this back to our *Tension* exhibition, Jimmy and I were both building responses to tension but also reconstructing the other person's experience based on our imagined perceptions. Similarly, if I were to reconstruct your imagined image of the fabric folds it would be different from mine. We conjure ideas based on alternative viewpoints, but when we assess another's work we need to consider the piece from his or her perspective.

Smith's recent novel *Autumn* (2016) is based on a world that tells the story of an artist's work created at the height of the 1963 Profumo affair. My investigation of this work revealed that the image was by the British Pop artist Pauline Boty titled *Scandal '63* and portrays a figure astride a chair, while at the top of the canvas, the male protagonists are shown. It was last seen in the year it was painted. Smith tells the tale that Boty created another work with a similar intention and how the loss of the original work gave way to change, new viewpoints together with new intention. Smith writes, "art like this examines and makes possible a reassessment of the outer appearances of things by transferring them into something other than themselves. An image of an image, means the image can be seen with new objectivity, with liberation from the original" (2016, p. 226). From the darkness of this situation, empathy, based on Litowitz's (2014) definition to create a reconstruction of another person's experience, was experienced. The need to consider new ways of communicating an idea by consistently making art, sharing ideas in an attempt to liberate it, is part of the growth and change process. For if we only made one piece of art in our lifetime how would we know what our potential

is? I think a narrow view of the world of tension would see us concede to the need to be curious—our protagonist would not have a unique voice and we would not have listened to or responded to the antagonists that keep us moving forward. Equally, would only one haystack painting have been enough to keep Impressionist Claude Monet content? I think not, for he painted the same scene over and over again, to fuel his *ethos*, his philosophy, and to respond to the tension or conflicting views of light as part of the everyday. As artist and teacher, I need to maintain my energy and commitment to reconstruct experiences many times over to show empathy as part of tension and moving towards creative freedom.

To reiterate this key point I refer back to Ricoeur, whose philosophical view suggests that the intersection between understanding the self and the other is volatile and is needed as a means to mediate our relationships. We co-exist in the world as the self and the other, which adds to our interpretation of interactions and how they are true for ourselves and for others. With this comes openness and liberation.

But there is a dark side to empathy that we cannot ignore. We align the concept with compassion and care but empathy can be deployed to manipulate, deceive, seduce and dehumanise others by means of vicariousness, where we experience what we imagine through the feelings or actions of another person. This way of making and responding to art opens us up to conflict and contradiction. The dark side of empathy needs to be explored or at least acknowledged as part of a discussion of conflict and tension.

I have spoken about art being vulnerable and fragile, but what if we think of art that speaks of untruths? As part of being human we tell stories of ourselves that

are not always true, but rather embellished, or coloured in our quest for approval. As O'Dwyer refers to Joseph Dunne's notion, "this is the province of self-deception, which might be defined as a significant discrepancy between the story one lives and the story one tells" (Dunne, 1996, p. 153 in O'Dwyer, 2009, p. 19). At times, we are guilty of trying to deceive others and ourselves by our actions. But is deception necessarily a bad thing, or is it another way of reflecting on the self and the way we see others and ourselves? We can make things up to deceive the viewer—as an artist we have the power to challenge the real or the truthfulness of a situation—to invite questioning and add layers of uncertainty as part of understanding. According to Jacques Lacan, self-deception is a "phenomenon, which must be acknowledged" (2007, p. 58 in O'Dwyer, 2009, p. 18). This is a natural part of the human condition and brings with it the tension between human thought and action. Litowitz (2014) writes about the role of deception as part of the tangles we weave. She shares that deception is an adaptation used for survival as part of the way we communicate and share interactions and it is part of our reciprocal relations with the self and the other. To this Ricoeur intimates that deception is a "human trait used to ignore or modify things that we find disagreeable" (O'Dwyer, 2009, p. 18).

Art can capture the disagreeable dark side of understanding, which can be seductive, alluring and share with us the untoward. But at a deeper level deception provides conflict within the self, our individuality, the unspoken and the hidden. This perspective aligns with authentic action and can elucidate our experiences even further. Tension in life, depicted through art, allows us to show the mysterious shadows of empathy.

In the mystery of the images in the *Tension* exhibition we can see that they are based on natural beauty and create a desire to stir the dark side and to effectively deceive. Parts of the images are identifiable with floral lines and forms but some of the works are ambiguous and designed to engage other parts of the imagination. The text panels equally conjure images of beauty but are also cognisant of darkness and ambiguity.

Like a black storm of butterflies in
the gut, it's a glut, a wall, a pall of
smothering and pushing and pulling,
and wanting and yearning. It cuts like a
knife through the remnants of your life
in your hands, falling to the demands of
everyone but you. (*Tension* exhibition, 2016)

As an artist and teacher, I see my primary roles are to communicate, to share ideas and to incite conversations that can bring order and disorder, or interpretation and misinterpretation. What was contrary became more apparent as Jimmy and I grappled to understand the tension that exists in life as we forged our ability to be aware of the self and others. We came to intersections where our minds entangled, became cross-linked, and we struggled to interpret experiences that would in turn shape our own personal narratives.

Tension has proven to be a means for growth and for promoting an intersubjective way of thinking. The walk that Jimmy and I took that first morning provoked tension, and from that we shaped a creative outcome. We ran towards tension

as a way to enliven our understanding of the self and the other. If we did not, we ran the risk of our unanswered issues becoming stagnant and toxic.

Life requires communication. As part of this discourse around tension I have explored the ways that both the protagonist and the antagonist are present. Tension becomes entangled with empathy and deception as part of our conscious and our unconscious actions. In response to this, tension is the major character in our work. Our exhibition—our story—gave way to differing interpretations promoted by the antagonists.

The final outcome was galvanised when our body of work for *Tension* was installed in the gallery, creating a long line of images and text that wrapped around four walls. Admittedly it was not our initial intention but the form of an installation emerged as we consolidated our final works—this became an authentic cause of action. My *ethos* and what follows in this thesis is the exploration into the world of the artist and teacher in the attempt to promote change and awareness in both myself and my students as part of the ubiquitous notion of tension.

Some of the images from the *Tension* exhibition will be filtered through the different *Lessons* to situate myself in the artist's process, with the *Epilogue* revealing all the images to you, returning you home to the beginning where my thesis starts as part of the artist's journey of wonder and an ode to the cyclical nature of life and the indelible or ubiquitous power of art as both a language and as a means to find understanding.

The next *Lesson* confronts our place in the world. It expands the notion of artist as storyteller. I confront the power of locating and sharing our story, which is akin

to the events that shape the self. I will weave in the importance of understanding the artist's voice as part of art making where we build on and reflect on our historicity. For if we are to make art under the auspice of integrity and authenticity we need to learn to be aware and respond to the *Lebenswelt*—the 'lifeworld', the world in which we live that tension is a part of, the world where our story is shaped.

LESSON TWO

The moment I realise the power of a good story...I realise I have a voice

Searching for a voice

Vagueness meets logic

The awakening voice



LESSON TWO



The moment I realise the power of a good story...I realise I have a voice

I was persuaded, at times dissuaded and even sceptical.

Storytelling remains our most comprehensive form of engagement. It cultivates relationships, encourages behaviour and incites action.

Our story was Tension. It was our ethos for making Art.

(Louise Bloomfield, 2017)

We may not have been able to determine when or how we took our place in the world, but now that we are here we must endeavour to understand what is put in our path. For me, the path or life we make for ourselves is ‘handmade’ and is akin to a chronicle of events—a story. If we consider what our lives might be, do we wonder what our story is? Meyer (2010) in her work *Living Inquiry* says,

As human beings we belong to the world long before birth. That is, each of us is born into the course of a larger human story and existing timeline, place, culture, and family. (p. 85)

As human beings, we are influenced by the world in which we live. Our life is a story shaped on the decisions we make and the experiences we have as part of our everyday-ness. Responding to, or uncovering our story is part of our living inquiry and as artists we can choose to express parts of our lives by responding to both noteworthy and minor experiences. But to do this I suggest that we need to foster the skills of awareness and think in a meta-cognitive manner. Only then can we consider how the interpretation and exploration of our lives might be used to support our creative expression as part of the ‘artist as storyteller’. This *Lesson* builds on *Lesson One’s Tension*. It deliberates the role of the storyteller and the importance of vagueness combined with logic to foster awareness of the *ego* in art as part of my quest to see if what we, as artists, produce has integrity and virtue.

What parts of the exploration of our living inquiry are we persuaded to tell as part of our story? Meyer (2010) asks a similar question, “How do we ‘uncover’ the impact of our worldliness to see what lies underneath” (p. 86)? What lies at the heart of this question is our ability to see ourselves in the world and our belonging to the world.

When I think back to the production of images for the *Tension* exhibition, I think of the plight of nuances that existed. These dilemmas were real. I was persuaded by the energy the artworks evoked, and the elements that aroused emotions of uncertainty. There were times when this concoction of sensations led to a feeling of vagueness and something that was, in part, tenuous. What became true for me as part of my desire

to express tension was the role of persuasion and the antagonist, vagueness. Hence persuasion and vagueness are my guides for this *Lesson*, as I see them not only as integral to the notion of story, but to the making of art. For me they encourage change and intrigue when laced together with tension. I see these two elements are part of finding a voice. I see them as imperative for the role of the ‘artist as storyteller’.

It would be safe to say that most people enjoy a good yarn. We like to listen to and be engaged by the narratives of others. You might like to hold court and to be the storyteller. You might find delight in sharing a story about the day just passed, an interesting fact or a humorous moment. But what persuades us as human beings to tell an interesting story? If we are to be persuaded by something we have to believe it, through reasoning or temptation. Compelling, potent, valid and eloquent are words that align themselves with persuasion—words that for me are also true to making art that has authenticity.

We might aspire to tell a good story through the words on the writer’s page or the symbols, shapes and colours seen through the artist’s lens. Equally we need to learn to interpret and try to break the code of another person’s story for an insight into their world. For if we are attentive to these two different views we can learn from our own exploration, as well as from the way others approach storytelling. We are in a position to self-regulate our knowledge and apply this appropriately and with knowingness to our own work and situations. To do this we need to practise ways to distinguish elements that capture our attention and combine them with our own conceptual and technical skills. We need to enter a point of curiosity guided by an artist’s persuasion and vagueness. As artists, we need to work collaboratively to make sense of the self through dialogue,

which I see as imperative for growth. With this in mind I ask, what elements persuade us to believe in and be compelled by an engaging and good story? What makes us look at an artwork and even an object, and want to share in its story?



Image: The Samurai braid

Here is an example. I am in one of my favourite stores, *The Maker*, which sells both traditional and contemporary artefacts and clothing, some of it from Japan. I have always delighted in the delicacy and style of the Japanese aesthetic. As I make my way around the store I spy a cloth bracelet displayed on a faithful wooden kitchen table that is laden with other objects of beauty. The bracelet is designed to be wrapped around the wrist three or four times, like a bind, then buttoned at the front. The design intrigues me. As I pick it up to inspect and touch it the shopkeeper shares with me the story behind the piece. The braid had once been attached to a Samurai's sword and was used as both a decorative object and a symbol. When she shares this story with me I start to imagine the sword and what it would look like as an adornment, and I wonder if this

is in fact a true story. I find myself becoming more curious about the Samurai, which leads me to research its historical context. My findings connect me even more deeply to the piece and the idea that is presented or symbolised. I am persuaded by the story of the braid and its romantic connection. The history of the piece makes me inquisitive, as does the innovation behind recycling the fabric and refashioning its purpose. If an artist desires to be a compelling storyteller they need to understand the elements of a good story and how to present these as a part of art.

But before this occurs we need to be persuaded by what to tell. Which of life's nuances pervade and persuade our thinking, leading to a fine story worthy to be shared? Which elements of a story lead you to question its validity, leaving you in a state of quandary or vagueness? In my experience at *The Maker* the object itself had beauty but with its added historical context it had become more precious and curious. This led me to value the role of meta-cognition as part of understanding and interpreting the object and myself. Meta-cognition is the role of thinking and rethinking, allowing for deeper interpretation. John Flavell (1979) referred to the term 'meta-cognition' as a way to understand what we know and how we think. The role of questioning is essential for my purpose to find a connection to a story to tell. I find this approach to thinking useful when applied to the notion of the artist as storyteller as well as useful in my classroom. For me, and hopefully for my students, the role of 'thinking about thinking' becomes an intrinsic part of an authentic artistic practice. When we think about art in this context, and the iteration of ideas and meanings we can see how the elements of a compelling story can be aligned. This awareness is part of my job as educator. I interpret Flavell's theory as one that allows for an individual to interpret and to regulate their experiences. It is a way to understand how knowledge is attained and how we know what we know

and what we have learned. This aligns to my idea about using art as both a way to know the self and to think about the self.

I religiously tell my students that when they make art they need to make it about something—something that matters to them, something about themselves. I tell them that I consider art making to be about thinking and responding to the world and our place in it. I tell the students that their time in the art studio, working as an artist, is a time for them to share, tell and reveal part of their story with themselves and others. They have a unique opportunity before them because other parts of their academic study are not as tuned to a style of teaching and learning that promotes wonder and creative expression. The word ‘wonder’ is not to be overlooked as van Manen (2014) says,

Wonder is the unwilling willingness to meet what is utterly strange in what is the most familiar. Wonder is the stepping back and letting things speak to us, an active-passive receptivity to let the things of the world present themselves in their own terms. (p. 223)

Wonder brings a new pathway to knowledge and understanding, which adds potency to teaching and learning. Each of the students are granted a form of freedom that allows them to follow their own passage, to grow as an artist and to explore their interests. My role is to facilitate this, to be their crucial friend and their coach. But for the students’ learning and teaching to be effectual, they are required to establish a preliminary context for their work.

This initial stage is about shaping a mindset that leads to self-efficacy (Dwek, 2014). Carol Dwek speaks of two mindsets in her work in positive psychology—‘a growth mindset and a limited mindset’. It is the growth mindset that she says enables

the students to achieve, to find a sense of belief in themselves and their ability to achieve a goal or outcome, for if they do not find a context and foster a growth mindset they run the risk of producing artwork that is not true to themselves, that lacks integrity, innovation and originality. They might settle for 'average' and not fully understand their potential. Making artwork under the *ethos* of 'growth' and the desire to 'discover a story' fosters the need to be truthful to the self and to contribute to the visual world by opening the eyes of others. You don't have to be a famous artist to do this, but I suggest you need to be motivated to try to honour the role and purpose of art. My creed is to identify an intention, to act purposefully and to foster creative thinking so that it can be nurtured towards authentic action.

Based on my experience as art teacher I advocate that if art is deficient of an idea or story, as artists, we are robbing ourselves of the chance to act artfully, we lack the ability to be insightful and as a consequence we become limited. Under this pretext I propose that if we adopt the role of 'artist as storyteller' we can embark on an exciting journey that gives us the power to respond to our stories through the interaction of images and symbols as part of the artist's language. In essence we become a researcher, we grow, and we become a guide to the self. As artists, we have the power to be listened to, and to be heard, but we need to have something worthy to say.

How do students decide on their story? How do I get them to talk about themselves and to relay to me what inspires or interests them as part of a good teaching and learning practice? What is their motivation and what persuades them to tell their tale? And can they persuade the viewer to connect to their story? When I consider these questions, I see the need for a sound rapport to be formed and a safe environment to

be ever present. As teacher I need to provide opportunities for the students to tell me things about them and I need to connect to these and forge ongoing conversations as they ‘learn to become’ (Todd, 2001). Learning to become under Sharon Todd’s inquiry is part of a teacher’s pedagogy that,

crystalises both the dream and the nightmare of education itself. On one hand, it touches on the hope that people think differently, can change the way they relate to one another, and can form new understandings of themselves and the world that makes possible the very act of teaching and learning. (2001, p. 435)

Todd speaks of a dream and a nightmare. The dream for me is for the students to be transformed through learning and experiences, and the nightmare could be the reality that is unfulfilled. I see that with these two opposing elements, tension needs to be present—to nag, to frustrate, to enable thinking and the rethinking of situations. It is the pushing and pulling, the friction, the binding together of frustration, skill, and technique. Tension builds resilience, connections to new understandings, and it can regulate what we know, as well as foster a growth mindset. Tension crystallises my pedagogy. Through this synergy the student as artist builds connections between their story and the different art conventions when they are committed to sharing an idea that is engaging rather than wishy-washy and null. I see tension as the essence of the creative spirit and about finding a voice—a persuasive voice.

Searching for a voice

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Why did Pablo Picasso in the 1940s respond to the World War and as a result paint *Guernica*? Why did Jackson Pollock become obsessed with drip painting as a way to respond to his world of chaos, confusion, alcoholism and destruction? What factors in his story persuaded him to be expressive? And why as artists are we drawn to respond to our situated experiences as part of self-reflection? A natural part of being human is the response we make to our different authentic emotional states—the states move between the expressive and the rational. Making sense or finding logic in our story might require us to use these ways of questioning both independently and in unison. For me to know that the art my students produce is authentic, by subscribing to, and building on Thompson’s ‘authentic action’ as seen in *Lesson One*, seems appropriate, as we need to oscillate between both the emotional and the rational to seek the logical. Sokolowski (2000) adds to this further with his notion of the “transcendental attitude” (p. 42).

The transcendental attitude is not the supernatural, but a step away from the natural attitude. It is a means to interpret or move beyond our common experiences. We can act on and take a ‘literal reading’ of our everyday experiences or we can conceptualise these experiences and move towards the transcendental view as part of art. This is true of my encounter of the Samurai’s braid. I was attracted to the object, which was simply a braid of striking colour. But on reflection I started to build a different connection. I saw it differently and questioned its history. The braid was not only a beautiful object but it contained a story. I wanted to make art about it as it conjured a fantastic visual image in

my head, which made me explore the shape and combine it mentally with the Samuuri, his sword and the kinetic movements of it gliding through the air. My imagined image was not a literal depiction of the bracelet but an expressive interpretation, which is true to my style of working. I had moved towards a transcendental view. This simple example shows how we start to interpret what we see and how we feel when we find a bond with an experience. We move beyond the objective and towards the subjective. And through this transcendental attitude we embody the actions and purpose of art.

Before we proceed further into the deeper philosophical level of art making I need to provide some elementary understanding of what a good story is. Jimmy has just returned from the ‘South by Southwest’ conference in Austin, Texas and was enamoured by a session he attended on storytelling. He sees storytelling primarily as a ‘creative tool’. As he says,

Storytelling isn’t new. It’s been around for 15,000 years—as soon as we could communicate we knew that stories strike a chord deep within us. Historically, the Storyteller was seen as the most powerful person—they held knowledge and passed wisdom and facts from one generation to the next. And this is partly why we still gravitate towards those people today, marvelling at their ability through not just the written word, but any form of expression, to portray something to us—an emotion, a piece of history, a mark of time. Some see the relatively recent advent of mass media as having have momentarily silenced storytelling, while others see it as the complete opposite—encouraging the sharing of information. (Jimmy, 2017)

Storytelling remains our most comprehensive form of engagement. It cultivates relationships, encourages behaviour and incites action. And it is this action that lies at the heart of storytelling. Our ability to find the trigger to engage people through storytelling is what compels us to create.

If we continue to look at the anatomy of story I think we can safely agree that a story needs to be about something, it requires a plot that moves forward and has characters. The story needs to be situated somewhere to give it a grounding and a good story needs a strategy, antagonists and scope to move and grow. In my opinion this is also true for purposeful art. The initial storyline might be shrouded with uncertainty and vagueness until it finds a voice and the development of a hypothesis through logic. But as time moves on, and we become increasingly more involved in our work, the idea moves past just sound bites of information and towards storytelling as part of a transcendental attitude.

I first came across the writing of Walter Benjamin when I was studying visual narrative at Art School as part of my Fine Arts Degree in the 1990s. At this time, I studied the role of the *flâneur*, a term first introduced by Charles Baudelaire. The term became synonymous for the “figure of the modern artist-poet, a figure keenly aware of the bustle of modern life, an amateur detective and investigator of the city” (Stephen, 2013, para. 1).

Benjamin’s (1969) work became significant to me and helped shift my views about the way we read the everyday and how to identify the difference between information and storytelling. His compelling work, *Illuminations* conceives that there needs to be discrimination between storytelling and information and the paying of attention to how these two contrasting elements compete for our attention while still being loyal to our experiences. Benjamin (1969) says,

Storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost when there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The

more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply what he listens to is impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled. This is how today it is becoming unraveled at all its ends after being woven thousands of years ago in the ambience of the oldest forms of craftsmanship. (p. 90-91)

A glimpse of an idea may be all that is required for exploration and for the potent layers of a story to unfold. Perhaps it is the little things, the small details in life that supersede great events and what inherently become more significant.

What glimpse or inkling might we use as our first cause of action to make art? I ask Jimmy for some insight into the way he applied his thinking to find an initial idea that was shaped into a story. For him, tension was a string of words aligned into lyrical sentences peppered with symbols and visual cues. He says that he comes up with ideas through initial brainstorming and playing with words and their meaning or context. Once he finds a motive that has some potential he massages it until it ‘sticks’ and he can start to build intent. It is not enough to just accept your first idea—there is no integrity or challenge to this.

Potency and true expression are in the hands of the artist and their quest to be authentic in dialogue with the self and with others. Moving this idea forward can be difficult and requires research and thought for the idea to evolve and to be retold over and over again to find the nuances. Jimmy’s words of advice about formulating an idea are to never say ‘no’ to an idea—listen, think, then leave it to be. See if it finds its way back to you. When you have an idea, you can turn it into a thread and embellish it. I ask him what drives his approach. What makes him tenacious, what make his ideas

move past the normal? He lists a number of reasons but the one that stays with me is his need and passion to tell and share a good story, to take an idea and push it, change it, mould it and provide it with a voice. From our conversation, I understand that he wants to make a difference, to persuade and suspend the reader. He wants to bring them into his world for a short or long time. Jimmy has something worthy to say and he desires to make a contribution to the world. This is one way to interpret events and to apply the rational and the emotional to express a story. His thinking and that of Benjamin sits well with me because storytellers are interpreters—they are the most powerful people in the world. And this is what I want for my students.

I apply this to my experience of viewing Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), one of the most powerful paintings in the history of art. When I remember the painting, I associate it with Picasso's style or work, but I also consider its greater intention. I remember it because of what it represents and the story it is telling and retelling. I am persuaded by Picasso's artistry and I wonder what convinced him to comment on the war in such a powerful way given he avoided the conflict by tucking himself up in the south of France, wining and dining guests and muses. The more I read about the formidable Picasso, the more I am intrigued with this work and his life. I am not sure if I like him as a character, which adds to the layers of tension—my curiosity—as part of my interpretation of the work.

The Museo Renia Sofia website says that Picasso's motivation for painting the scene in this great work was the news of the German aerial bombing of the Basque town of Guernica. The artist had seen the dramatic photographs published in various periodicals, including the French newspaper *L'Humanité*. The curious element is that

the work itself does not contain a single allusion to a specific event but instead is a gathering of symbols constituting a generic plea against the barbarity and terror of war. Paloma Leal on the Museo's website refers to *Guernica* scholar, Anthony Blunt, who observes that the painting,

divides the protagonists of the pyramidal composition into two groups, the first of which is made up of three animals; the bull, the wounded horse and the winged bird that can just be made out in the background on the left. The second group is made up of the human beings, consisting of a dead soldier and a number of women: the one on the upper right, holding a lamp and leaning through a window, the mother on the left, wailing as she holds her dead child, the one rushing in from the right and finally the one who is crying out to the heavens, her arms raised as a house burns down behind her. (Leal, n.d., para. 2)

Picasso had not chosen to use the normal affiliated symbols of war but rather added his own interpretation of destruction. This example adds to my acknowledgment of Sokolowski's transcendental attitude. Art is not about the 'literal everyday' but about transcending the object or experience. Picasso's work shows how a story can be borne from an inkling of an idea, or in this case the protagonist was information presented as dramatic photographs in the press.

I viewed this painting at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid many years ago and I remember it clearly. I remember how I searched the hallways of the gallery with Jimmy and my sister Jane. To this day I still recall how and where it was hung. I remember where I stood to view the piece and the empty white rendered textured walls that bookended its sheer size. The work is large, aristocratic in size, and you become lost in the skeins of black and white, expressive lines and abstract shapes. I looked at it with mixed emotions, surrendering to the distorted faces, the tonal qualities, and I looked

the bull in the eye. I felt empathy and fear as I stood back and started to describe the work in my mind. I was persuaded and at times dissuaded by or became sceptical of its story or interpreted story given my knowledge of Picasso. I started to translate *Guernica* in other ways. I tried to apply the rational and the emotional.



Image: Picasso's Guernica (1937) (Baldassari, 2006, p. 159)



Images: Etudes or preliminary planning for Guernica, May 1937. The lines trace Picasso's thinking and planning. The lines are the undercurrent of the work, haunting the canvas. (Baldassari, 2006)

When I see the painting reproduced in a book or on the Internet I see new elements that give me more insight into the story. I retell the story in my mind. I am left wondering more about the image and Picasso's response or story to the war given the contrast between its gravity and his character. There were many sketches and explorative studies worked on before Picasso committed to this final work. The idea was massaged and pushed—it meant something to him. And from his preliminary working it is clear that the idea or provocation for the painting was interpreted and reinterpreted, pushed and pulled, told and retold. There seemed to be various antagonists woven amongst its threads and layers of transcendental meaning. Finding the seed for the story was clearly critical for Picasso. This provoked action and when laden with his emotions he started to find ways to express them in a compelling way.

As a way to get my younger design students to consider their ideas through a similar conceptual lens to Picasso I set them a class assignment—a game to construct a set of images based on their intuitive, emotional and in some part vague responses to a situation, rather than being too rational in their findings. My purpose is for the students to be quick in their decision-making. I want them to take action, to be guided by their intuition as a way to see how it might impact on their conceptual skills and find a preliminary seed for a story.

The task is like a scavenger hunt where the students use their intuitive associations to find visual connections to a list of different words. Using a viewfinder made from card, they crop out small sections from larger magazine images. After they complete this I ask them as part of their conceptualisation to tell me a story, fact or fiction, about what persuaded them to make their cropped selections. To do this they

to foster and push this process of ideation and connection further so that my students could become storytellers.

What also became significant for me were the students who started to appreciate that the art making process was more meaningful when a link was established to an experience as an initial spark. These students seemed to be aware that making art is more convincing when they interpret and gather symbols of their own rather than just settle for the literal or the normal. There was evidence from our conversations that intellectual and creative thinking is desired to promote change and growth. In essence, imagination, ideation and openness to interpretation are vital so that their story can be written and rewritten. The students need to first isolate what matters and season it with a bit of intuitive impulse so that the idea can be massaged and pushed to see if it can go the distance. A good idea needs fortitude to live, and cannot simply fade or burn out. Art that has longevity and power like *Guernica*, tends to be based on something that is worth telling, done in a persuasive way and borne from or within the influence of the self. This encourages a feeling of belonging and ownership and gives the work and the self value and integrity. Maybe this is why I still remember my experience at the Museo Del Sofia. Maybe this is why this experience of art as a story lives clearly in my mind.

The thinking of John Berger (2016) and Jacques Rancière (1987) suggests that we must be able to reflect on ideas and their meaning to find what lies beneath our thoughts, enabling us in part to become more mindful of our ideas and ourselves, and the stories we want to tell and why. Berger (2016) tells in *Confabulations* of his experience of re-reading his own book and as a consequence of this, starting to ask himself what had made him the storyteller he had become. He says, that as part of this

revisiting he was compelled to reflect on his childhood and the sensations, the feelings, the sounds that this conjured. While he had loving parents, he referred to himself as an orphan—he altered or contrived his circumstances in order to see the world as a single agent, in effect learning to become self-sufficient. In essence, “one becomes a freelance” (Berger, 2016, p. 29). The lens of reflection that he adopted is one that he admits he still uses to mediate his story and the optics he uses in life. His ideas were borne from his childhood and he uses these to reflect and interpret his life as a storyteller. This is another example of how stories are shaped on connections—real, perceived, emotional or rational. As part of the creative working process the need to reflect and antagonise the idea seems necessary. As Jimmy said, while you might never say no to an idea, can it go the distance? The need for reflection and interpretation seems relevant in order to see if we can elucidate our ideas further and make them worthy to express.

Charles Bingham in *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy* (Simons & Masschelein, 2011) gives weight to the notion of story by interpreting Rancière’s work in the context of truth in education and scholarship. He speaks convincingly about the artist as storyteller, describing an emancipated community as one made up of storytellers and translators. His researcher for me is like artist and student.

Artists, like researchers, build the stage where the manifestation and the effect of their competences become dubious as they frame the story of a new adventure in a new idiom. The effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated. It calls for spectators who are active as interpreters, who try to invent their own translation in order to appropriate the story for themselves and make their own story out of it. (Bingham, 2011, p. 147)

I see interpretation and reflection to be necessary elements for my students as part of their art making and developing a persuasive story. To be able to interpret art

more deeply is a skill that needs to be taught, as it requires practice and the desire to ‘deep dive’ into an artwork. What resonates with me is the persuasive line of Bakewell’s rendering of Gadamer’s claim from *Lesson One* that we “need to learn the skills of interpreting and anticipating the world” (Bakewell, 2016, p. 231), and secondly that as part of authentic teaching we need to provide the students with genuine experiences. John Dewey (1966) cited in Greene (2001) says, “The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice and action” (Dewey, 1966, p. 135 in Greene, 2001, p. 148). He continues,

Not only are we inventing ourselves by means of the choices we make with regard to our teaching, we are trying to devise situations in which young persons can authentically form themselves though meaningful choosing, through becoming different through learning to learn. (Dewey, 1966, p. 351 in Greene, 2001, p 149)

The words of Dewey reinforce my opening sentiments that I believe our lives are handmade and not readymade. Dewey and Gadamer’s notions support my thinking for authentic action so we can respond to our ‘everyday-ness’ and negotiate our story. A student ought to crave to uncover what lies beneath an artist’s thoughts and intentions. As a teacher I can facilitate this way of working and I continue to be receptive to each student and challenge their intelligence as art makers. I am always trying to find ways to mediate between the student’s own work and the work of their artistic mentors.

I sit with a small group of girls and endeavour to teach them some ways of interpreting an artwork and ways to try to find out what the artist’s story is or what their idiom might be. I contemplate how the students look at art. What persuades them to engage in an artwork? Together we have the task of trying to interpret a particular image by trending contemporary Australian painter Fiona McMonagle.

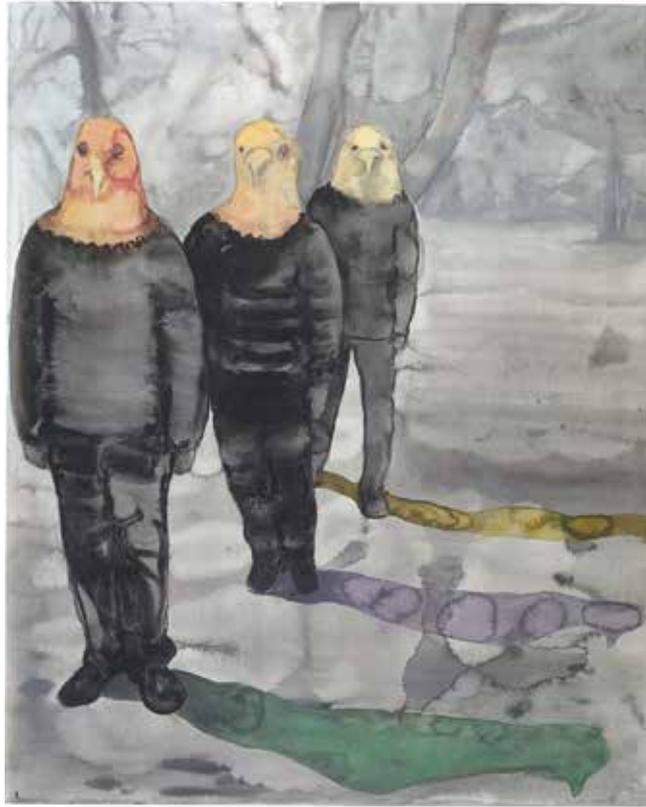


Image: Chicken Dance by Fiona McMonagle, 2015

I ask the students to look at a particular work titled *Chicken Dance* and to describe what they see on the canvas. They hesitate at my somewhat obvious question, but after some prompting they see that my question is not a trick. I want them to tell me what is in the picture, what they recognise and what they see before them. As they become more familiar with the objects in the image, other elements are noticed—things that they have not initially seen are revealed. These elements start to shape a story based on the way they interpret or read the image. What initially appears to be an image of three innocent figures dressed in black, with loosely painted orange and yellow chicken masks over their faces slowly turns into a more sinister image that resonates mystery and intrigue. The students start to question the masks, what they might mean and why the figures might be in an environment that resembles, or is an interpretation

of a landscape. They start to draw references to social and political themes as they think about the masked figures. The background, made up of loose blue-black vague watercolour forms resembles barren winter trees, whose leaves have fallen but the trunks stand tall. The forms waft in and out depending on the opacity of the paint and its application. They become like shadows or ghosts. After we unpack the key elements, the students become more curious about the figures, their gender and their purpose. They consider the composition of the work—is the artist drawing them to a particular place or focal point? The figures stand on a diagonal axis, becoming smaller as they move into the centre of the middle ground. Two of them stand tall, military-like, while the furthest one stands on a slight lean, weight transferred to the left leg, eyes appearing to meet the viewer straight on. While the faces of the characters are covered by a loose-fitting mask, the eyes meet the viewer directly via a small cut or torn holes. The students continue to build new narratives about the work, but also start to question why the artist has made the work. How was this image conjured and what events or elements have been her protagonist and her antagonist? What is the artist’s tension, her persuasive catalyst?

These additional questions prompt us to try and find out more about the story and McMonagle’s role as artist, and what these masked characters set within a melancholic landscape symbolise. We arrive at a point of vagueness and as a consequence we find ourselves at a new level of enquiry that impel the students to find out more.

When we undertake some additional research on the artist we discover through an article by Abby Crawford (2017) that McMonagle’s work “always carried an edge, a hint of double meanings: melancholia in its warmth” (Crawford, 2017, p. 124), while her back catalogue of works tend to have an association with a “strange nostalgia and

subjects that come to life” (p. 124). When the students find out a little more about her and her premise for making work they feel more at ease with their interpretation. They sense that they have read the characters as the artist has possibly intended. As art is subjective, we are not seeking a conclusive answer but there is still a need to find clarity and apply some logic about her approach and influences. We find that McMonagle’s work has a history of capturing sinuous lyrical figures rendered in the fluidness of watercolour. She has built a fascination with these figures and she explores and responds to them in her imagined environments. We can now see that her interests, her past and her present, all shape her as much as she shapes the figures on a canvas.

One of my senior students who is from our brother school is exploring the idea of story in the work of Tasmanian artist David Keeling. He is one of three boys I am teaching in a class of 15 girls and his ideas and contribution to the class add texture and distinctive thoughts to the lessons. The student writes, “Keeling has a very effective way of storytelling and has the capacity to create mesmerising pieces” (Working Paper: Senior Art Student, 2017). The student says of his own practice that exploring and understanding how Keeling uses “earthy tones coupled with contrasting light and dark textures makes for captivating viewing, and allows me to indulge in his adventure before going off on my own” (Working Paper: Senior Art Student, 2017).



Image: David Keeling image from Positively Slow exhibition, 2015, Niagara Gallery. The trees start to stretch and bend to the right. The atmosphere changes as the colours and light move from darker tones into a paler essence.

Keeling is known for his work on the Tasmanian landscape and spends time in an environment that he feels a connection to. He documents a place and reinterprets it in his studio, combining it with his lived experiences, his memory, different feelings and viewpoints. For my student, interpreting and looking at what drives Keeling to make art has influenced his thinking and his own creative process. The student has started to appreciate that making art is about finding a story to tell, having ownership of an idea and how to use conventions like paint and light to explore and share an adventure. Some months later the same student wrote another theory piece that said, “my work is about evoking the illusiveness of different situations through light and my connection to dark places” (Working Paper: Senior Art Student, 2017). At this time, his language had changed and he was more persuasive. His story and artistic intention was definitely clearer, which gave him more artistic purpose and success. As we talked about his work in the studio, the student pointed to a section of his own painting where a patch of dark

brown and black paint nudged each other at the horizon line. As he pointed to this exact spot he turned to me and said, “See this point? This is what my art is about”. This was commanding, and I don’t believe that he would have said that three months earlier. This small detail of the painting was the catalyst for change and was illuminated in his future work, which became refined, controlled and saturated with the luminosity of light.



Images: Examples of the student’s work showing progression and development in both his ideas and technique.

There was a notable synergy in the student’s approach to interpreting artwork and finding his story to tell. His confidence confirmed for me that the way I was

coaching and questioning the students was moving them towards a reflective and transcendental mode of thinking so that they could seek true learning and foster Dwek's growth mindset. The student had unearthed something more about himself and why he was compelled to paint images based on the expressive nature of light. He could describe and interpret his work, and the work of other artists, leading to interpretive clarity. When these elements combine, the application of knowledge and the art process becomes entangled and powerful.

Vagueness meets logic

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How had Jimmy and I been persuaded that tension was our story for making art? Tension was the provocation, an irritant that made us question our actions. It had the power to be both destructive and binding. The way it played out in our actions mattered. And the visual imagery that tension conjured up left a raft of sensations and emotions within my mind, and became a catalyst for the words for Jimmy. He writes,

With a gentle twist, an arc of the wrist, lips
 part with a gasp and the heart kick starts
 with nothing left, no more than a breath.
 Seeking relief in the pause, the moment
 suspended, before every single, tiny,
 fragmented, beautiful thing becomes upended.

(Jimmy, 2016)

Reading these words conjures a state of being stretched, pulled by an inner force that builds and causes an impact. This passage of words is a good example of how one can become seduced and persuaded, but left hanging, questioning the potential meaning of each word. The more I read and re-read the words the more I become entwined. And like any good story that is revisited, the repeat encounters can lead to new interpretations. New images are summoned. I imagine what tension looked like to me, how I might share this story with conviction. I have to suspend my judgments and, as Bakewell recounts the ideas of Husserl, be reminded to “set aside both the abstract suppositions and any intrusive emotional associations” (Bakewell, 2016, p. 40) so that I can concentrate on the phenomenon in front of me. If I can adopt this way of thinking I too may be able to discern and describe experiential qualities that are important and move forward with my story.

In storytelling, the device of persuasion is driven by emotional responses that can influence the artist and the viewer. The notion of the ‘artist as storyteller’ as a means to understanding the self is a relevant force for making art and life more potent. From my findings I infer that if we are more reflective in our thinking we might be in a better position to be persuaded by an event, to dig into our compendium of experiences, real and imagined, and use them as a catalyst for art making. At this time, we can start to become the emotive authors of our authentic story. We can move beyond the cobbling together of thoughts towards a more decisive plot that connects with being human as part of our *ego*, releasing part of an intentional life.

As the students and I grapple with our authorship and our *ego* to make art we can find ourselves frustrated, caught in a state of flux, vagueness, elusiveness and even

chaos in order to find logic. As Sokolowski (2000) intimates, out of this state we can find a sense of order. The antagonist of vagueness now takes the stage. Sokolowski speaks to this “phenomenon of vagueness” (p. 105). He suggests that vagueness is important not only in regard to scientific issues of logic, meaning and verification, but also in regard to the ordinary use of language. In support of this idea he proposes,

Everyone can be vague at some time, and there is nothing regrettable about that...Ideas that come to mind are almost always vague at first and ask to be brought to distinctness, when the inconsistencies and incoherences in the idea are filtered out. (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 107)

This phenomenon leads me back to the engaging work of Litowitz (2014) who advocated that tension can be present when our intentions become confused by the way we interpret situations and analyse our encounters. We build a “joint referent” where we establish pre-conceived ideas (Litowitz, 2014, pp. 300-303). For example, when we read something we often assume that we know what people are implying. But this hypothesis is not always so. So much of what people say is vague and coated with sound bites, or trending words. In essence the elusive might also be true of artists who use words overwhelmingly in their artist’s statement as an attempt to explain their work, designed to bamboozle the reader while endeavouring to cover up the fact that the work itself is lacking a story. Other artists make work that has little connection to the self. One wonders if the work has a story at all. In some cases the work of the artist is shallow, silent and void. For example, consider the artist who relies on technology alone to evoke an experience, at times devoid of a true idea or emotive response, or the portrait painter who just wants to copy an image from a magazine. Where is the storytelling and the risk? Where is the human challenge? Often these statements and artworks are without substance and lack interpretive clarity. Sometimes I see them as propaganda that tries

to persuade us that the art is good and has integrity. Approaching art in this manner speaks to a shallow interpretation of what art is.

Sokolowki's vagueness brings another context that I see as worthy to the development of art and the self. His state of being vague allows for an idea to be suspended so that rational and emotional thoughts can be considered as part of art and art making. Vagueness, considered in this context, can be read as the suspension of thoughts, as a pause for silence, which promotes reflection and the instigation of logic.

Sokolowski (2000) intimates that being vague relates to impulse and emotion where one cannot argue in a rational state and therefore cannot exercise reason to move forward. My students need to locate and tell their stories at varying degrees of complexity, which for many leads to uncertainty or confusion. At this time they can suspend their emotions and accept the invitation to seek logic to guide them in their decision-making, for at some point they need to find logic so that they can suspend their actions and be challenged. This state of lucidity is what I feel Sokolowski speaks of. Vagueness invites change through uncertainty and it is this that encourages us to step outside the emotional context to return to logic. At times when we revert to the rational we can counterbalance the emotional charge. I think both the emotional and the logical states have a place in art making. Art encourages emotional responses and is connected to the embrace of the human spirit, but to make sense of an artwork we need to revert to our ability to describe and question vagueness. At this point we can apply logic. As human beings, we are naturally caught in these different states of being.

I challenge this notion of vagueness and logic with my Year 9 class asking them, "If you could wish yourself anywhere, where would you be?" They look at me,

confused, but at the same time they are slightly intrigued. There is no right answer but it makes them think from another viewpoint, provoking some fun stories. Some of the students apply pure emotion to my question and others are rational and logical without any creative thought in their responses. Some say they would be on a beach in Northern Queensland, others hanging out at the shack on the East Coast. One even says, flying to the moon on my pink unicorn. When I ask them how they might communicate their ideas in a creative manner they have to apply logical thinking to find a sense of order. Those students who are not able to ground their creative ideas with logic struggle with ways to express their ideas on the page, while those students who have the freedom to be vague are able to apply logic to support their ideas by describing their intentions well.



Images: Year 9 Student Artwork, 2017

The students use digital and analogue collage techniques to tell their story.

These are two examples of the students' work in response to the project. One student sees herself as an astronaut with a garland of yellow petals around her head. She is either in space or looking up into space. The other depicts herself with floral and

accentuated shapes flowing from her head like an Indian head dress. She is thoughtful as her eyes are closed.

Through this exercise I could see how Sokolowski's (2000) notion of vagueness to seek logic as part of our thinking process was insightful. I understand if new directions are to be heralded for the purpose of the artist as storyteller, I need to foster and apply both rational and emotional thinking strategies to the students in order to promote change. While Sokolowski's notion of vagueness might appear frustrating to those who value rational thinking, it is not undesirable, because with vagueness we are able to enter into a new domain of thinking. It can give us the impetus to make fruitful decisions.

I consider this idea further in the context of my classroom as I think back to the times when the senior students were not clear on their context or story. This is when they might craft an image that is purely objectified, devoid of the layers of 'why' and 'how'. My students are happy to express and to tell me their ideas and what they are interested in. Such things include chance happenings, different objects of beauty, the science and patterns that form to make a human virus. They raise questions about fashion as art, how to capture the atmosphere of abandoned buildings as they fall victim to the present. As part of their adventure they need to find their own language, imagine what the story looks like and develop a code or symbols to use as a way to persuasively express their ideas with authenticity. Adopting this way of thinking will present itself as they actually make art and grapple with its success or failure. At this time, they need to reflect, interpret and reinterpret, invite a state of vagueness, suspend their thinking and apply logic in order to be strategic in their practice. At this point they are not fully persuasive, or persuaded by their idea but a sense of vagueness enables them to move

to that next step. They ride the wave of art making and they move between a state of flux as part of their decision-making. They will, as a good story does, respond and build moments of drama, sitting through moments of calm before the antagonist of vagueness rises again.

The awakening voice

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I have become more aware of those students who are not divergent or higher order thinkers. These students present themselves as poor problem solvers, as developing strategies and logic are not elements that they naturally adopt. At this point of their learning I am asking them to take on a transcendental view or adopt a phenomenological attitude as part of their practice so that they can describe what they see and how they feel. This approach might allow for the layer of curiosity to be present as part of their artistic endeavour—to find a new perspective to enable them to reflect, interpret and ‘go beyond’ the world, rather than just being in the world or in a natural attitude. They need to suspend their emotions and be contemplative. “Phenomenology is useful for describing things as they feel from the inside without having to prove that they represent the world accurately” (Bakewell, 2016, p. 41). To find ways to understand the bridge between the natural and the phenomenological attitude as part of this endeavour requires that we act and think in a philosophical manner. Erazim Kohak (1984) proposes that we “look to the experience with a fresh eye, taking as our datum whatever presents itself in experience, using the totality of the given as the starting point...” (p. 22). I am

asking my students to think differently, which can prove to be difficult. Rather than absolve these students from having to try and engage with possible interpretations I push them to develop their minds and try to awaken their understanding of the self.

As Bakewell (2016) recounts the history of phenomenology, she suggests that this way of thinking is indeed difficult.

Like all philosophy, phenomenology made great demands on its practitioners, requiring a *different thinking*. A thinking that, in knowing, reminds me, awakens me, brings me to myself, transforms me. (p. 43)

At this time when we suspend our judgments and just ‘be’, we become transcendental and come to understand more wisely what our story in art might be, and why it matters.

I have a student who is intrigued by apples and in particular the core or the heart of the apple. She finds a great picture of an apple core online and starts to copy this image as part of her art folio. The context of this drawing is based on a project I gave the class titled *The Biography of Things*. The project is designed to get the students to use their imaginations and give an everyday object a story—a history or a future. The story can be fiction or non-fiction, but what is of interest is the object they choose and how they invent or reinvent it to give it a sense of story. An interesting finding is how the students engage with their chosen object and the reasons they select and subsequently describe it as they interpret the object artistically. The student whose choice is an image of the apple core makes a curious selection and I press her with questions for her reason and what story it might tell. Her response is, “I just like it”. I need to try to get her to see that for it to be more than just a copy of the existing picture she needs to try to ascertain why the apple core is interesting. The idea and the original image need to become hers.

Left unchallenged, her final work might have been skilful and alluring to the eye, but this student was simply copying. Her idea is in part her own, but the original image is not. She is imitating someone else's story. What is her perception of the apple and why does she need to hold this found image so closely? I continue to probe her with questions about the nature of the apple and the textures. I wonder what the story is—does it have a history or provoke a memory? Her reluctance to see another viewpoint, to think and to be logical is frustrating. There must be reasons why she is committed to drawing the apple core or why she at least sees possibility in it as an idea for ongoing development. After some general conversation, I discover several revealing factors. She is allergic to apples, which is partly why she was not able or willing to use a real apple to draw from, and her sister had once taken an enthusiastic bite of an apple only to find her tooth left behind, embedded into the side of the apple. She laughs at this thought and I can see her reflecting on that moment. From then she starts to consider other possible ways to use the apple in her art and she portrays the apple in her own style—her imagery becomes her own. A transition in her thinking has taken place. There is a moment of realisation, a connection to a time passed and her life's story. Her natural or day-to-day attitude recognises it as an image of an apple but when she is able to suspend judgment and be transcendental she is able to see more. She has become more insightful and found reason in articulating her vision. These are the ways we learn to bridge the links between everyday happenings and our explorations of the *ego*, the self. This bridging can be the catalyst for our stories to be told.

Sokolowski says, "Phenomenology is the exploration of the transcendental *ego* in all its intentional forms. Our rationality makes us human and phenomenology is the

exploration of ourselves in humanity” (2000, p. 117). When my apple-drawing student understood this different way of thinking, her drawings appeared to have more purpose and more authorship, and she became more interested in her work and in sharing a story. Her drawings started to have character, sections were cropped and the dehydrated and wrinkly forms she depicted took on a life. I could see she was having fun, being more playful but also creating a dialogue between the emotional and the logical.

For my student, her story and idea had become even clearer and she had moved between the two attitudes—she had seen the apple as a normal object and she was encouraged and challenged to think. In turn, she became more reflective, able to suspend her initial thoughts and judgements and become philosophical about the apple. This gave her the ability to, as Sokolowski says, “bracket the world” (2000, p. 55), to see change in her thinking and shift these natural doxic modalities. Bakewell recounts Husserl’s description of bracketing, referring to it as ‘bracketing out’ or *epoche*, which allows the phenomenologist to temporarily ignore the question, “But is it real?” (Bakewell, 2016, p. 42) in order to ask how a person’s experiences affect his or her world. As we have seen, for this approach to become part of an art maker’s mode of thinking, copying an image is not enough. To act artfully an artist is required to ask more questions of themselves. It is important to keep coming back to the objects or experiences themselves and to strip them from extraneous material to get to the heart of the matter. One might never be able to finish describing an apple, yet attempting to do so is a liberating task. It is the retelling of a story that keeps its energy. Bakewell sees the value of questioning when she says,

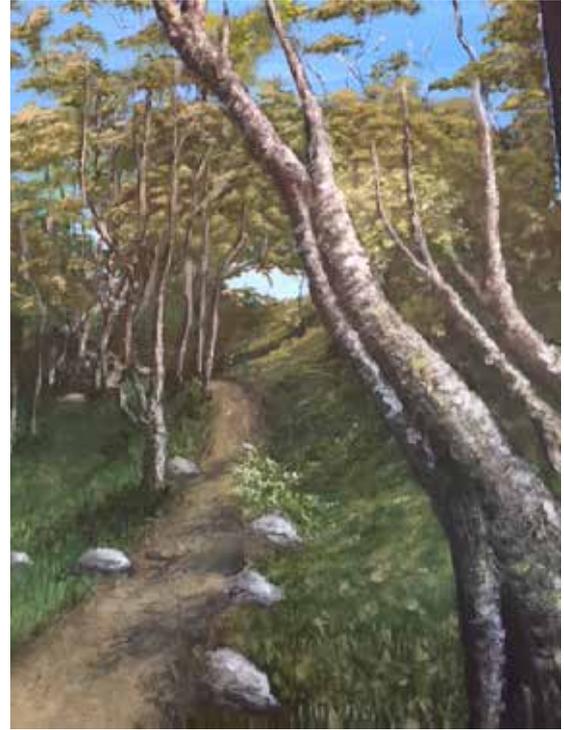
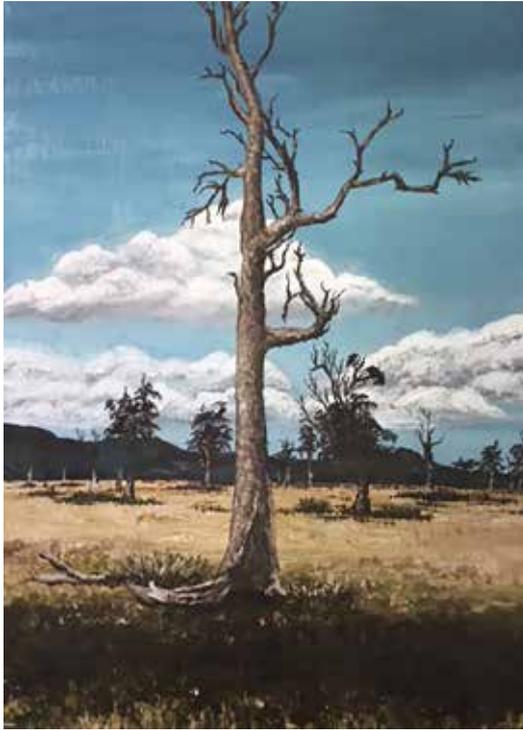
It works most effectively on the things that we may not usually think as material for philosophy: a drink, a melancholic song, a drive, a sunset, an ill at ease mood, a box of photographs, a moment of boredom. It restores this personal world in its richness, arranged from our own perspective... (Bakewell, 2016, p. 42)

Just like the student who pointed to his work and said, “this is what it is all about”, this apple-drawing student moved past a basic apple story and sought further inspiration and connection to her memories and her childhood holidays on the east coast of Tasmania. She saw how she could work differently. The work about the apple core was created in February and by July she had transformed her work and her attitude through her willingness to explore and alter her conceptual approach. She no longer copied images but used her own source material to give the work more authenticity and connection. She continues to paint rigorously and challenge herself conceptually. She writes,

The story in my work relates to the peace and beauty of nature and how it has impacted on me. I like to focus on the emotions of the sky and the conditions of the water...I have a strong use of turquoise, the colour gold, the peace, calm and tranquillity of blue, the balance and growth of green with the uplifting yellow, all of which I felt as a child sitting on the sand of the different islands on the east coast of Tasmania. These places bring me comfort, warmth, along with a deep feeling of nostalgia and recollection. These places have impacted on me, and have been a strong influence in my artwork. (Working Paper: Senior Art Student, 2017)

Her initial conversations and the ongoing reflection incited by vagueness and logic has enabled her to make better and more powerful work. She is finding her voice and her story.

LESSON TWO



Images: Examples of my student's work, 2017, after a year of exploring and questioning.

The visual artist who grapples with the story they wish to share, and how they learn and transfer this into new phases of interpretation is one who is being persuaded

by their actions and is persuasive in their art. The ongoing interpretation of an idea fosters a richer story and new meanings become embedded, or act like a 'ghost' living within the work. Just as Benjamin (1969) suggested, the more we listen to the tales the more we see. The more the artist makes and researches her idea and relates it to the self, the more questions she asks and the more possibilities become present to her.

Similarly, Susan Sontag (2017) in her mesmerising book, *At The Same Time* suggests that there is a distinction between stories, which have as their goal an ending or a closing, or where information by definition is incomplete and fragmentary. To this she says, "We know we must pick one story to tell...the art of the writer [artist] is to find out as much as one can in that story, in that sequence...in that time...in that space" (Sontag, 2017, p. 213). As the author or artist we have the power to make our selection depending on the story we choose to tell. It may seek to have a finite ending, or it might stop and start, leaving us in a state of flux or vagueness. Michel Foucault (1982) suggests that a personal transforming takes place,

The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a loving relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end. (Foucault, 1982, para. 3)

I echo my sentiment that for both the students and myself, locating this initial story is hard. To overcome this hurdle we need to be open to questioning, curiosity and logic, and deliberately seek to be hindered by chaos and vagueness. We need to oscillate between these modes of thinking to be persuaded and to be persuasive.

I know that I am guilty of trying to fool others and myself with my art. At times I feel I am the hollow artist who tries to use ‘art speak’ to defend my work. I am a fraud because when I started the work for *Tension* I wanted a quick fix. My preliminary photographs were conservative, anticipated, expected, and even boring and clichéd. I photographed flowers, played with the juxtaposition of light and dark and the unravelling and combination of textures. My approach was lazy and had been done before by myself, and indeed countless others. I was simply recalling information and expecting it to have potency and be powerful. I was trying to deceive myself and in essence, ‘copying’ what I knew I could do. I knew I could manufacture these images but I was not attending to the real issue of tension. I was not trusting of my own ability. Applying a phenomenological attitude to my thinking helped me to see the need to surrender to doubt in order to unlearn and relearn my skills. I needed to dig deeper, find a state of vagueness to find a new way of working that was authentic. I was not persuaded by my own actions nor honouring my, or our story. I arrived at a point where my passion to make art and my commitment to pursue our creative project dwarfed my inner tension and fuelled my urgency to move past the expected into the unfamiliar. This image was the compendium piece to Jimmy’s words I shared earlier in the chapter.

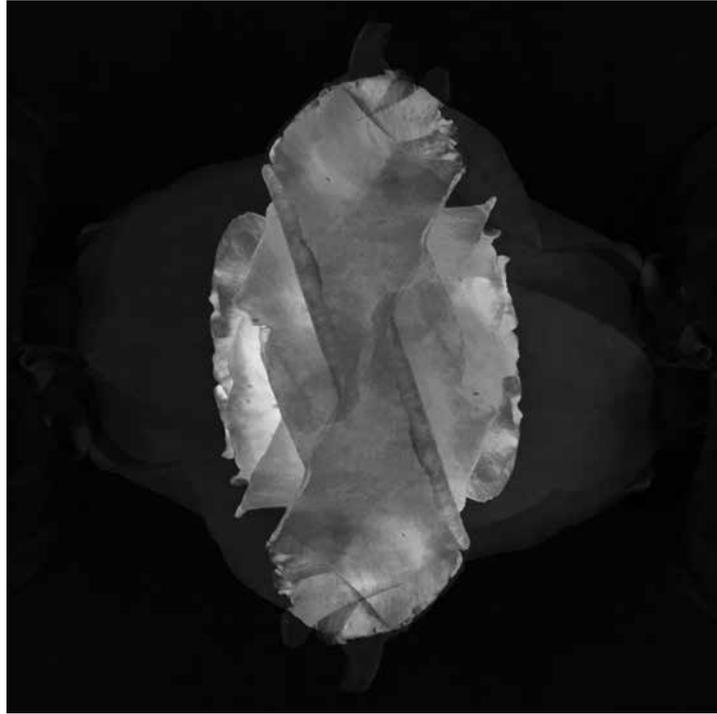


Image: Collision, Tension exhibition, 2016

Collision shows the coming together of two forms stripped from their natural environment and morphed together to construct a feeling of fragility and delicacy. The two shapes are set into a dark void, a vague space that is not defined. The shapes appear to be stacked on top of each other and they take on the feeling of a kaleidoscope. The forms that once may have aligned are starting to turn and they now appear at right angles creating a star-like form. The light creates a halo around foreground petals and parallel lines emerge on a slant—they buffer against each other, push against each other to create a stable force. The darkness implies a strong and dominant space but it can also be open to the unknown—the unexplored emptiness leading to unfamiliar ground. While the forms can be recognised as petals they take on a transcendental presence. “As agents to the space of reasons, we enter the domain of the rational, and when we do so we “go beyond”, we transcend subjectivity; and we act as transcendental egos” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 116). This is what my story is about.

Toggling between “being in the world” and deciphering what “constitutes our belonging in the world, our worldliness” (Meyer, 2010, p. 86) enables us to find more underlying questions about who we are—our *ego* and our transcendental *ego*. Sokolowski asserts that the “*ego* promotes marvellous ambiguity” (2000, p. 112). On one hand, it inhabits an ordinary part of the world. It occupies space, endures through time, has physical features and interacts with other things in the world. The *ego* can be played off against the world—it is the centre of disclosure to which the world and everything manifests themselves. It is an agent of truth, the one responsible for judgments and verifications. When considered in this manner *ego* moves towards transcendental. The empirical and the transcendental *ego* are not two “separate entities; they are one and the same being but considered in two different ways” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 113). They are not detached from the world because the *ego’s* intentional character requires that it have things and a world correlated with itself.

I follow the notion that if we can start to think and respond differently to the world, we can move between these two attitudes—the natural and the phenomenological. Our story will be clearer and our art making more convincing. If we can see experiences through these different modes we can consider how the mind grasps and interprets experiences.

The role of persuasion when coupled with the antagonist of vagueness moves the students and myself forward in the way we make art and the way we share a story. This undertaking allows for a good story to be found and enables us to pursue a phenomenological attitude as a guide to our development and as a way to question what matters to us. Through my own learning and artistic action I become able to

scaffold this thinking into my classroom practice and guide my students with significant experiences that broaden their learning.

The making of art has a long and symbiotic history of telling stories and capturing moments of time in contrasting and diverse ways. Art making is not about copying information from another source. It is about taking ownership of an idea that connects to our living inquiry and exploring it to find its depth. We must return to how we think and how we process ideas as a means to reflect on our lives and to make convincing art. Herein lies a challenge for the good storyteller—to grasp our ability to take an initial idea and move it into a compelling piece of communication, locating ourselves in a state of vagueness—to recognise and pivot between the logical and the vague. We need to shout out, “I don’t know what I am doing!” We need to be irritated by who we are and question why we exist. If we are to make meaning of our own lives and share this meaning with others as storytellers, we need to live between these two modalities. We need to find what persuades us and what influences us in order to act artfully. Sharon Verghis (2017) quotes David Bentley, the Artistic Director of the Birmingham Royal Ballet who says in a recent article in the *Australian Review*, “Storytelling is the basis of humanity, we tell a story every day, we wake up and go through another day, it defines us and what we are about” (Verghis, 2017, p. 5). Our stories or lives are not ready-made but they are shaped by our interpretations of our lived experiences. As artists we need to articulate and share them. But we must do so with conviction. We need to ‘find our voices’ and our *ethos* and it is when we do, that it becomes possible to share with integrity and meaning.

Sharing our lived experiences in art in this way must require commitment to understanding our 'being in' and 'belonging' to the world. In *Lesson Three* I explore possible fields of perception as ways we might come to understand being, looking and seeing as part of art and of the self.



LESSON THREE

*The part where I doubt and understand the
difference between looking and seeing*

The layers of appearance

Action and thought combine

Seeing the self through another

Shadows of doubt

Becoming wide-awake



LESSON THREE

*The part where I doubt and understand the
difference between looking and seeing*

I can't draw and I want to be able to.

I don't get how you make that look real.

How do you do that?

It's not fair.

(Student Responses, 2016, 2017)

One of the delightful aspects of teaching is being able to assist students in their dream to make art—to share what they perceive with others. In the last *Lesson*, I promoted artists as storytellers and that the storytelling role is an asset for good art making. Students of art want to be able to show their thoughts and elucidate a story. But at times different circumstances get in their way—their lack of confidence, their own self-worth, their

lack of skill, the sheer fact that they have lost their ability to be ‘free’ and explore, or perhaps their inability to distil what it is they want to express. What might be at the heart of these stumbling blocks is the students’ perception that they can’t draw, that they do not have a sound foundation of artistic knowledge to guide them, which is prompted at varying degrees by the antagonist of doubt, or more intensely, self-doubt.

When people say they are not creative or claim, “I am not artistic”, it tends to suggest that they can’t draw or they are not very creative. Their use of language is often where, a “joint referent” is built (Litowitz, 2014, p. 297). There is a pre-conception that to be artistic you need to be able to render objects in a realistic way. And while elements of this may be true, being able to draw is only one aspect needed to become an artist. What is also needed are the skills to be able to ‘interpret’ what we perceive and break the code of creative and personal symbols. Part of the hermeneutic ingenuity supports this mode of thinking, which is referenced by the words of Ruthellen Josselson (2004) who says, “because meanings cannot be grasped directly and all meanings are essentially indeterminate in an unshakeable way, interpretation becomes necessary” (p. 4).

A central part of making art and finding meaning in art is situated within the process of reflection and modelling creative intelligence so that we can decode what lies before us. If I can develop a learning pathway that leads my students to perceive and therefore interpret their world more deeply, they might be able to move further towards the state of self-actualisation or the emancipation that Biesta spoke of in *Lesson One*.

I consider modes of understanding the fields of perception to be my next *Lesson* as I deem certain qualities of perception to be integral to a student’s artistic and

educational development. The way the students perceive the world to tell a story needs to be compelling so that they can capitalise on their art making through reflection and interpretation under the auspice, and acceptance, of doubt as part of their practice. But we cannot stop here. When we find some clarity in our thoughts we must be willing to question what we know in order to further our quest for deeper meaning in search of self-fulfilment. If the students are to demystify what they perceive, entering this state of doubt seems significant. René Descartes (2003) says in his famous line, “*cogito ergo sum*”, which translates to “I think therefore I am” (pp. 24-25 in van Manen, 2014, p. 77). Largely, this quote intimates that we arrive at “certain knowledge about the self, through a self that thinks” (van Manen, 2014, p. 77). When we reach this point of realisation about the self through thinking, we can invite doubt and indecision back into our world of wonder and discovery. We might become hesitant about what we see, what we understand and what we think, but if we persevere with the creative process we can find lucidity. I suggest from my findings as an artist and as a teacher that this state of doubt can enable us to act, bringing our creative thoughts and artistic ideas into a state of reality through making and doing. Our ideas can be expressed through our heads and from our fingers.

Let us recall here that art is not to be perceived as, or created by a random, simplistic blast of colour onto a canvas, or a few scribbles of coloured graphite on a watercolour page. Rather, the integrity and purpose of art necessitates the mastering of materials, combined with how we understand the relationships that are formed between the art elements and the active component of critique. I propose through this combination of skills, discernment and reflection we can alter our ways of seeing by enhancing our process of perception—deciphering what we see and how to interpret

it. *Lesson Three* addresses the roles of perception through the practical examples of learning to draw in order to move past looking and move towards seeing. This stance of perception is taken further as I present additional ways to decipher differing viewpoints that pertain to the self and other.

I believe adopting a progressive approach as a teacher makes a difference to a student's learning. But what is it they perceive? How do I know what they perceive? And how do I start to explore what they see? It is difficult to see what others see, and yet I need to understand in some part how and what the students see. While I can never totally comprehend how others perceive shapes and forms, developing the skills of interpretation combined with ability to explore what they see through dialogue are two methods that can be used for some understanding to transpire. This is where I deem that knowledge about perception and the use of language as part of intersubjectivity (Litowitz, 2014, p. 295), for me as teacher and artist, play vital roles in art. Litowitz intimates that "intersubjectivity is the different ways we come to think and talk...and has consequences for how I [we] view the individual's struggle to maintain a private world" (p. 295).

Perception refers to our immediate responses to a situation. It enacts our senses. I see it as being uninterrupted due to the way we engage with the world. I describe perception as raw data that enters our minds in order to be processed through thought and action. Perception transcends a range of different situations. It is how we see an object, how we view an artwork, how we remember, it is our imagination, how we see ourselves, and it is even how we think others view us.

Developing a certain set of skills can assist us in our attempt to comprehend perception—skills such as learning to see as part of drawing an object, followed by the reflective skills used to interpret the object as art. These skills are pertinent because artists are essentially ‘makers’ and ‘responders’ to the world around them. Art writer and teacher Kit White (2011) says of drawing that it, “takes skill and practice, working in tandem with intelligence and keen observation” (p. 2). In his book *101 Things to Learn in Art School; Learn to Draw* he says,

Drawing is more than a tool for rendering and capturing a likeness. It is a language, with its own syntax, grammar and urgency. Learning to draw is about learning to see. In this way, it is a metaphor for all art activity. Whatever its form, drawing transforms perception and thought into images and teaches us how to think with our eyes. (White, 2011, p. 2)

White reminds us that there are levels of skill, application and insight required for transformation, interpretation and for change to prevail.

As I see perception as largely sensory, I suggest that the embodiment of an experience can move the students towards being autonomous art makers, masters of their craft and responders—to give them more freedom to see the subliminal. But like any form of true artistic expression the students ought to find themselves vulnerable, to seek to be a master, to find understanding. If we are in search of understanding about ourselves we need to be compassionate, doubt ourselves, and doubt what we see and how we see it.

Learning to be a ‘master’ of drawing suggests that we need to undertake a series of practical and theoretical experiences to understand this craft. This makes me consider

how teaching the students to draw as a technical device used to render or ‘imitate’ an object enables them to think about perception. How does teaching them to look allow them to see differently?

For me, the art of drawing is like a second language or a “shared semiotic system” (Litowitz, 2014, p. 295). I use it to show my students what and how I see. For example, when I am showing them how to draw a found or still life object, I might deliberately distort part of it to see if the students are following what I am doing. As I start to question my own mark making and the way I am interpreting a form, I ask for their assistance so that they can help me correct the shape. When I start to show the students how to render the form, I too have to question what I see before me, and I return to my theory of perspective and viewpoint to bring some rational thinking to my teaching. It is not enough to just draw the form in front of them and walk away, but rather I have to explain to them, teach them, through words and actions, ways to interpret and build the form as a symbol of the real. I have found that this small technique is effective to see if they comprehend what I am trying to show them. Drawing is a device I constantly use to visually explain and to explore. It was a tool I used to map out and problem solve the work we made for *Tension*. I would often draw the images I had photographed in my sketchbook to try and see them differently.

As I drew, and in essence became more conversant with the work using this different lens, I wondered what would happen if I reinterpreted the photographs in paint and how my perception of these works might change. This is a project I still yearn to undertake in its fullness as I adore the immediacy and energy I feel when I paint. For me, painting brings a different type of vulnerability. It is a type of vulnerability

that is even more open—it is raw and active. Maybe one day a painting series might be revealed. I can face my perceived vulnerability, my doubt, and my imagined images will not just be a set of pictures in my head. For many of my students, painting and drawing can be more terrifying than working in a photographic manner because they feel exposed due to its immediacy. We are open to direct scrutiny from the self and we are potentially judged by others.

As outlined in the opening student responses, many of the students I teach can and do feel vulnerable and inadequate. They say they can't draw—they are afraid to draw but they want and yearn to draw. They are often in awe of other fellow classmates who can observe and capture the world in a realistic and detailed manner. This is what they tell me they want to learn. They initially want some technical skills as a way to empower themselves so that they can draw what they see and capture their so-called reality. They think that with these skills their perception of their artistic ability will change.

For my students to draw 'realistically' or even emulate what they see to fulfil their aims, they need to have the ability, or be trained to gain the ability, to look at and respond to what they see in front of them, rather than draw what they think they see. A part of learning to draw from reality requires that we explore the object with our eyes, visually map the form out as part of our observations and then respond to this in the act of making. The visual connections that exist in the form itself need to be processed and aligned if the students are to draw and respond to what they see in front of them. From the outset, my purpose is to teach the students ways to use perception to render a form by breaking down the barrier between what they can do and what they think they can't do. I do this by encouraging them to focus on what is in front

of them and to see it as a shape, rather than acknowledge it as a whole, be it a bicycle or a musical instrument. If each of them can use suitable techniques to learn to draw, their perception of their ability, their self-doubt, may also change and lead to further exploration and interpretation.

The philosophy behind teaching my students to draw is worthy of note because to each of the students the object appears differently, bringing with it a unique sensory experience. Each of them holds and manipulates the drawing materials differently. The marks they make act as a voice and echo how attentive they are to the distinctions of the form. Some grasp the pencil tightly and use force to outline the shapes. Others will be more sensitive and weight the pencil more gently, allowing for more control and sensitivity. As an art teacher, I need to accommodate these differences in the way the students look, see, and express themselves. As a consequence of this I am always mindful of the way that I teach and respond to each of them.

The layers of appearance

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To help me with my understanding about perception from a phenomenological perspective, I follow the work of Sokolowski (2000). In *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000) Sokolowski refers to three major themes that are infused into phenomenological thinking—“parts and wholes, identity in manifolds and absence and presence” (p. 4). These themes enable us to look at objects and experiences in a variety of ways. Sokolowski makes it clear that, “each of the themes are interrelated but they cannot be reduced to one another” (p. 22).

When I ask my students to describe what they see in front of them I need them to do this from their viewpoint and move past just looking at an object. When we look at things as a group, multiple viewpoints can add to the overall classroom conversation and as a consequence open the students up to other ways of potential understanding. It is one thing to look at an object in a cursory way but another to see and describe what is present. These perspectives are significant to this process and each student's view has a separate role to play in how they understand perception.

Before I continue and play out this thinking in a classroom situation, I briefly survey Sokolowski's themes so there will be some familiarity with the terms that I am communicating in my writing. The first theme is 'parts and wholes', where pieces can exist outside the whole and act independently. For example, we can see a bicycle as a whole object but we can also experience it as pieces or parts of the whole.

The next theme is 'identity in manifolds' with another analogous term being the 'manifolds of appearance'. A manifold suggests that there are variable ways of looking at one object or situation. Sokolowski has sets or groups of manifolds, which he believes enable us to encounter an object and our human intentions differently. In these groups, he aligns manifolds to perception, remembering, imagination and anticipation, and in each of the groups their variants can be both interdependent and independent. For example, "we could have memory without imagination and anticipation" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 86). To this, I often ask the students to remember an object and a place they have been but I am not asking them to imagine it or anticipate what they see, I am simply asking them to remember. Similarly, I might ask them to imagine themselves at a beach or on the top of Hobart's kunanyi/Mount Wellington, which is not necessarily about

memory. I see these as different levels of awareness that call upon different modes of thinking. A given situation or object can be pictured differently, symbolised differently and perceived differently. Sokolowski describes these layers as tools used to interpret our worlds at different times of our intentionality. If one of my students perceived and rendered the identity of a pencil case in three different ways—one as a pen outline, one in red pencil and one as a black and white photograph—we would have three different expressions or appearances of the same object, with each from a different perspective. When we introduce the perception of others into the way we look at the identity of a pencil case we find a richer array of manifolds, because “the same identity takes on a deeper objectivity, a richer transcendence” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 32). Through these phenomenological descriptions these themes can be amplified and our thinking about experiences can change.

The third theme is ‘absence and presence’, which is new to modern thought, relating to how “the objective correlates to filled and empty intentions” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 330). An empty intention is something that is not there because it could be a memory or an imagined state. It is absent and not present to the one who intends. In contrast, a filled intention is one that targets something that is there in its bodily presence with the one who intends. An example of this is to imagine that the two of us are visiting an art gallery. On the way, we talk about a particular image I have seen, which is empty in intention, as you have never seen the image I am telling you about. I can remember the image and I can tell you about it but there is nothing concrete for you to see. When we arrive at the gallery we go to the painting, stand in front of it and appreciate and analyse the work. At this point our intentions are filled because we are able to embody the painting and see it in its true form. “The painting is present and we

intuit it. But when we leave and walk away from the piece, it is absent again and we are back to its empty intentions” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 37). We can remember or imagine ourselves at the painting but we are not present.

According to Sokolowski, when we apply these different themes in practice we apply ‘categorical’ thinking to them. “In categorial thinking, we can move from the experience of simple objects into the presentation of intelligible objects” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 5). If I consider this in my own context of the classroom, the act of learning to draw an object in a real state is a presentation of a simple object, but as we transform our thinking, adding other ways of looking at the form as we interpret what we see, our perception changes and we head towards presenting an intelligible object. When we apply this thinking to art making we are allowing ourselves to deepen our reading of an object and it becomes an expressive form. We are not just drawing a shape but we are moving towards the start of expression—we are making ‘art’.

With this background to Sokolowski’s theory about perception, let’s share an occasion with my Year 10 class that illustrates the way the students learn to perceive an object as part of their technical training and their desire to learn to draw in order to make art with integrity.

I design this project to foster the students’ observational and technical skills, and as a way to hone their sense of perception. I set up an interesting still life of three old dismantled bicycles salvaged from the local Tip Shop. I dismantle the bikes to mask any immediate perceptions the students may have of what they look like in their original and complete form. In the middle of the room I purposefully place the different bike

parts on top of each other, considering how each piece relate and visually connect to the other. I use the natural light of the studio's large windows to filter onto the shapes, casting delicate shadows and highlighting the different textures of the forms. When we sit around the still life as a group I ask my students to individually tell me what they see and how they perceive the objects in front of them, which promotes a range of answers. They tell me they see wheels, pedals, frames and gears. But to create additional connections to the objects I push them to describe what the wheels and the gears look like. I want them to consider the connections that exist between the textures and the shapes.

Next, to get them moving and to change the routine of how they generally work, I ask them to coat the tread of some bike tyres with paint and use the tyres to make marks on large pieces of paper on the floor of the studio. I need them to use the tyres like giant rolling stamps, layering lines, to forge a different and more tangible and immediate link with the forms. Just as the students use the weight of their arms to draw, they can use the weight of their bodies to play, interact and respond to the textures of the tyres. This approach gives them a tactile and more expressive experience that might add to their thinking, their understanding of the bicycle and in turn may change the way they deliberate about the form.



Image: A section of a larger group work where the students have used the bicycle tyres like stamps and drawn freely over the top of the shapes, 2017.

The image above is cropped out of a larger piece the students created as a group. The students have freely drawn back over the tread marks using different coloured oil pastels. These fluid lines are contour lines based on the bike's shapes. The students added the contour lines to the tread marks using a blind contour technique, meaning they drew the shapes without looking down to the page, keeping their eyes solely on the object. To make marks with conviction, they have to trust themselves and their ability to see what is in front of them. It is also a lot of fun and forces them to take a risk, to be brave, doubt themselves, and acknowledge the role of tension as they try something new. How does this relate to perception?

I hope that the students' more immediate interaction with the forms might give them a greater and more familiar understanding of the object. I wonder how using 'parts' of the whole bike brings a different sense of awareness to the form, so that when they came to render, for example a bike wheel on their own, they ought to be able draw the tread with more insight and consider how it feels, rather than just how it looks.

As my students chatter happily to one another while they work I realise that words are a great adjunct to describe what they originally see, but until they start to move their perception to paper, I cannot be sure what they perceive and what they understand. If they want to draw an object in the present or natural attitude, they need to be able to render what was actually in front of them and not what they think they see. Sokolowski's manifolds of identity are significant for me because through my teaching strategies I am endeavouring to transform the students' perception of layers of appearance. My aim is to lead the students towards interpreting the objects as part of their intentionality. Thinking about a bike wheel alone might not enable them to draw what was present in the room, as it was not the wheel that lies in front of them. The wheel exists in their mind, it is imagined and absent from reality. To be able to draw the wheel as a real entity it needs to be an object that is tangible. This shapes the conundrum for me about the way to guide them to draw what is actually there, opposed to what they imagine in a realistic way, as part of perception.

Through teaching my students to think in this way I start to formulate more questions that might break through their perceptions of the object even further. What are their different levels of perception and once I recognise them, how might I apply my appreciation of them to the learning situation I am offering? The way I plan and unravel my lessons is important as I aim to give the students different cues and approaches to respond to the objects I ask them to draw. In many ways, in my project I wish for them to reflect on my teaching goals. A scripted lesson in the form of a set of drawing instructions is not going to be all they need for this exercise to have an influence. I hope, as White says, they start to see that "Drawing is more than a tool used for capturing a likeness" (2011, p. 2). I desire each of the students to develop an ability to see and build

connections so each can transform the act of observational drawing into art making. But to do this we need to practise our skills and work in “tandem with intelligence” (p. 2) and move towards understanding, implementing and oscillating between Sokolowski’s three themes as part of understanding perception.

To activate and shift the students’ perception skills to the next stage of phenomenological analysis I set the classroom scene more explicitly to provide a clear context for the students to work within. In the next lesson, rather than asking them to ‘just start drawing’, I give them each viewing windows fashioned in non-conventional shapes, such as a circle and a triangle. The use of a viewing window, or guide, is not an uncommon drawing device used to hone the students’ focus and it was a tool that I used in a former example in *Lesson Two* to find a creative response to a list of descriptive words. It is a dependable strategy that has been applied in different ways to observational drawing over the centuries partly for the purpose of rendering what is in front of the artist. In the 17th Century, Dutch Baroque painter Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) used the first camera obscura to reflect the outlines of his subjects onto his canvas, and similarly the German Renaissance painter Albrecht Durer (1471-1528), who explored human proportion, used gridlines to trace the forms. These devices temper the artist and force her to concentrate on what is in front of herself, rather than what she thinks is there. It also dispels some of the uncertainty as it provides some clues about how to get started. As students learning to draw, the antagonist of self-doubt is real so this simple strategy temporarily allays their focus away from the self, distracting them from this primary mode of thinking. At times self-doubt comes and goes, but as I teach my students to draw, the potency of self-doubt may change the way they see the world and the objects before them. Self-doubt or feeling vulnerable can carry pejorative connotations but I

am sensitive to Josselson, who considers self-doubt to hold a more positive slant. Her thinking can be assigned to the

interpretative process as being one of distilling, elucidating, and illuminating the intended meanings of the informant or of discovering meanings that lie hidden within a false consciousness. (Josselson, 2004, p. 5)

Together these elements might propel the self into new and different ways of seeing.

The students hold their framed shapes up to the still life and move them around, forcing them to crop the objects and be more active and attentive to the way they see and approach their drawing. It is as though they are photographers looking through viewfinders. Some of them start to draw directly from life while others ask if they can use their phones to take a photograph. What this provides is a framework for them to start their drawing rather than not knowing where to begin. Giving them these parameters is to dismantle some of the fear associated with drawing from life. What is most interesting is the different way each of the students responds to and uses their frame to commence working and thinking. Each one of them is different in her style and for me it is intriguing to watch. They are silent, they move in close to look at the shapes and I can see them considering their options. It is engaging to observe.

After a few lessons of exploring some different drawing strategies and ways of looking at the forms, I am convinced that something has shifted. The students have started to draw the bicycle parts as they existed in their present state, as objects, with more confidence. They are more aware of the shapes and proportions of the objects. What becomes evident as I help each of them with individual technical concerns is that

each has started fashioning an element of her own style—each artwork has a different look, not just because of her skill level but also due to her newly formed ability to perceive and make sense of what is before her. The students are looking at the same objects and using the same materials but there are differences that reflect what they see and how they respond to the nuances of the shapes. It is clear that their perception has altered. They have grasped key features of the objects. Rudolph Arneheim (1969) articulates this idea in a lyrical way, “Seeing means grasping some outstanding features of objects—the blueness of the sky, the curve of the swan’s neck, the rectangularity of the book...” (p. 43).

The students learn some of the essential drawing skills they wish for, combined with some alternative ways to look at the forms. The tension they feel as part of self-doubt has pushed them. Self-doubt and tension become allies and builds texture.



Images: Two finished drawings based on the bicycle, 2017

These two artworks are examples of final drawings based on the students’ exploration. What these confirm for me is that through this guided process the students

have started to look at the object in both a natural and phenomenological way. The students' drawing skills have lifted, their use of negative space is more apparent and they have become more interpretative and conceptual in the way they were thinking. Their struggle to mentally break down the bike into parts to form a whole has given the students the skills and confidence to render an object as an art form. The different strategies I have introduced have given them a focus, removing some of the elements of fear and doubt. Their finished works induced curiosity—the bicycle parts have come to life.

If we refer to Sokolowski's layers of appearance, or "manifolds of identity", (2000, p. 77) we can see links between the drawings, the modes of perception and how we can identify objects that we encounter in variable ways. Together, these modes of thinking are encouraging creative thought, deepening ideas and fostering creative actions and can be called upon at varied times and stages of an art maker's journey. Following Sokolowski's views, these distinctive ways of looking and thinking about an object are convincing and we perceive shapes in distinctive ways. At the outset, the students were uncomfortable drawing the bicycle parts but with coaching and using perception as a device to enact change they were bestowed with skills and confidence. The drawings are powerful evidence of how we can look at an object as both part and whole.

As I observe my students' actions, what appears to amalgamate are their immediate sensory experiences such as 'thinking' and 'understanding', two words Aristotle used when talking about perception. Psychologist Robert Schwartz (2004) in *Perception* refers to Aristotle and how he relates perception to the alignment of thinking and understanding as a means to identify with the world (Schwartz, 2004, p. 8). While these two words are not interchangeable, my reading of Schwartz intimates

that perceiving can be universal and understanding can be found as an element of perception. In the classroom, we perceive the bicycles as general forms, but when we look more deeply, our understanding changes and we are aware of the dual role of tension and doubt as part of perception (Schwartz, 2004, pp. 330-334).

Through the writing of van Manen (2014) I find another example that returns us to the history of art. This dipping into art history strengthens my thinking and brings additional understanding about the different views of perception. van Manen references Merleau-Ponty's (1964) essay titled 'Cézanne's Doubt' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp. 9-24 in van Manen, 2014, p. 131), which explores Paul Cézanne's experience of the world and illustrates how a deeper understanding of an object can affect the way we see and interpret forms. The essay divulges how the Cubist painter perceived his world by delving into his practice, the way he was suspicious of the world around him and describes how he rendered the world in his distorted and yet inspired manner. The essay describes how Cézanne used paint to show how things appear as visual experiences after he has broken them down into simple geometrical forms. He looked to the underlying structure of each form to understand how it existed and as a way to demystify what he saw. This is testimony to the sensibility and sensitivity of artistic inquiry. It draws to our attention the idea that understanding and knowledge are ambivalent and ambiguous, or true or false. Knowledge and understanding can bring doubt. van Manen highlights this further when he says, "Truth and Falsehood do not stand in relation of opposition to each other but they are aspects of a constantly changing and shifting dynamic of primal human reality (2014, p. 130). This thinking continues to support the equivocal fields of perception but also highlights the importance of instilling them into an art maker's practice. Like tension, I feel we need to pursue them.

What was revolutionary for Cézanne and his counterparts in the postmodern Cubist period was their desire to know how forms existed and how they were situated or related to their environment. A deep examination of the landscape or the still life illustrated their perception of the world, but also showed how intellect is desirable to be a masterful interpreter and responder of the world. Through his work, Cézanne was able to instil wonder, attention and awareness to forms and essentially guide the viewer into a new way of looking and appreciating the image. His ability to master perception could change the perception of the viewer.



Image: Nature Morte Au Melon Vert, Cézanne, 1902-1906

The watercolour study on paper *Nature Morte Au Melon Vert* (1902-1906) is a still life piece by Cézanne that illustrates the way he starts to grapple with and question the forms and shapes of the objects he sees. I suspect that with his eyes and his mind he removes and peels off the outer skin of the fruit and looks at the geometry of the glass. He questions and considers what the surfaces and underlying structures look like as he works and reworks elements to get to know the shapes. His marks are gentle, perhaps

even tentative as he maps out the shapes and forms the composition. As Cézanne looks at the scene in front of him, perhaps he doubts what he sees and considers the objects as whole forms and as parts, allowing for connections to be made in order to render the character of the objects as he interprets them in an intelligent and insightful manner.

What this supports is that drilling deeper into what we want to understand makes for a more coherent approach, and one that slowly allows us to obtain a mastery of what we are trying to render in art. A more complete way of looking at an object and inspecting it through these different layers can lead us to move forward in our inquiry and curiosity. We become part of the discovery, more invested, and we see how other ways of looking at the object can enable our developmental and learning progress. van Manen suggests, “the process of something happening to us, is opening the world to us and opening us to the world in ways we did not anticipate” (van Manen, 2014, p. 192). If our perceptions and skills are not changing and being challenged, are we acting at being an art maker? Engaging and responding to the layers of self-doubt as part of tension gives us license to put ourselves in a vulnerable place. Committed to making art and to demystifying what we see as part of our reality we open ourselves to tension, self-doubt and vulnerability in our art making.

This manner of thinking to interpret the objects was what I shared with my Year 10 students. From our exploration of the object as a shape, rather than as the object itself, the students started to appreciate that a deeper understanding of the form enabled them to draw the object in a more sensitive and expressive manner. When they allowed themselves to be vulnerable as part of exploration they could identify the underlying structure of the object. At this point each of them responded differently to

the situation. Most of them showed greater confidence and a willingness to fail and start again. The others were still slightly tentative but I could sense their views had shifted. The students ceased to express the shapes via their words alone. They “wait[ed] until their mind distil[ed], from the uniqueness of the experience, generalities, what can be grasped by our senses, conceptualised and labelled” (Arneheim, 1969, p. 2.). They became discerning interpreters. Self-doubt and tension had moved them onward as part of perception.

From my experience as a teacher, successful students adopt the *ethos* of a scientist and take the time to study and think about what they see in front of them, looking and responding to the detail, working and reworking the lines on the page. They respond to the object in an elementary, sensory way, but for better work, their capacity to be more active and engaged brings consequences or openings as van Manen suggests. In a similar manner to van Manen (2014), Elizabeth Anderson (2014) interprets the work of Dewey (1934) suggesting, “It is the use of reflective intelligence to revise one’s judgments in light of the consequences of acting on them” (Anderson, 2014, para. 2).

Some of the consequences might be not getting the shape right, or not considering the different parallel lines to create a sense of perspective. Equally, we have not considered how the object responds to light differently, how the different tones are essential to give the shape form, or it might be that the student has imitated reality well and can now advance their skills and methods even further. In these situations, the students can take more ownership of their work and become more active in their learning. As a consequence of their actions, my students are making more conscious decisions about their work and are responding to and interpreting forms in a more complex way.

Action and thought combine

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Encouraging the students to become even more involved in the experience of art is where the work of Dewey (1939) guides my thinking. His writing explores the role of perception as an experience where action and thought come together. In *Art as Experience* (1939) he implies that perception becomes the conduit between the idea of the artist and how she understands what she sees. I follow Dewey's writing because of the way he describes art. For him, art is something that requires action rather than experiencing art in a passive state. For art to exist beyond preliminary sensory engagement it travels ahead of our initial senses and becomes an interpretation of the mind. Making art that moves past this preliminary perception of art leads us to a greater conscious awareness of art's meaning. Dewey says,

there needs to be a coming together of the action and its consequences, or as Aristotle implies, the culmination of thinking and understanding. For the students, these elements must be joined in perception and it is, this relationship that gives meaning; to grasp it is the objective of all intelligence. (1939, p. 206)

Investigating the action of thinking and understanding through my class bicycle exercises enabled me to find other ways to help my students render an object based on their initial perception. Discovering the nuances of the objects in this way gave the forms meaning and objective intelligence, and the students were establishing new questions about the objects and acting on them. They asked questions such as—What would happen if I turned the form around so it pointed the other way? What would it be like if I stacked one form on top of another? If I did this how hard would it be to draw? Could

I do it? How could I draw one shape and give the impression of the other shape behind it? And could I make one appear translucent and make one opaque to give a different feeling? To make art that has honour, and as a product of integrity, we must move past mere rendering, apply reflection and respond to the consequences of our practice by looking through the action of interpretation. This can lead us towards autonomy and self-actualisation as an art maker guided by perception. Dewey highlighted for me that the next step in relation to art making is to alter our initial perception into action and interpret what we see.

How do I embed levels of interpretation into action and how does this impact on the central theme of this *Lesson* on perception and art making that is rich and honours the authentic practice of an artist? I endeavour to use Sokolowski's notion of memory as a way to explore this question. I regard this concept to be a useful device to explore perception, which adds to the richness of my thinking. I consider memory on two levels. First, memory allows us to be more playful with our perception and how we interpret it is guided by the way we remember, which is influenced by how we feel and what seemed important at that time. Secondly, memory can provide us with the opportunity to interpret a situation differently depending on our intentionality.

I feel that these levels of interpretation I am endeavouring to add to my students' learning can enable them to move closer towards freedom or autonomy in their art making by strengthening their levels of awareness. Culminating thinking and understanding as part of art making experiences, coupled with critique, can enable us to question our actions more deeply. I wonder if the use of memory may give us some sovereignty to explore and perceive elements of life and the self differently.

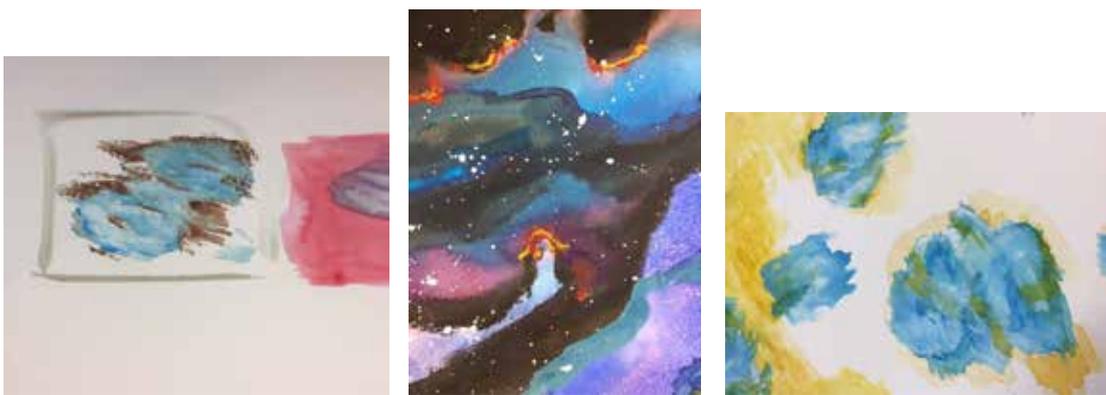
To survey this further I share the following classroom scenario. A student asks me what a bird's eye view of a cloud looks like. Before I express my thoughts in words I intuitively grab my pencil to start rendering what I 'see'. My initial response is to describe a cloud, but I have to stop and reflect on another way to respond to the question as I do not have a direct tangible reference to a cloud. I cannot create a situation where we can physically explore a cloud in the classroom and the sky on this particular day is crystal clear. Instead, I decide to play with ways of describing a cloud as I might see it. This is a perfect situation to see if adding Sokolowski's 'phenomenological analysis' (2000, p. 67) and adopting his manifolds of appearance does in fact amplify the event by adding to the way we perceive a cloud. I ask her to tell me about the cloud in her memory. At this point I am asking her to relive a past experience and remember the object at that particular time. As we each consider the notion of a cloud there is an element of doubt and indecision in the way we both attempt to describe it. I am asking her to recall a part of her life when the intention and context was different and apply that experience to this new situation. I am asking her to think about the cloud as it was then, yet presenting itself in the here and now. The way she experienced or imagined the cloud in the first instance was under different conditions, with different people and she was younger. These are all potential elements that play a part in how we remember our respective situations. Sokolowski refers to this as the "noematic form that remembered objects take on" (2000, p. 68). He equates this relationship to the different intentionalities that two different manifolds of appearance—'picturing and remembering'—bring to our interpretation, which is what my student is doing, moving between the absent and present states of seeing.

My admittedly different approach to explore how she perceives a cloud so that she can draw it is curious and a little enigmatic for her, but I consider these abstract qualities are important for a deeper and different understanding. How she explains the cloud is challenging and interesting—describing the cloud as a veil that masks what is behind and beneath it. This is an example where the use of words combined with the skill of drawing comes into play because the cloud needs to take on the characteristic of a veil but at the same time look voluminous. This synergy between words and mark making is constructive because we can explain things to each other through words and also through preliminary sketches and drawings.

To further demystify the way we understood the cloud, our dialectical conversations needed to continue. To add to our investigation I ask my student to imagine herself in a cloud looking down to the earth, to imagine what it might be like to be a bird soaring across the sky, or to recall a recent plane trip when she was above a cloud looking down. I ask her to describe to me what she sees and how she feels at that time. I am calling on her initial senses to play a key role in her thinking. This approach of using memory and remembering to shape our thinking enables us to collectively understand the cloud's form. With these different descriptions stowed in her mind I ask her to find a picture of a cloud that possibly represents elements of what she sees. This way we might be able to come to some agreement about what her cloud might look like and we would have something we could investigate further. We have some collective understanding about how we might create the cloud, making it appear voluminous and interpreting this information in her drawing.

Have our conversations that called upon her senses affected her awareness of a cloud? Have these elements helped her to understand a cloud's form and therefore interpret the cloud as an intelligent object in a visual way? Has the unison of the real and the perceived real aligned with Sokolowski's notion of absence and presence? As part of the process to recall a cloud experience and apply it to the present state, I am asking my student to be displaced and to live in both the past and the present. I am asking her to remember and to anticipate—to perceive a cloud in different states of consciousness. I am inviting her to think meta-cognitively. Sokolowski's manifolds of appearance, and in particular remembering, imagination and anticipation, has been a vital part in exploring and interpreting the cloud. This thinking enables us to act in a phenomenological way towards unearthing integrity in art.

Other students become interested in our conversation and cloud study, so I extend the opportunity for them to share our exploration. The consequence of this is a 'cloud lesson'.



Images: Student cloud studies, 2017

Among the images created in the 'cloud lesson', I can see each of the students' different nuances and interpretation of the cloud in their play. In one image, the fat

and thin layers of watercolour and dye endeavour to capture the voluminous essence of a cloud. In another, the darkness of night time contrasts against the light. And in a third piece I see the dense opposed to the wistful. Each image has a different feel, formed from the way each student saw and understood a cloud to be, based on the same question, “What does a cloud look like from above”? For some they move past this being a technical exercise to one where intelligent art making is governed by their actions. They act on consequence applying their intellect as part of their perception.

What is apparent to me is how my students’ perception of the cloud and their ways of seeing and interpreting the world nourishes them. The students’ new ways of seeing allows for the study of the form to be deeper and for the individuality of each student to become present. If I can bring Sokolowski’s way of thinking and interpreting into my lessons even further, and make my questioning more explicit in my teaching, can I find other ways to extend the students to think and act in this manner? The students ought to be able to inquire and become more competent technicians, as well as interpreters of their own work. Artists have the power to use perception as a premise to make art, to explore the world, to apply meaning and to be displaced between the real, the past, the anticipated and the imagined. As artists, we are lucky to be able to do this and to be able to tackle these questions that guide us towards change, and in doing so become better artists and in turn produce worthy art.

As a result of my classroom experiences outlined in this *Lesson* I consider interpretation and perception to be the synthesis that forms a tension between what we see and what we don’t see. When we start to make art, and apply a layer or theme of interpretation, a feeling of tension and doubt appears between the real and the imagined.

I liken it to the role the viewer plays when looking at a painting—some things we see, other things we don't. As Sokolowski states, “these experiences involve a blend of presence and absence. In some cases, focusing our attention to the mix of presence and absence can be philosophically illuminating” (2000, p. 18). The blend of presence and absence at different encounters may be balanced differently for each of us. The degree of being present and being absent can move and change. When we find ourselves in certain situations, other contributing factors in the environment such as noise, our attention, conflicting thoughts and the distractions of others can prejudice situations and influence or alter how ‘present’ we are in any situation. In life, we find a range of sensory elements that consistently interact with one another which can influence how we experience the world and the ‘self’ at any given time.

As we reveal these themes of interpretation, we can call upon Sokolowski's different layers of awareness to guide us. We see in real time, we can imagine, we can remember and we can anticipate. As part of this process, our thinking about experiences and objects might start to become more theoretical and move towards the abstract. The cloud project is reminiscent of these layers of awareness. Each student created an image of a cloud in the sky based on their interpretation, but if we interact and ask different questions of the cloud, how does our perception of it change? If we are to try to find an answer to the student's question about what a bird's eye view of a cloud looks like, we ought to be dialogical to find some shared meaning and move from doubt towards clarity in our interpretation.

Even though we found some shared meaning in this lesson, we can return again to the initial question—what does a cloud look like—and ask it a second time to see if

the question has changed given our interpretation and exploration of a cloud through memory and remembering. Is this question now more abstract and more theoretical for us? Has our understanding of the cloud deepened? Our question might be the same but has our response altered and do we perceive the cloud differently? The cycle of questioning and thinking in search of understanding about what we see and how it sways our perceptions is at the core of art making. I feel the cloud scenario indicated that intellect and intuition needed to come into play and interact. Elements like these need to work in tandem and push and pull as part of a discerning art maker.

Seeing the self through another

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With this thinking, allow me to indulge you in a personal experience. My encounter involves the coming together of an artist and two sitters to create a portrait. I am one sitter and the other is my sister. What becomes evident for me as part of the portrait painting experience is the different levels of perceptions and how Sokolowski's themes are at play. From the start I wonder if the artist and the two sitters each have different views about the painting. At the outset, the artist has an intent to create a portrait of us, but our perceptions or interpretations would no doubt be different. Anyone who has had a portrait painted can appreciate this perspective, as it is a time when you are uneasy, you doubt and you feel exposed.

I know from the beginning that this situation is going to challenge my notion of perception and make me question my own artistic practice. For this portrait, my

sister and I are painted in the artist's studio individually and together at separate times. This experience is not one I am initially content with at all, but my curiosity wins me over and I surrender myself to the artist and to my sister's desire for a portrait of the two of us to be painted. The artist, Kristen Headlam, is known nationally for her work and is collected in the Australian National Gallery. She is acclaimed in her field, so the opportunity of working with her is for me most intriguing, particularly as I am investigating the idea of perception as part of my own inquiry. I give my permission to sit for the portrait so that I can be in the artist's company and acquaint myself with her artistry as well as witness her technical process.



Image: Two preparatory sketches in pencil and paint done by the artist.

Preliminary drawings and sketchy paintings for the portrait are done over a few hours in a quick and candid manner as we share stories and conversations sitting in her studio. Being inherently uncomfortable seeing myself depicted, I have a mixed range of feelings about these preliminary drawings and hence what the final piece might look

like. I am acquainted with her work so I have a mental picture of the style of painting that might appear. I have in my mind what I might hope it looks like, but at the end of the day I have to wait, to anticipate, to see the outcome. I feel vulnerable but have to trust the artistic process, the interpretation and the perceptiveness of the artist to render me.

After many preliminary sketches, drawing studies, photo shoots and cups of tea, Kristen feels she has enough data to capture her response of me, and my relationship with my sister. I feel that she starts to understand and know me, and how I respond to the world.

After several months, the final piece is completed and revealed—it is not as I imagine. I am highly critical of my appearance in what I see. While I focus on my furrowed brow I am also in awe of Kristen's skill and ability to capture our likeness. The more I look and engage with the work, the more present I become. I recognise the relationship between my sister and me. What Kirsten captures is true and insightful—in the rendering I look somewhat quizzically up to my sister—I feel small. While drawn to my tense brow I am also aware of the vulnerability and skeins of tension in my sister's neck coupled with the tightness and smoothness of her skin. She sits tall, chin forward, hair pulled back, which is strong and articulate and exposes her high and structured cheekbones. My hair falls upon my face, my chin lowered and my neck is covered by my collar. The way the artist has positioned us on the canvas with consideration to the space and light that surrounded us acts as unspoken dialogue. My sister sits towards the light and both the direct and reflective light captures our facial expressions. The rendering of our individual gaze is impressive and speaks to both tension and compassion. The more I look at the work, the more the lines and strokes of oil paint start to take on different

shapes. These lines begin to imply different meanings and different intentionality. Each mark at the artist's hand reveals new ways of seeing and ways of interpreting the portrait. Under the thoughts of Sokolowski, each individual stroke weaves together to make the portrait. Each stroke is a part of the whole.



Image: The Sisters, finished portrait, 2016

But, it is not the 'me' I have perceived, imagined, or anticipated. It is however, an insight of me. There is an element of truth present and it is not an unfamiliar one. Faced with the completed portrait I consider my relationship as part of the past, the present and how it might shape the future. Through the portrait I see myself differently. I am reminded that my feelings about myself, my self-doubt and my vulnerability are more apparent than I have thought. I am reminded of our familial relationship and my response to my sister. These feelings are my own. Inadequacy reigns in the mind games we play as part of love and empathy. There are times when I know my sister so well and other times when I feel distanced. I feel I do not exist in her world but perhaps

this is by my own invention. Sometimes I cannot gauge how my sister responds to me, leading me into deeper and darker waters. Kristen has captured her perception of us but interestingly, for my sister and others it is simply a great ‘picture’ of us. I have never heard my sister speak or respond to the inner dialogue of the painting in a similar way to me. For her it is an aesthetic object placed into the world, a record and rendering of who we are. This is perhaps a more traditional view of a portrait when a painting is done to document and to record. As an artist and teacher, I consider what else I might learn from this experience. I wanted to see how another artist works and I now have a greater understanding of this as part of perception. From a self-efficacy view I learn more about the role of self-doubt and how it can be seen and transformed into beauty and compassion. I see that the state of self-doubt can be used as an ally to the protagonist of tension as a means to provide change and to demystify who we are. In both my sister and myself I see elements of beauty, not necessarily from an aesthetic view but as a response to who we are and how we act. In each of us there are levels of helplessness and intrigue, but it is how as artists we respond to these levels that can incite change. These elements can provide us with the ability to respond to and come to know the ‘self’ as part of being human. The portrait has a two-fold intention—an intention to capture us in time in the true nature of a portrait and to enable us to see more about ourselves and how others see us. This is an enlightening process and one that illuminates and secures for me the commanding influence perception has combined with the mastery of painting.

This example shows how the power of art making, when linked to the power of perception, is both alluring and intriguing by bolstering the different ‘layers of appearance’ that exist, helping us to understand the world through perception, remembering, imagination and anticipation. This is why art is rarely objective but is

often subjective and reveals why art ought to be open to interpretation, intellect and the acceptance of differing fields of perception. It is not just how we think or respond to the subject or object, but how we experience ourselves in the world.

Shadows of doubt

—

Here I turn to the work of Haim Gordon and Sholmit Tamari (2004) who interpret Merleau-Ponty and his work on being reflective, pre-reflective and reflexive as part of “sharing the earth” (p. 15). Shadowing and exploring Merleau-Ponty’s concepts adds another layer to the way I question perception. Gordon and Tamari consider how we might relate to the beings in the world through respect and with responsibility. Echoing their sentiments, I conceive that perception constantly establishes what can be called, from an ontological perspective, a shared world. A world where “every moment during which I am awake, my body shares my field of perception with the beings that I perceive and with whom I interact” (Gordon & Tamari, 2004, p. 25).

Gordon and Tamari bring particular attention to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the pre-reflective state highlighting,

the emphasis of the body’s perceptual involvement in the world, and its links to acts of consciousness, supports the tenet that human freedom emerges in the pre-reflective consciousness...this freedom emerges daily in a person’s bodily engagement in a perceptual field. (Gordon & Tamari 2004, p. 92)

When I think about the reflective state, I propose that when we are present in a situation we do not sit in judgment but rather we exist and respond to what we see and feel. When the students embody their art making they appear not to judge—they are in the moment, involved in their artistry. Perception at this level suggests that we encounter the physical aspects of making art. It is not only about rendering an object that we are trying to draw in a utilitarian way, rather it is about being part of the process, being open to a state of tension and being present in our actions. At this time, the students are in a pre-reflective state before reflecting on what they have just done. As my students become versed in the different layers of making art through my pedagogy, they can become more aware of themselves, their self-doubt diminishes and they see the world through different fields of perception. They don't just paint or draw to capture a form but rather they start to embody their actions. They become more aware and embed other ways of seeing and interpreting the object as part of the world. For different reasons, they may recall experiences, which may challenge their thoughts, not unlike my experience of being the subject of *The Sisters* portrait.

As a practitioner of many years I can relate to these challenges that confront the art maker and the different waves of emotions that rise and fall within my own work. When I am engaged in art making I embody the 'making and doing' of art. Tension and self-doubt are working in tandem. I am present when making but I also step outside this state and look back at what I have done. I call this 'knowingness', an intuitive feeling that overwhelms me when I am present or aware of my environment—a place or state where I am absorbed and caught in a trance of colour and the senses. It is as if I am almost part of the artwork. These feelings become overwhelming and I get caught within the image. From time to time I stumble, become frustrated and need to move 'outside' to

see what I have done. I need to look back at the shadows of my actions, my marks and make changes before I can move forward again. I feel the need for a relationship of the reflexive, the reflective and the pre-reflective, as this association affects both cause and action in my practice. This relationship is not always congenial but it requires me to be present, to dwell, to be aware of my senses and conscious of my creative measures. I ask questions of myself and I reference why I am pursuing this particular line of expression. Why is this image not working? What would happen if I added more dark and light areas to build depth? I imagine and reflect, I am aware, but I also look back inside my practice to see where I have been and where I might go. I sit in the present, reflect on the past and consider what the future might be.

For me art is about challenging what we see and encouraging others to change how they see. I want to provide a state of tension and place myself on the edge as part of life, questioning to expand my sense of self and my artistic vision. Teaching and holding an artistic practice emboldens me with this wish for each of my students. I desire for them to see this way too. As Jimmy and I proposed in *Lesson One*, we need to run towards the tension. To find this state of tension we need an element of self-doubt to be ever present so that we do not find ourselves in a state of complacency, but rather seek change in order to denote the plane of consciousness, freedom or Greene's (1977) 'wide-awakeness'.

If I am to give weight to my overarching premise that art needs to have purpose and veracity, I need to continue to pursue this line of thinking in my teaching and my own art practice. I feel that my alignment to Merleau-Ponty's notions about being reflective, pre-reflective and reflexive as part of sharing the earth are sound and prudent and lead

to greater awareness. These states fuel our actions as we endeavour to move towards this plane of consciousness. For true art making to occur, we can indeed embrace Greene's notion of wide-awakeness. Wide-awakeness suggests that to find creative freedom and to be perceptive to new experiences we need to embody our actions. Greene (1977) adds to this idea by saying,

When a person...is open to new ways of seeing, he or she can travel to new places, enter new aesthetic spaces, and locate himself or herself in an intersubjective reality reaching backwards and forward in time.
(p. 123)

The images we build in our imagination operate as a mirror to the self and as a window to other possibilities. I can see possibility in this way of thinking, and in mentoring it in my students' practice I can open them to possibilities, and importantly encourage their creative endeavours to have a higher purpose and meaning.

Becoming wide-awake

—

While crafting my work for *Tension* I had in my mind a mental picture of what each image might look like, but I needed to find the best way to express them. In my mind's eye I saw images that were ambiguous and deeply saturated with colours and tones of black and white. I sought for the work to have abstract qualities and the capacity to lead the viewer in and around the image. I wanted to give the viewer a small element to identify with but not enough information to be content or view passively. I wanted the viewer to be curious about what they were looking at and how the origins of the

image came about, committing them to investigate what they saw in front of them, challenging their perceptions of what they saw. I wanted them to be able to pause and remember what they had seen. Pausing allows for reflection. This reflection is part of the learning and decision-making that moves us towards creative freedom. As an art maker I wanted, in some way, to affect the viewer and share with them my inquisitiveness and views about the world. When we are able to pause we can consider our actions and our perceptions of an experience might alter. I wanted the viewer to pause and to dwell. I wanted to leave behind a voice in their mind that may allow them to think back and think forward in time. What impression had I made?

When I reflect on the *Tension* exhibition and remember it today, this passage of words by Jimmy resonates with me, particularly when I think of the reflexive, the reflective and the pre-reflective. Jimmy's words elucidate the different states we can be situated in. He writes,

Feeling like an imposter, unwilling to
 foster the thought of sweet blessed
 relief: a pause from the chatter in your
 head that galvanises every thread, every
 fibre of your being, waiting for another
 sensation of a feeling. Nothing becomes
 something when that moment is broken.

(Jimmy, 2016)

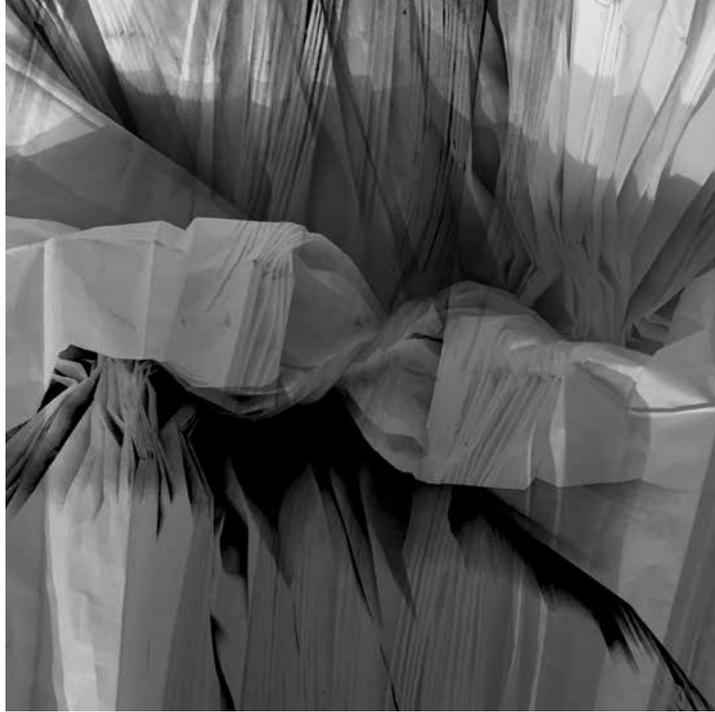


Image: Fists, Tension exhibition, 2016

Jimmy's words were written in response to my image called *Fists*. The image represents the unspoken feeling that is felt when two surfaces touch, pushing against each other, neither one relaxing but rather where a constant, gentle level of force is applied. The dark cavern to the left releases the viewer's eye into a void—it acts like a 'pause'. Often in traditional landscape paintings we see a small area of sky or water strategically placed in the work as a 'way out' of the painting. This small break in the image allows for space, for reflection, doubt, for the viewer's eye to find space before returning to the focal point of the work. My image, stripped of colour is still evocative. One wonders if the moment between the two fists might be broken, if they might soften their grasp or if they continue to gently support or repel against each other.

My conscious action of crafting this piece was built on my reflection and my need to break out of my routine of working. The combination of these aspects—

reflecting and crafting—allowed the work to exist with more purpose and for me, gave weight to its integrity. Centering my line of inquiry around perception is important for my learning, understanding and ultimately mastering the act of making art.

As a teacher, reflective practice is important. Looking at what has been created by the students and making decisions based on what they see, what has been learned and what their intentions are, drives my need to teach and to be a better teacher. If each of my students can arrive at this point of understanding, a sense of freedom or being wide-awake can be realised. Moving through their creative routines and finding new ground by the way each of them perceives both their work and themselves occurs at different times. Following this mindset, Daniel Smith and John Protevi (2015) interpret Gilles Deleuze by saying, “the task of art is to produce ‘signs’ that push us out of our habits of perception into the conditions of creation” (Smith & Protevi, 2015, para. 70).

With new understandings about perception and how it can be explored in art and in the art classroom I suggest that we can confidently move, as Greene (1977) suggests, towards wide-awakeness and become free to act, create and make decisions. Sella Kisaka and Ahmed Osman (2013) in their paper, “Education as a Quest for Freedom: Reflections on Maxine Greene”, shape this notion further by saying, “Once a person can do this, he or she is empowered, is autonomous, and can make real choices” (Kisaka & Osman 2013, p. 339). This empowerment is a goal I have for my students—to instil in each of them the capacity to become ‘free’, to be vulnerable so that they can make art with intent. Vulnerability as part of tension in this context provokes questioning for self-empathy but not emotional neglect.

Here I offer an example of a student who, for me, found self-actualisation, or Greene's (1977) idea of freedom within herself and within her art. I have taught this student, Adelaide for the past four years. As a consequence of her high school studies and her love for visual expression she studied art in both Year 11 and Year 12. During two culminating years of art making I feel she traversed her traditionally perceived routines into creative actions partly because of her skill development, and partly because of her response to her exploration of different layers of perception. Through her learning she responded to her self-awareness and to her awareness of the world around her.

In Year 11 Adelaide produced a suite of images based on her experiences of the landscape and what happens beneath the ground. As part of her reflective practice she expressed in an essay the foundation of her ideas and the way she perceived her reality. She wrote,

My background, upbringing, education and environment are all contextual factors that give me a better insight into how, what and why I make art. I like to explore, perceive and create landscapes stimulated by my upbringing, my place and my feelings in and about beautiful Tasmania. I have explored the layers and the sedimentation of the land and the relationship between people and the earth's surface – the deconstruction of the landscape. (Working Paper: Senior Art Student, 2016)

She continued explaining her practice.

One of my current pieces, which for the moment, has three panels that sit together, depicts the layering and dark tones of the landscape, exploring the deep dark mysteries of the soil below. The pieces sit next to each other creating a contrast between the colours, yet there is cohesion within the shapes and the folds. The rough torn, and elegantly falling edges of the paper play tribute to rolling hills and the gentle sloping changes within the shapes and shadows made by the landscape. (Working Paper: Senior Art Student, 2016)

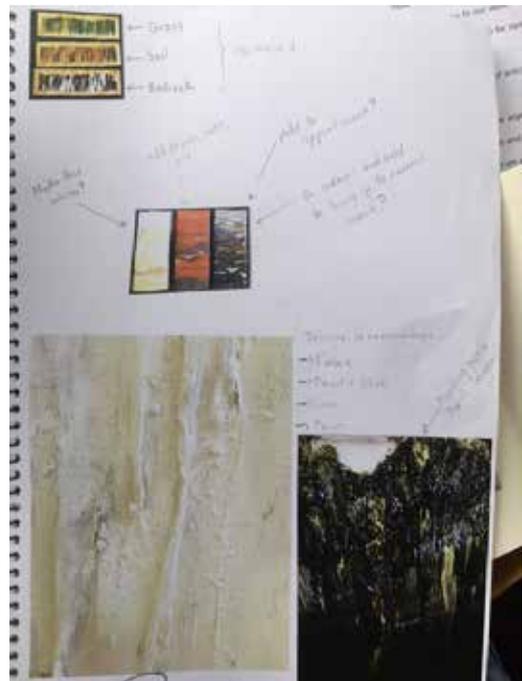


Image: Examples from Adelaide's working journal

Adelaide's words combined with the above illustrative examples from her journal show her preliminary attempts to explore her perception of the landscape. The pages show and map out some of her initial concepts, her thinking and her reflective

notation. Her planning outlines the ways she has moved towards gaining autonomy in her practice through her workings through preliminary drawings and the observations she undertook that led to the development of her artistry. Initially in the classroom she showed a very real sense of doubt in herself and in her ability. This was a stumbling block for her, but this vulnerability did not temper her inner sense of ‘knowingness’ and her desire to express her ideas with potency.

Adelaide was and continued to be questioning and exploring her ideas and sense of self through her artwork. In her Year 11 studies I recollect how together we experimented with materials to find effects that might assist her in her goals and forge what she saw in her mind into reality. She was not just repeating her actions or what she knew, but rather she was open to transforming and changing as she created. I showed her how to work with wax as an overlay to her paint and I left her to ‘play’. I observed her working with this wax medium and noticed she had become transfixed with the way it reacted to different paint surfaces. She started to explore how this technique could change her patterns of habit—how using her materials could add to her skill base as well as open up to possibilities and new layers of interpretation. Her preliminary perception of the landscape and the way she manipulated materials had transformed, which built awareness of herself and her practice. From imitating the landscape into responding and interpreting the landscape, she grew to know her practice more intrinsically and made decisions that led her to be ‘free’, creative and to show a command of her practice.



Image: Adelaide's final folio for exhibition

This image documents parts of her final submission for external examination at the end of her Year 11 studies. As a point of interest, she gained an exceptional award for her studies, as the body of work showed not only resolution of an idea but also her imagination, responsibility, self-awareness and her working process.

I believe Adelaide's experience was authentic and true to herself. The way I reflect on her and describe her learning is reminiscent of the ideas of Kisaka and Osman (2013) as they reflect and analyse Greene's (1977) notions of freedom as part of an authentic education. "Imagination and the arts can provide experiential opportunities to see the world from multiple perspectives, helping individuals 'wake up'" (Kisaka & Osman, 2013, p. 338). This was revealed by Adelaide's character, artwork and how her imagination, expression and being open to opportunities were pivotal in shifting her

perceptions and moving towards freedom through heightened perception. You see her rich progress when I describe and share her Year 12 work situated within the research and interpretation of the human virus in a future *Lesson*.

My exploration to ascertain how students seek freedom and become ‘wide-awake’ has led me to explore the idea of how we might come to understand ourselves better through our consideration of perception that we embed in our experiences. To be a responsible teacher I have to try to be a critical friend to my students and challenge them to think about the world and their interpretation of it in different ways. Together, my students and I need to consider the significance of perception in art making and its bond with intellect to make work that surpasses a simply ‘cosmetic’ or an ‘entertaining’ display of ideas. I have shared my desire to scaffold the students’ skills so they can toggle between the different states of consciousness, tension and self-doubt to gain insight into how this change in action might influence them—not just as creators or artists, but about how experiences can promote exploration, questioning and in turn, manifest their ideas and imaginations into a depicted reality, which is expressive and an extension of the self.

So, when a student says to me, “I want to learn to draw”, I now know that I have the tools and strategies to help make this happen. I can invite each of them to move forward as a maker and responder. An innocent request to learn to render the world in a simple way becomes a complex and layered operation that opens up the student’s fields of perception. Many of my students no longer see through a tunnel but rather their peripheral vision has been unlocked. As White (2011) implies in his work, “Drawing is more than a tool for rendering and capturing likeness. It is a language...it is a metaphor

for all art activity” (p. 2). Drawing leads us to intellectualise what we see. It gives us insight to decipher our experiences and allows perception to drive us forward. After my exploration, I am even more sustained by the need to underpin art making with perception and to hold my students accountable for their actions.

What is apparent for me, is this. For perception to hold weight in a student’s art making, she needs to show her willingness to be open to ideas, to allow herself to be vulnerable, to doubt and to welcome tension into her learning experiences. As each of the students become more aware of the world around her she can see every possibility, value the quest for artistic freedom, and have the ability ‘to be’ and to ‘live through’ art. From the initial lessons of drawing used as a preliminary way to explore perception, through to the resolved work by Adelaide, who is passionate about the expressionistic landscape, we can see that perception and interpretation can, as White (2011) affirms, transform our perception and thoughts, which can teach us how to think with our eyes.

With this insight into the fields of perception I invite you next to explore the role of aesthetics and its impact on art making as part of the *Lessons* of art. Investigating ways to translate our experiences into signs and symbols governed by aesthetic sensibilities is important for my inquiry to continue. Now is the time to explore and grapple with aesthetics in art as part of truth and aesthetics as part of our experiences. The next *Lesson* opens up aesthetics not only in relation to the adage of beauty but how it connects to and can be embodied in our human experiences.

LESSON FOUR

The time where I see beauty reveal its truth

Beauty in the unknown

Beauty as part of truthfulness

Confronting beauty

Truth and play in the vivid present



LESSON FOUR



The time where I see beauty reveal its truth

Wow! That's cool.

That is beautiful.

What is it?

Hmm, I could do that.

I kind of get it but it's not my thing.

(Student Responses, 2017)

I have come to know from my classroom experiences that students recognise artwork that looks good, and instinctively they want their artwork to 'look good' too. They have alluded to this in their comments to me. Statements like, 'That is really cool' or, 'Gee that is really beautiful', are not uncommon in my classroom when the students describe the work of self and others. I think, for them 'cool' means something that is pretty,

affable or appealing to the eye. They like this idea of ‘cool’ and equally they want people to like their artwork. But if their desire to make art that is simply ‘cool’ or ‘looks good’ for the purpose of affirmation is all that matters, I need to ascertain why this is so. I must establish what might make my students look at and experience artwork differently. The first three *Lessons* have investigated elements that underwrite the making of an artwork—tension, story and perception. My next *Lesson* is judicious in order to seek further comprehension about what might enable the first three elements to culminate into art that moves past the description of ‘cool’ and towards the artist’s truth and the experiential. Learning to make and interpret artwork that speaks to aesthetic sensibility is vital, but it alone is not sufficient. Through aesthetics, art needs to evoke an experience. Art is powerful and conveys stories but what makes for a richer collaboration? Thinking about ways to understand aesthetics is the theme of *Lesson Four*. If a term like ‘cool’ is all the students crave, at what cost does this come? Addie, who is a Year 12 art student, reflects on and writes about her Year 11 art folio.

Last year in art I created a set of collages that were colourful. They were made up of different cool shapes filled with swirls of paint and people’s faces. None of the elements connected with each other, they were just pretty pictures. (Working Paper: Senior Art Student, 2017)

Perhaps Addie also understands that making something ‘cool’, which is just pretty but devoid of substance, is not the ultimate goal for art making. It might look good, but it is certainly not compelling.

I ask my students what they mean by their comments relating to ‘the cool’. Generally they can’t get past responses such as, ‘I don’t really know’, or ‘something that looks good’, or something that is simply ‘pretty’. The meaning of ‘cool’ varies depending

on the student, but the images they refer to as ‘cool’ tend to be pleasing to the eye, meet with the trends of Instagram, or are images derivative of social and cultural orientated blogs on the Internet with little-known history. When art does not fit into the category of ‘pretty’ or doesn’t sit comfortably with the trending feeds of social media, the students can be less interested and less willing to explore the qualities of substance and purpose. For example, abstraction or work from past art genres commonly tends to leave them cold and speechless—it might leave them in a state of ‘anaesthesia’ where they are numb and often dismissive. My students can be quick to reject artwork or art experiences that do not meet with their immediate, ‘pretty’ expectations, or fit within the realms of ‘cool’. This absence of veracity leads me to question how we experience and how we use aesthetics to describe, interpret and produce art.

I consider aesthetics to be similar to perception as seen in the last *Lesson* in that we have multiple ways of interpreting aesthetics—an indispensable layer of inquiry for understanding art, making art and experiencing art that has integrity. To expose the notion of aesthetics from different viewpoints might lead to further discernment about what in a student’s mind is ‘cool’ or ‘not cool’. These phrases for the contemporary art student seem to be aligned to a popularised notion of the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘pleasing’.

‘Beauty’ materialises as a generic word that finds itself traditionally associated to aesthetics. When we consider and talk about aesthetics, beauty tends to follow alongside as an obvious partner. For me this is not dissimilar to the relationship that is formed with the common student sentiment from the previous *Lesson* of, ‘I can’t draw so therefore I am not good at art’. Comments like these seem to be problematic for making art as they can disable the students from moving towards depth and breadth in

their learning. Understanding other ways to see and explore the aesthetics of art seems to be important for my inquiry and for my pedagogical reflection to continue. *Lesson Four* proposes to reveal and explore aesthetics primarily through my lived experiences both in and out of the art room.

So, let's turn beauty around and play with it and mess it up. Let's try and see beauty from a darker, more subterranean level to see if this elucidates my ideas further. Let's try and find other associations of beauty in art to unlock other views. Removing beauty from the students' derivative reference of 'the cool' might inform their decision-making and bring confidence to their thinking about aesthetics. For me, to disarm the generalised use of 'cool' in art there needs to be a shift in the way each of the students experience and describe art. Does the word 'beauty' have to be aligned with the idea of 'the pretty', 'the perfect' or 'the cool'? Can I take heed and push my students to see beauty in an unconventional sense and seek to find beauty in the less than perfect, giving them the opportunity to jumble things up? Can this approach jolt the students to appreciate or think of beauty differently, and potentially release it from their association with 'the cool'? Like perception, which has a manifold of identities, how do they decide what is beautiful? What do they ultimately see as being 'true' for the self and for art?

I observe from my teaching and from being conversational with others about art that traditionally, we think of aesthetics in art as the culmination of beauty—the different elements of a painting, an object or a photograph are in balance and produce a work that is pleasing, something that we understand and are comfortable with. A sunset, not unlike the one below, radiates a spectrum of yellow and pink through to the early evening blue of the summer sky and sits within what we might think of as beautiful.



Image: Photograph taken on a visit to my home town on the North West Coast of Tasmania, 2017

While my snapshot is in essence a clichéd example of the landscape at sunset, it fits within our general understanding of beauty and aesthetics. The sunset is both a picture of wonder and an experience that brings balance. The sky's aesthetic is seductive given the luminosity of colours. The silhouettes of the hills that wander along the horizon line grounds my eye and contrasts against the harmonious colours of the sky. I am drawn into the sky as it supports cloud forms that look like spinning orange and pink tops. My image has elements of movement but its beauty invites me to experience an inner sensation. I feel calm and comfortable. Beauty, in this regard, channels a feeling of contentment. And while this notion of beauty is not bad because it heightens our mindfulness of the world, I think it is pertinent to question and interrogate the term 'beauty' because it runs the risk of becoming subservient to the general perception of art being about the comfortable, the identifiable and essentially 'the cool'. This generality of beauty might seem suitable for the unintended viewer, the lazy student, or even the

hobbyist of art, but in my estimation this alleged connection of beauty with ‘cool’ has eroded art’s potency, which I believe makes aesthetics harder to teach. To guide my students I feel that I need to decipher and shatter the codes of ‘the cool’ and ‘beauty’. As human beings, we are persuaded by general aesthetic elements and seemingly are more at ease with the expected rather than gravitating towards challenge and change. When I think of how some of my students align beauty with ‘cool’, I am persuaded that for most of them ‘cool’ is a contemporary and empty term used to describe a narrower view of aesthetics. The notion of turning beauty around and inside out is worth pondering further. I must say I love when I can challenge my students to think this way.

The nature of beauty is an enduring theme in Eastern and Western philosophy and culture. Beauty has traditionally been counted among the ultimate values along with goodness, truth and justice. Crispin Startwell (2017) refers to the classical conception of beauty as, “an arrangement of integral parts into a coherent whole, according to proportion, harmony, symmetry, and similar notions” (para. 36). This is a primordial concept of beauty and is embodied in classical and neo-classical architecture, sculpture, literature and music, regardless of where they appear. Startwell (2017) quotes Aristotle from the *Poetics* saying, “to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must...present a certain order in its arrangement of parts” (Aristotle, p. 2322 in Startwell, 2017, para. 37).

When we look at an image or an object we tend to see it as a whole form, yet we ideally describe it in parts or through the individual elements that create the whole. We look to the different elements to help us in our interpreting. As seen from exemplars in previous *Lessons*, my students are adept at pointing out different elements of an

image when prompted with suitable and leading questions. Fostering a connection to an artwork can be easier when it is well-designed and adheres to the aesthetic conventions of art making. For example, an artist can deliberately use light in a dominant manner to alert the viewer's eye to the main focal point. Or in contrast, an artist can subtract and deconstruct parts of the subject, including fewer and fewer things in the composition. In a foreword about the New York School's *Black Paintings* curated by Stephanie Rosenthal (2006), Director Chris Decron reflects on the words of Deleuze, who implies,

when we perceive an image we identify with different parts responding to the elements that we are comfortable with and the things that appeal to us as part of our reality or sense of truth. (in Rosenthal, 2006, p. 007)

These decisions around composition ultimately depend on the artist's intention. As artists and viewers, we are drawn to the essential parts of aesthetics, which is a reflection of the self and what we respond to.

For example, as I look out of my studio window I am drawn to the turning autumn leaves dancing and spinning as they part company with their branches. My eye catches the cover of a recent art journal, glossy to the touch, colourful, with embossed writing embedded on the front. I consider the delicate form of a small hand-made porcelain espresso coffee cup that I am holding. It sits comfortably in my palm and as I lift it to the light it becomes radiant. The gently scalloped rim looks like the edge of an old-fashioned rose. I want to cradle the form in two hands to support its suggested fragility. The simplicity and delicacy makes it attractive. With each of these beautiful objects I describe the different parts that make up the whole form. Each piece is, as Aristotle proposed, balanced and ordered. Based on my learning, for me beauty can be

about appearance, balance, order and truth. It is about what appeals or pleases the eye, combined with what I can identify and explain. Or as Decron (2006) advocates from Deleuze, we subtract things that don't interest us. Beauty is transient and evokes a sense of intentionality.

When my students look at any notable artwork I remind them about the conventions of aesthetics. I ask them to tell me what elements they think the artist has used to successfully provoke meaning and to capture their attention. How has the artist controlled the light, the shadows, the colour palette and ordered the objects on the canvas or page to show meaning? These are elements that they as artists might be considering as part of their own practice. Selecting these elements with intention and executing them convincingly shapes an artistic purpose, rather than just placing austere symbols on a page in the hope that they might form an aesthetic whole. As artists we decide on our objects or symbols and then, “the ordering takes place, the composing of sensuous and formal elements, the embodying of what has been perceived and felt and imagined...” (Greene, 2001, p. 12).

The history of art again and again provides us with theories and rules about balance and harmony. To find some context for this I seek guidance from the Renaissance period's 'Golden Ratio' theory that was devised as the primary method used to control space and arrange the subjects on a canvas to fulfil the needs for elegance and order. The depictions of the bible and mythology as seen in some of the great works of Leonardo Da Vinci and other period artists are set in romantic light-filled spaces. The 'Golden Ratio' theory aided artists to shape compositions that achieved balance, beauty and harmony. But regardless of the way the artist controls the space and uses the art conventions,

we must not forget that the story being told in the paintings might have been about war, the grotesque, and even depicted a graphic beheading of Judith. Whatever the subject matter, the artwork may be considered to be aesthetically beautiful because it is constructed using theories of composition, which are about balance and order. When an artwork is governed by a well-designed composition it focuses the viewer and draws them towards what needs to be noticed. The design is balanced, the light is affirming and makes us feel comfortable, yet the content can be disturbing. Can we see beauty in the uncomfortable even though it adheres to the rules and the identifiable notion of beauty as part of aesthetics?

If we deliberate further on the notion of beauty—as something that is ordered and balanced—and stretch it out to survey the idea that imperfection can allow for greater individual interpretation and subjectivity, we need to see if we can identify beauty in other ways. I suggest the need to push past the comfortable and the balanced and mix up these elements to allow for a greater awareness of what beauty might mean. Sontag (2017) writes, “Beauty defines itself as the antithesis of the ugly” (p. 6). I interpret her notion to suggest that we are often afraid to refer to something as ugly. She continues,

Obviously, you can't say something is beautiful if you're not willing to say something is ugly. But there are more and more taboos about calling something, anything ugly...The point is to find what is beautiful in what has not hitherto been regarded as beautiful or: the beautiful in the ugly. (Sontag, 2017, p. 6)

Like Sontag, I too take the approach that we need to awaken ourselves to the ugly, the distorted and the abstract to try to find a better relationship or dialogue with beauty. Looking past the conventional realm may bring a richer sense of aesthetic appreciation and even admonish the whimsical term of ‘cool’ as an arbitrary descriptor

for beauty in art. If this can occur, my students might be less likely to dismiss what does not sit comfortably with them and be open to new artistic interpretation. Having said that, I do teach some students who already show greater discernment in their work and arguably they are students who have studied art for a longer period of time or who have families who foster and encourage artistic experiences. As a way to illustrate my point I present two student landscape paintings.



Image: Student work, Abstract landscape, 2017



Image: Student work, The landscape of the East Coast, 2017

The first image was painted by my student Lin and the second by my student Allie. Do Lin and Allie's images both sit comfortably with you? Do they sit with your idea of what a beautiful landscape might be like? Do they please you? Both pieces are based on each student's relationship and interpretation of the landscape and what resonates with each of them. One image is textural, brave, messy, angst-ridden and outwardly charged with emotion. The other is detailed, considered, balanced, safer and calm. For you, is one piece more challenging than the other to look at and relate to? Can it be described as beautiful under the traditional conventions of aesthetics? Or do you find yourself in a state of anaesthesia, bored? A student can conform to the prescribed theory of beauty and produce art that meets with generic expectation or they can push the boundaries for a more unexpected response. Under scrutiny, a teacher and a student can confront the notion of beauty and consider it a liminal part of making

and experiencing art. When considered in this way, the dichotomy between beauty and the ugly can put the viewers and makers of art on the edge to see artwork differently.

I won't deny that I am partial to abstraction and I understand the difficult aesthetic conventions and contradictions required for artists to take the 'real' and break it down into shapes and irregular forms. As I observe the abstract slathers of paint in Lin's work I sense a rumble of beauty and its connection to the landscape. Lin's experience of the landscape—her truth—has been decoded and exists as a series of interlinked intangible shapes in an almost completely monochrome palette. These slabs of oil paint are building in temper and while this work is far from aesthetically resolved she is starting to discern between her mark making and building the layers and depth of her work. Lin does not describe her work as 'cool' but rather speaks to her sense of beauty referencing the menacing and turbulent work of the pre-modern Romantic painter William Turner (1775-1851) and of Tasmanian artist Geoff Dyer (1958-). If Lin continues to look towards the conventions of aesthetics and play with them further, her work has much potential to roar with intensity and beauty in a less than conventional way.

This image is in opposition to the inner calm that we associate to the beauty of a landscape identifiable in the second piece by Allie. Allie knows that she can produce art that is balanced, pleasing and harmonious, confiding in the traditional notion of beauty. She realises that for her work to surpass the safe suggestion of beauty as 'cool' she needs to step sideways from this current mindset and aesthetic quality. At the end of an art lesson Allie informs me that she is bored by her work and she wants to try and 'mess it up' and play. She intimates that she does not want to make art that is 'soulless', 'cool' or 'nice'. She wants to extend herself and juxtapose her work with sections of

abstract lines and colours that momentarily jar the viewer's senses. She describes to me her aspiration to build a relationship between the recognisable and the unrecognisable. She wants to bring attention to her response to 'memory and time'. Before she leaves for the day we workshop an idea or two in the hope of finding possible strategies for this to happen. I suggest she consider leaving some areas of her paintings devoid of detail, or blend shapes together using a palette knife as this technique might work as a way to conjure the feeling of blurred memories that seem out of her reach. I wonder if introducing both the familiar and unfamiliar into her repertoire of ideas, the real and the abstract, might combine and challenge her conventional levels of thinking.

Beauty in the unknown

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The antagonist of the unfamiliar or the mysterious is present in my thinking. I associate the unfamiliar with darkness and a lack of clarity, which allows for a state for reflection. I believe that when uncertainty or serendipitous thinking confronts us, we can become dislocated from reality. Through this abstraction, in art we can lose a sense of inner calm as we struggle to identify an emblematic form. I find that for most of my students, if they cannot connect to aspects of reality, they are more likely to scorn and be disinterested in what they see. This is an important observation and one I believe I need to focus on to shift the students' unwillingness to challenge what they see in art and trend towards confronting the unknown. By approaching the aesthetics of art in this way I can support my notion that the unfamiliar needs to be present if the students are to be challenged and able to discern between 'the beautiful' and 'the cool' for the purpose of art. I think

that exploring the unfamiliar can bring about change in perspective and a renewed energy to the students' life and artistic experiences.

When I think of the unfamiliar in art I conjure a rich inky black canvas like the Abstract Expressionists or the dark backdrops of my *Tension* images. The darkness is not evil but alludes to the mystery of the unknown. As part of the human condition we commonly do not like being detained by obscurity and the feeling insecurity brings. When I experience darkness, elements are distorted, sounds are amplified and I squint to make sense of the shapes. I think asking more questions of the unfamiliar can help me to understand what eludes me, making me more tentative and alert to my surrounds and our sensations. The dark conceals, which is why I think these questions matter more than ever. The antagonist of the unfamiliar in this context is the character that fuels the contest between the light, the dark, the familiar and the unfamiliar.

In part, this notion of the unfamiliar makes me recall my reading of a recent art review of an exhibition by American artist Analia Saban (2017). I was drawn to Saban's work as a potential reference for one of my Year 12 photography students. What became interesting was the artist's connection to the writing of *The Fold* by Deleuze (1993), who argued for Gottfried Leibniz's writings constituting the grounding elements of Baroque philosophy. Deleuze proposed that the world is interpreted as a body of infinite folds and surfaces that twist and weave through compressed time and space. The artist, Saban borrows Deleuze's reference to 'the fold' describing the "cosmos as an origami universe that is forever expanding and unfolding; this process also mirrors our own continual folding of the external world into our interior, subjective experience and self-image" (Saban, 2017, para. 3).

For me, the reference to the unfolding universe reveals the undetermined and the dissonance that can exist as part of life. I suggest that we do not dismiss that which at first does not agree with our 'sense of order' and disturb our notion of truth. Rather, we might find ourselves perplexed and use this state of being as a catalyst for challenge, for expansion and as a means to unveil the inner self as part of the unfamiliar.

My focus is not only on teaching the elements of art such as form, colour and line to enable the students to place and order forms on a page. While understanding the relationships that exist between these different elements is significant, what is of greater curiosity for me is how my students use these elements to create sense of their world and an 'experience of aesthetics'. How do they use aesthetics as an experience of art as both maker and viewer? The old adage that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' seems fitting here, as we are all beholders of beauty and we all control what we do and how we act. As artists, we can learn to manipulate the aesthetics of art to suit our intentions and break or modify the rules of order to bring an experience of pandemonium. Activating, pushing and pulling the elements of aesthetics in art making can disarm and evoke the unfamiliar, revealing more than we first thought. We can go deeper into the profundity, dissolve the preconceptions of our thinking and strive to be compelling.

As a significance of my thinking I suggest that another stream of aesthetics exists, beyond a traditional connection to beauty. This notion of aesthetics is not just about beauty in a neo-classical style, but rather it speaks to how we experience aesthetics or have aesthetic moments. Greene (2001) says those aesthetic moments are, "Perhaps living through lyrical moments of our own" (p. 12). She continues,

It is possible to have aesthetic experiences with the sight of trees, animals, sunsets, and thunderstorms. But certain kinds of objects and events are particularly suited for aesthetic regard. These objects are made by living persons, for living persons; they offer each of us visions if we are willing to open ourselves to them. (p. 12)

I add to this by suggesting that if we are to be open to our aesthetic experiences we need to be present and embody them.

These different interpretations or applications of aesthetics—beauty and experiences—are individual, but when the elements of aesthetics collide and connect they work in tandem. Why? I consider that for art to have integrity it must share the principles of aesthetics, inviting the viewer into an experience that seeks to show the truthfulness of the artist. To further delineate these views, I see beauty to be about appearance but also a response to our inner truth, or as Deleuze intimates, the cosmos is like the unfolding of our inner self. This is why I subscribe to the experience of aesthetics as integral to finding truthfulness in art. Deleuze's notion of 'the fold' (1988) and Greene's notion of 'wide-awakeness' (1977) promote the need to be willing to be 'open', to 'expand' and 'attend' to an experience. To understand beauty as part of truth we must be present in our experience of art. I suggest that an understanding and application of aesthetic theory has the capacity for this to happen.

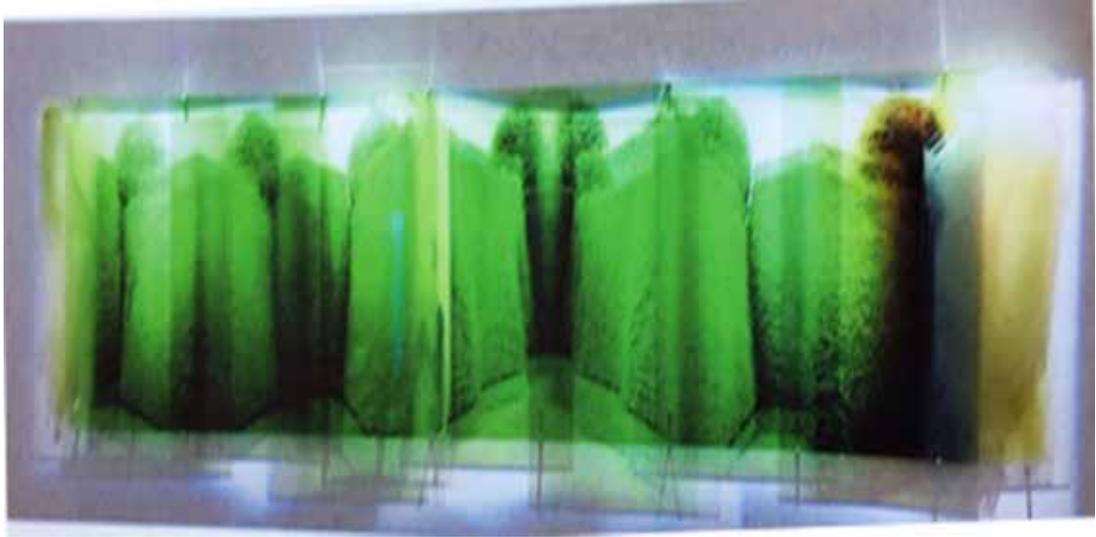


Image: Janet Laurence, Liquid Green, No. 5, 2008

Let's consider the experience of aesthetics when we look at this image by Janet Laurence, a contemporary Australian artist. The reflexive comments at the beginning of this *Lesson* are from my students as they first viewed this image. I remember seeing this work at a Melbourne exhibition a few years ago and since I have been a keen follower of Laurence's work. I like the aesthetic nature of her imagery, the textures, the colour palette and her technique of overlaying multiple translucent sheets of clear acrylic together to form the image. Her work is a response to her experience of the landscape—the way she sees the natural world, unveiling her truth as an experience of the landscape. Exploring the fragility and darkness of nature and its capacity to rejuvenate over time is a theme that presents in her work. As art curriculum writer Glenis Israel suggests, Laurence has a “unique vision of the environmental catastrophe to be conveyed to the audience, inviting them to reflect on the fragile ecology of the natural world” (2010, p. 31). Laurence's work is not a realistic or an empirical interpretation of nature, but rather it is modelled on the realistic elements of nature, which is interpreted and used as symbols for communication. There are elements in the work that we can draw

immediate associations with, but there are other parts that are more elusive, unknown and ephemeral.

I offer this image by Laurence to my students as part of a unit of study in their theory course. Rather than hand them an A3 colour photocopy for their reference, I project the work onto a screen so that they can experience it on a similar scale to my first encounter. Laurence's work is often interactive and her artistic concerns run "deeper than simply showing the decorative nature of the lush green bushes" (Israel, 2010, p. 32). Laurence wants the viewer to consider the potential impact of our actions and beliefs. "The vivid green verges on the toxic, thus linking the inherent beauty to some of the uglier results of human intervention in the landscape" (p. 32).

Before the class talks about the work as a group, in the hope of finding some shared meaning I tell my students about my experience of confronting the work in the gallery. I share how I immediately recognised the stylistic and aesthetic nature, her selected use of the art elements such as the colour palette, the design or placement of key features, and the way she masterfully manipulates her selected materials to create translucent effects. But what becomes evident to me—and to the class as I describe my interpretation of the work—is how invigorated I am recalling my viewing experience. I become increasingly more animated as I remember and describe my encounter with the work. Greene (2001) quotes Hannah Arendt (1958), who subscribes to the validity of my desire to make the students' experiences of art as authentic as possible, "Aesthetic education focuses on that space and what may happen there as a work of art is realised or fulfilled by a human being present" (Arendt, 1958, p. 182 in Greene, 2001, p. 194). I explain the aesthetic elements and how I experience and interpret Laurence's

compilation of signs and symbols. She has placed different aesthetic elements to make the work grounded and visually strong. Most of the students recognise and identify with the terms and ideas I am revealing, which leads to a robust class conversation about her work. I feel that each of the students connect with Laurence's themes and context. The class discusses and raises her use of colour and the techniques she uses to produce her work. We explore the abstraction of the image and how this evokes the landscape rather than just depicts it. At this time, the students' thinking supports the reflexive and reflective states of seeing and experiencing.

I have to remember that there are differences in the way each of us sees the artwork, which naturally influence each of the students' interpretation of the work. My class only has an image on a screen and my story about the work is based on my lived experience. I have to my advantage a firsthand experience and the truthfulness and reality of the work. I witnessed the multiple layers of the image that create the textural surface and the feeling of tension generated. I was able to move around the work and interact with the dark and light areas, whereas they cannot. Being present and having a direct relationship with the work had an influence on me—it made a difference to how I responded to the work and how I understood it to be.

At the time I am confronted by the artwork. I become more involved in my interaction and I need to spend more time exploring and interpreting what is before me. It is not good enough to simply walk away and not face the unfamiliar elements that initially grab my attention. The artist is not giving me all the answers and nor should she if I am to be part of the experience of interpretation. I have to dig deep, I have to work to make my way from the darkness towards a richer understanding of her piece.

Being part of the artwork is an experience that cannot be replaced with words no matter how profound they are. White (2011) says,

Texture registers visually. Images can produce adrenaline, as can sound and motion. Scale determines our physical approach to an object. We can still react to the world as animals, our bodies are receptors. (p. 81)

This is true for me, as I am animated by Laurence’s image. I am seeing textures and I am a receptor of her work, which is beautiful, dark, tactile, unfamiliar and evocative. The different facets of art making connect as a whole and the outcome is an image that not only has meaning but is technically well-designed, shares a colour palette fitting for the landscape, has form and is well-crafted—it has an overall evocative aesthetic quality.

I ask the students if they have ever had a similar experience. Have they been confronted by an artwork and challenged by it? Have they accepted the chance to be ‘moved’ and let an artist’s passion ‘unfold’ in front of them? Have they embraced the unfamiliar rather than accept a definition of ‘the cool’? Have they given this experience more or less time than the swiping through of an image on their phones? Do their experiences “keep the wonder and sense of mystery alive” (Greene, 2001, p. 194)?

Let’s look at this idea of experience of the unfamiliar more closely through a return to the history of art. Art has evolved and continues to do so as we inherit particular devices or principles to compose artwork that pleases the eye. Principles such as order, colour and light are the common associations but as new methods of art making develop, so do new aesthetic fundamentals or processes that relate to style and artistic intention. One only has to compare the compositional theory of Thirds in more conventional art making to the dynamic and unsettling designs of the Abstract

Expressionists and the New York School of the 1940s through to the 1960s to see this transition. When I look at the Abstract Expressionists' work I can see underlying hints of order are present, but as these artists rebelled against conventions—both art and sociological—they explored new ways to make art, which led to the rules of balance and order being challenged, and with these new notions they confronted our experience of equilibrium in art.

To firm my thinking about the unfamiliar in art, I return to the series of images created for the *Black Paintings* exhibition in 2006 at the Haus der Kunst in Munich that challenged the notion of beauty and aesthetics. These abstract works are described in the catalogue foreword as a response to “pure abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless...” (Decron in Rosenthal, 2006, p. 007). The paintings are dark, obscure and devoid of objects. They are an illusion of the *Die Nacht*. “Shut your eyes and see” (Rosenthal, 2006, p. 014) is a quote Rosenthal sourced from the first chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) to commence her catalogue essay. An artist can make art in both the dark and the light but when she focuses on the dark she can shift her senses to produce art that allows for exploration and for various ways of seeing and experiencing art.

The use of the dark is yet another way to challenge the artist and the viewer through the device of the unfamiliar. Artists who decide to use black as their premise tempt a special kind of seeing from the viewer, the kind that grows accustomed to darkness. Looking at a black image “demands a kind of seeing that leads to emptiness and makes us receptive towards it” (Rosenthal, 2006, p. 013). As individuals and as artists, when we are confronted with the darkness we struggle to see anything in our gaze. Eventually we are swallowed up by the darkness and turn inward. Decron says that

darkness leads to the unfamiliar, which is critical, for “not being able to see (anything) generates the ability to see in different ways” (in Rosenthal, 2006, p. 007). The feeling and the sensation of the unfamiliar, the awkward, the tension that is met in the darkness makes us see inversely. Being in a state of the unfamiliar can make for better art. Experiences of the darkness can provide the impetus for change—change to the self, our sense of truth and the way we appreciate the aesthetics of art that do not conform to the methodical and the conventional. Could the Abstract Expressionist movement have been seen as the death of painting with its intent to express the abstract? Or was it the rebirth of painting, as these artists challenged the conventional notion of beauty and the way we see? The artist and the audience are made to feel uncomfortable and yet the possibility of beauty and the artist’s truth can emerge as an enigma from that darkness.



Image: Mark Rothko, Black on Grey, 1969/70

This image of Abstract Expressionist Mark Rothko is one that I feel creates an impermanent place between the abstract landscape and how I commonly understand the landscape, allowing me to question my notion of ‘truth’ as part of our aesthetic

experience. While I cannot identify any object or subject I find myself drawn to the darkness. Rothko's work is dominated by black hues, and as an outcome of his artistic language the world appears to be simpler. Is this so, or in fact is it more complex? The work follows a classic style of design—the horizon line references and projects the sensibility of the calm. As I look into the universe of darkness and attend to the work I can identify balanced rectangles placed together as their blurred edges meet. I receive the work and apply my imagination and sensation to the fields of muted colour. As the receptor of the piece, I conjure my imagination and my experiences as I respond to the inky, rich surfaces that sit before me. My senses are active and my curiosity is alive.

While the artist has adhered to the elements of aesthetics, order and form, the painting lacks a cognisant link to reality. Rothko invites the viewer to be challenged. The planes of colour are beautiful, alluring, spiritual, and for me, transcend the mainstream view of beauty. Some of my students might not describe these elements as 'cool' as part of their modern notion of beauty. In fact when I show some of my students this abstract work they don't really offer an opinion at all. Their faces are numb. When I liken this painting to a night sky waiting for the sun to rise and be illuminated with the pretty colours of dawn they start to see it differently. When I ask each of them to consider the numerous tones and hues of black that make the night sky they start to see more. When I ask them to think of how they feel in the night time their imaginations become more alert. Their perception shifts and they are more enthusiastic to offer ideas. Their description shifts from what they see to how they feel. Some students even start to talk of their own experiences in the night. Links to other artists come to the fore. One student can see links to the work of Brett Whitely and his *Lavender Bay* series that depicts large rich blue areas of water that invite you to dive into. The artist's work becomes part

of an ephemeral experience and not just an object of illustration. A consequence of this is that the students start to see new ways to understand aesthetics in art that can move them into a liminal state where they can think about the dark or the unfamiliar. For Rothko and the Abstract Expressionist painters, the traditional or the neoclassical understandings of aesthetics are present, evolving and being contested. The students continue, as Greene and Deleuze intimate, to keep unfolding the self.

I have an artist friend David Hawley, who in his practice challenges the traditional sense of order and the notion of beauty to try to create an experiential situation.



Image: No Idea exhibition, David Hawley, 2017

In response to this Hawley created a series of paintings for exhibition in 2017 using a collection of floor brooms and household brushes. He applied the paint in an impulsive way, pushing the paint around a large canvas. The colours mixed and

the surfaces changed. His physical actions became his mechanism for decision-making, enabling him to make art in a less conventional manner. He told me he tried to surrender his considered artistic knowledge and understanding about balance, beauty and aesthetics and use impetuous actions as his guide. After a recent showing of his work we talked about the implications of his actions and how they changed the aesthetic quality and the aesthetic experience of the work to express an experience. He says in his accompanying artist statement,

When beginning a painting I aspire to remain open to possibility, to purge my mind of any preconceptions, to be without self-consciousness and the burden of consequence, to act intuitively and impulsively, to almost have no idea and to not know anything; nothing matters. This can be liberating... I strive to maintain this condition throughout the making but the longer it continues the more impossible it becomes. With every decision and every action the nothing moves closer to something. It proliferates as a cycle or loop between recognition and unrecognition, between creation and destruction, between hope and futility, between idea and no idea. (Artist Statement: *No Idea*, Hawley, 2017)

As part of making art we can break our conventional understanding of beauty and aesthetics, moving to challenge ourselves. If we hope for our artwork to have an edge and if we wish to find ourselves in a liminal state of art making, embracing uncertainty and the obscure is a brave response—brave enough to make art and be confronted by art. As artists we hope to reach a point of aesthetic understanding so that we can challenge the rules of order to learn and to hold a stronger presence in our practice. This is what my artist friend did. Approaching his work in this manner was a move away from art as beauty in its conventional sense and a move towards the unconventional. Hawley responds to similar ideas that purvey the Abstract Expressionists, moving away from his inherent understanding of the conventions required to lure the viewer. He

wanted to experiment and embody new ways of working to prompt new ideas. He wanted to challenge the way both he and the viewer interacted with his work. He knows that he cannot erase what he knows about aesthetics even though he tries to temporarily suspend this ‘knowing’ in this body of work. Given his knowledge, experience of art, connection to art history and the conventions of beauty, he has the control to incite his new actions so he can attempt to place the viewer into a state of instability—by breaking the rules of convention we might find what we do not know. White’s advice to his students is,

...nothing is more thrilling than to delve into the beauties of Titian, Turner, Rodin, or Cézanne or into the edgy excitement of contemporary work. But every student must remember that art is a constantly tilled field and its job is to overcome what we know in order to examine and celebrate what we don’t yet know. (2011, p. 99)

At the heart of art making there are fundamental principles and methods that can be contested and broken as part of aesthetic understanding. My artist friend is for me an excellent contemporary example of the ability to question the rules, highlighting the need for aesthetic knowledge to be masterful. Arriving at this point of questioning can lead us to challenge and isolate what we need to let go of as part of what we know. If we can decipher what we deem as truth at that time, letting go of the known might be part of the dark artistic experiment.

Beauty as part of truthfulness

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The more I unpack and apply my thoughts about the world of aesthetics and beauty to my work and the work of others, the word ‘truth’ becomes more prominent. As an artist I aim to communicate my own truth about the world, and as Jeff Malpas (2016) says of Gadamer, consider truth as not

...bound to a ‘theory’ or method of scientific understanding but rather through self-disclosure. Therefore, if truth leads to understanding and if we are to understand anything at all, we must already find ourselves ‘in’ the world ‘along with’ that which is to be understood. (Malpas, 2016, para. 9)

The relationship between artistic method and truth is an intrinsic part of understanding or unveiling the self. I intimate that in order to find truth we need to consider how we embrace and interpret our experiences in art. It is at this point of interpretation we can start to use our aesthetic experiences in the context of what is ‘true’ or ‘real’ for us. Does seeking a wider, deeper interpretation of art challenge our experiences as part of our practice, drawing us closer to understanding and disclosing the self as art maker?

To consider ways of exploring truth as part of art, I align it with inner dialogue that can be formed between the artwork and the self. This viewpoint can enable us to explore and communicate truth as part of our practice. Again as Malpas says of Gadamer,

The artwork, no matter what its medium, opens up, through its symbolic character, a space in which both the world, and our own being in the world, are brought to light as a single, but inexhaustibly rich totality. In the experience of art, we are not merely given a 'moment' of vision but are able to 'dwell' along with the work in a way that takes us out of ordinary time into what Gadamer calls 'fulfilled' or 'autonomous' time. (2016, para. 25)

For Gadamer art appears not to be about 'correctness' but rather about elements of the world taking on a particular appearance. This is where self-expression and interpretation are important. I do not want my students to be soulless and only create what they see as 'correct' to enable affirmation alone. I see this as futile and it disarms the potency of art and the artist. What needs to be disclosed in art are the elements of our experiences that create experiences for others by grabbing their attention and inviting them to attend the work. When we create art with integrity it transcends being safe and embracing intellect, the heart and being soulful. The decisions we arrive at ultimately flow into our hands as artists. We can choose to decisively manipulate the conventions of art to make work that is persuasive in its appearance as well as an opportunity for aesthetic experiences. This is where I feel truth becomes an indelible part of the maker's method. The application of the self to the artwork brings a deeper level of wakefulness.

This notion of truth is embedded into the ontology of aesthetics. My support for 'truth' in this sense is not only based on logic, but rather it is relative to the person. I do not understand truth to be definitive but instead I recount it to the personal. I refer you back to my student Adelaide, who produced three abstract landscape panels that I shared at the end of the last *Lesson*. I now speak to her more recent body of work that explores her dark inquiry about viruses occupying the human body. Investigating this theme invites the manipulation and contortion of a virus. To do this Adelaide

creates a set of drawings that turn into a set of textured black circular shapes that act as a metaphor for a virus spreading and morphing. She is curious about the enigmatic qualities of a virus and its insipid nature as it tangles, binds and unfolds itself in the body. She feels that “the virus is an ally with mortality” (Working Paper: Senior Art Student, 2017). From her preliminary preparation Adelaide communicates her notion of the virus, considering what is ‘true and beautiful’ for her and embeds this into her work. The organic forms she shapes from her initial drawings are rich, textural, black and evoke a sense of a void and the undetermined. As she continues to work, play and develop her forms she explores ways to display her work for exhibition in order to cultivate the feeling of tension within the virus. She attaches the virus shapes to the art studio wall and stacks them up to form textural pillars of darkness. When she works and layers up her rich black forms she tells me in a class that “it makes her feel still”. Adelaide, like Decron and Rosenthal, feels that the darkness allows for parts of the objects to be concealed, which produces new interpretations about the intangible assets of the darkness. Adelaide responds to her information, her research and accordingly turns her experiences into a form of truth as part of her creative expression. As she already has a strong understanding of aesthetics, as seen in the previous *Lesson*, she has a greater capacity to be challenged by and decipher ‘beauty’ in this dark theme. Through art she communicates her ‘truth’ and dwells within her work. As part of this she discloses elements of herself to others.

LESSON FOUR



Images: The virus shapes and preliminary ideas to display her work



Images: Adelaide's final installation

Adelaide's use of texture, the different tones and hues of black add weight to the illustrious nature of the work. She is not using black as a repressing blanket but

rather is weaving the many hues of the dark into the work to capture the nuances of the shape and the forms. She is brave, breaking into the unfamiliar while challenging herself. She is messy and confronts the convention of beauty as ‘cool’ as she wants more than making art that meets the expectations of others and in particular, her peers. She is working in an aesthetic realm of art making and provoking an artistic experience. Like Rothko she finds beauty in the dark and in the simplicity of form. By adopting her work as a lived example, I am aiming to convey the potency that art can have for the self and for others. It is also about upholding aesthetic qualities while honouring a soulful art practice. She shifts the way she appreciates aesthetics as part of her experience and I feel, as her teacher, that she takes her work to a more profound level and experience of her truth. Albert Hofstadter’s (1971) interpretation of Heidegger’s thinking in *The Origin of the Work of Art: Poetry, Language, Thought*, brings depth to Heidegger’s view that art is situated in the ‘experience’ as part of truth. Hofstsdter says,

Whether Heidegger speaks of truth as establishing itself in the being that it opens up or of the world and things being joined though the pain of rift or their dif-ference, he is always thinking of the opening up of the possibility of authentic human existence – of a life in which man does not merely go on blindly, withering in the grip of a basically false meaning of being...but rather a life in which man truly *dwells*. (1971, p. xiii)

Greene (2001) says in support of this, “We notice how these elements are ordered and composed for the embodying of what has been perceived and felt and imagined” (p. 12). These are the elements that give rise to the object or the event and they must be grasped, perceived and attended to in a certain way to give rise to another’s experience of a work of art.

I offer the following example by acclaimed Tasmanian landscape artist Phillip Wolfhagan (1963-) as a way to consider the aesthetics and truth in art from a more conventional level.



Image: Philip Wolfhagan, Experimental Garden no. 1, 2016

Wolfhagan is of interest to me partly given his wondrous, perplexing work that borders on the dark and abstract, but also because he is an artistic mentor for my two students, Lin and Allie, whose landscape work is situated at the beginning of this *Lesson*. Wolfhagan uses aesthetic characteristics to compose and create a painting that can be offered to others as an experience. He captures what he sees from his outdoor studies of the East Coast of Tasmania. Documenting scenes through drawing and photographing the world enables him to return to his studio with a range of findings as part of his lived experience. With these findings he can interpret his studies and combine them with what he remembers and how he feels. What Wolfhagan eventually provides us with after he responds to his field work is an image of the land, sea and sky—an image that, as Hofstadter infers, is not about correctness, ‘blindness’, or shall I add, the literal, but it is a depiction of the way he sees and interprets the landscape through both his aesthetic and real experience. His work is about appearance and the semblance of the world as part of his experience to find truth. Greene (2011) refers to art historian, Ernst

Grombrich (1965) who writes about how we can take the use of shapes and colours and turn them into a “semblance of the visual world” (Greene, 2001, p. 14). I suggest that if we can do this, the artwork can take on an aesthetic experience, a form of beauty, as well as stirring a transaction with human consciousness.

The work of Wolfhagan illustrates this point for me, as he takes elements of the visual world and interprets them as his own truth-making using the elements of aesthetics. His work is balanced and cleverly assimilates the real with the unreal. Slabs of oil paint are applied with discernment, honouring the ephemeral light source and the ethereal feeling of the landscape. What becomes intrinsic to his work and the work of good art is the transforming of human consciousness as part of thinking and interpretation.

In viewing an artwork we can accept what we see in front of us as ‘truth’ and be content and accepting of the scene. Or we can start to question the work further, looking for the reward of a greater experience. If we do the latter we can ask questions of the image such as, what part of the coastline are you from? What time of the day were you painted? What is on the other side of the horizon line? What sort of clouds are they? Asking questions means we attend to the work differently and invites dialogue with its aesthetic nature. This mode of thinking brings openness and allows for another dimension to be unravelled, creating a dimension to a world that we may have never suspected or experienced before. The painting cannot be definitive—it is not ‘true’ in a factual sense, however the viewer can be moved by the experience of the painting and its ‘beauty’. The different levels of aesthetics are combined.

Based on my example of questioning, try asking questions of an artwork that is in your immediate environment. Consider its 'truth' and how you experience or come to know the work. Does it exist as a beautiful object? Have the aesthetics of beauty been applied to give order and to share a meaning and truth? I support this style of questioning based on my experiences at a 2015 workshop at the Lincoln Centre Institute in New York, honouring the work of Greene and her work in Aesthetic Education. As part of the course we spent an afternoon at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We each had to find an artwork that visually appealed to us and consider its aesthetic qualities. What was the work's attraction? In conjunction with this we had to ask questions, out loud and directly towards the artwork. As I stood in front of my chosen work I reeled off questions, not unlike the ones I related to the Wolfhagan. The more questions I asked the work, the more questions came to the fore. My sense of 'truth' had been modified by my examination of the work. I had become more inquiring and inquisitive of it. The story around the piece became richer and led me to experience art differently. I became more conscious and consumed by the artist's process and how and why they had made their aesthetic decisions. After some initial hesitation, I do admit that this questioning experience changed the way I look at and make art, and consequently how I interpret work and teach. This experience made me appreciate even more that life and art making are borne from our responses, crafted by aesthetic features, nurtured by our life experiences, our interaction and 'play' (Gadamer, 1975; Greene, 1977, 2001) in the world. It is through these occurrences and exploration that I believe a greater relationship within the world can be sought and appreciated through purposeful and responsible teaching.

Relationships that become richer and deeper show how involved we can become when we interact with art. To discover truth in art, Gadamer (1975) wants to remove the emphasis from the viewer only interested in how the artwork appears, and instead encourage them to look to the object itself to see what it can reveal or disclose. When we are shrouded by darkness and the unfamiliar we can seek to find what art is capable of. Gadamer says, “Art is capable of something of a greater significance. Art is an opening to the world like truth itself” (1975, p. 89). This view is intrinsic to art and truth. I understand that for art to move towards integrity it needs to embrace the traditional notion of aesthetics—how it looks and how it is crafted. But if we want to discover more we need to consider how to combine this with how we experience and interpret art. All of these elements act in unison to remove the consumer-led or perceived notion of aesthetics and move towards representing the truth of the artist.

I do not believe that we can solely apply a generic statement that ‘all art is true’ if we are to respond to truth that speaks to the experiences of life. Lawn (2006) proposes that Gadamer’s strategy regarding art and truth is this—art is not specifically for outlining the beautiful but rather art is bound to experience, proposing that, “... truth in art is a form of truth about the world”, and “...uncovers truths about ourselves that no amount of scientific endeavour can reveal” (Lawn, 2006, p. 87).

This notion synchronises with my thinking, as I maintain that for art to be more than a beautiful, ‘cool’ object it needs to be an extension of the artist’s *ego* and an intrinsic response to an experience, which is in essence the artist’s truth. For art to become more than ‘just’ beautiful I do not feel that I can rely on method or process alone. I need to engage more than my intellect to make more of my experiences. Perhaps

the dislocation between the self and the artwork is why my students who speak of art as ‘cool’ are not able to speak about both their work and the work of others with conviction. Perhaps they have not found themselves in their own work and without a sense of their truth, their *ego* or their experiences, their work will not stand alone.

If I subscribe to the view that art is more than method I might also be able to find truth as part of art more readily and be open to remove any limiting boundaries and replace them with experimentation that leads to the unfamiliar. I propose that if this can happen, learning can be powerful. But to nurture this power I need to relinquish a reliance on method or routine alone and encourage the freedom of ‘play’ as part of an art practice. When I am open to the idea that truth surpasses method I can move towards revealing key elements of the self. I suggest that the inclusion of play and discovery into the classroom informs the self, and is conveyed into my students’ learning and experience of art. Including play and discovery can bring understanding and new ways to combine aesthetic features with experience, which in turn can enable art to move closer to Gadamer’s view on truth.

As part of *Tension* I started relying on Photoshop filters and a particular process to produce my images. I came to a point where this was overtaking my ability to think creatively and engage intellectually. Jimmy alluded to this one evening as we looked over some new work for the show. The images were not getting richer or better but rather staying the same. I instinctively knew this but part of me did not want to recognise it. The potency of the images was getting lost and I was not embodying the experience that was driving the work. Aesthetically they looked fine, they were ‘pretty’, ‘cool’ and were aesthetically pleasing but their meaning was lost. I was lost too—doing exactly what my students might do.

Truth in this context is not about the definitive or the conclusive, but rather it invites us into modes of making sense through aesthetics. As Greene (2001) says, “They [the arts] are not ‘true’ in the sense of conforming to some reality we know very well in common sense or in other ways” (p. 42). What I understand from this ‘truth’ is that it is the part of making art that enables us to make sense of our world, just like Wolfhagan, my artist friend David, and my experience of Laurence’s work. If we embody aesthetic experiences as part of our encounters, we can relate to the way artists conceptualise and experiment with how they see and express the essence of their world.

Confronting beauty

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In more recent times there seems to be an increase in conceptual and installation art, which is making an impact on my senior students because they seem to like the idea of creating an interactive environment. When they initially talk to me about creating an art experience modelled on an installation framework, I suggest they visit the close-by Museum of New and Old Art in Hobart, Tasmania (Mona) to see the work *Amarna* by James Turrell (1943-). Turrell is predominantly concerned with interpreting and creating experiences in response to light and space. The *Amarna* (2015) installation is a permanent fixture of the Mona collection and is a wonderful example of how the viewer can attend and become aware of aesthetics as part of an experience in a less traditional way. To view the work, people sit outside in a purpose-built pavilion where at sunset or sunrise they witness colours projected onto the ceiling of the pavilion that slowly change

and morph together. The roof of the pavilion has a rectangle cut out of the center, which enables you, at certain points and angles, to look through this into the sky. The colours reflect off surfaces and interact with the natural landscape and environmental conditions. Is this art, or just looking at a light show? Is it ‘pretty’, ‘cool’ or provocative? People are free to come and go during the work. Some sit for a long time, others tire quickly, some are less responsive and not willing to persevere or attend to the work, so they move on. This interaction between other viewers is curious and for me adds to the theatre of the artwork. What gathers and maintains their attention? How does the way we think about art, truth and aesthetics in this scenario affect us? As the sky changes and becomes light or dark, depending on the time of day, the way we perceive reality also changes—is this true or an illusion? This situation is not dissimilar to the black paintings of the Abstract Expressionists, or for that matter my student, Adelaide’s preliminary works of the obscure, opaque and textured response to a virus. Rather than demand recognition and affirmation, all these pieces require an emancipated and committed viewer. The hermeneutic thinking of Donatella Di Cesare (2013) supports this notion of the committed viewer proposing that,

the encounter with the work of art can impact life so profoundly that it can be the beginning of a renewal, or an entirely new way of living in the world. Since art is not an unreal reality, but on the contrary a reality elevated to a higher power, it can be said that being increases, strengthens...Art is an *experience of truth*. But wherever the conception of art changes the conception of truth will change as well. (Di Cesare, 2013, p. 46)

In the case of the Turrell installation, I suggest this work is not an illusion but rather it is Turrell’s ‘truth’, his representation of beauty through space and colour. There are cognitive values present in the ideas, demonstrated by the technical mastery of the

projection of the colours, combined with the science that links his relationship of landscape and space. Each time I attend the work I question the time of day and wonder how the colours can become empowering and hypnotic. This is the power of the artist's representation of truth.

Amarna is beautiful because it adheres to the tradition of aesthetics. The abstract morphing of colours, the design and balance of the architectural pavilion and the other environmental elements seduce you, please you and transfix you. And those who wish can allow themselves to become disorientated and curious about the way the real sky augments and reacts with the colours.

The Turrell work is certainly worthy of exploration as both an artwork and as an aesthetic experience. When the inquisitive students accept my advice and visit his work each of them return to me animated and willing to share their thoughts. They each speak convincingly about the use of colour and how the hues transition between each other reflecting and interacting with the landscape. The Mona website describes the work this way,

Turrell harnesses the numinous potential of light and space; kind of like what God would do if he decided to build a gazebo. We see *Amarna* as an elevation of the museum's hitherto subterranean ponderings of the human condition.

The coming together of the aesthetic elements affects our sense of reality about the world around us. Maybe from this we can question our own sense of aesthetic understanding as part of our human condition and apply it into practice.

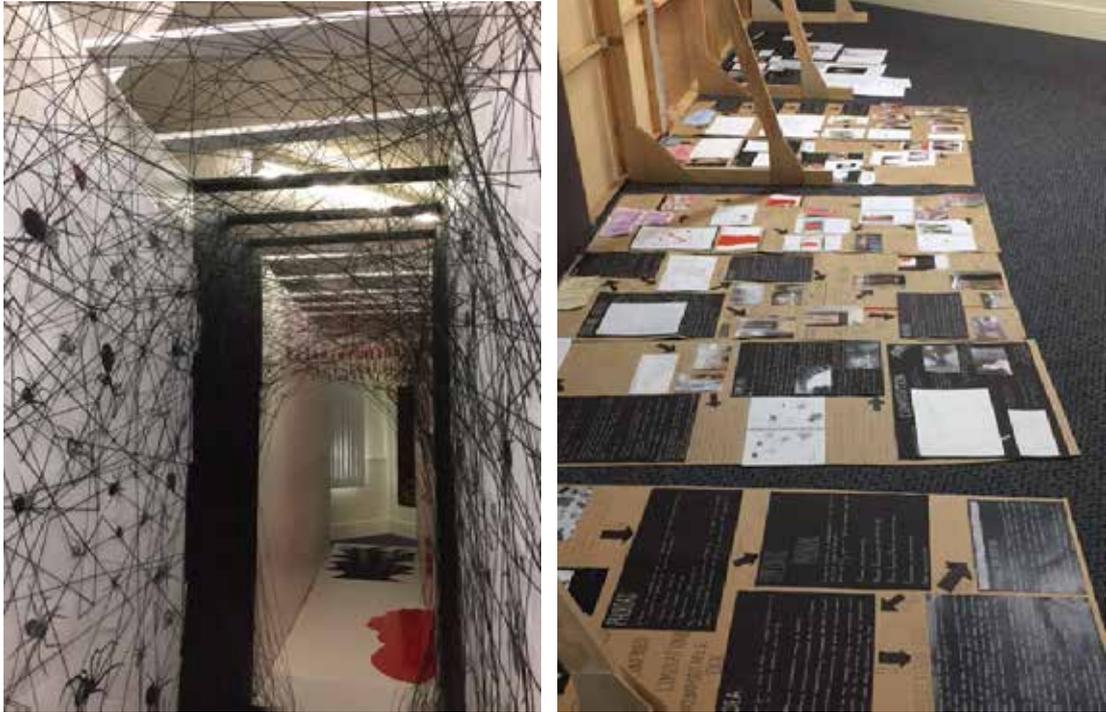
As a way to illustrate the power and challenge of creating an aesthetic experience in a similar vein to Turrell I share this classroom scenario. In 2016 I was teaching Celeste. She has studied art in the previous year receiving an outstanding award for her suite of expressive charcoal and conté drawings conveying her feelings and response to having a phobia of birds. She decides to continue her art studies in Year 12 and wants to challenge herself by creating an installation that embraces four phobias—fear of spiders, blood, heights and confined spaces. Her rationale for creating an installation is a desire to create a sensory environment where people interact with artwork—where they can be confronted by the aesthetics of art by being part of the work itself.

Entering a corridor Celeste constructs, there is a feeling of closeness and an element of caution. This space is slender, only wide enough for a single person to experience at a time. The opening section of the passage is filled with hand-drawn spiders that surround you, and you have to weave your way through the furry entangled wool that makes the web. This web becomes tighter. The restricted pathway closes in around you and makes you uncomfortable. The rich red blood that covers the walls in the next section makes a pool on the floor. It is smooth and cold and looks wet, which again plays with the senses. Syringes hovering above your head are loaded with red fluid ready to drip or burst. And finally, a charcoal drawing of a crevasse situated on the floor at the end of the corridor calls for carefulness. You have to slither yourself along the wall to avoid falling through the opening that she has rendered. At the end you feel an element of reprieve.

From her learning, exploration and artmaking experiences, Celeste is able to discern the materials that suit the four different phobias. She constructs the installation

considering the rules of balance and order as each section is equal in length and she uses a distinctive and classic signature colour scheme of red, black and white to create contrast between each phobia. Each of the four sections evokes new meaning and she cleverly manages to bind them together with consideration, fluidity and artistry. Her learning is based on a range of variations of her theme and is informed and considered. She wants the viewer to be engaged, tempted, present, and in attendance of this sensory experience. Celeste wants the viewer to feel the tension and insecurity that exists between each phobia.

Creating an installation is a brave undertaking but one she manages to complete with great success. What starts out as having the potential to be a clichéd ‘haunted house’ turns into a sophisticated piece of expression that calls upon the aesthetics of art, combined with the aesthetics of experience. Celeste has honoured her intentions, calling upon her experiences and senses to masterfully create this space that is filled with expectancy. My initial and tentative concerns about her ability to create a rich and conceptual experience are surpassed as she acts with sophistication and integrity. Her work of art, in the words of Arendt, has been “realised or fulfilled by a human being present” (Arendt, 1958, p. 182 in Greene, 2001, p. 194).



Images: The installation and her accompanying support material 2016

If aesthetics brings awareness to beauty, truth and experience we need to consider how our involvement in art making aids our learning and understanding of aesthetics. Celeste achieved this effect by the way she combined the layers of aesthetics with the human consciousness and showed discernment about her intentions. Her installation and artistic integrity took perseverance and she had to be challenged to break routines and to be more experimental, playful and conceptual.

Truth and play in the vivid present

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The notion of ‘play’ for art making takes a greater role in the dialogue of aesthetics as experience and is what I encourage my students to do. Both Greene and Gadamer explore ‘play’ in art making. Like them, I believe play embraces and expands the role of the artistic encounter. The word is a constant theme that runs through Gadamer’s work and allows for possibility—for the frivolous, artistic intent, strategy and exploration to be considered as part of our scholarship. Christopher Kirby and Bronlin Graham (2016) write about play under the philosophical inquiry of Gadamer and Dewey. They write that, play “should not be separated from the trappings of everyday life, but instead should be seen as one of the more primordial aspects of human existence” (Kirby & Graham, 2016, p. 8). Greene supports this with her view that, “the work...can only emerge as an object or event or encounter with some human consciousness, and this occurs in a vivid present – in which inner and outer time is somehow unified” (2001, p. 15).

In the previous example of Celeste’s work she had an artistic goal to make an installation that conveyed her truth about different phobias. She craved the viewers to encounter and be part of the experience by placing themselves into the work. She aspired them to actively perceive and be aesthetically conscious. As artists, part of making art is being stimulated by our experiences, and in essence the more we play and engage with our actions the more we live within the world. Greene quotes Alfred Schutz (1967) to explain this further,

Living in a vivid present...the working self, experiences itself as the originator of the ongoing actions and, thus, as an undivided total self; it lives in...experiences which are in accessible to recollection and reflection; its world is a world of open anticipations. (Schutz, 1967, p. 216 in Greene, 2001, p. 16)

This is a state where the working self interacts in the world bringing a state of consciousness to what we see and what we experience. If there is assimilation between our experiences, our play and our knowledge, learning can take place and meaning can become embedded into an artwork.

As part of my students' learning I wish for them to be lively, to take on the role of a 'working self' and not just create objects that have a sole purpose of beauty. As a teacher of art, embedding play into my lesson design is fundamental to aesthetic education. I suggest a student needs to embrace the role of experience as part of their practice to create a foundation for deeper exploration to seek truthfulness. I embolden my students to push boundaries, break methods, to be open to possibility in order to become more discerning.

I understand Greene and Gadamer's notion of play and the 'vivid present' as a push towards dismantling the boundaries of classical convention that gives permission for the artist to become part of or embody the experience of creating. This thinking reflects my pedagogical practice as I propose, that for the aesthetics of art to have integrity, giving the students permission to do so is my responsibility. I feel that encouraging them to play, to get messy, to move beyond the need for perfection through exploration is an intrinsic part of their learning. Encouraging rich exploration is integral for me as I might find that a majority of my students may only make art that is deemed to be 'cool'

by popular culture, entertainment or social media and as a consequence, lack any sense of self and ingenuity. This agitates me greatly. Art making should not always be about the end piece being ideal and perfect, but rather the need to be explorative should be embraced. The students need to interpret the visual world and find connections within it. They need to be able to decipher the aesthetic qualities of the less formal, unpack and ponder the mistakes and embrace the ‘ugly’ results. I consider mistakes and the less than perfect to be imperative for understanding and in turn for creating better art—art that is true. Through play and inquiry, the students can become life-long learners.

In response to becoming a life-long learner, the 21st Century classroom pedagogy steers us away from simply rote learning facts and pure logic in search of a conclusion (Marzano, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Green, 2001; Anderson, 2014). Rather, scholarship seems to call for a deeper understanding of content that can be shifted between learning environments. If we see some alignment to this method, it seems fitting to teach the students to transfer their knowledge into practice. I feel that this is what play can facilitate. I encourage my students to be aware of the art maker’s process through play and interaction. While logic or method are required to build skills and technique, play encourages backward and forward dialogue to occur between the self and the artwork, and the self and others. A foundation or mindset of play promotes deeper levels of inquiry and a sense of the unknown, and with this comes purpose and artistic veracity. Sokolowski (2008) speaks to the word ‘veracity’ adding to its potency. He says, “By veracity I do not mean a virtue; it is something more elementary. It is in us from the beginning. Veracity is the impulse towards truth and the virtue of truthfulness is its proper cultivation” (p. 20). My understanding of veracity has evolved, becoming clearer to me that veracity is not about finding truth but the desire to possess truth.

Sokolowki continues by suggesting, “Veracity is the *eros* involved with rationality” (p. 21), which for me suggests that veracity is not just the desire for technical discovery but rather that we are “born with this desire and we are carried along by it” (p. 21). It is in essence elemental to the self. I find this to be true from my own experiences in the classroom where the students create a semblance of their world, where their appearance of the world becomes revealed—a desire to know their soulful self as art makers. Perhaps this is where art making has purpose as a product of integrity and veracity.

When I transfer and apply my appreciation of my inquiry into the classroom the students are able to question and forge new understandings about themselves and their art making. Alongside this I can foster a relationship that surpasses art simply as the beautiful and promote aesthetics and human consciousness. I found that the students I have described in this chapter have needed to yearn to find this connection to self, to their inner veracity, to make this switch. Each of the students in my lived examples have put aside their initial need for the perfect and for affirmation and instead, messed beauty up to come to know the ‘otherness’ of an artwork. Through their own acts they have uncovered the reality of art. I have felt each of them has responded to exploration of undecided possibilities, of unfulfilled expectations, of contingency to find the soulful self as part of art and in turn, embraced the elemental notion of veracity—the impulse towards truth that Sokolowki suggested.

As I draw this *Lesson* to a close I reflect on my explorations, my questions about the use of ‘cool’ as a contemporary meaning of beauty and how the exploration of truth as part of aesthetics responsively links us to making art that has integrity. In presenting a range of ways to consider and apply the aesthetics of and for art, I recognise and apply

aesthetics that determine how we interpret, make and experience art. This facilitates a purposeful relationship between aesthetics and truth to be formed.

I subscribe to the thinking that this relationship unveils elements of the self and from this we find an inner ‘truth’. I learn that a true art practice needs these layers or different parts so that we can nurture the self and seek to make and respond to art that moves past my students’ initial interpretation of ‘cool’. Responsibly exposing students to works of art that are less familiar, perhaps darker, or even ugly can enable a shift in their mindset to take place. As teacher, if I do not offer the students richer art experiences they might not ever make this connection, and for many the clichéd prevails. I need to encourage students to look for the aesthetic in artists’ work and to accept the challenges that a work presents so they can move past the conventional and passé notion of beauty. I need each student to actively seek out the antagonist of the unfamiliar to unveil themselves to see art and the self another way. If these elements can be embraced and nurtured as part of teaching and learning I am not ignoring the complexity and power of art. I am not ignoring my responsibility as an art educator. I remember the words of Aristotle from the *Poetics* that Startwell referred to earlier in this *Lesson*. Aristotle’s words are evocative ‘...to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must...present a certain order in its arrangement of parts’ (Aristotle, p. 2322 in Startwell, 2017, para. 37). Art exists in its own right, but when we can align and appreciate the different components of aesthetics as part of our experiences, the elements of art can come together and make a whole. I sense that we can reveal the self as part of beauty, truth and aesthetics.

At this point I recall the earlier words of Greene (2001) who said, “the work... can only emerge as an object or event or encounter with some human consciousness, and this occurs in a vivid present—in which inner and outer time is somehow unified” (p. 15). I recall Greene’s words to be important as I move over the threshold into the next *Lesson* where I question the notion of time and our ‘place’ in the world as art makers and responders to the world around us.

Lesson Four offered you ways to consider the aesthetics of experience as part of truth and the soulful self. What seems prudent is to explore temporality and self as part of art and part of the human condition. To this I next ask, what does time and space mean for art and for us?

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a crumpled piece of paper. The paper is the central focus, with its texture and folds clearly visible. The hand is positioned behind the paper, and the background is dark, making the paper stand out. The text is overlaid on the paper.

LESSON FIVE

Where I imagine becoming lost in the tick, and tock, of a clock

Time changes tempo

Time as a dilemma

The knowingness of time

Time shifts to the virtual space

Time and our historical self

The fullness of time



LESSON FIVE



Where I imagine becoming lost in the tick, and tock, of a clock

A clock

I'm late, I'm late for a very important date.

The dark hallways of Harry Potter....

The parallel worlds in Stranger Things.

Time, Time, Time, see what's become of me.

(Student Responses, 2016)

These are some of the responses I receive from my students when I ask them in class what time and space mean to them. As I write these replies on a large piece of paper, what becomes apparent to me is the connection the students are making between time and space and their experiences. Time is presented not simply as a measure or a deadline,

but the relationship it holds as part of their existence. It is both temporal and spatial. “Time exists in order that everything doesn’t happen all at once...and space exists so that it doesn’t all happen to you” (Sontag, 2017, p. 214). These measured words of Sontag capture the essence of my deliberations. True art is connected to the way we find ourselves living in time and how we decipher our experiences as part of space. For a visual connection, I bring together time and space with a synesthetic view. I see a velvet-like gradient where rich dark charcoal tones flow into crisp white. The black and white blur together but at opposing ends they are delineated. I see this as a metaphor for the melding of time, as there is a graduation between the dark and the light, which also act as opposing forces that are a paradox for our intentionality and our temporality.

From my conversation with the students it is easy to see that time and its interrelated colleague—space, are not simple notions to articulate because they conjure up numerous situations and viewpoints. These notions provide us with the openness to explore and to reflect but in contrast they also hold the power to confine and impede. Two opposing states cause tension—tension that permeates our thoughts in life and it is these ideas that are the deep motivation for this *Lesson*.

Time and space appear as a paradox—connected, yet different and hard to separate—where both our perceptions of the objective and subjective meet. I seek different perceptions of time and space to see how they form a link between our social and cultural realities, the space of our consciousness and our self-awareness. Time facilitates exploration to express emotions and give rise to the opportunity to find ‘flow’ and for elements of the self to be revealed and to be empowered. For me, time and space were an integral part of the nature of *Tension*. It was like they clashed with the

tide, initially calm and silent but as my mindset changed so too the currents pushed and pulled. The different sides of time and space became intertwined and I saw them as essential layers of art. These notions give way to a tangible foundation to be fashioned as we build our intentions and our purpose. The physical and the incongruous elements are present.

Time and space are not new notions, but like any reflection on old themes, the skill comes in the ability to reinterpret and refashion them. In art, I interpret that this approach conditions and shapes the self to finding a new spirit or way of seeing. Just as the childhood game of Chinese Whispers or a virus is used as a metaphor for a rumour, altering a thought each time it passes to another, the original concepts of time and space iterated and reiterated become embellished each time they are passed on. I align this thinking with the nature of my teaching and the students' learning. For when I review what I do and equally how my students intersubjectively review their artwork, I can see that their thoughts and actions change. When I surrender and reflect on my art methods I can consider both new and old knowledge. Each of these threads—thoughts and actions—adds to our understanding and interweaves into our own particular timelines. I see the accumulation of information and knowledge strengthening our path, adding weight to what we know, highlighting areas that need potency and discarding what might appear irrelevant. When I consider my teaching and how I impart knowledge to the students over time, I wonder if what I teach and the ways the students learn are in fact relevant and worthy of knowing. Is their learning transforming? Is our time together giving them the skills to revoke the old, find space to seek the undiscovered, and crave the 'new'? We only have so much time together and so few lessons to teach what I deem as important. Equally the establishment of a sound art practice is time

consuming and requires space to bring on creative adventure. This is why I also present time and space as a contradiction and the antagonist who urges confusion in our mind. Like the Renaissance of painting, the resurrection of opposing forces brings newness. I reason that if we do not learn to see the value of new ideas, change might not be saluted. Do we run the risk of conceding to the ‘average’, hovering in the subterranean, and accepting the expected? This is not what I aspire to.

Time changes tempo

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As I teacher who wants to continue to grow her practice, I find more constraints are appearing as part of teaching and learning. There seems to be a trend towards an even more time-orientated and hard skill-based continuum that appears in educational dialogue about time management, efficiency, and implementation of strategies of learning designed to suit testing and outcomes. The work of John Hattie in *Visible Learning for Teachers* (2009) and the *Art and Science of Teaching* by Robert Mazarno (2007) are two contemporary texts that promote ways of creating the efficient and successful learner. They contribute in more recent times in wider conversations about the transparency of assessment, having clearly stated objectives, overarching time frames and explicit learning goals as part of the contemporary teacher’s vernacular. The work of Hattie and Mazarno has been embraced in education systems Australia-wide. When I think about my current teaching practice from these angles, I see duelling notions of time and space more prominently. I confront the objective and detached strategies

for measuring success amongst a curriculum that lacks space and needs to be pared back. I see time restrictions, and with this, compromise. Because of these restrictions I see moments when creativity is choked and other times where it is electrifying and impulsive. With all these elements at play, one thing I do accept is that time and space are measures of learning. If I can harness and manage the contest between the mindsets of time and space and form a synthesis, I can promote energy and action in my classroom and within myself. I need to respond to and make human-centered decisions rather than textbook conclusions to establish what is the best action for my students. My alleged contradiction of time and space when seen through a positive lens can be a driver for change, placing us in the uncharted and potentially uncomfortable state of new awareness.

I ask you this—what makes you uncomfortable? Do you ever sit in silence and notice the tick and the tock of the clock as the hands move in a repetitive, staccato-like movement, around and around in a circle? This silence can be impenetrable, or lead to moments of flow, or moments of tension. Meyer (2010) says,

In any given moment, time can appear ahead of itself, or having been. Chronologically time appears straight forward, structuring our lives and never waiting for any of us. But there is a glitch in this matrix, for in our hectic lives, time isn't as reliable as clockwork, sometimes it drags on and other times it flies. (p. 87)

My example of sitting in silence is an acknowledgement and a measure of time that can feel tangible and sometimes abstract. But at its heart, time builds consciousness and a cultural bond or link to the lifeworld. When we take time to question and reflect on who we are, time can become an abstract notion that enables us to interact with others and to move between different spaces—shared and personal, cultural, physical

and intellectual. Meyer (2010) refers to ‘time’, under the influence of Heidegger who suggests that time places us in the world and is a “unitary phenomenon” (Meyer, 2010, p. 85). If we apply Meyer, Heidegger and Sontag’s thinking to our own situations we might realise that we are affected by time and we cannot avoid it. It shapes the self and leads to the formation of our personal history—our relationship to the world, be it spiritual, material or emotional. These are elements that contribute to the self. I don’t think that we can deny that we are both in time and part of time.

Similar thoughts prevail in *The Watched Pot* by Michael Flaherty (1999). He speaks of time as

...a measured interval, and marks the movement between social realities, worlds of sub-universes’ entities and how the clock or the timepiece is a form of standardisation of temporality, which guides our movements between the spaces we inhabit and our experiences of everyday life. (p. 4)

Flaherty refers to time and space as being allied. If we take this into account, space is used for waiting and for reflection and has a physical surrounding—a place in which we exist, work, learn and act. Artists have a propensity to be mindful and influenced by their space and the environment in which they work. Instinctively I suggest that this awareness can influence art making and irritate the artistic ‘flow’. When Sontag (2017) speaks of time she refers to the linear scheme of storytelling as it transitions between,

the ‘before’, to a ‘during’ to a ‘final’ or ‘after’ but this is more than a casual sequence, just as lived time - which distends with feeling and contracts with the deadening feeling - it is not uniform, clock time. (p. 216)

I think of this passage in response to Jimmy’s writing for *Tension* and also reassign it to both my art and that of my students. Time is linear and punctuated by stages,

but as Sontag's quote suggests, time oscillates and through the changing tempo of time I encourage the view that an artist's role is to invigorate time and to animate space. Together time and space can enliven the layers of experiences and learning and possibilities can be united. I support this opinion and share the views of Sontag and Flaherty that each moment of time is like a separate space and when combined becomes a coil of events as part of an enduring and embryonic time continuum. Tension was both the protagonist and the antagonist in *Lesson One*. Can time and space be both allies and in conflict? Time and space for me are not dissimilar.

Through my thesis, and in support of my teaching, I have offered insights into the history of art, which for some of my students is like finding examples from dusty obscurity. But my historical study is relevant and holds direct correlations to time. For if we were to map the movements in art history on a continuum we would see the different genres and conflicting views, we would see how artists have taken modified stylistic features and extended philosophies and acted on the findings to move forward into new ways of thinking. Artists appropriate and build on the knowledge of the past to refine and redefine their actions. The reappearance of ideas and techniques is part of an artistic practice with even contemporary artists looking into the past for inspiration and clarity. We would see artists who took a stand against convention and the historical flow of art, fighting against the establishment and developing anti-art making strategies. Each new art movement partially eclipses the last to find a new direction. The distorted and extended figures of the Mannerism period of the 16th Century influenced the work of Matisse and the Fauves in the 1940s, and we see its authority in the work of the Australian abstract painter Brett Whitely in the 1980s. If you take the time to examine these three portraits you can see evidence of this.



Images: Perino del Vaga, *The Nativity*, (1501–1547); Henri Matisse, *The Beautiful Martinique Woman*, 1946; Brett Whiteley, *A detail from Wendy on Cushions*, 1976

We witness similar and explore the different. The faces in each of the images are elongated and each mark made by the artist captures the features or the essence of the sitter. Two of the figures' eyes look away, while the gaze of the middle image commands your attention. Their expressions are accentuating the long faces, the gravity and importance of the lines. This Mannerist image by Perino del Vaga, titled *The Nativity* (1501–1547), is 'realistic' in as much as we identify with the subdued female face—her milky, even skin embraces her large dark eyes. In the second image, Henri Matisse's work, *The Beautiful Martinique Woman* (1946), is linear and ingenuous. It feels brisk and bright given the brief marks and the clinical white space. But how hard it is to capture 10 or 15 essential lines that build the entire character of a person. To do this we need to know the complexities of the person intimately as part of time. A detail from *Wendy on Cushions* (1976) by Whitley might appear more complex or even a bit confusing than the flowing, suggestive lines of Matisse, but again the artist's decisions are masterfully considered. Through Whitley's lines he expresses how he sees the model, Wendy, as both an object and as a person with a history and a story. He shows the foundation or the underlying structure of the figure combined with the more rigid and

contrasting shading of the exterior. Each work is similar in its intentionality, yet vastly different. The influence of time is present as a guiding stylistic influence.

These different periods of time each happened in the ‘now’, at a particular time and space for the artist, but they shaped the history of art—they happened at a time and in a space of time that impacted on the future. This sharing of styles and ideas continues today as I constantly ask my students to look for inspiration, assign themselves with creative mentors and build socio-cultural connections between different realities through the work of the great artists. This learning is like an augmented praxis where theory and practice connect. Connecting and responding to the oeuvre of art enables my students to build informed responses to the space around them, helping them to see the purpose of art and the impact of time. They come to understand both the individual and the collaborative nature of art—art is not just plucked from nowhere, solely from the imagination, or is a random act of intentionality, but rather art and art making has roots and a foundation in historical consciousness. As artists we too become part of this timeline.

I draw a parallel between the history of art and the continuum of our own life. For just as the history of art is a timeline so is our temporality. In essence it is our state of existing that is a relationship with time. To form a better understanding of temporality I turn to the judicious phenomenological thoughts of Sokolowski (2000). His work is significant because he presents time as a notion that, “pervades all the things both noematic and noetic...” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 130). Time pervades ideas and how we experience them. Sokolowski uses the terms, *noematic* and *noetic* to guide his thinking, based on Husserl’s term *noema*, which indicates something that is experienced as part of

an intentional act, for example relating to how we perceive, how we remember, how we judge and respond to events. We can describe our experiences or the objects we choose to render as *noetic* but when we look at their “meaning giving components” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 60) or how we perceive them, we surpass them moving towards a subjective state. Navigating this notion of the *noetic* can bring change and our experiences might become more contextual. Looking at the Greek root, the verb *noein*, which means to think, to consider and to act, adds to my awareness of the notion.

Over my time as a teacher and artist I feel certain that when I apply this mode of thinking to my work and coach my students to deliberate their experiences we can move towards capturing the *noema*—the character and essence of the object or experience. Reflecting on the past and seeking the ‘new’ to transcend the object and reveal its and our own intentionality and temporality is part of this modality. As a teacher and as an artist responding to the world, the notion of time is applicable to me in order to build the layers of understanding and interpreting the self. A self that we may never fully know. If I only had one gift to offer my students it would be to teach them to think, *noein*—so that they can see, remember, judge and respond to the world and themselves.

I understand Sokolowski’s (2000) terms—*noematic* and *noetic*—in ways that might be significant for the mind to interpret and reinterpret experiences and objects by placing them into a space. These themes are persistent in both my *ethos* and my thesis as I see they are required for art to hold the virtues I contend. Each layer of art making offers a lens to our experiences and it is an awareness of this that brings a deeper association to our temporality.

Sokolowski (2000) describes three layers of time. Layer one suggests that time is transcendent or objective, given it is used to locate ourselves in the common spaces we inhabit. Layer two suggests that time is also immanent or subjective relating to the sequence of the mental acts we perform as part of memory and perception. And finally, layer three says time can have a consciousness of internal time. As part of my inquiry I consider all three layers can be apportioned to learning about art, but when these three layers or levels of temporality come together a kind of closeness or completeness is achieved. When they are combined they constitute the “temporality of our activities that occur in our conscious life such as perception, imaginations, remembering and sensible experiences that we have” (Sokolowski, 2000, p.135). The words ‘perception’, ‘imaginations’, ‘remembering’ and ‘sensible experiences’ are familiar terms to the reader as they have helped shape my phenomenological inquiry. And because they are persistent refrains, I see both Sokolowski’s and Husserl’s ways of interpreting time as inherent to my thinking and therefore my dialogue about art, time and space.

What I am discovering are objective and subjective views of time and space. I return to these layers more specifically later in this *Lesson*, but in the meantime, I explore in more detail how objective time equates to the classroom and teaching. As a contemporary teacher I am required to be explicit, deliberate and ready about considering the place that the hard artefacts or the mechanisms of time have in my teaching regime. Time in this context is where the prevalent work of Marzano (2007) and Hattie (2009) play a role. When I speak of artefacts I include elements such as due dates, timetables, rubrics, proficiency scales and fixed routines as part of a rigorous system to ensure student feedback as part of their learning. The blueprints of my curriculum documents are objective, concrete and cover what the students need in order to be proficient. The

students produce art within these limits. In accordance with this, Carl Leggo (2013) says in the foreword of Anita Sinner's *Unfolding the Unexpectedness of Uncertainty*,

so much curriculum and pedagogy has been constructed and constrained on a relentlessly rigorous march to the place of certainty where discernment is no longer needed because everything we need to know is already known. (Leggo, 2013 in Sinner, 2013, p. xiii)

But what is even more poignant is Leggo's further comment,

Of course, in the course of all that efficient organisation, we have all missed how education is wandering and wandering in uncertainty, in mystery, in the volcanic and vorticular heart of the whirling world we hardly know. (p. xiii)

Time as a dilemma

—

I ruminate on those artefacts and mechanisms of time that act to constrain contemporary teaching practice so that I do not lose sight of the need for my students to recognise their personal insights as part of their learning when it is fostered by a pedagogy of discovery. The students' authorship of their own learning cannot be deemed by the likes of hard skills alone but by the acknowledgment of temporality, spatiality and intersubjectivity. Insightfulness, intuitiveness, head and heart need to be present as part of art education if I am to respond to my students' imagination and creativity. Equally these attributes need to be present in my students' awareness of the self if they are also to respond to their experiences with valour.

I am working on the development of a rubric and a proficiency scale as part of my acknowledgment of Hattie (2009) and Mazarno's (2007) mainstream influence and the derivative taxonomy that 'visible learning' and rigorous feedback has on education. I create a toolkit to assess my Year 9 students on a particular design-focused task. As I revisit the work of Hattie and Mazarno I consider the ideas and the outcomes I will be assessing and measuring. I become lost in the educational jargon, which enables me to describe to the students what they need to do to achieve an 'A', 'B' or 'C' grade. Using elements of visible learning I decide to set the students particular assignments over three lessons so I can gauge their understanding of the specific information and skills. In my mind I "chunk" (Mazarno, 2007) information and enter the design studio ready to deliver the lesson with an armoury of words, rubrics, tools, examples and learning objectives. I am explicit in what I want my students to do. As the suite of consecutive lessons unfold I start to question if my approach to the class is in fact good, or if I am disabling the students from their ability to be creative and to foster their ideas. Some of the students start to loom over me with their workbooks asking me if they have done enough to get an 'A' as per my descriptive evidence-based rubric. I look at the content they create and I ask them to tell me what they are learning and what they are understanding. What did they know before and what do they know now? I ask them, "Do you think you are an A?" For some the 'A' is what they deem to be the most imperative outcome and filling in pages in a workbook is all they think they need to do.

Has the true essence, heart and purpose of learning been lost? Yes and no. I need each of them to understand the information and become competent in a set of foundation technical skills to help each of them produce artwork. How can I expect them each to act in a creative manner and transcend their thinking with the staccato-

like time pressure I am inevitably applying on them? Are my actions on these occasions detaching them from their creativeness? Is my preoccupation with material time fracturing their ability to find ‘flow’ in their thinking and application of the learning? If I subscribe to the idea that time and space play a role in gaining understanding and acquiring knowledge I need to review my actions. Has my need to teach techniques to a certain set of guidelines and pre-existing knowledge that holds me accountable to the specifications of a rubric gone too far? Have I taken the work of Hattie in particular too literally and caused some harm to my students’ truth as part of learning? I feel I have partially compromised my teaching and in turn my students’ thinking and artistry. I have not let my students wander and explore the sense of mystery that Leggo referred to—‘...mystery, in the volcanic and vorticular heart of the whirling world we hardly know” (Leggo, 2013 in Sinner, 2013, p. xiii). Have I negated what augments both an intelligent and heartfelt art student?

I accept that we need time frames to get through the day and to move forward and yet I do not suggest that time restraints should be thrown into the whirling world. From my observation, the students who are absorbed by their creative actions are the ones who set less delineated parameters for time—they don’t want to be held back by others, they want to move on as they crave the knowledge they need. At this point of awareness, time unearths a state of natural flow. I remind myself that a good teacher needs to identify and use these physical artefacts of real time—things like timetables and rubrics for transparency in assessment, for goal setting and for an attentiveness to order. In addition I need to trust my intuition and allow the students time to explore and be uninterrupted at pivotal points so that they can find that ‘flow’ or ‘closeness’ that Sokolowski depicts when his three layers combine. When I become too focused

on the hard artefacts I can be accused of going against my commitment to support key doctrines about 'play' and 'wide-awakeness', as seen in the last *Lesson*. I am at this moment beguiled by the nuances of our language, data and time, which troubles me. I am contradicting my *ethos*, not honouring my years of experience, and I feel compromised.

The next day I am deliberately a few minutes late to the same Year 9 class to see if the students get to work by their own volition. I want to see if they need me to set 'rules' and time frames and be explicit for the lesson, or if I had prepared them for their own learning and interpreting of the information to take place. I observe the class from the door and find them hard at it, and legitimately talking to their friends about their work. I do not interrupt them. I wander around and listen to them and help them as they need.

This lesson prompts me to consider that even though rubrics, routines and transparency in teaching are somewhat essential and effective, they ought not surpass the poignant human experience. The students need time to find a flow and to reveal their learning into their practice. They need to relish the ability to be subjective and to find moments for space and for reflection. I feel compelled to say at this point, in support of flow, that the energy and subconscious intuition that can happen when perceptions of time are suspended or forgotten are exciting. From my own experience, the most productive and effective work is created when I am in a state of flow, which is not governed by 'hard' time. Inner dialogue and the natural course of learning that forms between the self and the art becomes real and implicit.

I reiterate my concerns. Was my unfailing implementation of the assessment and the learning objectives for my set of lessons over the top? Was I devaluing my ethics as an art teacher and disabling the students from finding creativity? I believe I was.

Through my experience I am reminded about the importance of the ongoing dialogue that is established at a time and in a space of the classroom. I have always been a firm believer in the power of talking and sharing ideas, but I have allowed the administration and the language of the rubric and the proficiency scale to intimidate me rather than nurture me. The conversations I forge with students are meaningful ways for feedback and for ongoing formative assessment to be shared. This approach is not tied to an algorithm or a rating but rather a transaction that delves into the more intrinsic understanding of the elements of art making and the students' world as part of time and space. It is these dexterities combined with technique that will get the sought after 'A' and still have meaning, as a product of veracity. It is this balance of elements that can make learning meaningful—scholarship that surpasses the bell that starts and concludes each lesson.

Nurturing a learner's responsiveness to the spaces around them leads to considering possibilities, shared or 'blended' learning, experimenting and studying and creating practical examples. At this time the interaction between thoughts, perceptions and findings come into play as part of art. I recognise that my interpretation and application of objective time was impeding my teaching, so I decide to return to Sokolowski to investigate time more deeply. At the beginning of this *Lesson* I introduced Sokolowski's *noemic* and *noetic*, which describe something that is experienced as part of an intentional act to which further clarity is brought by relating time to three layers that investigate

our relationship with time. While I acknowledge time constraints and formal assessment are part of measuring standards and required for the annotation of a student's learning, I resolve that it is not the only way. The antagonist or paradox of time is a constant reminder of the need for tension to exist in order to forge new directions in learning.

Sokolowski's layers are noteworthy so I apply them to some further lived experiences for clarity around time and the way the students and I might perceive it. The first layer is time that belongs to worldly events and processes, for example if we went to the art gallery for two hours or I have an art class for two periods. These are events through which I arrange time. This is similar to the "spatiality of the world" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 130) where time becomes objective and public, can be measured and relates to the common space we inhabit.

Layer two is internal time or immanent time and relates to the sequence of mental acts and experiences that take place in a conscious life. These elements are intrinsic to our being and are intentional acts and experiences that follow one another. When we see time in this way we can call upon memory to evoke prior experiences. When I remember seeing the *Van Gogh* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria I can re-enact my perception of the exhibition and my intentions and experiences are temporarily ordered. I can recall the feelings that pervaded the experience. This experience is an internal feeling and not public like objective time. It is subjective and I cannot put a value of time around it. In my art class, when I encourage my students to explore their ideas and skills without an imposed time frame or set assignment, I am hopeful they can locate themselves within this second layer as they can use the lesson to reflect on and deepen their connections to their learning.

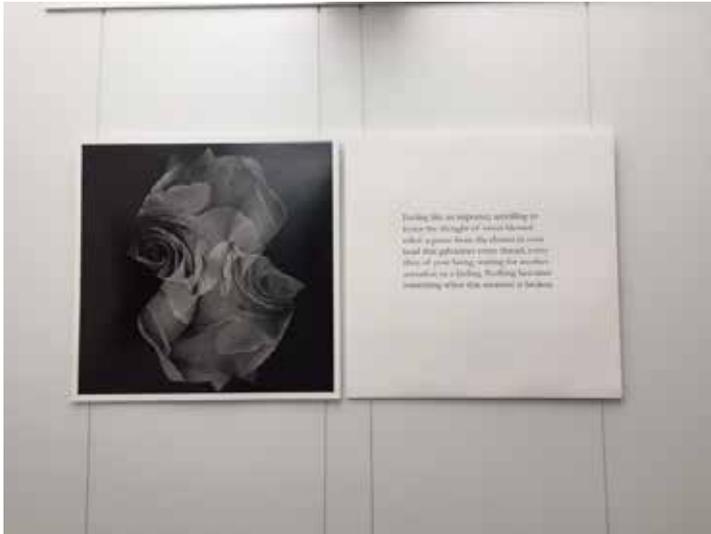
The third layer of Sokolowski's theory is the most problematic or perplexing and pertains more closely to my dilemma in the classroom where I feel I was fracturing the students' learning. Sokolowski explains this layer as 'closeness' or a flow. He says closeness underlies both the subjective flow of internal time and the objective flow of world time, yet it is an even more internal way of being. This third layer of time seems to suggest that at the heart of our being we are "locked into a kind of solitary confinement" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 134). My reading of this notion intimates that this state of closeness is even more private than the subjectivity reached through Sokolowski's notion of "transcendental reduction" (p. 134). This is the moment when we can withdraw from the natural attitude, where we can move away from the everyday world and move towards the intersubjective level of our *ego* in search of self-efficacy. It is a time when we suspend judgement and 'be'. In my Year 9 design class example I stood back and watched the students find flow, and if it was even for a moment, they were not disrupted by the awareness of time or expectation. I was letting them 'be' and they were being. They were learning and in search of new discovery.

If we acknowledge Flaherty (1999) who spoke of time as a measured interval, marking the movement between social realities and worlds of sub-universes, and Sokolowski's (2000) three layers of time, we can start to consider that time presents itself in different states and sets a foundation about how we experience, interpret and respond to the world as part of our human condition. As I made the imagery for *Tension* I toggled between being conscious of time and getting lost in time. When I was lost in time and free of restrictions I moved towards the intersubjective and into a state of flow. I was able to reflect on past experiences that were fuelling my ideas and I had moments of feeling suspended and locked away. I felt withdrawn from reality and lost

in my thoughts and actions. But when I became conscious of a time frame I started to compromise my ability to be creative and I considered ways to take short cuts to get similar results. This is not dissimilar to when I try to create visual samples for the students on ways to use art materials in my classes. When time restricts me, I can get frustrated and as consequence things do not turn out not as I intend. I get angry with myself. Time disables me and I am compromised. If this state hinders me, does it also immobilise my students?

This feeling of being lost in space was what I wanted to evoke in *Tension*. I wanted the seductive and majestic tonal colour palette of each image to interpret space and time, leaving a state of suspension, contradiction and wonder. I wanted the work to be seen and experienced not just as objects, but as part of the phenomenological attitude that embraces the notions of the *noemic* and the *noetic*. I wanted the viewer to become saturated by the linear show of images connected by the eloquent and provocative panels and be lost in time.

LESSON FIVE



Images: The images of the Tension exhibition installed in the gallery

The knowingness of time

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Is art not about a form of communication and contradiction in response to our world as part of time and being in time? Can art transcend the viewer and the self into another time and space? I accept that time needs to work on many levels. If time as a measure is all we know, I consider that it hinders our capacity to be fully human. I reiterate Gadamer's perspective, articulated by Lawn,

Art is not an innocent diversion and amusement but a crucial point of access to fundamental truths about the world and what it is to be human. (Lawn, 2006, p. 87)

Gadamer's viewpoint continues to shape my thinking and bolsters the links that are needed between aesthetics, truth and their imperative marriage with time. Being able to surrender ourselves to time in order to find moments where time becomes transcendental, intersubjective and finds flow is an important lesson. Hard skills such as deadlines and language laden in rubrics inevitably do not allow for this richer experience of life to be present. For that matter, does information alone lead to authentic and meaningful learning as part of the self? For art and for honouring my role of teacher I suggest not. I need to imbue my students with richer experiences at a time and in a space of time.

Is the state of the transcendental or finding flow part of human nature, or is it a state we learn to be in? I suggest that both the acknowledgment of the objective and the subjective is required to find flow. For example, the practicing artist works hard each day exploring and understanding the value, tone and depth of each brush stroke as an individual mark and as part of a unified image. Equally I suggest that the

students cannot function at a higher and transcendental level of art making if they do not understand their method and the capacity of their tools. I propose that both interpretations need to work together—we need to understand content, struggle with and reconcile our intentions so that our foundation of knowledge can move forward and we can try and locate ourselves in this state of flow.

Jean Grondin (2002) says in a contributing chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer* that Heidegger argues in *Being and Time* (1927) that “understanding designates less a cognitive (and thus methodological) process than a know-how, an ability, a capacity, a possibility of our existence” (Grondin, 2002 in Dostal, 2002, p. 37). As a consequence of this idea,

one who understands something is not so much someone endowed with a specific knowledge, but someone who can exercise a practical skill...is not necessarily an apt theoretician of his trade but he “knows” his trade. (p. 37)

A good artist and a good teacher is one who knows what to do. To achieve a state of knowing I feel that we need to find time to get lost in time. Paying attention to the world can lead us to disclose defeat to a factual connection to time and space and instead we become open to its paradoxical tendencies.

Louise Mabile (2012) sponsors my thinking in her exploration of Gadamer in *Contra Excess*. She suggests that there is an

insistence that human understanding is always culturally and historically situated and that understanding is not merely a reproductive event but always a productive activity as well. (Mabile, 2012, p. 51)

She states that understanding is a “process of communication” (p. 51).

Understanding leads to knowing. These two words are essential for me because the students need to ‘understand’ and ‘know’ their actions as they move forward and build their practice through time and space. Giving my students time to make art and explore their skills without me directing their every move, empowers them to become lost in time. Some of them do start to search for a deeper understanding about how to apply techniques and how to change their designs in order to communicate an idea more successfully. The response that this level of engagement brings to learning and teaching is hard to annotate on a rubric using education speak. It is hard to enumerate, but when the students add this more profound level of engagement to their own learning and experience they can genuinely understand what an ‘A’ really looks like.

Acknowledging to myself that I need to restore the balance of time to my teaching in the classroom is important. Time allows and provides for change, so when the students and I identify with art making on this level we move forward and make better decisions about what art is and how we make it under the desire for veracity. Finding some clarity about who we are as part of human understanding through the creative process can lead us to know elements of the self. For me this is what art is about—the expression of the self, over and through time and space.

Mabille (2012) rightly reminds us of the connection between human understanding and cultural awareness, leading me to explore the bearing of cultural spaces more explicitly upon my students’ work. To share my findings on the connection to culture I call on an encounter with my Year 10 art class. It is a Monday morning in

June. The day is clear and fresh and the girls are passive from the weekend. They know that we are starting a new project today and so they wait patiently to be briefed. The silence in the room is a reminder of time and the power of a shared space. The stillness allows me to pause and to remind myself of what I want to achieve and the essential learning that underpins my intentions. I gather the students around the motley paint-stained main table in the studio and ask them, “So, what do you think of when you think of time?” “Sleep”, “...more sleep”, is an initial cry, and then, “A clock”. These two initial intuitive metaphors are not unexpected and in many ways are easy replies. They are instinctive and reflexive answers, so I push the students to find other ways to interpret time. There are some long moments of stillness as they pause, avoiding eye contact in case they are asked to respond. But after a few minutes a small, brave voice says, “I suppose time can be about life and stuff...Things live and then they die”. I agree with the gentle nod of my head. “Yes, but what else?” Inevitably the ball starts rolling and they begin to open up and share other associations that they relate to. Their answers flow and the responses are a running commentary on how we live, sleep, theories of evolution, historical time frames, personal snapshots and moments that mark a particular time for them. A natural synergy arrives as they talk about time as a measure and space as an environment. Some describe spaces and far-off places like those created in *Alice in Wonderland*, the dark hallways of *Harry Potter*, the parallel worlds and changing time zones of the TV series *Stranger Things*, and the more controversial Netflix show *Thirteen Reasons Why* and its constantly time-shifting state. Some speak about time machines and travel, the seasons and how the ratio of dark and light shifts accordingly as part of the way we describe the days getting longer and shorter. They wonder about time as an abstract entity, that time can be never-ending.

After 15 to 20 minutes of this idea generation I am reluctant to shut the conversation down as their thoughts have become increasingly more diverse and creative. I wait for a natural pause, but the themes keep appearing. The ideas move towards how time and space relate to their actions as part of cultural connections. The students speak of watching and re-watching movies and TV shows about time, like *In-Time* and the *Time Traveller's Wife*. Seemingly they never tire of the same story being retold and rehashed as they watch, listen and read pieces about time. They remember timeless parts of films and they report on seeing something new each time they watch. The watching and reciting of their favourite parts keeps the memory alive. They never wish for the shows to end or for time to stop, so they recall parts of stories with vigour. The ideas continue to get deeper and are changing, hesitating between the objective and the subjective. Time is being considered in regard to change, history, sociocultural diversity and space. The ideas keep rolling and are getting more obscure. Linking their examples to cultural connections is seemingly becoming more noticeable and the students are more aware of their changing social environment. Identifying elements in different cultures that advocate links to historical consciousness are apparent and the students' social awareness and empathy for others starts to unravel. The students' cultural awareness promotes connections to the passing of time and as life changes, they adjust. They connect to new cultures, to the rise of technology and they reflect on their privileges. The thinking and perceptions of the world around them alters.

As their notions of time and the human condition align so too does the rhythm between change and time fall into synchronisation. This is what the Year 10 students seem to be connecting to at a deeper layer through the project I am introducing. Flaherty

(1999) writes about the phenomenology of time and its relationship to the human condition. He says,

Human beings are unique in part because they are capable of fusing their experiences of heterogeneous events into a coherent sense of persistence. We can attend to change by remembering the past, stepping back from the present and anticipating the future. (p. 1)

This crossing of events or our experiences transpire as part of the duration of time and they inevitably start to write our personal history. Flaherty continues,

We may or may not understand the experiences we are faced with and we might find ourselves with a feeling of timelessness. Therefore, time is not to be seen as a separate entity but we should learn to understand ourselves better and recognise that in all understanding, whether we are expressively aware of it or not the efficacy of history is at work. (1999, p. 312)

My Year 10 students begin to consider change as part of their understanding about time. With every occasion they recall they become more conscious of their experiences and their appreciation of life changes as many of their responses are based on cultural influences and their conscious connection to socialisation. Flaherty finds additional support for the work on time from Henri Bergson (1922), who remarks, “time is at first identical with the continuity of our inner life. To be human is to be self-conscious, and therein lies the primordial feeling of duration” (p. 44). If we are aware of our own endurance, then reflexivity can give human existence an intrinsically temporal character. I can sense that the students are arriving at a stage where their self-awareness and their temporality is more evident. Flaherty gives momentum to the correlation between time and socialisation when he says, “...one’s sense of duration is shaped from the very outset by society because self-consciousness is generated through socialisation” (1999, p. 2).

Equally, Flaherty responds to French Sociologist Emile Durkeim's (1912) work recognising that the individual's temporal experience is conditioned by the collective rhythms of society. He says that given Durkeim's functional orientation to society, Durkeim's emphasising that a working consensus on temporality is requisite for the maintenance of social order because consensus is constitutive of intersubjectivity and interpersonal coordination (p. 492). The point I distinguish and emphasise is that being conscious to the effects of society gives a functional orientation to what we do.

Being conscious to the effects of society becomes evident when I consider this in terms of my students and their responses to time. These are elements that are important to learning for ethnography and for self-actualisation because they promote change as part of understanding and a mindset of growth. What is more apparent for me through my introductory lesson with the Year 10s is how a macro-sociological outlook becomes explicit the further we converse, share and ideate experiences. Noting the increased depth of my students' responses aligns in some part with the impact society and culture has as part of time and space. For my students, surpassing the elements of objective time helps them to appraise the self and their actions.

The students' verbal and creative responses to this project reflect the way they relate to their everyday lives and how they become more in tune to their culture. I ask them to express the essence of their ideas via the production of a sculptural artwork using a carving material called basla foam. The foam is like the consistency and colour of the confectionary 'Violet Crumble'—smooth, easy to carve and golden in colour. One student is objective and concrete in her expression of time as she starts creating a typical rendering of Big Ben, while others tackle more explorative ways to express and

align time with change. Another student expresses the change of technology over time by morphing together an iPod and a 1970s radio into one sculptural form. Another piece is a bookcase full of books, relaying the idea that our stories and sense of history are contained within a bookshelf with the vertical lines of the books resembling the architectural pillars that act as the sides of the book case. My choice of 'time' as a project allows the students to form connections to both a universal view of time and their relationship to time and space as part of change.



Image: The bookcase sculpture carved from balsa foam 2016

With many interesting responses to the project evolving I return to Durkheim's idea of socialisation and the 'rhythms of society' in which I place our relationships to culture. I see this as an intriguing view of time as it provides the students with new, and at times contradicting, human associations. It shows how time and entering new spaces can make us both vulnerable and empowered.

I present these next two examples in response to cultural sensitivity and diversity as part of time and the conscious self. Two Year 10 students in the class have recently returned from overseas as part of the school's cultural exchange program. One went to Japan and the other to Laos. As part of our class conversation, both students remember and recount their experiences and how the day-to-day happenings of each culture was governed by the differing or perceived hierarchy of time and space. They speak about the different cultural *ethos* they were each part of and how time shaped and affected the school or working day for them.

The student who went to Japan explains how time is intrinsically embedded into that culture and into daily routines. This way of living was a shift for her. She expresses how her experience of time living in Hobart and her new relationship to time in Japan are in stark contrast. When she was living in Japan she had to promptly adjust herself to always being on time, having order and managing space. She soon learned that time is crucial to the Japanese and their aesthetic sensibility. Time is deliberate, controlled and calculated. The notion of time is very public, utilitarian and objective. She had to be ready to catch the train, to be part of the family routines and morning sequencing and if this was not respected and acted on, the day was sent into disarray. There was an order of events that collided when not synchronised, presenting as a cacophony of feelings, sensations and consequences. For her this was a new experience and initially caused her to feel vulnerable and tense—playing on her inner and real anxiety. Being late, and her more lackadaisical routine at home, was not an option.

For the other student who went to Laos the idea of time as a call to action was almost non-existent. In the cultural space of Laos, time was not a driving force for

the instigation of hard and fast daily routines. Clocks and phones were not relied on to monitor the day's activities—there was a cultural internal clock present that was not overwhelming or prescriptive. She found the people of Laos' approach hard to adjust to but very insightful. She noticed that other elements became more important and they formed an intuitive guide for the natural routines of the day. The people have order but they are not driven to exist by measuring time. Time has a place but it is not scrutinised as we understand it in our more 'modern' Western cities. In Laos time is more subjective and intuitive. The physical environment is dissimilar to her usual space and the people operate differently within it. Another personal observation she makes is how people respond to each other and how their values and priorities appear different. They have an alternative appreciation for time and are more mindful and conscious of the self, which also unsettled her goal-setting and social media-focused western world as she felt in some ways that she had lost control of time in an uncommon space.

In both cases the students had to adjust to the distinctive use of time in these different spaces, and they each needed to respect these disparities as part of another country's socialisation and culture. They both comment on their understanding or awareness of time and how it shifted. They were embracing phenomenological thought and moving through and around Sokolowski's layers of internal time and time allocated to worldly events or process. What becomes clearer for the class and for me as they describe their experiences and observations is how these experiences have affected each of them and the way each of them now sees and thinks about the world. Exploring new cultures was brave and their safety net had been broken. As a consequence, the feeling of vulnerability made them more aware of their own lives, how they live, and how others live. The two students each stepped into distinctive cultural spaces where

they had to become part of a new continuum of time in an unfamiliar space—this lived experience is worthy because it has forced them into new cultures and ideology, having a transforming impression on them and the way they appreciate each different environment.

These two particular students were present in a place, in a space and in a culture that provided them with contradictions—the power of ambiguity set them on a divergent, wonderous and perhaps windy road between the past and the future. The students were fortunate to be in a situation where they could recall this part of their life and use their feelings and their senses to help shape their future attitude. Just as the class is asked to translate their notions of time into a sculpture, I am hopeful that these two students might align their wakefulness in their art making. I want the students to embrace and embody their feelings based on the cultural empathy as part of time. I want them to remember their encounters and express them in art. I am curious to see how their experiences might come to life as they act in both reflective and reflexive states of being, based on their experience of time and space. I suspect their work might be different from other students who have not have such stark and rich experiences.

To transfer and express their ideas based on their reflections into art, the students do some preliminary planning and design thinking. I ensure they have time for play and reflection. In their journals they scribble down notes and ideas and they include photos from their travels that act as an extension of their thinking and prove to be a sound analysis of their thoughts. The student who travelled to Laos works on an idea that is linked to the country's natural environment. The form she creates is languid, imperfect and organic in shape. And while her story becomes embedded in

her artwork, the written piece that accompanies her final sculpture exposes her thought process clearly. She writes in her reflection,

While my sculpture did not turn out the way I wanted it to, it did capture some of the heart of my experience. It shows the idea of growth and how I felt when placed into a new culture. I tried to capture the life cycle of two trees—one was restricted and bound while the other was more organic. The one that was restricted was a metaphor for my restriction of time and my anxiety while the other tree is illustrating the freedom of time that I perceived and came to appreciate in Laos. The two forms join in the center, held together by a sphere which is covered with intertwining and binding roots. (Student Response, 2016)

In contrast, the student who went to Japan starts to chip away at the balsa foam to create a sculpture that is a closed, angular structure with hard-edged lines showing her interpretation of an ever-changing city skyline—the culture she had experienced and been enveloped by. This student is reluctant to annotate and reveal her thinking in a personal reflection. She, like her sculpture, has become closed, which I think adds to her intention and is true of her lived experience. The absence of words is insightful and perhaps expresses her reality and evokes her tenuousness at that time.

Both of the students' work become an interpretation and an understanding of time, space and place that are significant and meaningful for them. In alignment with this idea, David Pledge (2014) in an article in *The Conversation* says,

No artist can control the passage of time but these days they tend to be more mindful of cultural and presentation contexts, their complicity in them and how this process attributes meaning to their artworks. (Pledge, 2014, para. 15)

Through their artworks the students are able to express more deeply their self-awareness to cultures and to be self-actualised. They transcend the objective and move into the

subjective. Time has passed and taken a different path, which makes an impression on them. Time and its capacity to make them feel vulnerable has made an imprint on the self. It leads to uncertainty that adds another chapter to their historical narrative, which Gadamer elucidates, “can never be whole” (2000, p. 313). As a consequence, this transcendence alters them and their understanding and relationship to the human condition.

As the Year 10 project draws to a close I reflect on the appropriateness of the content and the different paradigms that are illuminated. I believe that time is a sound thematic choice for this group as it allows for a range of responses to be found given the students’ individuality and their own experiences. While this project helps me to understand some of the ways the students see and respond to time and space and how it impacts on them, what is prominent is the change in their perceptions. They are not as conscious of time as a measure, but more concerned about timelines and the relationships that exist between cultures and their history. I mentioned in an earlier *Lesson* in my thesis that I believe the value and virtue of art cannot be empirically measured but rather it is an extension of the relationship with the self. The qualities of time and art are synchronised and have an intrinsic value when they are not always equated with grades and ratings. Sokolowski’s phenomenological mode of thinking becomes clearer for the lucid thinker and is an indelible constituent to the way we ponder our place in the world. Time, like art, is one link to the beat of technology, culture, human experiences, emotions and aspects of society that are more prominent for my current students.

Times shifts to the virtual space

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The association of time and technology as part of timelessness is worth considering as technology has the potential to alter our historical consciousness and our temporality. The rise of technology in society has altered the way we respond to life. Phone and social media platforms are prime examples of this effect, particularly in my students' world. Mobile devices monitor us, altering the way we respond to time, space and the self. Engaging with Facebook and Instagram are examples of mapping time—the posting of single moments, which become part of a feed, which plot our history—recording our whereabouts. Some of us may see technology as an expansive means for socialisation and potentially a way of offering new insights into how we exist in time and as a way to record and respond to time. Others might see technology as meaningless, narcissistic and restricting. One of my senior students suggested to me that she should include a particular image in her senior examination folio because it received the most 'likes' on Facebook. She felt that this could equally sway the examiners too. At first I found this comment disturbing but on reflection I acknowledge that it was a measure for her—a measure of her self-worth governed by a space within the technological landscape. If we view temporality through technology can our intentionality and view of the world change? As a means to reflect on this question I look to Herbert Hodges (1952) who reflects on Wilhelm Dilthey for insight. Hodges says,

And yet, by the very nature of life, every experience has connections with other experiences and with physical events of different dates, which are, for it, transcendent; it presupposes the past course and future aims of the individual life in which it is an incident, and that life again depends upon the surrounding society and the natural

world. In the lived experience itself there is no awareness of these connections, but yet they are ‘contained’ (*enthalten*) in it, and every lived experience tends naturally to give rise to a process of ‘reflection’ whereby they are brought to light. (Hodges, 1952, p. 49)

Interestingly this quote from Hodges was written over 50 years ago but it gathers my attention and I see it relating to my students. When my students enter their complex, all-encompassing, dependent space of technology, phone tightly grasped in their hand, time shifts and their personal history becomes part of a digital traffic timeline and part of their socialisation and connection to culture. In many cases the succession of events posted as live feeds can never be entirely erased and never be totally absent. The realm of digital technology as a space in time reigns on these so-called digital natives—the students are “native speakers” (Prenkys, 2001, para. 2) of the digital language.

Looking at the world of virtual reality (VR) or the more influential world of augmented reality we might see how the students can interpret time and space as part of the divergent nature of our society. This provides me with a sense of curiosity. Many of my students are increasingly enquiring of the power of these digital platforms and how they can transport them as they learn and exist in new realities and new spaces that run concurrently with real time. The work I see my students create in the VR field is very exciting, opening up new ways to view and see time as an abstract space. As some of my students apply the VR Oculus—a wearable headset like goggles that fits over the eyes—to an art project, their relationship to real time changes. Using the VR technology, they have the power to create and transport themselves into their own new space. I see this presenting as the vagueness of time, as my students explore their new world without a reference to external, real time. Once they have a set of foundation technical skills

and the knowhow to operate the software, they have the power to shape a whole new world that they can enter. Their inclusion in this new reality occurs once they apply the viewing device and not before, producing an even more intimate view of the created space. Being present and open to the vagueness of space is the key to the virtual reality of wonder. They can walk around the environment, move through and around objects and see space in a whole new light. Each lesson, two of my students move into the VR space and are challenged by what they can make and how they can respond to the world using this technology. It is an application like this that takes the creative space into a new time reality and self-realisation into a new realm.



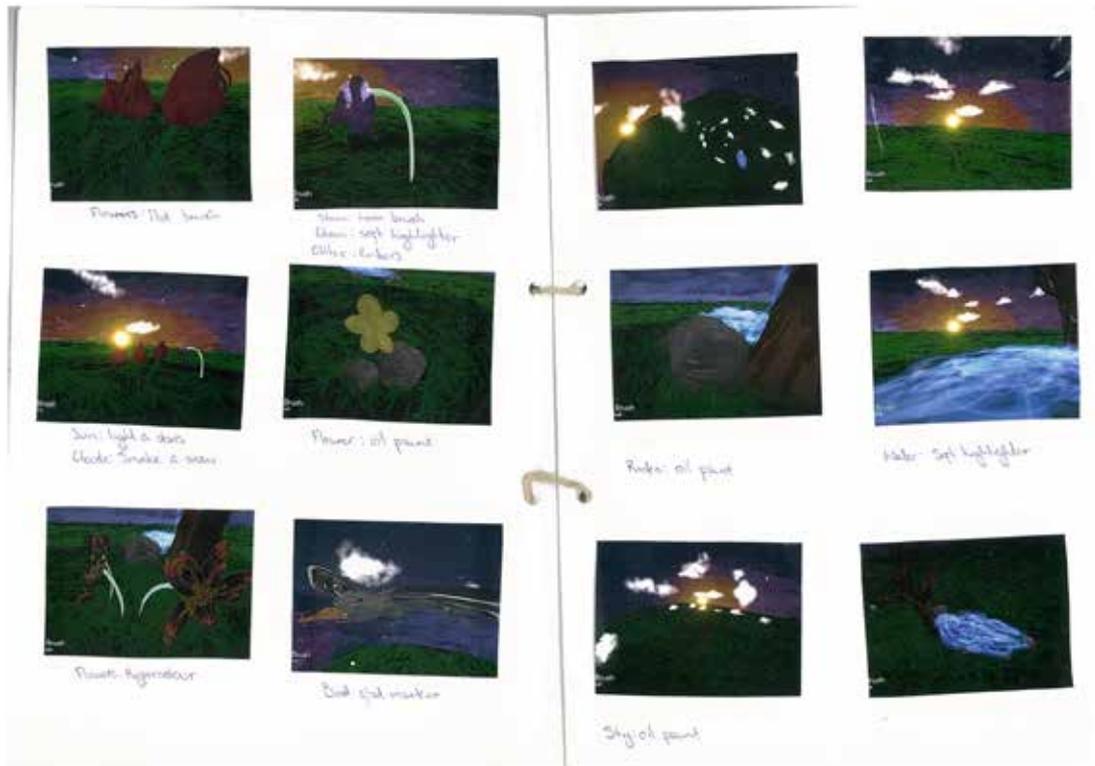
Image: Student screen shot of Zen Garden

This image of their crafted *Zen Garden* is a screen shot taken from the VR world that they have created. Interestingly, even though they have before them the technology to create a world unknown to them, to transport themselves and the viewer to an abstract

time-free space, they chose to render elements of the natural world and not shape a land entirely based on whimsy or surreal fantasy. They say in their working journal,

While the Zen Garden was not as we had originally imagined, we are pleased with what it has become over time. The space we entered and created was new and unknown and not what we had originally thought. But this void inspired us to change our ideas. It was both intuitive and organised. The outcome led us to explore bigger projects, to escape, and to try new technology that we never thought we were capable of using nor capable of being part of. We created a new imagined space and part of time. (Students' Reflection, 2016)

In the students' new imagined space elements of the natural world exist and as we enter their world we can identify with the trees, the water, the darkness of the sky and shape of the land but as part of their learning and creative response the students bring dashes of the magical and the mysterious to their new world. At the outset, these two students realised that they would be challenged by the complexity of the technology but when they took control of this and let both play and exploration inform them, they embraced the opportunity to take their learning through Sokolowski's three layers of temporality—the objective, the subjective and move towards closeness. Once they took command of the technical controls, their idea and the space changed—which they welcomed as part of their art making. These images are part of their support material and are isolated key frames of the piece.



Concluding Statement

The reason Jas and I have learnt so much about the Titanush and it has been amazing drawing in 3D. We have learnt so much and are so grateful for this amazing opportunity. Although our finished product is not the 'zen garden' we originally imagined, we are very pleased with what it has evolved to become. We managed to complete for more than we thought was possible and by working so as a team we have been able to learn from each other. 3D design has become a new area of interest for us and the 4th which has inspired us to move on and do bigger & better things than we thought we were capable of.

Lee & Jas this project has been highly successful & rewarding. It has been such an independent & collaborative project - you have both contributed equally to the task & made decisions based on your expertise & learning. The design is excellent & shows how you have thought about & considered space & thinks to the viewer being in the space as well as looking into the space - An excellent work indeed.

Image: Screen shots from the students' journal

The screenshots show some of the different fragments that make the whole artwork. A tree is the central piece but hidden amongst the landscape an unusual vivid violet flower grows. It has lights that pulse like a beating heart. You eventually find this bloom as you traverse and meander the blue flowing streams and rises of the landscape. These images are in many ways a poor rendition of the work itself, as you lose the energy of luminous colour that is evoked from being in a 3D space and using the Oculus. Nevertheless these images act as a visual guide to give the example prevailing context.

One of the students has taken this experience much further and initiated a lunchtime VR group into the school. She has also started delving into the augmented world as part of her senior studies in Computer Graphics. This digital technology and her own experiences provides pathways for making art that she has not considered before. She has the power to bring the unreal into the real, which emboldens her. What the emotional and subjective experiences of the virtual world and of course traditional art making methods bring to light for me cannot be expressed on a rubric.

Time and our historical self

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My research at this point leads me to further investigate time and space as part of historical consciousness, historicity and how this defines and shapes the self. We make marks, apply daubs of paint or even digital pencil lines to render a form or create an image based on our response and thoughts. Each time we do this we make a mark in history on the page or the canvas. In theory if we don't like our physical marks we can

erase them, but I don't think we can ever leave these lines behind as part of our historical self. The marks we make as part of art, show our connection or our dialogue between ourselves, our actions and the work itself. Each time a student makes an expressive mark on a page or makes an aesthetic decision it becomes an indelible sign and an extension of the self, embedded into their personal history.

An example of this are the underlying marks of student charcoal drawings from a Year 9 project I titled *Tracing Nature*. The images are created from a series of time-based drawings. As the students draw an object from nature I give them a time limit. This approach to drawing is not a new method of working but a common exercise for illustrating and connecting with life that awakens the senses. Drawing exercises like these are like a warm-up for the eyes, the body and the mind. At the conclusion of each timed section I hand each of the students an eraser and ask them individually to rub out their work, so that they can again start layering another drawing of the same object on top of the erased image to build up a series of charcoal marks on the page, each line adding to the drawing's intentionality and history. The charcoal lines, no matter how hard they try, can never be entirely erased. Initially the students find this method problematic, but after a few attempts they recognise and understand how the build-up of lines adds to the aesthetic energy of the work.



Images: Students' work based in Tracing Nature, 2017

I wonder how they see the charcoal lines as part of the work's character, history and appeal? Are the drawing lines like ghosts—shadows haunting the page? Just as the marks on the page remain, for me they illustrate Gadamer's concept that we are always in time, leaving something behind as we move forward. It is within a space and in a time that we inherit the elements of who we are. Gadamer continues,

we should learn to understand ourselves better and recognise that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not the efficacy of history is at work. (2013, p. 312)

We do not necessarily have to recognise the impact of our actions immediately as part of our own historicity, but it exists, as the influence of our actions may return at a later time. We are moving in time but we leave something behind inheriting the elements of who we are. For as we move forward in time our actions and thoughts stay with us in memory. Equally, when we make art we leave behind part of ourselves in the work. As we make an image we receive elements of understanding, promoting historical consciousness in a temporal existence. Each time the students make a piece of work they may not be able to distinguish the impression it can have on them, or the next piece they make, or the next, until a later time. As time passes they have the opportunity to question themselves, feel vulnerable and exposed. Over time the students can recall their understanding as part of their attentive awareness and their ability to be reflexive about their experiences. I have faith in them and their ability to promote self-discovery as part of their learning.

So, what weight does historical consciousness have on the state of actualisation? I reason that time influences the way we approach or see our place in the world, which supports the hermeneutic perspective that lived experiences are elemental for growth and consciousness. But to develop consciousness or a connection to the self we need to appreciate and give thought to some prior understanding of the situation we are in. For example, if we want to understand a particular photograph it might make more sense if we have some prior understanding of the image, even if knowing how to take a photo is all we have. If we don't have any connection to the photograph we might not fully understand what we see before us. We might appreciate the photograph for its appeal, recognise it as 'cool' but do we understand it? Do we know the photograph? Can we find a greater meaning? Malpas (2016) refers to Gadamer and applies this example in more basic ontological terms. He says,

if we are to understand anything at all, we must already find ourselves ‘in’ the world ‘along with’ that which is to be understood. All understanding that is directed at the grasp of some particular subject matter is thus based in a prior ‘ontological’ understanding—a prior hermeneutical situatedness. (Malpas, 2016, para. 9)

I ask you to recall the detailed painting of the landscape of my student Allie, which I described at the beginning of the last *Lesson* on aesthetics and beauty, who connected her work to memories and time. I shared how she came to me in a lesson and said she was bored with her work and we talked about ways to ‘mess things up’, to try to break through the conventional and to develop her notion of time and memory into her artwork.

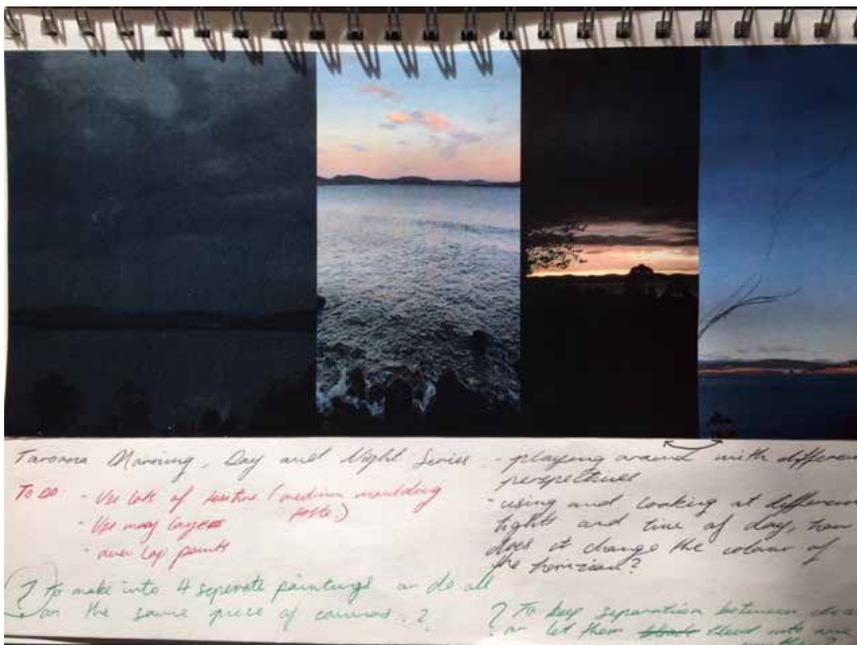
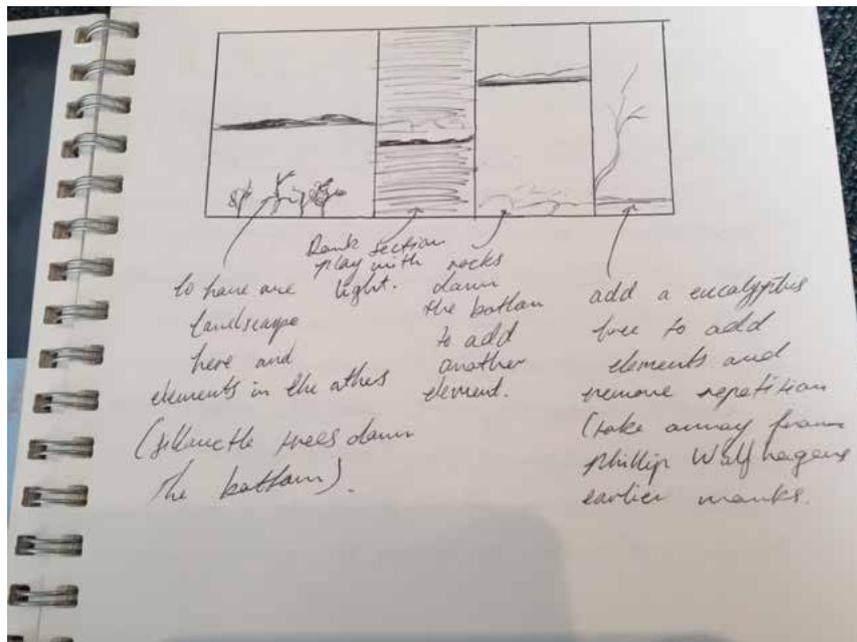
While these next two images and journal entries are working examples, they embody the start of a new direction based on our prior discussions. These are a response to Allie’s desire to find deeper meaning in her art so she could try to extend herself and juxtapose her work with sections of abstract lines that momentarily jar the viewer’s senses. In these images the horizon lines are altered, they do not align and change our orientation or reading of the space.



Images: Allie's new exploration of the landscape, 2017

These initial layers of paint are the foundation on which new brush strokes can be laid, building her mark making as part of her history. Allie might add areas of detail

to the paintings, not unlike her other work but this time she leaves sections incomplete, rough and more ethereal. First she applies the darkest darks and the lightest lights to give her a grounding, to build tension and to establish some contrasting spaces. Her new direction is based on her intuitive response to try to release herself from her current routine and to seek new interpretations of a space as part of memory and time.



Images: Allie's journal shows how she has used other images to recreate new work.

This reiteration of her ideas as part of her artistic storytelling leads Allie to experiment further with her technique, reconsider her design and her understanding of her artistry and herself. Her diary entry speaks about the way she considers connecting different times of day, playing around with different perspectives and shaping layers of paint to build textures to express and extend her idea of time and memory. She, like me as her teacher, is unsure of where this direction might lead as it contradicts her current actions, making her feel uncomfortable, vulnerable and doubting her ability to change. Altering our perception can be applied to explore diversity and foster change as part of time. This state of obscurity places Allie in a new space and on a new trajectory. She continues to explore her ideas based on memories, her historical context and what for her is imperative about time and a space. Her ideas, while still not complete, come primarily by memory and from photos taken by her family. These artefacts act as inspiration and give her purpose and deepen her genuine intention.

Through time we can acquire an awareness and an insight into the ‘historical being’ of who we are. As Gadamer (2013) reiterates,

all self-knowledge arises for what is historically pre-given because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions and hence both prescribes and limits every possibility of understanding... (p. 313)

The awareness of the historical being was particularly true of my Year 10 student who went to Laos and conceded that her work was not as she had intended but what was important was her ability to recognise that her creative struggle led to self-knowledge. She was able to identify how time and culture had affected her. She had started a sculptural art project with an intention, which shifted to a more thoughtful intent that evolved even further and surpassed the artwork itself. She writes,

Overall, I believe that my project taught me a lot about myself and about art making...I captured the essence or character of my idea. I think this process has been beneficial and although some things did not turn out how I expected it was still a very useful learning process. (Student Reflection, 2016)

This example of how her lived experiences added to her learning, her self-understanding and her attentive awareness is part of her ongoing historical consciousness morphing into her context for life. While she was not able to find a complete answer to her response to time and space, she was able to express what was created with clarity and intent. Perhaps her experience had influenced her more than she recognised, which is what Gadamer (2013) is suggesting when he says, “to be historical means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete” (p. 313). Art making changes us, adding to our history, our context and our purpose.

Historical context is important for art. It can be translated into an artwork and act as a metaphor or intention about the way we consciously exist in our social reality or our lived time. History is about temporality and our relationship with time. As time passes, our values and ideas can become clearer. Lawn says that “for Heidegger Art is disclosive” (2006, p. 89) and for my context reveals the truth of an experience as both the corporeal and the tacit. Let us not forget that truth in the mainstream “...tends to speak of truth as a kind of correctness whereby the mind corresponds rationally to the word” (p. 89), whereas truth in art for my context pushes past this empirical definition and extends it to embrace our social and historical reality.

As part of time we are placed into real situations but time is also unspoken, for it lives in our memories and the past. I contemplate how time allows us to formulate

decisions—to think, to reason and to wonder. Without the awareness of time and space as part of the relationship we form with our personal identity we might not be able to understand what we are trying to achieve in art or isolate what elements motivate us to make art that has virtue. As my students become more in tune with their work as both a physical entity and as an expression of the self, they can, and I suggest start to express their ideas and thoughts more eloquently and evocatively in both their imagery and through the spoken word. The students' intentionality becomes even more evident when they use the artistic lexicon with greater poise, rather than generic comments or open statements like 'cool'. White (2011) says in Lesson 63 of his book *100 Things to Learn in Art School*, we need to learn to speak about our work.

This not only helps those who are looking at your work to understand what you are trying to achieve but it is also critical to your own understanding of what you are doing. Avoid trying to interpret your own motivations or what may lie behind your work as an invitation to mislead yourself or reading into the work something that is not there. The work is a starting point and ending point of its content. (p. 63)

This quote from White is significant in relation to time, space and the hermeneutic situation because I believe that if my students can articulate their concerns and respond to historical consciousness through their context, they can move towards an empathetic place creating art with truthfulness as part of veracity.

The fullness of time

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As the final piece in this *Lesson* on time and space I share how I see and value the way artists embed notions of the temporal and the spatial into their practice to find the essence of their work in a cohesive way—the connection of the real and the transcendental in part align for the expression of their ideas to be achieved. Approaching the end of the academic school year is significant for me and for my senior students as together we need to find elements of lucidity to consolidate their final examination folios for external assessment by a panel of experts. Ironically this will be the time when rubrics and standards appear, measuring and moderating their success. These standards will be combined with human subjectivity deeming where each of them sits on a continuum of success to be awarded an ‘A’, ‘B’ or ‘C’ rating. There is even a criterion in the syllabus that assesses how cohesive their work appears to be. Helping them on this path is a rewarding challenge as I set them a final writing task requiring them to articulate their context in art. This culminating piece of theory in the course is designed to consolidate their work and bring together their research, their learning and their historical understanding into a state of fullness. The most difficult element of culminating their work is their capacity to express and share their ideas with others. Finding what can make their essay and their final folio of artwork persuasive tests them and their ability to explain their connection to their concept and how well this is being expressed in their work. For the students achieving this connecting layer, to realise the power of their historicity can give their work an anticipated potency. The more successful theory pieces from this written task will be from the students who come to recognise that true art, or art made with veracity,

is an extension of the self and is shaped by their history fuelled by and acknowledging their personal contradictions. Effectively, this final piece of writing is about how they locate and build context in their work and how, as art makers and viewers, they identify and use contextual cues to make meaning.

The terms *noematic* and *noetic* return with more clarity as I continue to draw the students' attention to the character and essence of their work. Asking them to reflect on the past and imagine the future can reveal their own intentionality while acknowledging their temporality and spatiality. I ask the students to compare and contrast artworks to show their level of understanding and depth. I invite them to recall images and experiences from their back catalogue of inspiration, memories and field research. I ask these questions of my students as part of their reflective practice, but to shape their written responses to my questions I bring the class group together to share a theory session designed to unpack the context of an artist and how time and space is intrinsic to art making.

I have a list of possible artists that I can show the students as examples of context in art, but I keep retuning to the work of the German Abstract Expressionist, Anselm Kiefer.



Image: Anselm Kiefer, Departure from Egypt, 1984

I introduce Kiefer and his imagery to the students. He was born in 1945 and his artwork is entrenched with both cultural and personal history. Studying Law and the Romantics of Language were not enough to sustain Kiefer who was deciding to pursue a life as an artist. His process and his premise for making art encapsulates time and space as he was becoming a significant European artist. His work is bound to his connection with German history, Jewish tradition, the Old Testament, nature and belief. These different facets have a historical context and a historical consciousness. At first sight and even as I came to know more about Kiefer's life experiences and background I found it hard to remove the cultural connections from his work. Kiefer's work speaks of hardship, compassion, destruction and the violence of war, yet in some of his works there are glimpses of hope, which adds to the intrigue and emotional reading. At times he includes found objects, which are added to his painterly and textured paint surfaces. Using light as a device to provide hope in his somewhat haunted landscapes draws me into the possible emotional stories of the image. Each layer of thick encrusted paint and debris is used to create a surface that acts as a metaphor for the tiers of history that are

built over time and to depict a space. His work is metaphorically and realistically rich and laden with sentiment, based on his response to his history and cultural connections.

As my senior students' knowledge of the art history timeline forms throughout the year, some of them can now start to see links between modernism and Keifer, particularly in the work of the Post World War Two 1940s Abstract Expressionists. Some of them can compare Keifer's work to the French Romantics such as Eugene Delacroix's (1798-1863) use of light and an idealist's use of drama. I ask the students to consider how the audience's viewpoint to Keifer's work will shift, given their personal experiences, beliefs, nationality and historical knowledge. With this preliminary background in place we explore the image titled *Departure from Egypt* (1984). I share my interpretation of the work with my students as a way to start the group's conversation.

I remember the *Departure from Egypt* painting at the *White Cube* Gallery in London—as I stood before the piece, I became lost in time. I was in a space as part of time. I relay to my students that my research into the artist's past enabled me to understand and know the image and its context more clearly because I could identify with the artist's philosophy. Keifer painted this work after a trip to Israel capturing the rich disfigured surface interlaced with the conventions of the Abstract Expressionists. The selection and combination of materials creates a sense of tension in the work, as on close inspection we can see a physical artefact—a shepherd's staff—has been incorporated into the painting evoking a cultural symbol of Moses or a pharaoh's emblem of power. The vista shows a high horizon line and the tilled earth curving towards us acting like the furrows of ploughed fields, a lava flow or possibly a destructive force. It could also be symbolic of the frustration on a person's brow, worn from time and expectation. While

the colour palette is limited and dark, the break of light plays a role navigating the eye to a certain point of focus, adding to the atmosphere and mystery. The image evokes a ghostly mood, a narrative of destruction and devastation—real or metaphorical. After I share my personal interpretation of the painting, the class starts to consider the artist's context in their own minds. I discuss the characters of the landscape and how it mirrors a typical European meadowland and the possible impact of the World War. Yet, we can start to wonder what else has happened on this piece of torn and worked land—have people planted crops? Who has worked the soil? Who has fought and died on these fields? These are questions we cannot directly answer, but as part of our curiosity we should not avoid wondering what has happened in a space over time. The layers of paint that have been built up hold the secrets of the artist making the element of the unknown highly pervasive.

We might not have all the answers to the painting and the artist's intention but we sense that this painting is based on Keifer's sense of temporality and that his intentionality was formed through time and in time. The links to the self, culture and political history are ever present. Keifer, like us, is thrown into time and a space and seeks to adapt and find a place on this continuum of life. He is haunted by a past of which he had no part, but he is responding to this history through his artwork. As human beings, we have the ability to fuse experiences into a line of events, each one affecting another in an attempt to find a unity of consciousness, which for me reports back to the thinking of Gadamer's notion of knowledge and how it benefits the way we come to know the self as part of our temporality and historicity. When I see Keifer's work I become caught up in it. I become part of the work and I feel the energy he is trying to express. I feel connected to his work through his use of space and time.

I think my students could see what I was endeavouring to impart to them in this theory session and how I was hopeful that they could respond to and write about their art with meaning in their essays. Why do their ideas speak to them? Why do they propel them to make art and how is their sense of self and historical consciousness part of their artistic deliberations? I was not asking them for all the answers nor for a definitive reply to my questions. Finding the full sovereignty of the picture is not achievable nor should it be the sole ambition of art. I do not wish for there to be only one answer to an artwork if the subjectivity of true art is to prevail. What matters for me is asking my students to dig deeper—*noein*—fostering the significance of the sacred and of the self as part of art.

When we view an artwork our experience can be sacred, spiritual and dialogical. It could be considered that this experience also happens when we see an image on a screen or in a book. Art is a physical act and the moment of meeting an artwork in the flesh is a far different experience from seeing it in the pages of journal or on a gallery website. Being present in time and in a space adds a sacred connection to the viewing of art that for me is one that words cannot fully express. My first viewing of Keifer's *Departure from Egypt* is now very different to my current relationship with it, especially in the context of the classroom. Time has passed and shifted my interpretation, my perception and my memory of the artwork. Presenting this image in the classroom for the context of teaching adds yet another layer of interpretation to the work. I cannot erase my initial encounter with the work nor can I fully describe that sensory and transforming experience. There are new layers that now shape how I perceive the artwork. As humans, we are conscious and this consciousness sits over our intuitive feelings and our responses to experiences, which is what excites me about the intentionality of the phenomenological method when creating and exploring art.

My classroom theory session about the artist's historicity was essential for the students to gauge the value of context, engagement and being present in their work. If this level of engagement and power is what my students want to achieve to evoke a raft of responses in the viewer as an extension of the self, understanding and applying this phenomenological lens to art and to the self might bring insight. A heightened level of commitment in the last part of the academic year is tough and hopefully we find the right way to reconcile their ideas. The students' final steps warrant art to be about sharing lived experiences as part of the fullness of time. It is with this focus that true art making can be achieved as part of time and space.

If we seek to make art that has power and virtue, sustaining the desire for veracity, linking art making back to the self, our personal history, temporality and our consciousness is indispensable. If this connection occurs, art evolves from responses to both the present and the historical, relating this back to Sokolowski's second layer of time where we remember time but we are not time bound. My thoughts and my body stirred when I was present at the image by Keifer. My heart became heavy as I imagined myself in the field depicted. Time as a measure did not matter but my relationship 'in time' did. My mind stopped chattering and I was able to 'be' and to feel the sensation around me. The ontological valence of the picture became timeless. I was present but also part of time and the fullness of time.

I call on these evocative words of Jimmy to share this idea of time, the feeling of being lost or finding the fullness of time. He says,

Feeling like an imposter, unwilling to
foster the thought of sweet blessed
relief: a pause from the chatter of your
head that galvanises every thread, every
fiber of your being, waiting for another
sensation of a feeling. Nothing becomes
something when that moment is broken.

(Jimmy, *Tension*, 2016)

I relate to these shrewd words as they capture the spirit that exists when I am present in ‘flow’ and how I interact in the now and how I respond to the space around me. Gadamer (2013) refers to this state of flow in relation to the temporarily of art as “suprahistorical” or “sacred” time (p. 124), suggesting that the present is not fleeting but relates to the fullness of time. Or as one of my painting students said to me when I asked him to come into a quick class pow-wow, “No...really, no, I am in the zone...” My response to him was to please stay there and paint. He had found ‘flow’ and I was not going to destroy that moment or admonish him for the purpose of sharing deadlines and other such administration. These are times that sustain me and give me assurance about the decisions I am making and my capacity to know my students and to foster their learning.

The paradox of time and space continues to perplex me but through my investigation I have gained insight into the way my students see and respond to its contradictions and how society, culture, technology and lived experiences play a role in shedding light on our historical consciousness. I have come to some further appreciation

of the role that understanding plays as part of action, and how a historical connection to time leads to consciousness—a sense of flow that enables the students to build an art practice that is reflective of changing worlds and also honours their sense of history.

The world continues to evolve. The clock continues to move around with its staccato movements and we find ourselves placed within it. Analogously, our life span is like a space into which we are thrown, and this too continues to go forward around us. We find ourselves amongst it. It is a space that can theoretically be defined by boundaries—we have a beginning and an end. This space could be also be described, as Gadamer does, as a void or an openness, which is punctuated with encounters and understandings that influences our actions. Gadamer speaks of a void and openness, whereas Sokolowski speaks to finding closeness. I relate to both notions and while they summon opposing forces, they are in part referencing the same sensation or feeling—a connection to self and to being.

What does temporality and the spatial mean for my students and myself? To this I raise this quote from the *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002), where Merleau-Ponty says, “The world is not what I think, but what I live through” (p. XVIII). This illuminates that we should be more faithful to our experiences of the world and look to what makes these experiences possible instead of looking at them from a purely dispassionate and functional view. The situations that we find ourselves in, the environment and spaces we build and inhabit all contribute to the way we make decisions, which builds self-awareness and consciousness. The initial paradox of time and space remains, but like those indelible charcoal marks on the students’ drawings they become part of what we do and who we are. Understanding the self is not about going down well-trodden paths and repeating what we know, rather we need to use time and space as a means to

challenge, to interpret and to reinterpret. This is a process that can be fostered to shape artistic intentions with integrity. The decisions we make can consequently influence the way we act and the way we seek to find meaning faithfully.

For an art maker and teacher this decision-making process is relevant to the way my students learn, how I teach and how we tease out and build on practical experiences to understand the self. As we change and come to understand our context and our place, we can make art in response to this. We cannot control time but we can use it to explore who we are and what it means to ‘be’ in time and part of time. Lyrics from the 1980s song by *The Bangles* says, “Time, Time, Time, see what’s become of me” and resonate in my head reflecting the words of Merleau-Ponty, “The world is not what I think, but what I live through” (2002, p. XVIII). I see from my work and my students’ work how the contradiction of time and space can be a catalyst for change if we can temper time in a space and be confronted by our own temporality.

These past *Lessons* have been attributed to the exploration of the elements that I see are important for art making. The layers of story, perception, aesthetics and time, harnessed by the ambiguity and paradox of tension, are for me essential to know the self and to explore the enigma of art. To give my inquiry more veracity I need to challenge myself again and consider the ethics of art and my moral self in relation to what I do and how I implement these *Lessons* in my classroom. It is all very well to ask the students to be confronted by art and by their decisions but I suggest there needs to be a moral compass applied to this as a teacher and as an artist. Or, in a world that promotes free speech, does there?

The next *Lesson* is where I confront the integrity of right and wrong in and for art.

LESSON SIX

Where I confront the integrity of right and wrong

The dynamics of wakefulness

The imprint of ethics

The state of nothingness

The persuasiveness of beauty

Being mindful of another



LESSON SIX

Where I confront the integrity of right and wrong

*I need to teach the students to be authors of their own learning and
once I can do this I must stand back and get out of the students' way.*

I must take responsibility.

I consider that trust and passion are needed for art.

(Louise Bloomfield, 2017)

As a final *Lesson* to this inquiry I consider the moral and ethical role of art and of art teaching. As a teacher guiding the millennial learner, articulating the ethical elements that drive me to teach and to guide my students to produce art that has purpose as a product of integrity is essential but my quest is accompanied by a moral purpose. Why? Two reasons—first, to ensure that my contribution to art education has intention and secondly, to reconcile why teaching and honouring an ethical art practice matters. I

consider in some part the role of art, the artist and the role of the teacher have separate ethical codes or moral purpose but they are infused with the virtue of trust in order to encourage freedom for learning and freedom for expression. I add that my own moral compass drives my actions and plays a substantial role in what I do and how I act. My ethical voice becomes the protagonist giving credence to my purpose. The choices that I make as an educator and as an artist are voiced in my thesis, governed by my own ability to judge, to show expertise in my area of knowledge and by my trustworthiness. I have become more aware of these attributes as I have deepened my inquiry.

Arriving at a consensus on the ethics of art and an ethical art making practice is not an easy position. If I am to apply my present thinking to the field of mathematics do I have the same conundrum? Possibly not. Interpreting and making art is not exclusively a black and white undertaking as I see it having multiple layers as seen in my *Lessons*. My students need to consider and apply these different layers to art making in order to find and believe in their story and artistic purpose. I consider that these layers of art making do not stand alone. They are imbued with an artist's passion, responsibility and judgement so that attitudes about art can be formulated as part of an ethical art practice. This thinking is pertinent to me because I see my ethical role of teacher as one that provides students with the skills to embody the role of artist by equipping them with the proficiency to discern between 'good' and 'bad' art with integrity before taking their own intelligent action.

As illustrated through my numerous classroom and personal narratives and examples, which I have woven into each individual *Lesson*, art is both expansive and emotive. Art making is an action charged and guided by the artist's hand and their

values. Emotions and breadth of experiences can be formed in response to artistic method and the interdependence we have with others as part of our ethical character. Aslaug Kristiansen (1996) in Maurice Freidman's (1996) *The Interhuman Dimension of Teaching* explores moral education under the counsel of Martin Buber. Kristiansen refers to Buber's contribution to this subject saying,

the ethical is rooted in the interhuman and must be fulfilled in the concrete situation insofar as each partner moves beyond the mere observance of ethical norms as they have been taught and authenticates such in real relationships. (Kristiansen, in Freidman, 1996, p. 215)

This ethical notion makes the recommendation that we cannot undervalue human existence and its need to be nurtured through both the independence and the mutual relationships we form. Ethics, like art, is not simply a matter of true or false. Rather I see ethics sitting in a state of evolution where different relationships or layers come into play. The notion of ethics is both considered and an intuitive element of each of my *Lessons*, as art is not merely about the rendering of a material object but it reveals elements of the self. Art, I believe, similar to the right to learn, ought to be authenticated and transformed with integrity, self-effacement and compassion.

My applied and scholarly examples show how trustworthy relationships formed in the classroom, in art and through art add to the worthiness of learning and teaching. I do not disregard the influence that tension and conflict have on my struggle to make art, to interpret art and to find purpose when dealing with my own uncertainty. Equally, I do not ignore these elements in my students who struggle to reconcile art with the self. Buber applies these turgid relationships to the ontology of art—the nature of being. The writing of Goutam Biswas (1996) articulates Buber's thoughts further. Biswas writes,

For Buber, the ontology of art is to be sought in terms of one's relation to it, i.e. in the ontology of the 'between'. The ontology of the 'between' appears to speak to the relational dimension. One's relation to the image-work accomplished or unaccomplished so far. (Biswas in Freidman, 1996, p. 229)

If the students are to make art as an offspring of their experiences based on their relationships within the world I propose that the responsible action for the teacher is to expose the students to different art practices and artworks so they can become aware of Buber's notion of the "between" or the "relational dimension" that forms the "image work" that is accomplished or not between them and the object or the experience.

If my students can navigate their way to the state of the 'between', finding the space to share dialogue as part of their relationships with the world and the self, they can possibly locate themselves in a place to appreciate the complexity of art even further. Finding the 'between' can give my students the capacity to make ethical decisions as part of their own practice by bringing an awareness to the origins that drive their actions.

For me the role of a 'good' or 'moral' teacher is one who is in pursuit of this state of the 'between' promoting a growth mindset as opposed to a limiting one. Understanding the power of a growth mindset and supporting the notion that the role of the 21st Century teacher is not to 'dump' information but rather to engage the student to appreciate, to discern and seek ongoing inquiry and curiosity is intrinsic to the practical and ethical context of my thesis. Or as Hattie (2009) implies, the students ought to become their own teachers. While I do not fully sustain Hattie's methodology, given its framework, which in my opinion is a strident process, I do concur with his sentiment because it suggests that students, artists and teachers can move towards and

live through authentic learning, action and teaching. For example, my role is not just to teach the students to draw and colour in but to teach them to interpret and question information in pursuit of communication and expression. How I coach my students to become authors of their own learning is laden with ethical decisions that become part of my responsibility as teacher and is much more than using aesthetic conventions to make something that looks 'cool'. I encourage them to seek out and make decisions about the artistic concepts and the materials they use to express their story. I need to deem the artworks that I select to support my teachings to be fitting and appropriate to show my students in order to broaden their artistic encounters. Judgement and responsibility are essential for this to occur, for I do not want to shelter them, nor do I want to harm them. Positioning myself on this see-saw of ethics fluctuates because each student has different values and tolerances. To come to know the student commences by building a rapport with them, shaped as part of the dialogue that forms between a teacher and a student in the classroom. Deciding on the best information to share with them is imperative and I need to do this with meaningful dialogue. I see the virtue of trust surfacing as part of the interhuman connection—a bond and an empathetic affiliation between myself and my students needs to be in play if we are to work together and if the students are to come to realise their context, share their story and interpret the stories of others with integrity. I suggest that along with knowledge and information, the virtue of trust is necessary in a good teacher and to produce purposeful and good art. A teacher who does not act on such values might cause or intend harm as Arendt (1958) and Raymond Gaita (2000, 2004) speak of in the context of demonstrating 'meaning blindness'.

Martin Krygier (2011) in *The Meaning of What We Have Done* signifies the work of Arendt and Gaita, sharing with the reader their views on meaning blindness. Arendt

and Gaita are both seemingly of the opinion that this notion forms a state where we are seen through. This state of blindness is found when a person's deepest attachment and feelings are treated as non-existent and are overridden. Krygier suggests that for Gaita, meaning blindness brings a sense of injustice saying that it causes harm—the “harm of ignoring, denying, rejecting the humanity of another” (Krygier, 2011, p. 128). Ignoring another intimates that the dialogue between the self and the other is overridden and the virtue of trust is eliminated. As a teacher I feel that I cannot ignore or turn away from my students and their interests but rather I need to listen to them without judgement and make recommendations based on this information.

Pia is a student in my Year 10 design class who has severe learning disabilities and needs a teacher's aide in each lesson to guide and support her. I could ignore my responsibility to Pia and let the teacher's aide oversee her in each lesson with colouring in equipment and paper. But as her teacher it is my moral role to give her an equally engaging learning experience and opportunity. Her learning program needs adjustments so that she understands what I ask of her. I could have adopted the approach that colouring in is all she is capable of and this is all I need to provide but the more I work with her in class the more curious I am about the way she sees the world before her. There are times when I ask Pia's aide to assist me in other ways such as to retrieve materials for other students, so I can see how Pia works with technology and how she explains her ideas. From these encounters I perceive more about her understanding of art and design and I discover and discern her character. Her use of colour is a cue for me to know how she is feeling. When she is engaged her actions are strong and she uses bright colours. When she is having a bad day or is easily distracted, she turns to her muted coloured set of pencils. It is part of her self-regulation and the pattern that I

have come to understand. Her confidence of late is high and in fact, some of her more recent work is transcendental and more powerful than some of my able students. Her thinking process, while slower and at times contradictory, gives her, in my opinion, a greater opportunity to seek the ‘between’ state. She is methodical in her actions but these actions are meaningful and highly considered. Her repetitious thought process is part of her learning disability but nevertheless enables her to find space to explore and respond to her imagination. The easy option of supplying colouring in equipment is not the ethical option. Her learning differences do not silo her thinking, her perception, or her ability to produce art as part of the self.

When I apply my understanding of Sokolowski’s view of perception from past *Lessons* to this situation, I am swayed even more by the role perception has for finding purpose in art and in the self. Applying my premise about moral education towards my experience with Pia makes me appreciate art, the power of learning and the way we see through yet another lens.



Image: Pia’s responses to patterns and shapes

These images belong to Pia and are a hybrid of digital and analogue art making techniques. She is naturally drawn to geometrical shapes and patterns so this is the aesthetic I encourage to see from her. Pia loves soccer so her work often refers to the

patterns of the balls and the designs on a player's uniform. I see her images having a raw energy infused by her exploration and the way she observes the world. I find them to be soulful, free and purposeful. Her work is pervaded with trust and a passion to engage and respond to the world and what she regards as necessary. This accompanying page from her journal, which depicts a range of images is both her work and the work of her aide. It represents elements of play and decision-making, reflecting her use of colour and line.



Image: Pia's journal entries that show her different designs

Under close scrutiny I can see similarities with the work of Modernist Swiss painter Paul Klee and his metaphysical use of shapes and colours. When I show Pia this work she too can see connections between colour and shapes. She likes Klee's work and responds to it intuitively.



Image: Paul Klee, *Ships After the Storm* (1927/v1) crayon drawing

This image *Ships After the Storm* (1927/v1) is an image we both think has similarities with her work. Together we ask questions of Klee's work to try to unpack his set of codes and abstract symbols. We ask questions about the shapes and how they represent the ships and the energy of a storm.

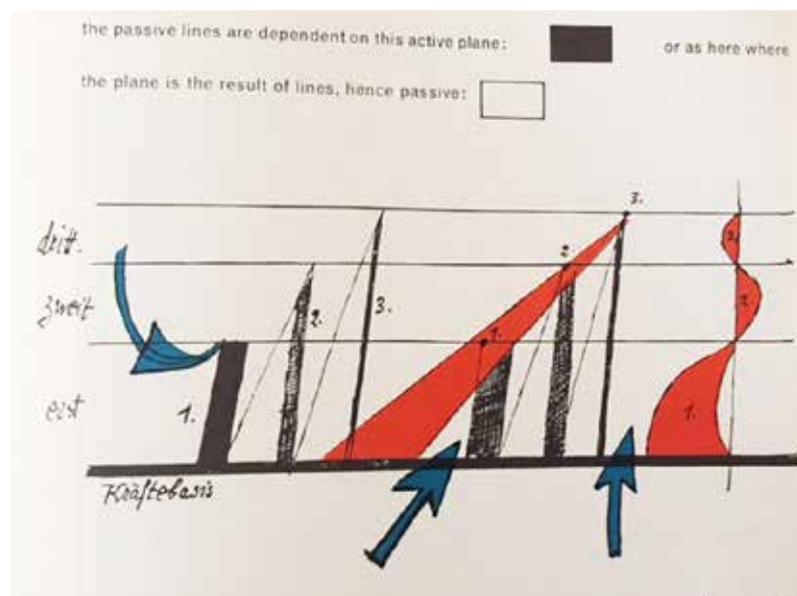


Image: Paul Klee diagram that shows the science behind his art

When I show Pia this diagram from *Paul Klee, Notebooks Volume 1, The Thinking Eye* (Spiller, 1956, p. 373) that reveals the science behind Klee's work she can identify with the movement—the shapes moving upwards, reminiscent of ships riding the waves and how they get smaller as they fall away to the sea or head towards the horizon line. For me this image is like an artwork in itself—showing moving symbols and lines that connect to reveal yet another interpretation of a thought. Pia, like me, can see how Klee organises his feelings and how he responds to the world in an incorporeal way. The time I spend with Pia on these occasions is concentrated but my other students are generous, giving me grace to engage and build trust with her.

The dynamics of wakefulness

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The challenges of the teacher are becoming varied, which is what Rancière (1987) speaks of in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. My understanding of his work reveals to me the need to believe in educational liberalism as a means to cultivate a free person. Considering this in the context of art and education I strive to enable my students to seek freedom as part of ethics in the classroom. In my first *Lesson* I referred to Biesta's (2011) move towards emancipation, which promoted the ability to teach oneself as part of a lifelong learner seeking freedom. Under the auspice of Rancière it seems prudent to be reminded of this notion as part of a pedagogical practice that honours authentic and ethical learning. Biesta says,

The route that students will take when summoned to use their intelligence is unknown, but what the student cannot escape, Rancière argues, is ‘the exercise of his liberty’ and this is summoned by a three-part question ‘What do you see? What do you think about it? What do you make of it? And so on, to infinity. (2011, p. 23)

This cycle of questioning has been a critical element of my work and research as an educator and artist, and supports my desire for the students to think about the world and find creative freedom based on their own level of intelligence.

My Year 10 student, Pia who has differences and clear learning difficulties should not be compromised but rather given the same opportunities as her peers. She shows me her passion, her story, and through her artwork, we develop trust. She teaches me to see more freely.

Todd May (2008) in *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière* explores the work of Rancière and his views on the complex interactions that exist between how we think about ourselves and how we act as part of a social hierarchy. May interprets Rancière’s political perspective with the premise that we are all of equal intelligence and that any collective educational exercise founded on this principle can provide the insights from which knowledge is constructed. Rancière claims in his work that the disenfranchised should feel perfectly able to teach themselves whatever it is they want to know. Furthermore, we should not feel bound to experts or reliant on others for our intellectual emancipation. This perspective on equal intelligence is worthy of consideration as a part of a teacher’s ethical role—Pia seeks knowledge, she finds her expression and equivalently she contributes to my awareness and how I think about myself and others.

This wakefulness about classroom dynamics illuminates for me another way of considering equality in the art studio. I do not intentionally apply a political lens to this space but perhaps I am naïve. Is my initial ignorance about the social hierarchy in my classroom good or bad? I am silenced by this thought when I think of the art space as a domain of hierarchical claims. And really it is. The classroom has both passive and active players, all of whom have a right to be heard, acknowledged and accepted. The students learn at different levels, bringing their own voice to the creative classroom dynamic. When the students arrive to my class I hold no judgement and I see them all as equal. I suggest that this is a good thing and is morally sound. I do not need to know too much about them for if I am to practice my belief that they are all equal, then over time I observe and come to know them for who they are. I establish what they know and don't know under a liberal and open-minded framework.

What percolates through these views is the notion of dialogue—not superficial dialogue but dialogue that has meaning as an agent of change. I concur with the opinion of Buber that trust becomes the staple of aesthetic dialogue and forms the interhuman dimension of teaching that enables us to live fully. Similarly, the contemporary views of Waleed Aly (2017) and Scott Stephens (2017) from the ABC podcast *The Minefield* resonate. Aly and Stephens host a podcast on moral life, discussing issues, ethical dilemmas and contradictory claims that form the complexities of modern society. In a podcast on trust they say,

If we are not able to nurture the capacity to trust, to rely on others for what is most precious to our common life, are we condemning ourselves to morally wasted existences defined by fear and envy? (Aly & Stephens, 2017)

This notion of trust extends to art makers and teachers. As teachers we need to form a level of confidence with the students for learning to be meaningful. This role is permeated with reconciliation about what information and knowledge is relevant and worthy for the students to learn and know. In the same way, an artist needs to form a level of trust with themselves and with the viewer to act in the interests of all. I return to my own values and endeavours to nurture the self, to act ethically and judiciously as part of the influential role I have as an educator and as an artist.

Looking at the role of knowledge as part of the genesis of ethics intimates that I cannot go past the hermeneutic relevance of Aristotle. His work is important because of its link to the human sciences and the role of reason as part of moral action. Gadamer (2013) suggests that Aristotle is, “concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 322). I interpret these words to mean that we can strive for knowledge through actions that are formed by our morals, incentives and contemplation rather than being single-minded and detached from the self. I return to Friedman’s *The Interhuman Dimension of Teachings* and recount Biswas’ (1996) work referring to Buber’s understanding of knowledge. Biswas writes, “Knowledge here means knowledge of—a discursive mode of awareness where there is no meeting or encounter” (Friedman, 1996, p. 227). Buber implies that knowledge in this form is immediate and is based on our connection or perception of a situation. “Perception draws us out of being in the world and that we need only vision and, in its wake, art transcends need and makes the superfluous into the necessary” (Friedman, 1996, p. 227). ‘Transcend’ in this context is to go beyond the object or the meeting as a ‘thing’ via dialogical exchange and to consider our connections to the world. This attitude is aligned to the work of

Sokolowski and particularly his third layer of time, where he proposes that over time we can surpass the experience itself and move towards a transcendental attitude. At this time our perceptions change and we respond to what we see as necessary. As a teacher, I see it as being critical to determine what is in fact necessary and eliminate what I perceive to be superfluous.

I raised the notion of the transcendental attitude in my *Lesson* on perception suggesting that it is important to find the ‘necessary’ in art to make meaning. I also proposed that locating this state of being signifies that when my students are confronted and engaged by their ways of seeing, elements can become brighter and clearer. I rekindle this idea under the code of ethics to add weight to the dialogue about knowledge and acting with virtue. This view became prominent during one of my Year 12 student’s mid-year art review. Together we looked through a series of her recent landscape photographs that revolve around the notion of perception as part of ‘reason’ or intention to make art and to find her creative freedom. She finds it fascinating how we can both be looking at the same setting but we each see different things. She says of her work,

My idea of perception is portrayed and complemented with photography and collage rather than other mixed media forms, (sic) as it is this combination of materials that make the idea stronger. The act of taking a photo is in itself my own ‘experience’ of the situation in that point in time. It is what I see as important. When I take a second photo of the same space on the same or following day but at a different time I see fresh things. My challenge is to combine the two images. I am trying to show two different ‘worlds’ and or ‘views’ of a singular situation. (Working Paper: Senior Art Student, 2017)

The topic of perception is significant to her as she recalls sifting through her camera’s SD card. When she came across a set of images she realised that her own

perception had shifted. She remembers being out one morning taking photos and leaving them on the SD card to look back on at another time. What she remembers seeing, or what was significant to her at that time had now changed. Her connection to the images and the world has altered. We both acknowledge that the notion of perception and human interaction are not new ideas in art but regardless, it is an area that she wants to pursue. Her struggle is with the way she conveys the changing viewpoints in her work, to find the ‘necessary’ in an innovative and true manner. After a few attempts, she experiments with taking the same scene at two different times of the day. The importance of day and night becomes a relevant convention. She tries shooting the same scene from different standpoints in a 500-metre radius and combines the two images together to see what transpires. She feels this approach is a step towards capturing her idea that applying this lens of perception enables the artist to transcend the object. For her, the superfluous becomes the ‘necessary’ due to her reflection, her questioning of herself, her work and the iteration and reiterations of her ideas and space.

She is not content with her results and knows that she could easily take two separate images of the same scene at different times of the day and place them side-by-side on the wall as a way to communicate two differing views of one place. She knows that if she did take this option she is not pushing any boundaries or using her idiosyncrasies as an artist—her efforts are not sponsoring an ‘ethical’ art practice because they are not honouring her true creative intentions. If she is to compromise her artistry in this way I think she might recognise that she is not acting in her best interests—she is not trusting her intelligence and creative ability. What is important and necessary for her is to express the fusion of two views into one image to interconnect her idea to her intention. The challenging element for her is discerning ways to use her knowledge for

this synthesis to become real. She knows that she cannot find resolution through her art by following a generic formula but rather she acknowledges her desire to honour her artistry by transcending time and space to guide her as a maker and as an interpreter of the world. Ruminating true creative intentions in order to act in an ethical and moral manner for her art and for herself is the tension that lies before her.

This image starts to creatively express her idea in its true form, where her intention and skills are aligning. When we attend to the artwork we can see two views that are accentuated by the use of complementary colour, the strong contrasting lighting and the dominant diagonal lines of the bridge and the fence railing that supports the sunglasses leading the viewer's eye to a point on the horizon line. The sunglasses reflect a scene from the daytime. The bright sun lit sky draws us towards the lenses and we might wonder if the view is the same as the night time.



Image: Student work, the coming together of two views into one

Through the student's work and through our conversations I can see my *Lessons* starting to combine with meaning and ethical purpose. Each *Lesson* is endorsing the art making process empowering my student to act in a manner that sits with her values and shows how she can combine and control the art elements of line, light and colour to form an image of curiosity. It is important that she is sharing her story to the best of her ability under the code of ethics and trust. I feel that my teaching is making a difference to her human action, and in turn her learning. She is finding meaning in herself and through her art.

My students of art must learn to be open to the acquisition of both knowledge about art but also knowledge of art in their quest to be artful. Adopting this view overrides stumbling upon a final answer as an uninformed response. As humans, we come to know ourselves from our actions through reason, judgement and knowledge that determines the point at which we make art. As Gadamer says, a way to consolidate my thinking is for, "the purpose of knowledge to govern this action" (2013, p. 325). The student who only wants to create art based on a final product or to entertain weakens their desire to nurture a deeper relationship with their experiences or respond fully to the accumulation of knowledge. The student that takes the easy road is not being soulful but rather I suggest that they can imprison themselves with art that is purely cosmetic and derivative—art that lacks meaning and is empty. Is this ethical, trustworthy and artful? I suggest not.

The imprint of ethics

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To take my ethical conundrum as teacher and artist past the classroom and into a more public space, let's discuss the dialogue within art as part of ethics. To do this I suggest it is timely to recall our understanding of art. Under the guidance of my *Lessons*, I shape the general definition that proposes art can communicate ideas—creating a sense of beauty to explore the nature of perception and be a response to the world around us through our emotions. Biswas (1996) has a more articulate definition. He says, “art has an origin based on the desire to enter into personal relationships with things and imprint on them our relation to them” (Biswas, 1996, p. 225). Just as others, including Sokolowski and Gadamer, have spoken about the way we see and think about an object, Buber (1996) also sponsors the notion that “art transcends the ‘thingly’ nature of the thing. It ceases to be an accessory or a tool and becomes an independent structure.” Biswas continues,

But this independent structure is not to be dissociated from the purview of relation, it beams light of relation. Artistic creation and awareness proceeds from our dissatisfaction with the stringent meaning-contents of the world... (in Freidman, 1996, p. 225)

The notion of the ‘thing’ was supported by Heidegger, so to see it appear in contemporary thought is of value—giving credence to our need as artists to be aware of the scope and the influence that our ideas have on the self and others. Under this thinking we can endeavour to transcend the object, using it as a form of expression. The notion of dialogue in art exists in varied combinations. What is established is a rapport between the artist and the experience itself, and the art and the viewer. Within these dialogical combinations different responses arise, bringing subjectivity, intersubjectivity and ethics into play.

How far can these dialogical relationships be stretched before trust is broken? How far can art be pushed until it breaks a code of ethical norms? How far can I push a student before their idea and their work tips over from being their own, before it rips their boundaries apart and becomes what I think it should be, or what they think I want them to do? And does this matter? I believe it does. This is where the students can start to show inklings of becoming their own teachers, making ethical decisions, shifting their tolerances and becoming broader thinkers. Through their assimilated knowledge acquired from their learning the students can make decisions that enable them to create art with integrity and purpose.

With this predicament in mind and as I write this *Lesson* for my thesis, it is 12 pm on June 17, 2017 and a three-hour art performance is about to take place as part of the Dark Mofo Festival in Hobart. The festival is known for its less than conventional art content. Each year the artistic director seemingly seeks to find an artist shrouded in controversy—an artist whose work is on the edge of what is comfortable for most. When the program for the festival is being curated I feel that a premise to antagonise the community is deliberate and designed to bring different styles of art to the public. But with this foundation to cause tension questions around the ethics of art and making art become apparent. Are the festival directors appealing to the ‘relational and aesthetic dimension’ of art or are they acting blindly with the choices they make in an attempt to entertain and to antagonise? Regardless of the ideology, they are offering a wider invitation to the community to see and experience art differently. In my opinion, this opportunity for exposure to other art forms, good or bad, is not without value, for art should not be merely created to meet the needs or tastes of all, to be hung in a gallery or to pander to the comfortable. Art should be able to incite people to form judgment as part

of the virtue of trust regardless of how it is set or seen. This year Dark Mofo is revelling in the work of the Austrian Artist Hermann Nitsch. Nitsch is a 78-year-old artist currently in Hobart to facilitate his visceral work titled *150 action*. Stephanie Convery (2017) in *The Guardian* reports Nitsch as saying, “All art tears borders apart. That is what art has to do” (Convery, 2017, para. 11). Nitsch says he is intent on merely showing what is already there, exposing what we know to exist but choose to turn away from.

That evening the ABC weekend news service reported on the performance as a “bloody sacrificial ritual”. Their narration of the event says it began slowly, with performers stripped naked and bound to crude stretchers and wooden crosses. Some were doused with blood and milk. About halfway into the three-hour show, a bull carcass was brought in and hung on a wooden structure. The performers lathered their bodies with the bull’s blood while an initial audience of 2,000 looked on. According to the ABC the audience soon dissipated to about 200. Live instrumentation and an orchestral score, which at times resembled the calls of wild animals, accompanied the show adding to the drama and the suspense of the performance.

When the work was introduced in the Dark Mofo program my initial response was one of dismay and I felt strongly about its pretext. But now that the event has happened I am in some ways disappointed that my natural curious tendencies did not entice me to attend. My ethical disposition suggested this transgressive art was not art but rather a degrading act based on the killing of an animal. Trust had shifted and it aggravated my values of what the role of art is. But I can never know if I was right or wrong, or if the artwork was in effect good or bad, as my familiarity of Nitsch’s work was not real. I can only read, view media images, and listen to reports of the artwork to

inform my opinion. I can only imagine what it was like to be in the initial crowd of the 2,000 curious viewers. I can only imagine and fictionalise the newly slaughtered bull placed as a central iconic component of the show where the performers' choreographed sequences of ritualistic actions that eventually led to the dismembering of the animal's carcass. Part of my decision not to attend the show was based on my lack of trust with the artist. I did not feel I could seek dialogue or find the 'knowledge of' the work. I was biased in my unsolicited views, which I now consider to be narrowing and limiting.

This feeling in itself alters the way I interpret the work as I was removed from its intentional viewing. Some might say Nitsch's work is not art but rather entertainment. Animal rights protesters fought for the rights of the bull and some said it was disgusting and disrespectful to the animal. Others say that if you eat meat there is no problem as the animal would have died anyway. I read a subsequent article on the ABC website the following morning written by Elise Fantin (2017). Fantin brings new perspectives to the artwork replaying comments from some members of the audience that were varied. One patron said, "After two hours of waiting and then it was just arty boringness, boring, with another layer of boring, I'd like to think that life has more to offer than this crap". Some felt it was heartbreaking and amazing. Other spectators took a different view, proclaiming, "It's intense but that's the freedom of art and I respect them for that". "You can either like it or dislike it, the performance was mesmerising", and "It was emotional and intense. The significance of ripping apart a bull was heartbreaking and amazing and in the end I felt relieved" (Fantin, 2017, para. 8-10).

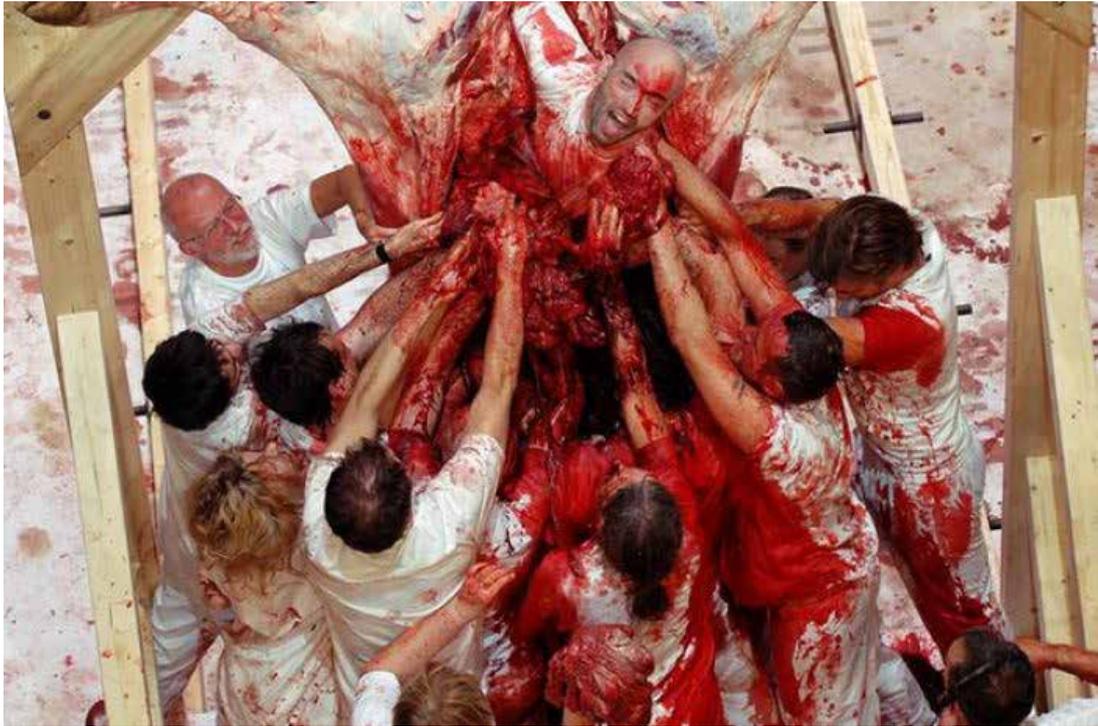


Image: Taken from a previous performance by Nitsch

Herein lies the subjectivity of art and the ethical issues that surround it. Nitsch says of his work in an article titled *Blood and Thunder*,

The animals are not killed by the theatre but by the society that consumes them. I use the dead cadaver like an anatomist, displaying meat, blood, inner organs like a mesentery. (in Cornwell, 2017, p. 8)

The Guardian reports him saying,

I want only to show what is. I never was interested to make provocation. I want to show intensity. And let's say, maybe an intensity is a kind of provocation, but for me [it] always is important to show life and to celebrate life. (Convery, 2017, para. 13)

In a similar fashion, I recall reading the tale of a Nazi officer asking Picasso if he painted *Guernica*. His response was, "No, you did". Just as Picasso painted the horror of war, Nitsch captures the cycle of life and its intensity. Is there a need for

intensity and passion to be the underlying antagonist? Each artist's passion differs but nevertheless it seems to be a crucial element that binds my *Lessons* together. It appears that Nitsch's passion is to show truth combined with the sensations of happiness, death, joy and resurrection in this style of transgressive art to give him a voice. Or can we say that in essence he is painting like other artists but in another form? Nitsch also reminds us that the history of the arts responds to the themes of death and that they have been prevalent in the work of artists including Bach, Michelangelo and Shakespeare. If we apply Buber's definition of art, that "art transcends the 'thingly' nature of the thing... becoming an independent structure..." (Biswas, 1996 in Freidman, 1996, p. 225) to these situations and momentarily set aside our own opinions, are these artists embracing art by where they have entered into a personal relationship with things and imprinted their relation on them? One could suggest that with unbiased reason, under Buber's definition that they have. When we start to layer our own opinions and ethics into artistic interpretation we become more questioning of the artist's intentions, freedom or context. If we do in fact arrive at this juncture of freedom our minds can become animated and our emotions can shape our views. I propose that if we are morally and ethically disturbed by this genre of experiential and transgressive art we might struggle to find emotional reason and rationality in the artist's actions. Some wonder why someone would do that to an animal and parade it in front of a crowd. How can the act of dismembering an animal under the guise of art be an artist's passion? The action and intention of the artist potentially becomes troubling because it challenges our values and our predetermined association of what art is or what art should be.

If we consider how the dismembering of an animal might be depicted in a painting or a photograph would we hold a different relational stance? Do we take such a

moral stand with the work of contemporary British artist Damian Hirst and his animals cut in half and placed in glass vats of preserving chemicals in the Tate Gallery? Do we reject the hanging carcasses of Francis Bacon or the abstract and sometimes violent marks of Picasso depicting war? Do we see these examples as inhumane? Are these depictions of animals and war ethically or morally different from Nitsch? Has trust been broken between the artist and the viewer, or is art doing what art has the power, freedom and permission to do?

The state of nothingness

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Do we give people with the title of ‘Artist’ a greater sense of freedom that allows them the opportunity to go beyond an accepted convention of ethical practice, as part of art? John-Paul Sartre (1943) in *Being and Nothingness* wrote about the pursuit of being as part of freedom and responsibility. I see correlations between Sartre and Buber as they both describe the links that connect our being to the consciousness and to the physical sensations of the world, like joy or sadness.

The ‘how’ (*essential*) of this being, so far as it is possible to speak of it generally, must be conceived in terms of its existence (*existential*). This means that consciousness is not produced as a particular instance of an abstract possibility but that in rising to the centre of being, it creates and supports its essence—that is, the synthetic order of its possibilities. (Sartre, 1943, p. 15)

Adding to my thinking is Thomas Flynn (2011) who signifies these sensations as being “transphenomenal characters of being” (para. 36) and are part of the structure

of human life creating our own essence and adding to the way we create ourselves. Bakewell (2016) also aligns with these views on Sartre's writing.

Freedom, for him lay at the heart of human experience, and this sets humans apart from all other kinds of object. Other things merely sit in place, waiting to be pushed and pulled around. (Bakewell, 2016, p. 6)

I pursue Bakewell's elaborations of Sartre, as she delves deeper into his notion of freedom to explain his viewpoint. She describes his two realms of freedom. One is that of the *pour-soi* (for-itself), defined by the fact that it is free. Bakewell says, "This is us: it is where we find human consciousness" (2016, p. 153). The other realm is the *en-soi* (in-itself) where we find everything else like paintbrushes, cars, trees and sponges. "The in-itself and the for-itself are as opposed as matter and anti-matter" (p. 153) and in between is 'nothingness'. Heidegger (1927) in *Being and Time* wrote about *Dasein* as a kind of being, existence in the world or 'hereness' but in contrast to this Sartre says for-itself is not a being at all. I interpret Bakewell's view on Sartre to possibly mean that what exists between the matter and the anti-matter is an active 'nothingness'. I wonder if this state of nothingness enables us to become more aware of the necessary, where we perceive other things like sounds, the light and what is potentially missing. The notion of nothingness engages my curiosity and triggers my senses, activating my state of being. For example, if I arrive at the art gallery to meet a friend and if on my entrance he is not where we have organised to meet, I seek him out. My being becomes present as I look for him but I cannot see him, falling into a void of questioning—wondering where my friend might be, if something has happened to him, or if there has been a misunderstanding about our plans come into my mind. My questions portray my looking as active nothingness. The state of nothingness in the context of my gallery visit

and the absence of my friend brightens my awareness of the space as I search and scope the environment. Observing the gallery means the sounds become more prominent, I notice people's clothes and the way they engage with their phones and others. I notice the wall colours and the temperature. I suggest that my new and pre-reflective awareness heightens my sense of self in and of the space. Looking for my friend places me in a void, bringing to light Sartre's realm of nothingness. This gives me a new form of freedom articulated by Bakewell and Flynn.

Do artists have licence to act more freely and have the ability to create work that sits outside convention under the title of 'Art'? Or are an individual's values and cultural creed what underpins our ethical and responsible actions when we make art? If we concede this viewpoint, I think artists do have a licence for more freedom to elicit their area of passion, but one would anticipate or trust that their actions are governed by an inbuilt sense of ethics, a moral compass based on values. In the case of Nitsch, are his ethics and notion of freedom different and stretched past the norm? An animal died to become a symbol for truth, life and death. For Picasso, *Guernica* was painted to expose and express his relationship and the tension associated with the character of war. This work became celebrated, it challenges the viewer, it is artful, poignant, antagonistic and considered a masterpiece. But what is different between this painting and *150 action*? An obvious but substantial difference is our dialogue and relationship with the works as part of our aesthetic experience. Traditionally, when we view an artwork on a wall, we are at arm's length from the truth. We are initially displaced and our standpoint is voyeuristic. The way we respond to the content and the way we experience the work comes back to Buber's relational dimension. We are also placed in a position to question the truth of the content, its reality and its part of the artist's freedom. As I deliberate

I need to be reminded that people's values are different and their moral consciousness may be acute or wide. I consider how these ways of seeing and experiencing combine, reminding me that we create our own nature, or as Buber and Sartre reiterate, we notice what is necessary as part of our perception and our being. The subjectivity of art is yet again prevalent and interwoven with our ethics.

Commonly when we view a painting or a photograph that depicts a morally disturbing image our relationship to it appears or is perceived to be different to an image that is pleasing to our senses. A painting or photograph is an object and there is a veil of safety between the content and the viewer. The impression of trust is different. A painting is an image of something that was potentially real, or in essence, is the artist's interpretation of an event or experience. The contrast in the artworks is their intentionality, context and the immediacy of the work. Nitsch and other relational artists such as Serbian artist Marina Abramović challenge our interface and our immediate exchange with and in art.

To explore this idea further I contrast Nitsch's work with the relational work of Abramović for some more transparency. Abramović has actively worked for over four decades "exploring the relationship between performer and audience, the limits of the body, and the possibilities of the mind" (Abramović, 2017, para. 4). Her art is for self-exploration, expressing similar life themes as Nitsch as she correspondingly invites people into an active, live, real-time space requiring participation.

What is it like to be part of an Abramović work? I participated in *Private Archaeology* at Mona in 2015, which is why I can speak to her work with greater awareness.

Unlike Nitsch's *150 action*, I was more trusting of her work and context. Participating in her work was less provocative than other performative work I had experienced and remembering this moment I felt assured as I entered her art installation. As part of my commitment to participate I dress in a lab coat and wear a hat to cover my hair. I leave my personal belongings in a locker and I am ushered into a long silent room, where people all dressed in the same garb sit side by side at a long, thin communal table. The room has a minimalistic aesthetic and the lighting is low, quietly illuminating the space. Running down the centre of the table is a strip-like 30-centimetre-tall mountain of white rice and brown lentils. I take my place at the table where I look around to see what others are doing. They are carefully sorting the lentils from the rice. I too start sorting and counting rice and lentils, cautiously watching to see if there is a system. I am to place the grains and pulses in some order or pattern under my own regulated system. The tension in the room is remarkable—captivating yet silent, and I start to feel discomfort. To stay or not to stay and how long should I keep counting? These questions preoccupy my mind while I diligently sort the rice from the lentils. These questions become distracting and I am aware of my presence in the room. The experience is palpable and hypnotic but also angst-ridden. For me there is tension, which is perplexing as I am free to be in the space, yet I feel so constricted. When I finally find the courage to leave the space, my separated piles are scooped up and placed back into the middle of the table. My effort, like my presence, is erased.

As the participant, I accepted the invitation to be present, at which point the dialogue between the artist and myself changed. The feeling was tangible and sensory. In essence, I was a player in the artist's world. This reality in some ways disarmed my feeling of trust, and instead my vulnerability became evident. In the case of Nitsch, the

rumble of the inner self surfaced because I felt the interpreted or perceived violence towards an animal, whereas for Abramović, the counting of rice was not violent by action but for me there was an inner conflict that caused tension in a less obvious way.

These are contrasting examples but both illustrate relational dimensions that move past the traditional or norm that can be imposed on generic art making. Are these artists working under a normative code of ethics that appeals to a common good or do they utilise an organic set of boundaries, allowing for freedom and self-expression to be integral in art? If art is to communicate and act as a response to the world, are we allowing for freedom to be a part of expression? As part of human nature, we tend to look for right and wrong—questioning our values, which can incite feelings of vulnerability. When this response occurs the inherent human bond of trust can be broken because when we are in a vulnerable state we are released from our preconceived perceptions. Aly and Stephens (2017) speak to this by saying,

trust is not something we develop or substantiate but rather trust is given and part of the human condition. We are entrusted to each other and each other are responsible for another. (Aly & Stephens, 2017)

Patrick Stokes (2017) buys into this conversation on *The Mindfield* podcast saying, “vulnerability is part of trust, as we come to expect trust from others” (Stokes, 2017). Trust under this definition moves past calculation and becomes an element of living an ethical life. When trust becomes clear it becomes salient—trust becomes more than just a calculation but rather an innate and esteemed virtue. Trust is embodied into life and is an element of organisations, religions, education, and in part we come to expect trust within art given that we trust the creative action of artists to act with good intention and to avoid harm to others.

There is much discourse that evaluates the ethical dimensions in art and this discourse is divided. Are artists judged by the same rules as everyone else in society, or are they in a position of privilege that allows them to elude normative rulings? British-born Claire Bishop (1998) was a pioneer in understanding contemporary art in relation to ethics. Her focus was on participation or relational art, also known as relational aesthetics, which was originally defined and conceived by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud (1998). Bourriaud's term 'relational aesthetics' (Artspace Editors, 2016, para. 1) in the realm of artwork can be understood as a means to connect art with the real world, the public, the people, the masses, the common man, the common ideal or common adversaries. Relational art seems to be the vehicle by which the public is reached, to make the public itself self-aware. Art holds a mirror towards us inviting us to open our eyes to ourselves as a whole.

The persuasiveness of beauty

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I take a moment to consider art and ethics from an aesthetic viewpoint, in contrast to the focus on the ideas the artist is exploring. Through the lens of aesthetics how might we comprehend the artwork? I have discussed and described the context of *150 action* but I have not considered the aesthetic nature of the work, how it looks and how this adds to my stance on relational art. I have endeavoured to illustrate the different aesthetic elements that embrace the potential beauty of the work including the sensory and luminous elements like the interplay of colour and sound. In *150 action* how does the

rich colour of the red blood cast across a white space look? Is the blood that falls onto the white clothing, onto crisp white canvases and onto the naked bodies of the performers beautiful and rich? Is this sight appealing, seductive and in some ways pleasing? Turning our thoughts away from the fact that the blood is of an animal, is our attention and awareness altered? Do we recognise it as blood or red paint? The artist's intention might not please us, but these aesthetic conventions of art might persuade us to look more closely and to be convinced that the passion expressed is in fact masterful, or in some way beautiful. At what level is our trust with art restored? If we conjure an image by the great Italian Baroque painter, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1751-1610) who often depicted barbaric acts, are we transfixed and seduced by the brushwork, the majestic colours, his use of *chiaroscuro*—a technique used to create drama and contrast through light—and his highly considered composition? Caravaggio was known as a rebel and was often associated with sword fights. There are stories embedded into his history that he even committed murder. Is it any wonder his paintings of brooding scenes are punctuated by drama and turmoil? His *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1599) is a famous and controversial work that captures this brutality.



Image: Caravaggio, Judith Beheading Holofernes, 1599

This depiction of harshness is experienced differently here to *150 action* but do we trust the masterful Caravaggio more or less than Nitsch? There are correlations as the themes are similar—both are conceivably considered as ruthless and a potentially controversial experience for the viewer. Is the ethically questionable content of the painting outweighed by the technical mastery of the artist? At this point we might consider both works as gruesome, we might also become transfixed and contemplative of their beauty. In this situation is trust broken and are our ethics challenged, or are we more accepting of what we see? As we understand from Gadamer, aesthetics are affective, and through art our perception of the world can be altered. This attention to the aesthetics of art, opposed to the meaning of art, can change our viewpoint and stance on art. The notion of trust and the virtues or ethics of art become challenged.

I find the way we implement trust to art to be interesting and worthy of greater consideration. What appears to be evident from my research is the view that a normative, homogenised understanding of aesthetics is intertwined with beauty, experience and our perceptions. What seems to be different is the context we apply to our thinking.

With *150 action* being performed in Hobart and heavily featured in the media, I am conscious that my students would have an awareness of its presence and so my ethical lens as teacher comes into play. I can choose to ignore that this is taking place and leave the students to wonder what it is all about, or I can embrace the situation and offer it to the students as a point of discussion. Is this responsible or unnecessary? Would this be a style of art making that I would normally use as an example in class? Possibly, possibly not, but given that it is part of a current cultural festival it seems to be appropriate to open the conversation rather than be blind and ignore the performance as art, or as both Arendt and Gaita say, be ‘meaning blind’—a state where we ignore the views or feelings of another.

As a teacher touting the need to provide numerous experiences for students to become discerning thinkers, this is a good opportunity to investigate—I want to see what values guide them as young artists and as individuals forming their own morals and ethics. As the contents of *150 action* are sensitive I am mindful of how to initiate a conversation. The key to the dialogue would be in the delivery of the topic and the relationships that are established in the classroom. I might also see the rise of a ‘political landscape’ as the students offer their thoughts and rebuttal. I have to respond to my ethics and responsibility as a teacher for I am not qualified to know how they all might answer.

With my awareness of ethical conduct in mind I raise the subject of the artwork by asking my Year 9 class what they understand about the work by Nitsch. Most of them know about it—they do not have close associations with the artist’s name but have some familiarity asking, “Is that the art thing about the bull?” Like me, they have unanswered questions. I do not launch into my questions or show them pictures of the

dead carcass being paraded and venerated as I am aware of the sensitive nature of the piece and the possible views of the group. After my initial invitation to talk about the work, I seek further permission to continue the conversation. I explain to the group that I am curious to hear their insights about the work as 15-year-olds living in an ever-changing cultural democratic society that encourages free speech. They all consent to the conversation and start to share their unsolicited thoughts. They describe to me their understanding of the show and what they thought happened. Most thought the bull was going to be killed at the performance. This was one aspect that needed to be clarified as the bull was reportedly killed humanely prior to the event. The students portray how the viewer might see the work. They express their ideas about the philosophy, context and purpose for the work. Some of them are outraged that the artist could call this 'Art'. One student makes the point that if she went to Mona and poured blood and milk on her body she would most likely be arrested, because it goes against the norms of what is expected of people. Is her idea motivated by the conventions of art in search of independence and transcendence or is this a personal outcry? The interesting point here is that she refers to the 'normal actions' of people, but she does not refer or infer that this does in fact challenge the norms of art making. The action of pouring milk and blood on the body in a public space when done out of the context or not under the ideology of an artwork changes the intent and action. Reasoning what artists do and having information and knowledge of the artist's purpose underlies their passion. Considering how an artist thinks needs to be deliberated before possible judgments can be made. One student says that the butchering of animals is just part of life. The media referred to the dismembering of the animal whereas the student refers to it as butchering. This word 'dismembering' for some reason appears less brutal and considered where 'butchering'

for me implies aggression. I even have one very open-minded student tell me without any hesitation that she thought it was challenging and really very interesting.

The students who apply their personal moral compass cannot understand why the artist would feel the need to respond to the world in this way, under the semblance of art. The students question why people want to watch it, let alone be part of it. Others in the group are sympathetic to the bull and question its killing for the purpose of art. A few students sit quietly listening but say nothing, while others bravely put forward the pragmatic view that ‘it was ok’—we eat meat and animals are killed, and if you don’t want to look at the work then don’t go. It is a free world and we are entitled to free speech. As the discussion continues, the students acknowledge the freedom of the artist to respond to the world, making the point that while this work might not appeal to everyone, artistic expression is part of life, the human condition and an element of living in a free world.

Is my conversation about *150 action* causing the students harm and placing the value of art into question? The students and I are not ‘meaning blind’ but rather, the discussion is open and considered. Their thinking and comments are reflective and respectful. The conversation makes the students consider their stance on the purpose of artwork and their own values. It validates for me that the students feel safe and trust the classroom environment enough to speak freely. They have made ethical decisions based on their values, and how they see the purpose of art. I am pleased to have initiated this conversation about the work, because while it is centred around a controversial act, it opened up other avenues for consideration and makes for a meaningful practice of art appraisal and criticisms. I do not want to harm the students by exposing them to the

theatre of Nitsch, but I feel that I have a responsibility to unpack the work and to give them a forum for conversation. They need to be aware and open to different ideas and legitimate forms of art even if they cannot reconcile with them.

If a student has a desire to explore animal rights or the idea of death, which are not unconventional themes, I could suggest many options for her and I might possibly use Nitsch's work as a point of reference and mentorship. In my experience of being a statewide examiner for Year 11 and 12 art folios I have seen innovative ways that students have grappled with and confronted animal rights by combining aesthetic beauty with an engaging and thoughtful meaning that shows intelligent thinking, skill and complexity. I recall two examples. First is a painting folio of a set of detailed portraits of animals and humans where the student used pig's blood instead of paint to craft the images. Secondly, I saw a set of cleverly displayed cuts of meat, sandwiched between sheets of clear acrylic with words and illustration-like marks added as symbols acting as codes or secret messages. This is the power of a growth mindset where a sensitive idea can be communicated within a safer, more ethical and thought-provoking manner with integrity.

Being mindful of another

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When I associate my definition of art to my purposes as teacher and artist, I think seriously about the interests of others. As an art maker, I make imagery for myself based on my experiences and to show my truth but as part of moral action. I deliberate my actions and how they might affect others. As a teacher offering advice to the students

and suggesting, for example particular artists to research, I have to mediate what I am exposing them to. I have to be mindful of what I say and that I deliver this information to them prudently. I have to model my ethical code, which does not insinuate being prudish, rather it is about pushing them towards the uncomfortable with acumen.

You might wonder how I could respond if a student came to me with a premise to make art that veered away from the conventional. If they posed an idea that went past the boundaries of comfortable exceptions, and to a greater degree past the values of the school where trust and compassion are integral elements, how would I act and react? I do not have to like the work or the ideas presented to me by my students and I do not believe that I am in a position to overlook or admonish their thinking. Do I have the right to ignore their ideas and display the characteristics of blindness to them because it does not suit me, or for that matter the school?

What would I do? I have had some situations presented to me where I have had to reflect on my initial responses to students' ideas and see where they fit within my role as artist, teacher and member of a wider school community. I have had students come to me and ask to make art based on female mutilation or the seven deadly sins, but in a less than conventional manner. I have had students who want to photograph the naked figure and explore suicide in graphic forms.

The nude figure example is an interesting case, because under Tasmanian law photographing a naked figure under the age of 18 is an offence. Rather than shut the student down and use this fact as an easy 'out', I do not initially share this as a reason to say no to her concept. However I might have to at some stage, if her ideas are not

modified to sit with some conventions and be lawful, but not yet. First the student needs to tell me why expressing these concepts is important to her, why she is passionate about the figure and what art references and aesthetics she might use to evoke her ideas. She needs to put together a robust proposal that explains her viewpoint, her research, examples of suitable like-minded work and a rationale. My strategy is twofold. First, is she really interested and fervent about her philosophy, or second, is she just trying to contest those around her? If she is serious and shows intelligent thinking she might need to undertake the necessary planning to give the idea deep-seated integrity. If she can present a valid and informed plan we can start to consider ways to express her idea intelligently rather than place herself, others and potentially the school in a risky situation. The student needs to honour and understand her own ethics and actions as an art maker and her contribution to the visual world. She needs to give thought to global and cultural concerns that address the values of the school she attends. As she creates a folio of work as part of her end of year examination, which is to be publically displayed, consideration of the viewer is also relevant particularly in a Kindergarten to Year 12 community. As an ethical art teacher wanting to honour her students, what I see as important are their ideas and how sustainable these are for the purpose of making art.

The challenge for me in the example of the nude figure is to find and suggest ways for the student to photograph the figure in a way that is poignant, artful and aesthetic as the student intends without putting herself at risk. As I consider possible options, what comes to mind is the ethical situation of Australian Photographer Bill Henson who had an exhibition of work removed from a Sydney Gallery in 2008 because it depicted naked youths.



Images: Bill Henson from Naked Youth, a series included in the Mnemosyne Exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2005. These images are similar to the images taken from the Gallery in Sydney in 2008.

For many in the art and wider community Henson's imagery is simply art. He expresses lonely figures against brooding environments. For others his work sits under the banner of exploitation and child pornography. Margaret Throsby (2008) in an ABC report said, "Henson's defenders argued the images were part of the western tradition of the nude, were non-sexual in nature and vehemently opposed their censorship" (Throsby, 2008, para. 1). From my understanding, and my extensive personal experiences of seeing

Henson's work at numerous exhibitions including the retrospective show *Mnemosyne* in 2005 at the Art Gallery of NSW, I have no hesitation in supporting his practice as I consider his work to be artful and mesmerising. Art writer Dennis Cooper (2002) writes, Henson has an "...almost devotional need to elicit empathy from his troubled human subjects, there's a feeling that nothing would prevent the black from completely absorbing his attention and extinguishing the work" (p. 94-97). Artworks created under the auspice of photography, a clinical post-modern source, can become an issue as it delineates a specific moment in time and action in time. The artist is representing a time and place not as a fictitious situation but as a reality. While Henson works in a postmodern framework he conjures an almost premodern beauty, which is evocative and holds a visual lustre.



Image: Puberty, Edvard Munch (1894)

Recalling the work of modernist painter Edvard Munch and his naive painting *Puberty* (1894) gives me an opportunity to contrast a post-modern photograph with the modernist painting through an ethical lens. Both artists have been considered as pushing the boundaries of art given their connection with their sitter. In *Puberty* we see the figure placed in a pose that evokes shyness, her legs crossed and her hands sit modestly in her lap but her wide-eyed gaze confronts the viewer. In contrast, Henson's figures are looking away appearing to be thoughtful and cautious as their cool blue-toned skin is released from the anonymous night time. Both artists worked from life, using models for their studies and finished work. At the time these works were produced they were

shrouded with controversy and innuendo as they both had young models as their sitters. In each piece there appears to be an awkward tension present but can we assume that trust is present as part of art? Is the painting by Munch and his approach different to the sensibilities of Henson? Regardless of where we sit in this dialogue, Henson's work now has a predatory tone attached to it implying a more sinister connotation, which questions his moral actions. Under this lens, if I suggest a student looks at Henson's work as a point of reference I have to premise it with the fact that the artist has been controversial and the work shows youthful semi-naked and naked people in dark soulful spaces. I don't feel this pressure when I show my student *Puberty* as a comparison to how the figure has been represented in art.

As seen from my examples, part of my ethical dilemma is not to just say 'no'. I can't shun a student's ability for artistic freedom, authorship and self-expression without first listening to her rationale. As Gaita and Arendt infer, I cannot be blind and ignore her, for I do not wish for her to make safe, non-academically driven art. There must be a reason for this request, be it to shock, to be sensationist, an antagonist, or because she is deeply grounded in the idea. Is her purpose for good or for potential harm? If I say no at the onset, am I causing harm and defusing trust by denying the student the freedom of expression? Herein lies the dilemma of ethics in education for the art teacher. If I promote that artists can act freely within the definition of art, then the student as artist needs to be given the scope to act responsibly and to find her own voice. This is where elements of tension abound.

As society changes and technology becomes increasingly more prevalent I have to also be aware of what students are watching and being influenced by. I have to trust

them to search the Internet with purpose and relevance—an issue highlighted to me when working in the design studio with my Year 9 class. My eye catches the screen of a student's work, which makes me look twice. This particular student is besotted with anime and its many complex layers. What I see on her screen makes me flinch and I immediately question my role as teacher. Have I overseen her current work responsibly? As a class I am teaching the students to animate shapes to create a gif using Photoshop—a simple yet effective technique that is fun and has the potential for deeper and detailed options. The outcome is that the students use the information and technical knowledge to create and animate a character of their own. This particular student's animation is set on a white background. When she presses play by using the spacebar on her keyboard what appears on her screen is a set of basic shapes that form a floating black head with red eyes. Seconds later a gun appears and the word D E A D is spelled out in capitals across the screen in a staccato-like manner. I become bothered by the content and start to question how appropriate it is. Am I overreacting? I ask her why she has created a gif with these aesthetic elements and how she feels about it and the content. She explains to me that it is a spin-off of the type of work she regularly looks at based on the animation of anime and cartoons in which she is intensely absorbed in. She says it is not a political statement but a cultural response to what she sees as a normal form of expression. She can justify her idea to a certain point as she is responding to what culturally matters and influences her. Is it causing harm to herself and to others? I think about her perception of the world, what is motivating her ideas, how other students might look at it and how it might appear to another teacher or passing visitor stepping into the classroom. Where do I stop the students from self-expression and dissolve their individual ability to make decisions, to consider their actions and respond to freedom? When do I have to simply trust them and get out of their way?

In this *Lesson* I have explored a range of artists and students who want to make art that shocks, enrages and tries to cause controversy to epitomise their sense of value and responses to experiences. I speak to the importance of being confronted and being uncomfortable in order to not shy away from these experiences.

Regardless of what the subject matter is, potentially shocking or not, what becomes clearer is that there are key concerns that shape art making, placing us in a state of dialogue. How we act and what we do contributes to our actions and ultimately affects others and the self.

The enigma of making art is real and it is something I struggle with as a teacher and an artist. I have divulged my undulating positions as a teacher, but where do I sit as an artist? I am an art maker who responds to the natural environment. I make art in response to the world and how it shapes me. In Buber's words, I make art based on my desire to enter into personal relationships with things and imprint on them my relation to them. Or as Bakewell (2016) reasons under the guidance of Sartre,

I may be influenced by my biology or by aspects of my culture and personal background, but none of this adds up to a complete blueprint of producing me. I am always one step ahead of myself, making myself up as I go along. (Bakewell, 2016, p. 122)

Being in a state of ambiguity is true for me as an artist as I change ideas and seek new ways of working so my work is never complete but rather, each iteration builds on the next. While the natural landscape is by no means a new theme for art making it is an area that I have explored in different ways through my painting. The work for *Tension* steps away from my usual expressive tempered and untempered marks on a page, but nevertheless

the photographic shapes and forms are artefacts borrowed from the landscape. The fabric forms are contorted to be reminiscent of the diversity and tension of the natural world. Each image is in essence a pertinent and controlled landscape, but of a different ilk. Much like my Year 12 student at the beginning of the *Lesson* who wants to find a way to fuse different ways of seeing into one photographic image, I too want to find my freedom, to trust myself, to be compassionate to myself and to act ethically as part of my artistic truthfulness.

There are many ethical dimensions associated with being an artist that I contemplate when creating artworks based on my response to my world and varied aesthetic elements that combine to build a sensory impact. I consider my moral knowledge and my ethical position as I struggle to make sense of the way I make art and how this response aligns to the way I teach. I feel that as a teacher I need to present to the students as a mentor who is open to risk taking and encourages questioning of the self and others. As I get older I want to know more, make art more and shake the routines that shape and constrict me. The act of art making as part of my being that supports the findings in my thesis has become a pivotal element to reconcile my questions about art and knowing if what I do and teach has veracity. As my writing draws to a close I can share with the reader that this journey has reinforced my desire to respond to the world and to help others do the same.

Art is subjective. It is an enigma and continues to be so. Through my ongoing reflective practice, I endeavour to honour my passion for art in education. I do not believe it is ethical for me to only teach my students about the art elements alone, for if I am to honour my intention and make a contribution to art education my classroom

needs to be challenging. I must encourage my thirst for knowledge to explore and express elements of the world under the guise of trust. To be an ethical teacher and artist I must maintain my integrity to transcend the 'normal' in order to find the 'necessary'. To find the state of the 'between' to 'be' is to act artfully in response to myself and to my students. If this can be achieved I can continue to navigate the ethical landscape and respond to my personal moral compass. I teach the students to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' art under the artist's code of freedom that allows them to inform and build their own personal expression and relationship to the world.

With my initial question about art and integrity surveyed, the final part of this thesis is to establish the worthiness of my efforts. Is it all worth it and how do I know? As the reader, you have been my companion at each step, entering my world as a teacher and as an artist. I can say that the passage of time to research, contemplate and write my thesis has been thought-provoking, perplexing and at times impenetrable. I have had to look at myself and interrogate my thoughts and my actions.

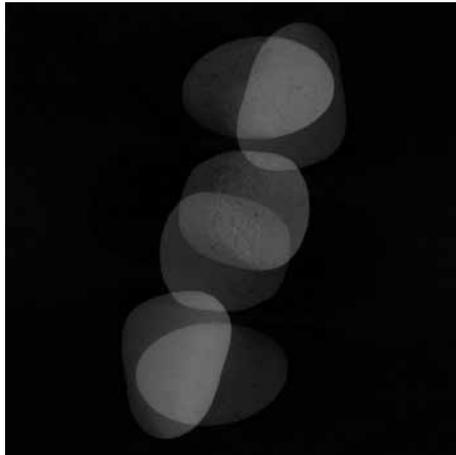
But what makes this thesis valid? What makes my sense of self worth pursuing under the semblance of both teacher and artist. Jimmy's words of wisdom return. In *Lesson Two* I asked him about ways he established an idea. His advice was to let an idea sit and see if it stays with you. The ideas that are intrinsic to my inquiry have stayed with me and guided my actions and decisions. Each day as I place my feet on the floor I ask myself what is it that I can do to make a difference to my students as I impart to the best of my ability my knowledge and my creativity.

The final piece to my inquiry shares with you what it is that makes my idea stay with me and guide my philosophical thinking. What makes me persevere and honour the virtues of an authentic teacher and artist? What makes this investigation worthy and of value? Why do I not give up and why do I pursue my inquiry? With all the prevailing tension that sits within my thesis, states of nothingness and hereness, contrasting views and characters of being, I wonder what happens next.



EPILOGUE

Where I decide that what I do has worth



EPILOGUE

Where I decide that what I do has worth

We can find Tension anywhere. Or rather, it can find us.

From the literal tautness of two forces fighting in opposite directions, being presented with the fragility of time, or experiencing something simply and unsettling out of alignment, tension is a ubiquitous influence on our lives.

Within all of these pieces is an additional element; the unspoken potential of what happens next.

(Tension, Artist Statement, 2016)

The phrase “the unspoken potential of what happens next” begs curiosity. It is timely in that it gives credence to my inquiry as I draw on my conclusions and deliberate the significance of their worth. I see this phrase as a little absurd in a way, because logically, ‘what happens next’ is that I divulge my findings, my thesis concludes and I am ‘free’

to pursue other adventures. But this is far from true because this inquiry leads me to broader investigations, further conflict and more questions about how I forge an even better pathway for learning in art education. My worth at this point continues to be challenged by myself, and no doubt by others.

I started this inquiry to confront what I do and to find some responses to my never-ending question around knowing if what my students are producing has honour and purpose as a product of integrity and veracity. Tension became the catalyst for the *Tension* exhibition and grew to become a pervasive theme and element that influences my actions in and out of the classroom.

As I decided on my best course of action to challenge the integrity of being an art teacher the obvious word of 'lesson' became my guide. As a consequence, each of my *Lessons* voices a layer of learning that I deem shapes the students to become art makers who can act with virtue. In my *Prologue*, I refer to Todres (2007) and his use of tension, which he describes as a texture, implying that experiences become richer when formulated under a level of description. The dominance of describing art and life experiences has become a strength of my work. Interpreting the world under a hermeneutic methodology enhances how I imagine and how I embed tension into my thesis. My goal is to interrogate the principal themes of art making in each of my *Lessons* by placing an element of tension amongst each of them in order to see how it might challenge my perception of my classroom, my students, my art and my pedagogy. The injection of the antagonist and the protagonist occurs to amplify tension and to suggest the moral voice of the self. The dual roles are presented as the unfamiliar and the ugly and the unknown becomes the dark and questioning constituent throughout. When I

recall each of my antagonists, some shrewd and others more distinct, tension continues to be the most germane and prevalent. Through my lived experiences, which are a fundamental component of my inquiry, I believe that my preliminary notion—to see if what I teach as part of a visual art education has integrity and authenticity—is valid and true. But there is still something unexplored and unfilled to complete my inquiry and make it transformative and significant.

I state in my *Prologue* I would return you, the reader, ‘home’—back to the beginning to complete the circle. I intend to do this with the reiteration of my images from *Tension* but before this can occur I explore two final ideas to support my suppositions. The first relates to the notion of ‘serendipity’ and the second is ‘the past lies before us’. These themes are attributed to Lederach (2005) and his work on conflict resolution and Mbiti (1969). Lederach’s writing seeks to instil change through a tactical process but, as he acknowledges, this alone is not enough for authentic and transformative change. What becomes clear is that the exchange of language as part of the interhuman dimension are important for meaningful conciliation—the celebration of our imagination as part of self-actualisation. I have tried to persuade you that the development of artistic skills alone is not enough for art making, so these two final notions—the ‘serendipitous’ and the already explored notion of time assimilated with tension—add credence and persuasion, I hope to my inquiry. These distinctive components are not definitive but rather invite a pause for insight and understanding. These elements are paramount for my pedagogy and my artistry, and when combined, make tension into an ineffaceable force.

I sense my discovery of these two final notions are at the heart of creative thinking and discerning art making. While Lederach (2005) speaks of conflict in the sphere of war and violence, I do not. I seek encouragement and refuge in his work and take his thinking from outside of us to inside, to the inner conflict that tension brings to the self, and to the different elements that both compete and synchronise through art. Our ability to make art stems from our creative potential to problem solve and to take confidence in our ability to act with knowingness and intuition and acknowledge the 'otherness' of art. Questioning ourselves to find meaningful resolve is a poignant part of this action. Both time and 'serendipity' are overarching notions that orchestrate my main themes and become elemental to the philosophical sustenance of my *Lessons*.

Each of my classroom lessons are designed to guide the individual student to create better art. Each of the *Lessons* in my thesis is laced with an antagonist as a driver for change, provoking personal reflection in a quest to be artful. Under guidance, the students ought to be able to see how each of these elements find conciliation and form a temporary or permanent resolve. These elements in themselves contribute to art making and are the foundation that shapes each of my *Lessons*, riffing, unleashing action that I reason to be essential for effectual learning. Art, like life, marks the character of the 'serendipitous' where the elements of time, space, perception and aesthetics collide and coalesce. The *Lessons* augment the skills, the knowledge and the techniques that the students need in order to take art into an intelligible place.

Together these elements become animated as I apply them to the reinterpretation of my images in *Tension*. I feel it is imperative that I reinterpret my images as a way to consolidate my findings, to act in the manner I believe to be truthful for my students and to take the reader through this cyclical process, leading you back to the beginning.

I propose that this *Epilogue* is the final *Lesson* but one that cannot be taught but rather it can be fostered. It is the *Lesson* that invites the artist and the learner to be open to implementing peripheral vision and embracing the “divine naiveté” (Lederach, 2005, p. 115). It requires the artist and the student of art to notice and take heed of their feelings in order to tap into the other parts of human “being and knowing” (Lederach, 2005, p. 175). It is this openness that instigates resolution but is open to disruption in search of growth. Lederach’s field work and negotiations come from a variety of situations, ranging from tribal and indigenous scenarios to war torn conflict as a peacebuilder. He declares that the

conciliation process happened not through direct planning but through serendipitous openings that led to relationships, break through and ultimately direct negotiations. (Lederach, 2005, p. 116)

Similarly, it is these ‘conflicts’ that I find to be parallel to art making, within the self and within life, because they profile the narratives we subscribe to. Inner turbulence borne from our actions, encounters and our ambitions enable us to consider other perspectives. It is the retelling of our story through a wider lens that facilitates this change. The innovation that accompanies this methodology is not to be underestimated in the building of relations. It is like a good rumour that mutates and transforms. It is like my student, Adelaide’s interpretation of a human virus that plagues the body, spreading like a rumour. It is like my 1980s childhood icon *Pacman* in search of the ghost—it is both methodical and impetuous.

As I apply similar negotiation skills in the classroom, what becomes apparent is how the different elements of our worlds become clearer when the students show genuine engagement in art and themselves. Surrendering to their learning and their art practice

makes the study of art more than just an academic ‘subject’ but rather a way of life—an artist’s way of life. It is from this observation that I develop a clearer understanding of how to guide my students and their intentions. Their artistic needs become clearer, necessary and palpable. My students see that art and the artist have the power and privilege to express their ideas in a prevailing way. It is at this point the students’ interests become louder and brighter. As they make more art and iterate and reiterate their ideas, their stories become stronger and they observe and describe their environment with truthfulness and veracity. When my students return to their work each lesson they can determine if it stands the test of time and might leave an indelible mark on the world, like that of Picasso and others, or if it rescinds into pale insignificance.

The ‘serendipitous’ can make things brighter by shifting our behaviours. It has and does make me look more closely at what I do and how I do it. It gives me the opportunity to confront my failures, my self-doubt and my self-antipathy entangled with moments of realisation. The ‘serendipitous’ allows for chance to be present and for meeting the unforeseen. Questions like, “What do I do?” and “How do I do it?” become significant but they do not demand a final response. Rather they exist as abstract problems that linger, are cyclical and eliminate the temptation to see the world through a single tunnel. At times the responses to these questions can be unexpected and optimistic because these are courageous questions that require a curious mind for learning and authentic art making. As teacher and artist, I suggest that these questions consciously disrupt my students’ learning and temper it with the potency of the unexpected. Pursuing this action allows me to ‘derail’ the students, acting in the spirit of the ‘serendipitous’ and with a moral imagination. This is where Lederach’s text titled *Moral Imagination* becomes significant. Lederach says,

the greatest weakness of tunnel vision is its inability to see peripherally, to feel, to understand and move in response to dynamically changing environments without losing a sense of purpose and direction. (2005, p. 136)

As seen in the last *Lesson*, the need for moral action welcomes the unknown and it is the awareness of tension that guides our values about right and wrong. If we show no awareness of right and wrong then do we act blindly, without meaning and cause harm? I raised this through the words of Arendt and Gaita in the last *Lesson* and within this context I feel that these notions have even more weight. I add to this that the lessons we learn from the both the physical environment and from within the self are the hardest lessons we encounter—powerful personal stories, our imaginations and their application to art cannot be underestimated.

The role of narrative or storytelling is an active way to seek personal resolve. The power of storytelling has a long historical context that informs our culture, our values and our being as seen in *Lesson Two*. It is a means for understanding and empathising with our personal and universal quests. Interpreting lived experiences to unravel the human condition is a style of qualitative research that builds real connections. The personal elements articulated through my different case studies bring peripheral vision promoting the ‘serendipitous’, bringing attention to the intricate elements that can be often ignored. Lederach supports this view by stating that some events that take place seem to

...derail a process or something as simple as a slip of a word from a key negotiator that creates a new twist in the situation, gives insight into a hope or a fear. (2005, p. 121)

In the art room, I am like the peacebuilder, attentive to my students, their conflicts and the relationships that appear as they reconcile their ideas as part of the self. These unscripted moments bring awareness, flexible responses and I feel, authentic moral action.

I sustain the notion that to pursue an art practice that is virtuous a strong foundation is needed, built on learning the necessary artistic skills and techniques in conjunction with the accumulation of knowledge. These skills provide a methodological structure, which is a desirable element because it provides an edifice and a sense of direction that supports authentic acts. Considering if these skills alone are sufficient is important. I say they are not. What is required is for each of us to be adaptive and creative in our approach to art rather than be undeviating and bound to technique. Throughout my inquiry I speak to the value of the technical processes we undertake and how these exist in conjunction with the gathering of knowledge in order to have built creative understanding. My students who rely on technique alone are not acting artfully, and I have found that they are the ones who become complacent, numb to the energy of art, and consequently less questioning, causing their work to become one dimensional. They become technicians alone and lose the veracity or 'soulfulness' of what they do, using generic imagery and acting without creative acumen. Some of my students believe that a high academic award is achieved if they can copy or appropriate well to produce an image that is skilful. Lacking creative intention for the purpose and value of making art can lead to the students deceiving themselves. The risk of raising technicians instead of emerging artists and problem-solvers to bring insight and who have an awareness to all the layers of art making frightens me and is why this thesis is of value to me and I hope to others.

Under this premise I am supported by the thinking of Lederach, Greene, Dewey, Gadamar, Leggo and others who I acknowledge throughout my thesis. Scholarly reading in this hermeneutic field suggests that education runs the risk of falling victim to technique and process rather than building resilient creative thinkers. This is where the idea of the moral imagination takes place. For if we “do not expend an equal amount of time supporting people in trusting and developing their capacity to invent and create adaptive processes responsive to real-world situations and shifts” (Lederach, 2005, p. 124) we are missing an opportunity for artistic and pedagogical endeavour.

This creative adaptive approach requires more than rote skills. Knowing how to shade with 2B, 4B and 6B pencils, how to imitate an image derived from the Internet, or how to apply colour in equal sections in the colour wheel are simple examples of the technical student. I make this point because “creative learning leads to the discovery of things by accident and sagacity” (Lederach, 2005, p. 123). Some things in life cannot be taught through a book or measured on a rubric, which is why the role of chance does not reside as a firm dot point in a written teaching document. Rather than quantifying each artwork with measured outcomes alone, I have a repertoire of questions such as—What unexpected insight was gained along the way that had little or nothing to do with your art? What change has happened? These questions antagonise the student who desires to move past the mediocre. It invites them to think and to embrace possibility. These questions are for the student who wants to ‘be’ an artist, not act like one. ‘Serendipity’ nudges us towards the art of change. It builds “an insatiable curiosity and love for learning” (p. 126). ‘Serendipity’ embraces the role of the antagonist and this excites me.

The second part of ‘what happens next’ draws me back to the lasting notion of time or “the past lies before us” (Lederach, 2005, p. 132). I use the collection of images from the *Tension* exhibition as a way to inform this *Epilogue*. When I reflect on my images, the way I remember them has changed. When first created I had a specific way of reading them but as time has passed new ways of interpreting them have evolved. My reading and application of Sokolowski’s manifolds of appearance have had greater bearing than I thought. Twelve months after the *Tension* exhibition I conjure the images in my mind and I try to describe them differently to myself after a year of lived experiences. In some of my *Lessons* I have revealed initial interpretations of some of my work, but my new cognition of them comes from renewed appreciation. What I understand from this approach is that ‘the past lies before us’ in memory. Nostalgia is affecting my practice and my remembering of the images. Before I share with the reader my current descriptions of the work, I wish to explore this concept in a different state of temporality as part of my teaching and art making.

Engaging with the work of Mbiti (1969), who writes extensively about the notion of nostalgia, allows me to investigate temporality. He first wrote on this perception of time in 1969 and was met with many questions and great scepticism. He hypothesised that the past is our future, using the example of someone passing away to give clarity. Our culture tends to think that when someone dies we ultimately see this as the end of a life. I understand Mbiti’s view to be insightful and in contrast to this generic perception. Under his thinking he suggests that while people are still remembered, appealed to, conversed with on a range of matters in memory and in stories, they are not dead.

They are alive and present or in the Sasa (present). Only when the last person who remembers the departed physically dies, the departed then passes from the living dead to the sphere of the dead or the Zamani (past). (Mbiti, 1969, p. 25 in Lederach, 2005, p. 131)

The premise of Mbiti's views need to be pondered. I offer these questions for your reflection. When someone or something dies do they cease to exist? When do our memories wither enough that the event or a person is no longer among us? Is it when they die or when the last person who remembers them dies too? The images in *Tension*, not unlike my other encounters with significant artworks, are in my living memory and consequently they live in my present world.

This thinking about the *Tension* images revolves around the allegory of time, memory, story and nostalgia, where lived history and remembered history are an important part of learning and enable us to break away from the structure of a timeline set in a rigid form. This approach is valid for the artist, as our ideas continue to be shaped based on our learning and interpretation. Like me, the students are also affected by different events that I see are an indelible part of the artist's truthfulness and creative intentions. Just as a narrative is based on timelines and crafts our personal blueprint of life, each memory lives in front of us. We can seek "interpretation and understanding of meaning in an expanded view of time..." (Lederach, 2005, p. 143). This notion of time supports the idea that 're-storying' is a way to heal the human condition, which requires memory, time and space. In part, my example of the reiterated descriptions of *Tension* speak to this method. I am not merely rendering the same story that surrounds each image, rather I am embracing new interpretations and relationships that exist based on my remembrances, through time and space. Each image has a story formed from my

memory, which is the pulse that promotes change. Evident from my explanation is that what comes next is based on the past. The continuous birthplace of the past lies before us and for my art making and my teaching this approach can be applied and amplified. The students' art making and the way they learn from the past lies in the present. They cannot see the future, but the past that lies before them is aiding their self direction and giving them the capacity to transform their work. For further clarity, I apply this opinion by sharing the following passages from past students who have success in art and use the past as their present.

I acquired these students' words as part of a compendium of biographies that accompanied a recently curated exhibition as part of the school's 125th anniversary celebration. The show is a celebration of the Tremayne Art Prize recipients from 2000 to 2016. The collection itself is 30 years old but the 17 works exhibited are a comprehensive reflection of the more contemporary artworks that students have produced as part of studying art. Tremayne is a historical title for the School's Old Girls Association and holds a strong presence in the school community. The Art Prize is an annual art award bestowed to a Year 11 or Year 12 student in receipt of their artwork into the school's art collection. In essence, it is awarded to a student who creates artwork showing integrity and creative spirit. They don't have to be the best and achieve the highest academic result but rather they have lived through and by their work. They are guided by their moral compass, have taken creative risks, are open to change to embody their ideas and surrender to their passion to make art—they live as an artist rather than just a technician.

The students who created the exhibited works have left the school to write new chapters in their personal stories. While their pathways are now diverse—lawyers,

designers, curators—their comments about the impact and value of art and imagination as part of their studies are worthy and confirm for me that the role of art in their education has played a powerful part in their lives. Each one speaks to the virtues of creativity and how their learning has holistically impacted on them. Their past lies before them.

These are extracts from two of the students' biographies and statements.

“Studying art and design has amongst many things taught me that it is creativity that makes the world turn. It is so much more than just pretty pictures, creative thinking is what drives inventions and discoveries, advances in science, and breakthroughs in medicine. There are so many industries that would stagnate if it wasn't for the creative thinkers of the world.”

“Art, in whatever form, functions as an outlet for me to express my thoughts, anxieties, passions and desires. It is absolutely crucial that I find time to be creative every day, to keep me grounded and inspired, and I urge everyone else to do the same.”

Having taught many of these students I find myself nostalgic as I relive the times in the classroom, the chats, the debates and banter about art and life that we shared. When I place these students into their new worlds I recall the character of each of them. I acclaim how as young women they have continued to foster their moral imagination. They treasure a mindset that sparked turning points and transcendence. They and their artwork live on, holding a lasting place in the historical context of the school and part of the respected art education program. It is their story in art that lives before them.

Providence, or for want of another word, wisdom, is important to consolidate my story by throwing new light onto what I do and how I do it. A recent encounter acted as a significant turning point and has bound my inquiry together. It relates to my own kinfolk—my story and my personal history. At the time of writing this *Epilogue* I am spending much of my time in a hospital room with my dad as we wade through the trauma of his spinal operation. Percussive sounds of medical instruments and staff chatter murmurs in the background—the atmosphere, though partially restful, also rumbles with unease. The moments pass around me, the staccato movements of the clock I described in *Lesson Five* are palpable, uncomfortable, creating a void of timelessness. This dramatic description must sound ominous. Why is this significant? Why do you need to know this? My reason for sharing this is because as I sit here religiously each day I toggle between a suite of different emotions that are embellished with uncertainty, a touch of fear and hope. My world has temporarily been thrown into a spiral where routines have been stripped and the daily path becomes windy. As I ride the curves of this path, I am nearly thrown off, but I hold on tighter, harder. I become nostalgic and through remembering the past I am increasingly more aware of the need to nurture human relationships, to show empathy and a commitment to dialogue as part of human interaction. I believe this to be sacred and crucial for a meaningful life that values the virtues that we are bestowed with.

Remembering the importance of dialogue is an essential component to my inquiry and an aspect that I make prominent in my tapestry of *Lessons*. I feel that yet again the sound voice of Gadamer reigns. Gadamer has been a constant source of reference to my dilemmas and wider theoretical reading particularly because of the way he encourages the significance of the spoken word. As I have become more familiar with

his work I acknowledge the intrinsic value of his writing. When I commit my thoughts about my observations and my research to a page I am more faithful to myself. Di Cesare (2013) explains in her book *In Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait* how he had an anguished relationship with writing. She says, “it is not an exaggeration to say that almost everything he wrote is based on dialogue” (Di Cesare, 2013, p. 2). Gadamer craved to disclose his thoughts through literature in an articulate and salient form. Equally and in concurrence with Gadamer’s thinking, Lawn refers to Heidegger in *Gadamer: A Guide for the Perplexed*, where he spoke of art as a means to disclose and to find a form of truth (Lawn, 2006, p. 89). I use dialogue deliberately to support this hermeneutic inquiry and to represent an opening up to my world and the world of my students.

Being present in the hospital room prompts me to read the current work of Havi Carel (2016) who writes on the power of illness. There is a lot of important work about the philosophy of death, but not as much on the study of illness and how it deepens our relationship to life, self and others. Carel (2016) believes that this area of inquiry has been neglected but has the potential to have an insightful impact to how we come to interpret our situations,

because of the disruptions of habits, expectations and abilities, meaning structures are destabilised and in extreme cases the overall coherence of one’s life is destroyed. (p. 14)

Her work appears to be qualified predominantly by Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, so I find an honest connection to her thinking. At the time of surrendering to a hospital and the trust of medical staff, my dad’s and my own life are far from destroyed, but rather dismantled and craving to be re-established. Rather than shy away from the state of illness, we decided to embrace the unknown. This state of the

unknown was how things must be at this time but rather than fall victim to the lack of routine, the frustrations and seeing Dad in waves of pain, I embrace these unfamiliar, serendipitous moments. I run towards the tension and conflict as part of my world and move towards the uncertainty that has found me. Arriving at this emotional juncture compels me to write my new descriptions of the *Tension* images to accompany this final episode of my scholarly journey. I want to instil in words the atmosphere and the senses that they conjure for me. I no longer procrastinate disciplining myself and challenging myself to return to the past and remember the images in my mind. In this vein I try to write about them eloquently, painting a picture in words purely from the past but effected by the present. I want to see how I remember them and if my memory has distorted the work or if they are still truthful to my mind's eye. I want to establish if time and new encounters make them richer and worthy of return, or if they have fallen victim to technique and been tarnished and faded over time. Regardless of the outcome I am moving towards a new way of thinking about my worth and my art. At this point I intuitively refer to Husserl's notion of *epoch* that Bakewell reflected on (Bakewell, 2016, p. 42)—the bracketing of new ideas—as I feel I am entering an affirming new period. I am learning a lot about who I am as an individual, as a daughter, as a teacher and as an artist. This is why I coach my students, teaching them artistic skills and to use their moral imagination. My aim is for them to attend a new *epoch*, transcending each experience and seeing it subjectively and intersubjectively.

I make my claim again that a good art student is one that, as Carel says of illness, “sheds new light on taken for granted aspects of the world” (2016, p. 215). I subscribe further to her thoughts on this dimension of seeing and experiencing. I am fortunate that my studies and my artistic tendencies allow me to think in a phenomenological

manner. The past happenings, and more particularly my dad's operation, have been paramount for me to recognise and to affirm the validity of my work and how it is guided by this method of philosophical thinking.

Among these skeins of events, some serendipitous and others a little more unsettling, I compare my original and unpublished descriptions of the *Tension* images to see how they have changed and formed a new dimension. The use of memory plays a predominant role in my new narrative as part of a lived experience. While the exhibition happened in the past, the images are in my memory, so the work is alive (*Sasa*), as Mbiti would suggest. My images don't necessarily need words as they can speak for themselves as a testament to an authentic art practice, but with the grace of Gadamer I test myself to express my spoken words and write them down to describe my creative conversations about *Tension*.

With this vision, I offer the reader my twelve images and the five panels of text and their expressive and languid descriptions that embody *Tension*.

Emblem



The iconic rose is used as an emblem of love and beauty
but I cast it with a veneer of strength using natural light to give it a sculptural persona,
as though it has been cut from marble.

The dual between the delicate petals and the strong form prevail.

While the rose is the most obvious image of the collection it acts as the foundation for
change. I want to exploit the rose's potential, linking it to the darkness and the light to
conjure the contradictions of tension.

Fists



Two starched fabric-like forms bump together. The harsh angles are reminiscent of a stone figure or even the metallic box-like form of a dystopian robot.

The lighting is brighter so there is some hope of change.

The eye is drawn to the dark chasm that has naturally formed in the folds of the fabric, creating an opening to enter and where a feeling of solitude emerges.

Will the forms release, or continue to push against each other?

Collision



This luminosity of the petals collide and overlap each other to form an oval shape that floats in a dark, infused space.

Each layer of the petals mingles with the next, suggesting an undertone of strength bringing forth the last, building up like scar tissue—thick and thin, weak and strong.

Fusion



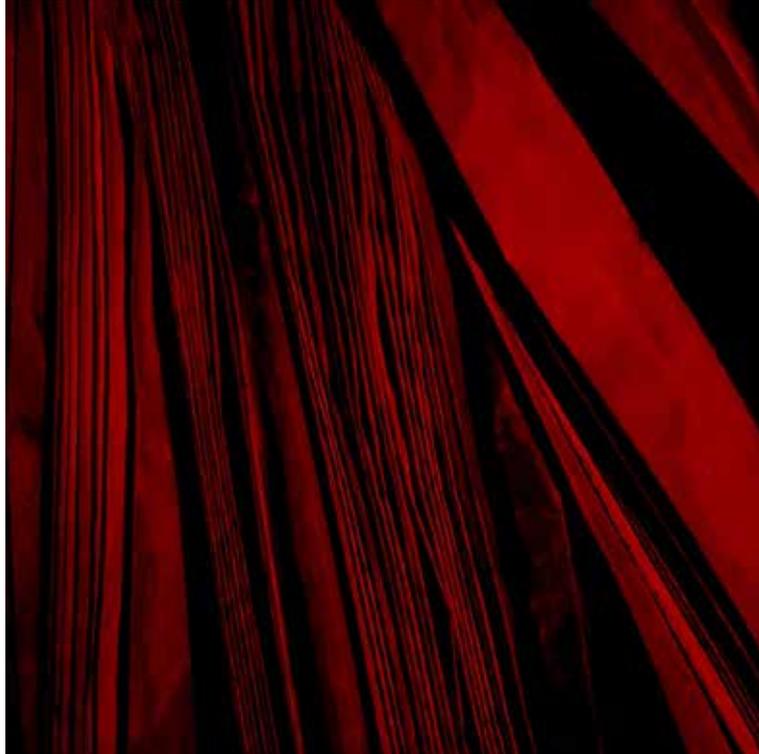
The contours of an old Japanese fan feel like they wrap me,
bind me and embrace me.

Each line crosses the other to weave a scaffolding together
that holds me in place.

Each line is intrinsic to the next, but this binding can
and must fray as I retreat into the shadows of the past.

The fan acts as a symbol for 'flow' while held close in the grip of my hand.

Incision



The harsh luminous red lines created by the edges of the fabric are sharp and cutting.

They are sculptural and firm and remind me of pages in a book, or the sharp and cutting interface of a blade.

The lines act as contrasting surfaces—some are upright, some tilted towards the left.

They are sinister and repel against the softness of other images.

The etched lines are like the surgeon's precise incision, harsh but required for change.

Entwined



The soft forms are like seamless shapes that provoke a sea of red.

The forms flow and entwine.

The fabric dances and acts in a liturgical way.

I am caught in its stream of fluidity and dance along

with it as it weaves itself across the frame.

Alter

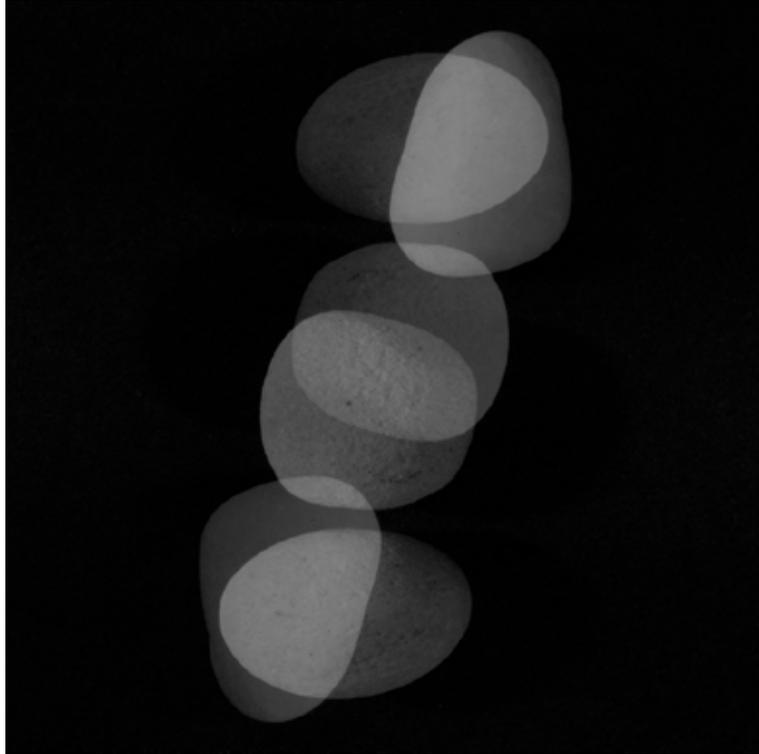


Two reflected shapes combine and become one.

I imagine the rose has dual eyes glaring back at me like a distorted face.

The shape is curved and reminiscent of a circle, but it is not complete, as parts
have slipped away into the elusiveness of the nocturnal backdrop.

Stones



The oval profiles are pebbles foraged from a walk along the beach.

They are a metaphor for the steps I navigate.

They float amongst a sea of obscurity, ghosted, shadowed by themselves.

I look back in time to review my past strides.

While I leave these tangible moments behind as a wordless entity,
they mark me and are unforgettable.

Rosette



A rose is the luxury of beauty.

It is a decorative motif that is universal and laden with memories.

The floral shape envelopes me with its openness and femininity.

The colour and patterns lead my eye beyond the printable page,
bleeding off into infinity.

I cannot grasp the edges of the rose, fold it closed or crush it in my hand,
but rather it becomes elusive, maintaining its potency.

The Red Well



I dive inside the hollow well that exists between
two red cliff faces that have parted ways.

I am tethered to the surface but I acknowledge the unknown in a wide, open space.

I will not fall to a point of rescue, but if I do not enter the rich red languid darkness,

I consider that I am a lesser person, unable to trust myself or another.

Dark insignia



The rose withers and starts to corrode.

The velvet petals turn inwards and seek refuge from life
as they subside into the darkness.

They succumb to time but parts hold steadfast and will not be diminished.

Petals stand tall like jewels or an emblem of a crown,
bathing in the light that reigns from the top.

The dark and the light play havoc with meaning and intention.

Dukes



These two fist-like shapes return in a second image.

They have grown, changed but meet graciously in the middle.

They appear to be polite but one form is unwilling to relinquish to the other.

They are not brutal in their meeting but stubborn, stern and steadfast in their plight.

The lighting is dim and the contours that run from left to right ground the shapes, giving them weight, adding to the strength and determination of their tautness.

These are the five accompanying panels of text that Jimmy wrote. They are alluring and conjure rich visual imagery, bringing inner depth and purpose to our story. The exhibition viewer is the interpreter of their meaning.

Like a black storm of butterflies in the gut, it's a glut, a wall, a pall of smothering pushing and pulling and wanting and yearning. It cuts like a knife through the remnants of your life in your hands, falling to the demands of everyone but you.

With a gentle twist, an arc of the wrist,
lips part with a gasp and the heart kick
starts with nothing left, no more than a
breath. Seeking relief in the pause, the
moment suspended, before every single,
tiny, fragmented, beautiful thing becomes
upended.

Feeling like an imposter, unwilling to foster the thought of sweet blessed relief: a pause from the chatter in your head that galvanises every thread, every fibre of your being, waiting for another sensation or a feeling. Nothing becomes something when that moment is broken.

Strain and suspense. Fragility so intense it becomes stretched until all the colour disappears, fading and falling away like a string pulled so tight the note pitches higher and higher until it hits the point of breaking, fragmenting, fraying, shattering.

Without it we fall. Into oblivion,
obscurity or the mundane - whichever
frightens you more.

As I draw this thesis to a close I maintain that along every step of the journey the relationships we foster between each other are similar to the relationships we hold with art. The essence of my thesis and the contribution it makes to myself, and hopefully to others, is to bring awareness and insight about the way I teach and the way we live through art to the fore. It is my attitude that when art making is authentic it is ultimately an extension of who we are and who we become. Students enter my care to make art, to learn about art and to know art. I encourage them all to find their own story and to respond to their experiences and their curiosities as part of the human condition.

I persist with my philosophy that to know art that has integrity and authenticity requires respect, judgement and perseverance, along with technical skill and an understanding of the aesthetic elements. The questioning, the iteration and reiteration of ideas alongside the mastery of technical conventions are important lessons. They are prerequisites desired for growth and change. Through my thesis I have shown you that my students who undertake this way of thinking are the ones who can make evocative art borne from their passion, rather than art that is derivative, soulless and imitating life. Under my guidance and the ethical educational decisions that I make for each of them, I am grateful that I can contribute to their learning so that they can foster connections to themselves and the world to which they belong. I believe that my intentions are authentic and instilled with the virtues of art and art making. As the students learn more about themselves through the formal and unspoken lessons of art, change becomes more tangible, desired and less elusive.

I persevere with the notion that my students must transcend themselves in soulful ways to make and see art, as I must too. As art makers, we must be curious and

questioning, tethering our thinking to the objective, the subjective and the intersubjective. My father, who is not an artist, but a man who is always curious, determined and a risk taker, epitomises the characteristics and virtues I want for my students. When I was in my final year of school he questioned my decision to study at Art School rather than attend Law School. He has come to understand why this was important to me and what potential influence I can have. With each experience we share together I am reminded of how these strengths speak to who we are or more pertinently to who I am. My recent passage with him has given me new ways to see myself while affirming that what I do has distinction. Unwittingly, my father has given me a gift and an emotional one at that.

The lessons I have learned during this inquiry have taught me about the role phenomenological thinking plays in embracing the unforeseen and provoking change. As a family, we took a medical risk so my father could return to a full life—a risk that was challenging but will have a great and ongoing reward. I want my students to take creative and intelligent risks as part of their learning so that they also might seek reward and hold an appreciation of art and the ability to make a contribution to the world as a response to the self.

I return to the powerful phrase Jimmy and I scripted—“the unspoken potential of what happens next ...” Each time I enter a classroom I often wonder what happens next. This state of tension in all its textural layers is what I want to build and embrace. There needs to be a framework and a foundation for learning, but there also needs to be elements that are unfamiliar in order to find ‘flow’ and ‘closeness’. And it is through the shadow of tension, under the guise of the protagonist and the antagonist, that I fuse together the key themes that pervade this thesis.

My research and practice as teacher and artist affirm for me that what I teach and how I teach are lessons that are not siloed to a classroom but rather are skills that can traverse a life's landscape. The sensitivity of tension was and is my nuance and it continues to push and pull me and my approach to life. The antagonist and the protagonist do not discriminate but rather they percolate. They are both present and are part of the pathway that incites transformation fused with the binding agents of virtue, trust and a moral imagination. These elements drive me, my decisions and my honesty.

My inquiry and current thinking about our personal history, temporality, perception, ethics and of course how it all 'looks' under the semblance of aesthetics are and continue to be present in my actions. For me, these elements are the essential lessons for art and for understanding the lifeworld. It is this awareness that gives me the strength to pursue what I do and gives me a sense of personal reward. The ability to make a difference and contribute to the lives of others is something that teachers and artists who act with integrity do for the betterment of others. It is through these notions that I find understanding in art and life, rather than trying to demarcate or label it. This thesis has helped me to respond to the world in a phenomenological way and has been paramount to finding a soulful place for me. I have found it in my classroom and through my art.

It is at this point that you, the reader, and I have arrived home. But the circle does not stop as it will start again, forging new interests and the need to dive further into our life's purpose. For me the school year will start again, and I will build on what I have discovered as I lead another cohort of students through the enigma of art making.

One final note. On returning to school after the summer break, I entered my office to grab a few things before heading off to the first staff briefing of the year. As I put my bag and laptop on my desk, sitting there was a torn piece of cartridge paper with a scrawled handwritten message.

Hi Ms Bloomfield, 
Thankyou for teaching me last year!
I learnt a lot about
myself xox! hope you have
a fantastic year  
Love - Hannah  



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