

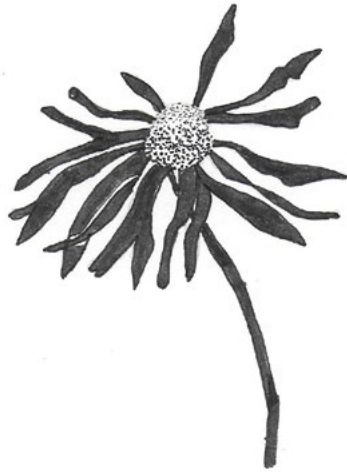
FREE COLUMBIA

NEWSLETTER #5 FALL 2021



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Greeting | 3 |
| Aesthetic Education for the Anthropocene | 4 |
| News from the M.C. Richards Program | 13 |
| The Wisdom of the Four Elements: A Fairytale | 20 |
| Annunciation as Fender's Blue Butterfly with Kincaid's Lupine | 24 |
| Seeing the Animal Whole and Why It Matters | 25 |
| Looking Back | 27 |
| Looking Forward | 32 |
| Correspondence | 35 |



Purple Cone Flower

Cover Image: Isabel Dancey, Pen and Ink Drawing

Image on this page: Purple Cone Flower by Laura Summer

The Poem *Annunciation as Fender's Blue Butterfly with Kincaid's Lupine* (c) from Mary Szybist, *Indarnadine* (Graywolf Press, 2013) used with permission.

Greeting

This newsletter brings together an article on aesthetic education and natural science, a fairytale inspired by a course at the Nature Institute written by a student in this year's M.C. Richards Program, a portrayal of a series of experiences from the new "Coming Home" branch of the program, sundry works of art in color and word and many small windows onto the event we call Free Columbia. In a season for harvesting it is a hearty spread. Thanks to Laura Summer, Stefan Ambrose, Erin Corrigan, Heather Rosenthal, AJ Taysom, Mary Szybist, Ella Manor-Lapointe, Isabel Dancey, Zvi Szir and Paul Zachos for bringing bread to the table, and to all of Free Columbia's many supporters. We have been able to continue offering all of these independent and creative activities with no minimum pay walls due to the widespread support and generosity of individuals, first and foremost, and limited support from a few small grants and foundations, and for this we are grateful.

— Nathaniel Williams



Image by Laura Summer

Aesthetic Education for the Anthropocene

Nathaniel Williams



Free Columbia's M.C. Richards Program is a site of action research, a college level initiative aspiring toward aesthetic education and contemplative inquiry. It is small and as humble as one would expect, and it is a fledgling, just entering its second year. This essay is inspired by the ongoing work in the program toward a contribution to Mary Caroline Richards' question of whether one can develop "...practices to strengthen and enliven living images, in contrast to mechanical and life-destroying images? And how may thinking itself be taught in ways that promote life, rather than estrange us from it?"

Who needs aesthetic education? This archaically colored phrase could easily bring up associations of uselessness, or of the aloof enjoyments of a privileged life. It might be associated with the beauty parlor or with art appreciation seminars at liberal arts schools. Aesthetic education can be understood in a much more comprehensive way, as important for everyone. One reason aesthetic has an archaic sound is that it is derived from a term in ancient Greek. The term meant the perception

of things with the senses. In the dentist's chair and the hospital anesthetics are used to block perception and feeling. Aesthetic experience is as common as memory, dreams or thought, we all have it in some measure. It is the foundation for a trusting, open and intimate experience of life. Our ability to live with the wonderful, special forms of sensible experience, to perceive the particulars of life, is aesthetic. It is also connected to our experience of qualities, moods, and intangibles that emerge as we move through life. It is not only sense perception, but en-spirited, en-souled perception and imagination, connecting us to our natural environment and other people. Aesthetic experience unfolds when we watch a friend approach and feel how they might be doing, through how they walk or stand, how they address us with movements of their voice. Sense perception is suffused with soul and mind. We might find ourselves inadvertently staring at someone, at some feature of their face, and the slightest change in the feature suddenly ignites uneasiness as a mere what becomes a who. We look away. We see a deer, ears stretched up,

erect and head alert, our presence leads to the sudden cocking of the legs, ears tilting back, breath quickening; another sentient being. Climbing a northern mountain in autumn, the forest's bronzes and reds fade into many evergreens as do the sounds of insects and birds; bright lichens and mosses fill the forest floor. The stones are loudest in silence. Water has washed the stones clean along stream beds and white waterfalls rush, sounding like light.

In the dentist's chair and the hospital anesthetics are used to block perception and feeling. Aesthetic experience is as common as memory, dreams or thought, we all have it in some measure.

Generally speaking aesthetic education is associated with the arts and humanities today. Yet it is easy to see that aesthetic judgement is a central part of our social and political life, our relation with other beings and the various regions of the earth where we live. Our first associations are misleading. Aesthetic education is not necessarily about privilege, aloof art appreciation courses, beauty school, or even of the humanities. It is more foundational. It is connected with our ability to participate in ecological, interpersonal, social, cultural and political life.

Perceiving with our senses is an activity that can be strengthened or atrophied. It may seem

odd to suggest that our ability to unfold rich, pictorially constituted understandings is under threat, when we are increasingly surrounded by images from digital devices and inventions. The digital revolution is a watershed that will increasingly deserve careful attention and critique, but in this essay I follow another path.

The Swiss zoologist Adolf Portmann suggested a general approach to exploring aesthetic experience that I will contribute to here.¹ In an address he delivered on biology and aesthetic education Portmann differentiates between two core human capacities. He calls these the aesthetic function and the theoretical function. He suggests recent centuries in the Occident have "emphasized the value of scientific rationality and the valorization of the quantitative, shifting qualitative experience to the margins."² The feats of the theoretical function are all around us, they include the technological revolution we are in the midst of. They stand before us with grandeur and power. We also know they are heavily capitalized, at work defining our current lives and immediate future. In this essay the task is to look toward these powerful tendencies and achievements from a critical perspective, focusing on their anesthetic affects. The following characterizations and critiques of the functional capacity are not an argument for irrationalism, but an argument against hyper rationalism.

Portmann characterizes the theoretical as "...{t}he activity that employs above all the capacity of rational thought, that employs and utilizes scientific analysis, and which leverages

1 Adolf Portmann, "Biologie als Aesthetische Erziehung" in *Biologie und Geist*. (Suhrkamp, 1968). His address has only grown in significance. In this essay I follow his lead in making a general distinction between theoretical and aesthetic capacity, though I develop this along different paths.

2 Ibid. 250.



mathematics in general. This activity quickly leads the thinker beyond the immediately given world of sense experience and especially loves to dwell in the realm of numbers and quantities. This activity involves striving to transform the qualitatively given world into quantity. Once tones are traced back to vibrations and colors are traced back to wavelengths, a certain contentedness sets in, a victory has been achieved. This is said without the slightest irony, as an attempt at a sincere characterization.”³

Living into this orientation we can make some observations ourselves. In the theoretical tendency one can make out a sense for an absolute, calculable coherence. It is a kind of lawfulness that we sense as “behind” normal experience. When we turn toward this coherence, however, it is peculiar in the way it is static and immobile. We feel changes can be made to a part that superficially affect the overall frame. There is a weighted sense of sameness, and a diluted sense of particularity. Re-ordering the whole is of no significance. It is different, but the coherence is the same. The victory that Portmann characterizes above, when qualitative particulars are transformed into the calculable, culminates in a wholeness of this type. It is a certain sense of comprehensive judgment. Perhaps the most important observation we can make, however, is that we are not a unit in the equation, that we ourselves are excluded. This need not be articulated to have an effect on us. There is a widespread

subtle, general cognizance of this. We feel we are privy to a phantom of wholeness. How can anything be whole that excludes our being?⁴ This exclusion marginalizes the felt value and gravity of much of daily existence. Think of our experience of the vivid connections or tensions with people, ethical energy that animates our actions and goals, or an exquisite impression of the spider's web covered in dew, lit by the morning sun. Our theoretical function engages to transport all of these into quantitative models of coherence and pattern. Generally we sense this process of translation is the process of knowledge, and first person, qualitative judgment as rightfully marginalized along the way. But we feel on this journey of knowledge, we arrive with our theoretical vehicle but we have lost ourselves along the road. Spookily the engine of transport delivers a vehicle with an empty cockpit. Marilynne Robinson offers this characterization in *The Absence of Mind*, “A central tenet of the modern world view is that we do not know our own minds, our own motives, our own desires. And – an important corollary- certain well-qualified others do know them. I have spoken of the suppression of the testimony of individual consciousness and experience among us, and this is one reason it has fallen silent. We have been persuaded that it is a perjured witness.”⁵

The contentedness described by Portmann will be familiar to all of us. In this essay we are not focusing on the joy and achievement accompanying it, instead we can focus on this

3 Ibid. 248.

4 Rudolf Steiner develops a powerful characterization of this unconscious feeling in an address given on January 19th, 1924, published in the collection *Anthroposophy and the Inner Life: An Esoteric Introduction* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 2015).

5 Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind: Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (Yale University Press, 2010), 60.

subtle lonesome hue. Its basic character tends towards defined functions and units that can never correspond with a being who is able to respond and relate to us, or a world in which we could actually live. It excludes our basic experiences of both selfhood and life. This is why there is an unconscious feeling that comprehensive translation of existence into theory of this type cannot result in reconnection. While sensing theoretical interconnection of this type on a sublime scale (say the universe) can awaken reverence and awe, this reverence is at the same time tinny, for its finitude is always only slightly veiled to the heart.

But we feel on this journey of knowledge, we arrive with our theoretical vehicle but we have lost ourselves along the road. Spookily the engine of transport delivers a vehicle with an empty cockpit.

This quasi-wholeness is an engine. If our lives are weighted toward the theoretical, the isolation it can produce makes us thirst for movement, variety and speed. It is the internal combustion of a schism. This spark can lead us to high velocity, high definition images in games, movies and series, social media, general surfing or digital sex sites. Yet in the end, we feel we are building bridges with air. The schism can also lead us to drugs and religion as pathways to escape our one-sided mental life. Drugs take us somewhere blindfolded, only to dump us

out sometime later in a ditch with no idea how to make the journey again, bruised and weaker than when we set out. Religion opens up spiritual visions and images for us giving meaning to existence, and often aesthetic ritual, yet it is the rarest of occurrences to feel oneself able to travel from the alter to the forest, and certainly not to the “prestigious” halls of the university. Drugs seem to give us what we want on the terms of the loan shark, while religion often treats us as orphans, even though they cannot take full custody, nurturing us only on Sundays while demanding we renounce our natural parents, with whom we spend the rest of the week.

Despite this discontent, we often sense that our theoretical work is objective, neither good nor bad, actually neutral. This feeling is not arbitrary. It reveals important characteristics of the theoretical function and quantification. Still, when we look at the theoretical function in context we see it is not neutral, that it does privilege certain values. The theoretical function unfolds through quantification, calculation and functional manipulation, and in turn we shape the world in this spirit.⁶

During our daily rounds aesthetic experience flares up, with sustenance, important contours are washed out and alive on the edges, with fissures bubbling with interiority and life. Portmann suggests this is connected to the “... striving of many humble people toward joy and happiness. As educators we have to take most seriously that the most simple and genuine sources of joy are drying out for countless people. The natural foundation for joy, the

⁶ See the first part of Hans Jonas’s *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Prentice-Hall, 1974).



ability for rich and spontaneous experience, is eroding.”⁷ These indigenous capacities do not require techno-prosthetics or chemical crutches. Adolf Portmann characterizes the aesthetic function as, “... leaving the primary impressions of the senses intact, retaining the original, unique, qualities of form and line, color and sound, smell and touch ... all spiritual/mental activities have their point of departure in these primary experiences. Whereas the theoretical function works to transcend these qualities and to replace them with measurable units, the aesthetic function engages these primary sources of spiritual/mental life with trust, building on them, creating images and truth.”⁸

Acts of qualitative embodied judgment are minor miracles not based on calculation. In these judgments we find impulses, melodies and movements.. The aesthetic capacity is present in our naïve, attentive, embodied surrender to perception, feeling and understanding. It is an orientation we adopt when we listen to someone through words, tone and body language while suspending definitions. It is hospitable to surprise and revelation, it waits and listens, it anticipates singularity. A bronze rose color on a book cover opens into a space of contentment, warmth and kindness while the dark brown of the decaying black walnut shell in late August opens into a vast, sublime and earnest field. The white pine, surrounded by maples and oaks, makes an impression combining ocean spray and feathers, light and delicate, festive and noble. The Silhouette of the cedar trees in the north country suddenly reveal a gentle and introspective atmosphere set against the bodies of hemlock. These dynamic perceptions can be intensified into

works of art. Charles Burchfield was want to compose word pictures on the back of his paintings. On August 12, 1917 he wrote, “THE AUGUST NORTH: In August, at the last fading of twilight, the North assumed to the child a fearful aspect (that colored his thoughts even into early manhood). A Melancholy settles down over the child’s world; he is as if in a tomb. He thinks all his loved ones are gone away, or dead; the ghostly white petunias droop with sadness; un-named terrors lurk in the black caverns under bushes and trees. As the darkness settles down the pulsating chorus of night insects commences, swelling louder and louder until it resembles the heart-like beat of the interior of a black closet.”

Aesthetic judgement, a misfit figure in science, has increasingly been shown the door when trying to attend the academy. Portmann describes how the naturalist who approaches the world aesthetically has come to be seen as an awkward ancestor of today’s scientist.

There is something epiphanic about this form of judgment, wherein the distinct feeling of comprehension unfolds and flashes up with a sense of unbounded life. There is a tendency toward wholeness, yet one that is open and qualitatively mobile. Compared to the quasi-wholeness of the theoretical function, these strike us with life, subtle delicacy and sublime drama. Art can possess these tendencies in an intensified portion. If we are

7 Adolf Portmann, “Biologie als Aesthetische Erziehung”, 256.

8 Ibid. 246.



accustomed to moving through with a theoretical attitude, we pass by so many possibilities of judgment. We may, however, find ourselves deeply struck at some point by a simple work of art. Works of art have traditionally been shaped with a special care for perception and pictorial power. Images, moods and ethical

movements are invited and tended to as active presences. The artist greets them with hospitality, and makes room for them.

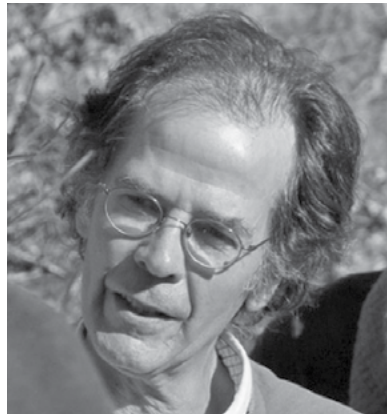
Water emerges, foreground, yet there is a movement from top to bottom.. The light of the sky is also a broad field of moving moisture and clouds, and the moisture opens the back of the mountain that threatens to close itself off. A boat is on the water where we float. The parts of this world transform into one another, all receiving themselves from the greater whole. The parts are not strictly separated and defined, yet they are specific. They pass into one another in an imaginative circulation of transformation. When we focus on a part, it is never severed from the whole. Art, as illusion, is lifted out of the “real” yet it feels intimately connected to reality. Cheng, the Sinologist, suggests a painting teacher leads a student to “... the creation of an organic composition in which the full embodies the substance of things and the empty the circulation of the vital forces thereby joining the finite and the infinite, as in Creation itself.”, Chan art is not a definitive orientation, we can find kindred approaches in Burchfield’s practice and in the works of Cezanne and Emily Carr. These artists participated with their living environments toward the emergence of these vital artifacts and images.

There is an epiphanic dimension to aesthetic judgment, yet images are connected through rhythms; they can make a strong impression and then recede, only to come again changed. One can feel one “knows” a work of art after one encounter, but this is a habit taken over from the theoretical attitude that possesses truth. We may dwell on a dazzling echo, but

9 François Cheng, *The River Below* (Welcome Rain, 2000), 109.

Image: Kanō Tan'yū, *Landscape in Moonlight* 1668





we will find that the notion of our possessing a picture empties it. This is a remarkable characteristic of being alive, of making visitations. We can think of Cezanne's attempt to capture his living motif, which he could never capture but only encounter, leaving traces of a face as a result.

This is all too easy with art. We need not fight to recognize these experiences. We still look at them like Nietzsche's leafy oasis in the desert, they make life tolerable. But what of the desert? The all-powerful habits that relegate aesthetic judgment to the arts and humanities and theoretical judgment to the sciences need to be challenged. Aesthetic judgement, a misfit figure in science, has increasingly been shown the door when trying to attend the academy. Portmann describes how the naturalist who approaches the world aesthetically has come to be seen as an awkward ancestor of today's scientist. This is deeply concerning when we think that it is the sciences that we increasingly turn toward to establish our connections to our natural environments. "The natural forms that surround us are a treasure chest of riches, yet how few sense the joy awoken by the variations of autumn's colors, joy that can be ignited by one single maple in a city. How few know of the source of joy that is generally available in

the fullness of leaf forms, of fruits, the flight of birds and their song? Who notices that every mother of pearl setting of the sun is a festival, every glance through the sunlit yellow leaves of the beech tree into the cool blue sky a drama, that from these simple joys of perception it is possible to ascend to dizzying imaginations of worldly experience?"¹⁰ Do we practice science in a way that we can experience the earth as a treasure in this sense? Or is it simply a "natural resource" to be understood and used in the spirit of calculation, control and domination? What kind of natural science might counteract this anesthetic tendency?

Throughout his prolific career Portmann pioneered a research method to expand empiricism using aesthetic judgment in biology. He realized that if you are always looking for functions when you try to understand elements of an organism mysterious facets of their existence are rendered invisible. To look at the forms and movements of animals as expressive, pictorial presentation, requires suspending the functional approach and employing aesthetic apprehension. This reveals what he called the "expressive display" in nature. Aesthetic judgment reveals interiority and sentience. He articulated a distinction between the open and visible formations of the body that required this

10 Adolf Portmann, "Biologie als Aesthetische Erziehung", 256.

Image: (left to right) J.W. v. Goethe, Craig Holdrege, and Mary Caroline Richards.

approach, as opposed to the internal and hidden, such as internal organs. This empirical approach moving between the dynamic of the physical and interiority has the effect of reclaiming a portion of those experiences that aesthetic judgment can offer us with full consciousness. The gravity and reverence of Portmann's writings on animal's leads to a realization that sentience is a foundational and observable mystery of our existence. Through this aesthetic method animal sentience is imbued with the gravity of the real and brought out of the epi-phenomenal shadows (or perhaps it is us who are brought out of our abstracted separation). It ushers the sentient life of animals back into the universe, and shows how mysteriously sentience is interwoven with the formation of certain facets of the physical body.

More recently Craig Holdrege has developed filial investigations in biology, building on Goethe's delicate empiricism. These culminate in aesthetic ties to organisms through the method of "portrayal".¹¹ Holdrege's studies involve careful empirical tending to the parts of organisms with an eye for how they express the life of the whole. Each part is not closed off as a fixed function that is thought of as a specialized wheel in a machine, but expresses the whole in a unique way. What is remarkable in Holdrege's work is how he turns towards parts without losing the background of context and wholeness. He shows that just as we can focus on an element in a painting, or a refrain in a piece of music, while sensing its embeddedness in a whole, there are biological research methods that attain the same. These methods are disciplined and

distinct even while related to artistic appreciation and creativity.

Both Portmann and Holdrege draw significantly from Goethe and his orientation in science. Goethe, famous for his literary achievements, saw his scientific work as more significant. He occupies an important position in the history of phenomenology. The foregoing may prepare us for a glimpse of Goethe's importance. But we have to push back against the conventions and habits of the "two-cultures" that seem to place the natural sciences and the humanities in opposing worlds. Without effort on our part to understand aesthetic knowledge practices in the natural sciences we are bats in the midday sun. Goethe's work did not lead to "theoretical" explanation in the sense we have described above as theoretical, but to aesthetic theorems. His search for "primal phenomena" involved developing aesthetic judgment into scientific insight. Unlike artistic activity, Goethe's scientific orientation involved creating long series of sense perceptible observations and experiments that culminated in phenomenal theory, or in the words of Arthur Zajonc, facts as theory.¹² Theory's culmination was perceptible, yet not as a case to be explained by a general rule. In physics his color theory still stands out as a watershed moment, where a science that can lead to understanding while cultivating qualitative connections to our own experience emerges. Georg Maier's research in optics offers a more recent example of this scientific culture in physics.¹³

We know today that this is not only about personal

11 See Craig Holdrege, *Doing Goethean Science*. Janus Head 8, no. 1 (2005): 27–52, *The Flexible Giant: Seeing the Elephant Whole* (Perspectives 2. Ghent, New York: The Nature Institute, 2005) and *The Giraffe's Long Neck: From Evolutionary Fable to Whole Organism* (Perspectives 4. Ghent, New York: The Nature Institute, 2005).

12 Arthur Zajonc, *Facts as Theory: Aspects of Goethe's Science*. In *Goethe and the Sciences: A Reappraisal*, edited by Frederick Amrine and Francis J. Zucker, (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub. Co, 1987).

13 Georg Maier, *An Optics of Visual Experience* (Adonis Press, Hillsdale, NY. 2011).



joy or a “romantic” view of nature. Our moment reveals countless ways we are destroying the foundations of life and we quickly come to ask how far the ecological crisis is at root a cultural crisis? I am convinced an expanded notion and movement for aesthetic education is one part of the solution we require. I once took an undergraduate level class in Environmental Science wherein the author referred to ecology and the “Wisdom of Nature”. In the context of the textbook, that contained nothing but models of “mechanisms”, the sad impression this term made on me is unutterable. While there are obvious reasons that theoretical culture is most at home in the natural sciences there are increasingly obvious dangers to its hegemony. We understand that we are interdependent as beings and we share a moment on this planet that requires a wisdom of the particularities and existential interdependence of our existence, which our theoretical culture cannot offer.

Aldo Leopold, of particular importance to the ecological movement in the USA, once wrote: “All I am saying is that there is also drama in every bush, if you can see it... When enough men know this, we fear no indifference to the welfare of bushes, or birds, or soil, or trees... We shall then have no need of the word conservation, for we shall have the thing itself.”¹⁴ Here Leopold presents the idea that our ethical action is connected to the quality of our connection to our habitats. Our awareness of our natural environment, largely informed by our theoretical culture and muted by our technological life circumstance, is knowledge numb to the terrestrial that can be held dear.

14 Aldo Leopold, *The River of the Mother of God: And Other Essays by Aldo Leopold* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 263.

Image: *Water Plant*, Ella Lapointe, Ink on Rice Paper

In a decisive moment for our limited and interdependent planet we live in thoughts of infinite translation as calculation. We find ourselves at the peak of a legacy of a theoretical culture that can be traced back at least 500 years to the continent of Europe. It has worked for centuries to translate qualities of experience into quantitative fields of calculation, subtly tending toward domination, control and alienation. This is now our superpower, looming over our increasingly atrophied aesthetic capacity, when it is the latter we need more than ever in natural science and our practical ethical lives. If the ecological crisis is going to be faced voluntarily and collectively, and not through ecological or public health tyrannies and dictatorships, there is a significant task at hand- The expansion of the notion of aesthetic education to include the natural sciences, and its energetic and widespread implementation.*



News from the M.C. Richards Program

The M.C. Richards Program's first year was successfully completed in May of 2021. The first year took place during a difficult time. Besides the expected challenges of launching a new micro-college year dedicated to Goethean science, aesthetic education, anthroposophically oriented contemplative inquiry, and action research, this took place with serious public health restrictions and widespread anxiety in the world. Despite this, the first year was a success. The cohort was able to meet together and work in person throughout the year. The cohort began with 12 students, 9 of which graduated in May (3 could not complete the year for financial and health reasons).



At the end of the year we asked students what they would share about the M.C. Richards Program with someone new to it who was interested in applying? Here are some of the responses:

“This program stands unique to anything else in the United States right now. I felt it perfectly complimented, and also surpassed, my competitive bachelor’s degree. I consider it a post-bac year and my expectations were happily met. I feel now so well oriented for my future academic goals!”-SR

“I would share that it’s life changing!! I came into this knowing it was going to change my life, and it did! It truly alters the way you think about all the things around you. I think it’s underestimated how important the community here is. I came here thinking the program was the main part of my experience, and while it was huge, I think the most influential part for me was all the people I met and was able to work with. The teachers brought me so much, the students taught me just as much as the teachers, the study groups were such a grounding activity all throughout the program. I don't know how I would have received everything this program offered me if it wasn't for the individuals around me, digesting the information with me, and the greater Philmont community supporting me through extra curriculums, potlucks, and so forth.”-LN

“This program is an opportunity to explore education and the arts in a wholesome and dynamic way. It gives you a chance to dive into a diverse collection of fields that may at first seem disconnected. Further study, observation, exploration and practice shows how connected all aspects of life are. The arts come into many components of the program, directly or indirectly. This program marries intellectual, spiritual and artistic pursuits very nicely. It gives an opportunity to see how important beauty and creativity are in something that could seem stiff and rigid at first. I learned to ask questions better and how to be ok with not having answers, to live with questions as opportunities. Be ready to tear down old concepts of what you think you know and stay open to what the world can reveal to you.”-KM





As we started our second year we were joined by Stefan Ambrose and Erin Corrigan, two new full-time faculty members, to integrate land care, agriculture and excursions throughout the year. Three afternoons a week students work together in a community garden and on Common Hands Farm (a local biodynamic farm), most weeks there is an outdoor excursion, and there are two week long camping trips. Besides this there is a weekly potluck, two student lunches, prepared by a student from last year's cohort, and ongoing evening study groups. This was envisioned as a way to create red threads that run through the whole year and opportunities for students to spend time together outside of more structured learning contexts. Another red thread for the program is emerging as staff at the Nature Institute are working with Erin Corrigan and Stefan Ambrose to support each student to pursue an independent research project that spans the whole year.

One of our students in the second cohort, AJ Taysom, sent in a reflection on his experience that captures something of the mood of these first couple of months:

“I sit on a farm down the road from Free Columbia and draw landscapes with charcoal. I'm learning to see where pictures exist all around me. After drawing we harvest, weed, and plant in the fields. In the evenings, after the program hours, I work in the kitchen of a small farm to table restaurant. The produce I harvest follows me there, and I use it to prepare and plate elegant salads for the people of the Hudson Valley. Pictures everywhere! The salad I prepare liberates the tomato from its natural form, allowing it to ascend. There's creation in every stage of this process. How lucky I am to see it.”

Last year the demands of a fledgling program and the pandemic kept all of our attention on what was happening close to home. This year two faculty members are dedicating 8 weeks during the winter trimester to an intensive outreach and publicity push. I am certain that what is happening here would interest countless young adults all over the country.

If you have any ideas that could support this effort, or if you want to help spread the word, please reach out to nathaniel@freecolumbia.org.





The second year of the M.C. Richards Program begins on a late August afternoon with six students and two new staff members. We eight, carry in our inner lives seeds. Seeds, the abundance of an earlier season's harvest, rooted in home, and work, and living and dying, and now are ready to go into a new soil. To bring what we are, from where we've been, through where we are. To the home that is waiting to become. We grow and live together, and through our land care service work and wilderness explorations, we live with the question, "How to truly become at home in place?" and "How to actively participate in the making of our homes into somewhere of nourishment and growth?"

This is a sharing of images from our unfurling time together over the first trimester.

Seven of us sit in a circle on the lawn at Free Columbia. We're all newly together, mostly new to each other and new to making a home in Philmont. We each bring to life images of the homes we come from...

Suburbs leading to winding farm roads, a river, a forest, an eagle in a tree...

A recently fallen iconic statue, an expansive pink lake full of long dead creatures...

A descent into a valley of evergreen forests, moving into the spirit of the north...

A special potato taco, a city of eternal spring, of buildings low to the ground...

Holding your breath in a world full of smoke, mountains burn, surrounding the valley...Color in abundance, each home a more surprising hue...

Hot, thick air, dark marsh water dreaming, twisting live oak trees and radiant sandy earth...

We hold seeds in our hands and stand within two freshly prepared garden beds at the Free Columbia garden.

Spinach, turnips, radishes, tat soi...

For many of us this is our first time sowing seeds, our first time growing food.

We part the soil, each of us in our own manner, and for our own seed.

We initiate our commitment to this place through putting these seeds into the earth, cover them lightly, give them water, and, together, continue to watch them grow over the coming weeks...

In this same garden, earth covered in mugwort and grass, contaminated by lead from industry's past, is transformed week by week into raised garden beds. Layers of cardboard, woodchips, leaves, and soil are wheelbarrowed out onto the beds. We tell jokes, give each other high fives, and share stories as we work. The compost pile is transformed into an abundant source of life and fertility. We sift the newly transformed dark soil, singing Mexican ballads, learning by doing, creating a medicine for our Earth. Together, we create a source of nourishment for the land and for this community for years to come while also growing in our relationship to this place and one-another.

"Stay with the Surfaces!" "Draw everywhere at once!"

Hands and charcoal move over paper on boards, on easels.

We extend ourselves into the world in front of us.

A park, a river valley, a waterfall, mountain lakes, a sloping meadow...

We strive to indicate something of these places that leaves them alive and enlivens something within us...

We sit in pairs at the Nature Institute with glass containers full of tap water in front of us. We use a syringe to drop a single drop of ink tinted water into the container. The droplet hits the water and a single ring mushrooms from the inside out into a cascade of multiple streams and circular forms. Over time the form appears to rest and looks as if it were a solid that could be pulled out of the water. It has form. The water is completely changed by this one drop, the ink reveals that water is much more than one amorphous being but that each movement has its own character and integrity and brings something new...

Each experiment in the classroom brings us into greater wonder of the mysteries of the world outside. What invisible forms are being created in water's movement all around us?

The sun still makes its way towards the dawn horizon, while we make our way toward the North. We caravan, canoes strapped down, bags and hearts full for the journey ahead. The gentle clay soil changes. Stone and sand now grasp cooler waters round their edges. Red pine tower, lake sides fiery guardians. We set out with Thoreau's benediction, that when we've settled our debts, and cleared our minds, we're ready for a walk.

The rain begins to fall, soaking us quickly, just as we step into the woods.

We move over large rocks, a trail always changing, the forest transitions from shrubs and birch to a darker, slower world.

Hemlock and Spruce scent the air, gather silence.

Mosses of green and red cover decomposing logs and rocks.

Those new to northern forests find this world eerie, others find peace in the elemental, in simplicity.

We stop and marvel at blue shining rocks in a stream as the sun returns and we reach our lean-to camp.

We squeeze together, all eight of us in our little shelter. We chase away the cold and wet with warm food, warm tea and the last peach sunlight humming through the evergreens.

We begin the ascent. Mountain lakes and meadows become rushing streams, and waterfalls.

The Opalescent river leaves just enough room in the cleft for our passing. Its icy water shimmers and glides, plunges and pools.

The silence widens the higher we go, the path demands all we have, and we give it, and finally, exhausted, we arrive. Lake Tear of the Clouds, the highest source of the Hudson,

spreads before us reflecting New York's tallest mountain, Tahawus, Cloud Splitter. We all learn about making camp, cooking, filtering water, using the bathroom in the woods. In the evenings we have no other separate home and life to go to, so we talk and laugh with each other. We improvise folk school lectures by visiting fictional personalities. We return back to Philmont stronger in ourselves, more connected to one another, and with a new world living inside.

We go out together on excursions to local wild places and to offer service to local farms. Upon arriving at each place, our arrivals often being returns, we take a moment together to bring ourselves there consciously. We first become aware of ourselves, our bodies, the earth under us, our sense of warmth and cold, the movement of air on our skin. We taste the air around us and take in the smells. We give attention to sound, let it create worlds within us. Opening our eyes anew we bring a fresh glance to what we see. We then bring the present world into words amongst us: a vibrant flower, cool air tangling with warm sun, sounds of birds dancing through, pooling within us, the dark bark of trees watching, changing leaves.... Having now taken a moment to meet this place, we then set out into work.

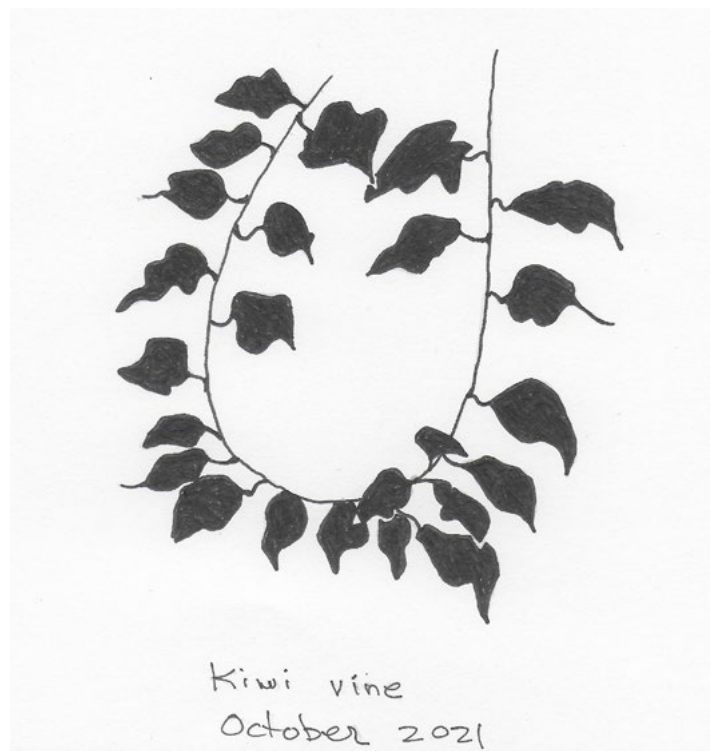


Image by Laura Summer

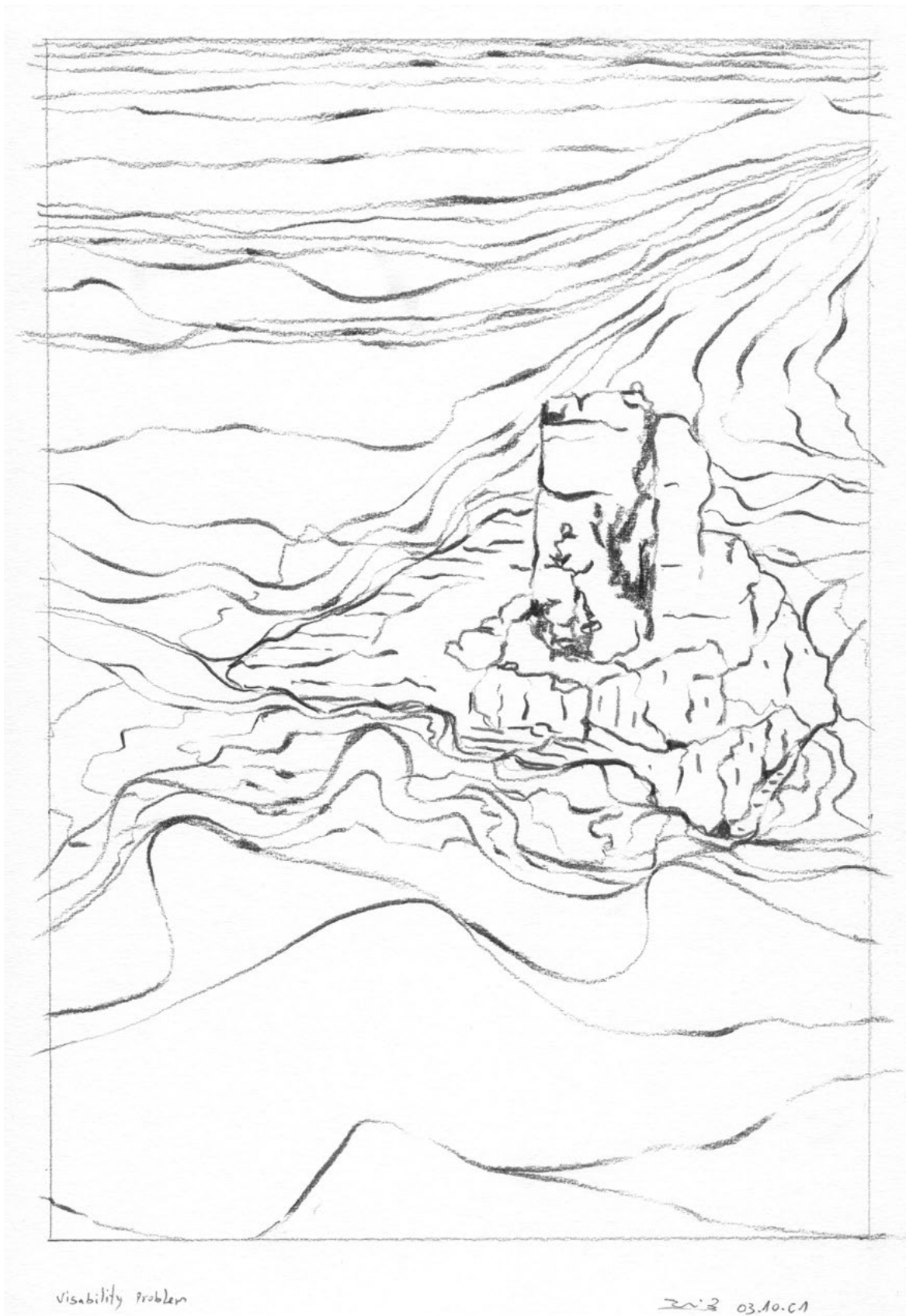


Image: *Visibility Problem* by Zvi Szir

The Wisdom of the Four Elements: A Fairytale

Heather Rosenthal, Inspired by the teachings of *The Nature Institute*

Once upon a time...there was a large kingdom nestled in the center of a thriving valley. The beauty of this valley was unsurpassable, for the lands were abundant with the vitality and rhythm of nature. The people here were strong of spirit and kind of heart, and thus the kingdom was a place of great prosperity.

But time went on; and, as is the power of time, change inevitably arrived. The people of this kingdom grew hardened and weathered by the challenges of life, and soon a disease of selfishness and disconnection spread rapidly across the land. Yet, the people of this beautiful valley were distracted by their daily lives, and no one noticed the cries of the earth.

Then one cold winter's day, the people awoke to a great shock. Upon walking outside, it was made clear that something terrible had happened to the earth. The valley's great lake, which was normally frozen over with a solid layer of ice, was now liquid on the top. However, the entire lower layer of the lake was frozen solid. The position of the ice was reversed! Thus, the poor fish and other creatures were stranded at the top, gasping for their lives. The water flowing in nearby rivers had also changed. Although not frozen, it was surprisingly warm—a similar warmth as the

nearby air—and wasn't retaining its normal coolness. And even worse, the water in the river was no longer meandering along its normal course, but instead was flowing in a straight line—crashing into everything in its path.

The waters were not the only element to have changed. The wind, too, was behaving abnormally. In fact, the wind had disappeared altogether! Not a single leaf or blade of grass stirred on that cold and silent morning. And, when the people tried to start a fire, nothing happened, for the wind's helping hand was nowhere to be found.

The people cried out in surprise, and their heads ached from a great pressure that was suddenly pressing down upon the earth. The warmth of the land seemed trapped upon the ground, unable to rise up into the air. The people felt crushed by the weight of their own body heat, which didn't rise from their bodies but instead stayed stuck to their heads. Many folk could be seen upside down with their heads stuck in the snow—a desperate sight indeed. But this act brought them no relief.

The earth itself was behaving strangely, too. The trees no longer stood upright and strong, but had toppled to the ground, having lost their

balance and equilibrium. And, the surrounding mountains crumbled into the lands, for their colossal shapes were no longer supported by the solid foundation of the earth.

Soon the kingdom was in a tremendous state of confusion and chaos. “What has happened to our beautiful earth?” cried the people. And, although time continued its steady march forward, nothing went back to normal. So the elders of the kingdom gathered to discuss this terrible problem. After several days of deep reflection, they stood before the people and spoke:

“The elements—the great laws of this earth—are behaving abnormally. Something is clearly out of balance. Beyond our kingdom there lies a magical land containing four forests, and each forest contains the wisdom of an element—water, wind, fire, or earth. We have come to the realization that someone must travel to these forests and bring back the wisdom they contain. This is the only way to solve the mystery of our problem.”

There was much commotion amongst the people, for they could think of no soul who was capable of completing such a journey. Finally, another elder said:

“For this task, we need someone who is flexible enough to carry water, light enough to move air, temperate enough to hold warmth, and strong enough to transport earth. Thus, we need a child, for the children have not yet become hardened, weighed down, heated, or weakened by the demands of life.” The people searched far and wide for this child, and soon they found a brave soul who was willing to accept the challenge. They offered the child their hopes and thanks, and the next day the

child ventured into the lands of the four forests.

After traveling for four days and four nights, the child came upon a winding blue forest, where the trees were the color of a deep lake and the leaves shone like shells. Shortly upon entering the forest, the child came across a fairy sitting in one of the trees. The fairy introduced herself as the Water Fairy, and said,

“I am the Mighty Moderator. I am flowing, soft, healing, cleansing, and consuming. What brings you to my forest?”

And the child said,

“The waters are not freezing properly or retaining their temperature, nor are they meandering as they should. What can be done to remedy our problem?” To which the fairy calmly replied,

“Your people are not mindful of their true selves and the importance of retaining their authenticity. Neither are your people carving their own paths; they are following the established paths before them. Therefore the waters are not retaining their temperature, and thus the waters are not meandering properly. Your people must honor their true selves. They must retain their core qualities, and they must follow their own paths.”

Full of gratitude, the child thanked the fairy and continued onward.

Next the child came upon a billowing silver forest, where the trees were the color of flowing clouds and the leaves were lighter than the softest breath. Shortly upon entering the forest, the child came across a fairy sitting in one of the trees. The fairy introduced himself as the Wind Fairy, and said,

“I am the Transient Transporter. I am delicate, powerful, fleeting, stimulating, and influential. What brings you to my forest?”

And the child said,

“Our wind has disappeared and a great pressure weighs down upon us. What can be done to remedy our problem?” To which the fairy quickly replied,

“Your people are not conscious enough of their speech and how their out-breaths influence the patterns of the wind. Also, your people put too much pressure on themselves and others. Therefore the patterns of the wind are being impacted and cease to flow, and thus the air pressure is far too strong. Your people must be more mindful of their words and the effects they have on those around them—the elements included—for they have a ripple effect. And they must release the pressure they put on themselves and others.”

Full of gratitude, the child thanked the fairy and continued onward.

Next the child came upon a towering red forest, where the trees were the color of flames and the leaves glistened like embers. Shortly upon entering the forest, the child came across a fairy sitting in one of the trees. The fairy introduced herself as the Warmth Fairy, and said,

“I am the Tremendous Transformer. I am liquefying, destroying, expanding, and releasing. What brings you to my forest?”

And the child said,

“My people are being consumed by the heat of the earth and their own bodies, for it seems unable to rise upwards and away from them.

Nor are they able to warm or cool themselves against their surroundings. What can be done to remedy our problem?” To which the fairy hotly replied,

“Your people are not mindful of their tempers and the importance of allowing their own heat to be released. They have also lost their connection and flow between each other. Therefore the warmth is no longer rising upwards, and thus natural heat exchange is no longer taking place. Your people must be more mindful of their tempers and find ways to release them upwards instead of suppressing them. And, they must be more connected with one another, cultivating an exchange of wisdom and love.”

Full of gratitude, the child thanked the fairy and continued onward.

Next the child came upon a strong brown forest, where the trees blended with the stones and the leaves held the colors of the soil. Shortly upon entering the forest, the child came across a fairy sitting in one of the trees. The fairy introduced himself as the Earth Fairy, and said,

“I am The Strong Supporter. I am striking, crushing, stable, independent, balancing, and solid. What brings you to my forest?”

And the child said,

“Our lands are crumbling beneath our feet, for the trees and mountains can no longer maintain their balance. What can be done to remedy our problem?” To which the fairy slowly replied,

“Your people have lost their sense of balance, leaning too far towards materialism and selfishness, and too far away from connection

and altruism. Therefore the earth has lost its own balance, and thus the land is no longer able to maintain its equilibrium. Your people must find a balance between giving and receiving; between independence and connection; and between self awareness and collective awareness.”

Full of gratitude, the child thanked the fairy and continued onward.

The child traveled for another four days and four nights. And, just as the sun was beginning to rise upon the vast landscape, the child came upon an open meadow. At the edge of the meadow stood the four fairies of Water, Wind, Warmth, and Earth. With open arms, they welcomed the child forward. Then they spoke together, sharing the truth of the kingdom’s strange problem.

“Your kingdom is out of balance with the elements because the people are out of balance with themselves and each other. We are all part of the elements and the earth. We cannot separate ourselves from nature. We cannot undervalue the impact we have upon the world. You must more closely observe and respect the elements around you. And you must be more aware and reflective. But you must also observe your own inner states of being because this is just as important as observing that which is outside of you. Remember that your inner state has an impact on the outer world. Pay attention. Most importantly, you must remember what you’ve learned here. Make strong mental images, transport them to your heart, and never forget.”

Full of gratitude, the child thanked the four fairies and continued onward.

Soon the child returned to the vast valley, and descended down into the eagerly awaiting kingdom. Upon arriving, the child shared the vital discoveries with the people, which filled their hearts with flexibility, lightness, warmth, and strength. With time, this helped transform the people and the land back into a state of balance—as is the power of the earth’s wisdom.

The End.



Image: *Mountain Cloud*, Ella Lapointe, Ink on Rice Paper

Annunciation as Fender's Blue Butterfly with Kincaid's Lupine

Mary Szybist



The endangered Fender's blue butterfly associates,
not with common lupines, but with the very rare
Kincaid's lupine

—*Native Plant Society of Oregon*

But if I were this thing,
my mind a thousand times smaller than my wings,

if my fluorescent blue flutter
finally stumbled

into the soft
aqua throats of the blossoms,

if I lost my hunger
for anything else—

I'd do the same. I'd fasten myself
to the touch of the flower.

So what if the milky rims of my wings
no longer stupefied

the sky? If I could
bind myself to this moment, to the slow

snare of its scent,
what would it matter if I became

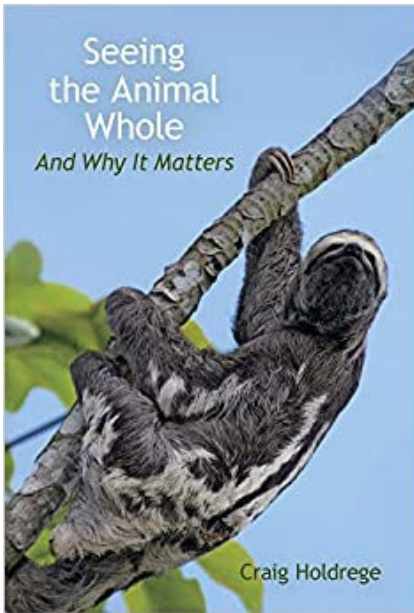
just the flutter of page
in a text someone turns

to examine me
in the wrong color?



Seeing the Animal Whole and Why It Matters

Reviewed by Nathaniel Williams



Craig Holdrege, **Seeing the Animal Whole and Why It Matters** (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne, 2021)

Craig Holdrege's new book is a fruit of decades long exploration into animals and biology. A contribution to the field of zoology and evolution, it also stands as a practical contribution to the philosophy of science, one that reveals a researcher struggling with the ethical dynamics implicit in pursuing understanding. The significance of the book appears in its true proportion on the backdrop of one of Hannah Arendt's probing questions: "Can we find a way to love the world enough to take responsibility for it?" How do we answer this in our intensifying environmental crisis, a crisis that is unavoidably connected to our lives and culture? Can our very ways of knowing engender love for the earth and impulses to take responsibility for the parts we play in life? Through studies of the American bison, the giraffe, the sloth, the zebra and lion, the elephant, the mole, the frog and the dairy cow, Holdrege offers one unique and affirmative answer to this question. His approach, emerging from a research community that reaches back to Goethe, does not only involve a different dialect on conventional insights, but opens new possible ways to think about evolution, paedomorphic tendencies, the notion of the boundaries of an organism and ethical dimensions of animal domestication. Throughout, Holdrege's work joins practical zoological research and greater philosophical questions. These new orientations are connected to how one thinks, not just what one thinks. Like the brilliant biologist Adolf Portmann, who forcefully showed the inadequacy of research into life that does not develop aesthetic and pictorial forms of judgment, Holdrege demonstrates the significance of this underdeveloped form of thinking. He describes a path where careful observation, paired with pictorial practices in thinking, lead to profound horizons of perception and living insight, or, a "biology of beings" that fosters connection.



Image: *Island* by Zvi Szir

Looking Back

Online Courses

Online courses have become well-established this year at Free Columbia. This autumn Laura is teaching six sessions per week of courses on color, composition, contemplation and dynamic, as well as once a month drawing courses on the Philosophy of Freedom by Rudolf Steiner and a course exploring the mantra of the first class of the School for Spiritual Science of the Anthroposophical Society. All of these courses together involve about 100 people from many places including Malaysia, India, Canada, Mexico, Romania, the Philippines, as well as many places in the United States.

The courses follow a basic format of exercises that people do at home during the week and then a zoom call where everyone shows their work and asks and answers questions. Through this creative work a supportive transnational community is being formed. Often in the groups, working together, we can feel inspiration and understanding flow between us.

New Calendar

For 2022 Laura has collaborated with poet Mary Szybist to create a calendar of paintings and poems. Each month has one poem which inspired two paintings.

Spring Crowdfunding

During April and May students and faculty organized a crowdfunding campaign to help fund the expansion of Free Columbia's faculty and the "Coming Home" initiative. 163 donors contributed \$16,000.

Youth and Nature Roundtable

In June Nathaniel Williams and three students from the 2020-21 cohort joined Steven Johnson, Jean-David Derreumaux and some of the seasonal interns from the Churchtown Dairy on a roundtable hosted by the Foundation for Health Creation Discussion on "Youth and Nature".

July Visual Art and Shoemaking Workshops

In July Laura taught two weeks of in person summer workshops exploring cold wax. Cold wax is a medium which is mixed with oil paint and lends itself to layering with many media. 17 people participated.

In July Nathaniel also led a weeklong intensive leather shoemaking workshop with six students from around the Hudson Valley.

How We Will

In August Laura traveled to Detroit to work with Bart Eddy and the students of the Brightmoor Maker Space (<https://brightmoormakerspace.org>) as part of the “How We Will” Conference. Despite ninety degree weather, unusually messy techniques and a rain storm that flooded the space with four inches of water, the workshop was a great success and many colorful masks were created.

Layers of Blue Layers

In July Laura collaborated with Sampsa Pirtola to create a video and painting installation called “Layers of Blue Layers” for Lightforms Art Center in Hudson, NY.

Layers of Blue Layers

What is it to make blue together? Is that task more difficult if each person is on a different side of an ocean? What language does blue speak? What medium would be best?

We have done collaborations before on subjects such as “What is Collaboration?” “What is Death?” “What is Initiation?” Having learned to speak each other’s artistic language, blue seemed easy at the beginning.

Blue is the color that is said to be the last to be spoken of among different cultures. It is not clear whether people did not actually see the color blue, or was there just not a word for it. The ancient Egyptians started to work with the color blue early on and regarded it as highly valuable - they even used it to decorate the tombs of their pharaohs. But why did the Ancient Greek poet, Homer, not describe the ocean in the Odyssey as some tone of blue, but rather called it the color of dark wine?

Could this be an example, for those of us who do not see beyond the physical realm, that something that is very obvious and in front of us - like the color blue - we do not “see” yet - as we do not have the word and concept for it.

In the installation Layers of Blue Layers we worked with the question of the layers and tones of blue, but also what is “blue movement” and “blue form”. While working on the installation, we realized that at times even though there is blue color, the movement is still more like yellow.

The installation also speaks to the layers of life. What are all the experiences that are influencing us in any moment? How do we influence each other?

-Sampsa Pirtola and Laura Summer, from the installation text

World Social Initiative Forum

At the beginning of August Nathaniel was one of the keynote speakers at this year's World Social Initiative Forum where he presented on "Cultural Independence and Individual Development in the Context of the US".

Youth Section (Re)Search School

Nathaniel is working with the Youth Section at the Goetheanum as a faculty member of the (Re)Search School. It is a hybrid course that began in July of 2021 and will culminate in March of 2022 at the Goetheanum, focusing on the intersections of conventional research methods and anthroposophic contemplative research practices.

Art Dispersal

In an attempt to make Art Dispersal part of the art culture in Hudson, NY Free Columbia has run four Art Dispersals this summer in various places in Hudson. Basilica Hudson, Mercury's Playhouse, and Lightforms Art Center have hosted. 39 paintings were dispersed to enthusiastic and occasionally tearful stewards. Patricia Lynch came from Portland OR to participate in the Art Dispersal at Basilica Hudson. She brought 12 paintings for dispersal.

International Steiner Symposium

In October Nathaniel presented a paper at the International Steiner Symposium: The Actuality of Rudolf Steiner- An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Steiner in the 21st Century. His paper was titled "Rudolf Steiner, Aesthetic Education and the Anthropocene"

Changes on the Board

Free Columbia has the good fortune of welcoming two new capable individuals to the board, Daniel Seitz and Allison Fox. Linda Park, who was one of Free Columbia's founding board members, has had to step back. Her enthusiasm and generative presence will be greatly missed.

The Good Work Institute Radio Hour

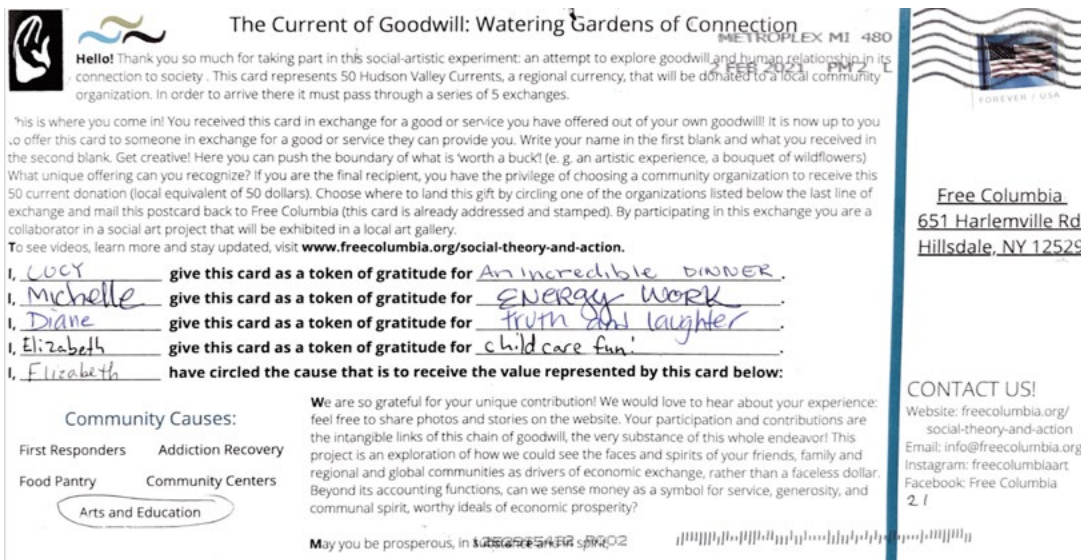
On October 12th Helene Lesterlin and Aja Schmeltz hosted Nathaniel on the Good Work Radio Hour for a discussion of the work of Free Columbia, the notion of good work and just transition.

The Current of Goodwill Final Report

The Current of Goodwill was a social-art project within the context of the M.C. Richards Program in 2020-21

"If my Mother had four wheels and a drive shaft she would be a touring bus." -Rudolf Steiner

Art allows us to entertain things that are “not real”, and this opportunity can inspire us to see our conventions in new light. This was the idea of the Current of Goodwill, a social-art project of students from the M.C. Richards Program cohort 2020-21 and the Hudson Valley Current, that is now complete. It was not intended as a project that would demonstrate a shovel ready alternative to conventional money systems, but as a creative act that could open novel thoughts and perspectives on money and economic exchange. In the process hundreds of moments were created when a currency evoked an act of thanks, learning about the Hudson Valley Current and Free Columbia. Through this project a group of students were introduced to monetary orientations inspired by Rudolf Steiner, in the context of Marx, Friedman and Raworth, among others. Each completed card, or unit of 50 HVCs, was ultimately directed as a grant to individuals and initiatives dedicated to the common good.



100 cards, each worth 50 HVCs (equivalent of 50 USD), were created. Assembled together they created a picture of interdependence, giving and receiving.

In order for them to be redeemed as a grant to a local organization each card had to make a journey, which involved passing between five people and being returned by mail. Of the 100 cards that went out, 25 made the return journey. 1,250 Hudson Valley Currents were dispersed according to the choices indicated on the cards. In September of 2021 the grants were awarded.

450 was earmarked for “Arts and Education” and awarded to THE ART AFFECT

250 was earmarked for “Addiction Recovery” and awarded to SIMADHI

250 was earmarked for “First Responders” and awarded to THE PHILMONT FIRE COMPANY

150 was earmarked for “Community Centers” and awarded to TILDAS AND THE HVC

150 was earmarked for “Food Pantries” and awarded to SEASON DELICIOUS

Grants

Our thanks go out to Stewarts Shops, to Project Hudson, Columbia Greene Council on the Arts, The Rudolf Steiner Charitable Trust and the Iona and Evidenz foundations for support this year.



Images: Painted cards from the Current of Goodwill project before dispersal and after return.

Looking Forward

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Winter - An artistic investigation with Laura Summer in Philmont, NY | February (exact dates TBD) |
| Color and Cold Wax with Laura Summer in Portland, OR | February (exact dates TBD) |
| Leather Shoemaking Intensive with Nathaniel Williams in Philmont, NY | June 27-July 1 |
| Imagining the Real with *Zvi Szir in Columbia County, NY | July 5th - July 23rd |
| Painting and video installation with Laura Summer, Sampsa Pirtola and public participation at Lightforms in Hudson, NY | August and September |
| Launching of the third year of the M.C. Richards Program | August |

Imagining the Real

***Zvi Szir** is a co-founder and director of the newARTschool in Basel, Switzerland, where he has been teaching painting, contemporary art, and Anthroposophy for the last 24 years. He is a painter, writer, and lecturer.

Working with paintings inspired by pivotal moments of world development, from old Saturn to the present. For painters, those who love to paint or would love to paint.

Zvi Szir will be leading courses in painting over three weeks this Summer. It is possible to attend all three weeks or to attend one or two.

The course will take place in Columbia County, NY, from July 5th - July 23rd, 2022.

Week 1: How can we imagine and paint the event of the big sacrifice at the beginning of the world (Old Saturn Imaginations)?

Week 2: A world of light and air; how to create unimaginable figures? The human being in its paradisaical plant-like stage (Old Sun).

Week 3: The soul is a cosmic battleground; can we re-imagine the images of the fall from grace? Lucifer and the art of painting.

In preparation for the courses, Zvi will be hosting four online presentations in the Spring of 2022 (dates TBA).

It is not necessary to register for the summer courses in order to attend the online presentations.

For more information, write info@freecolumbia.org

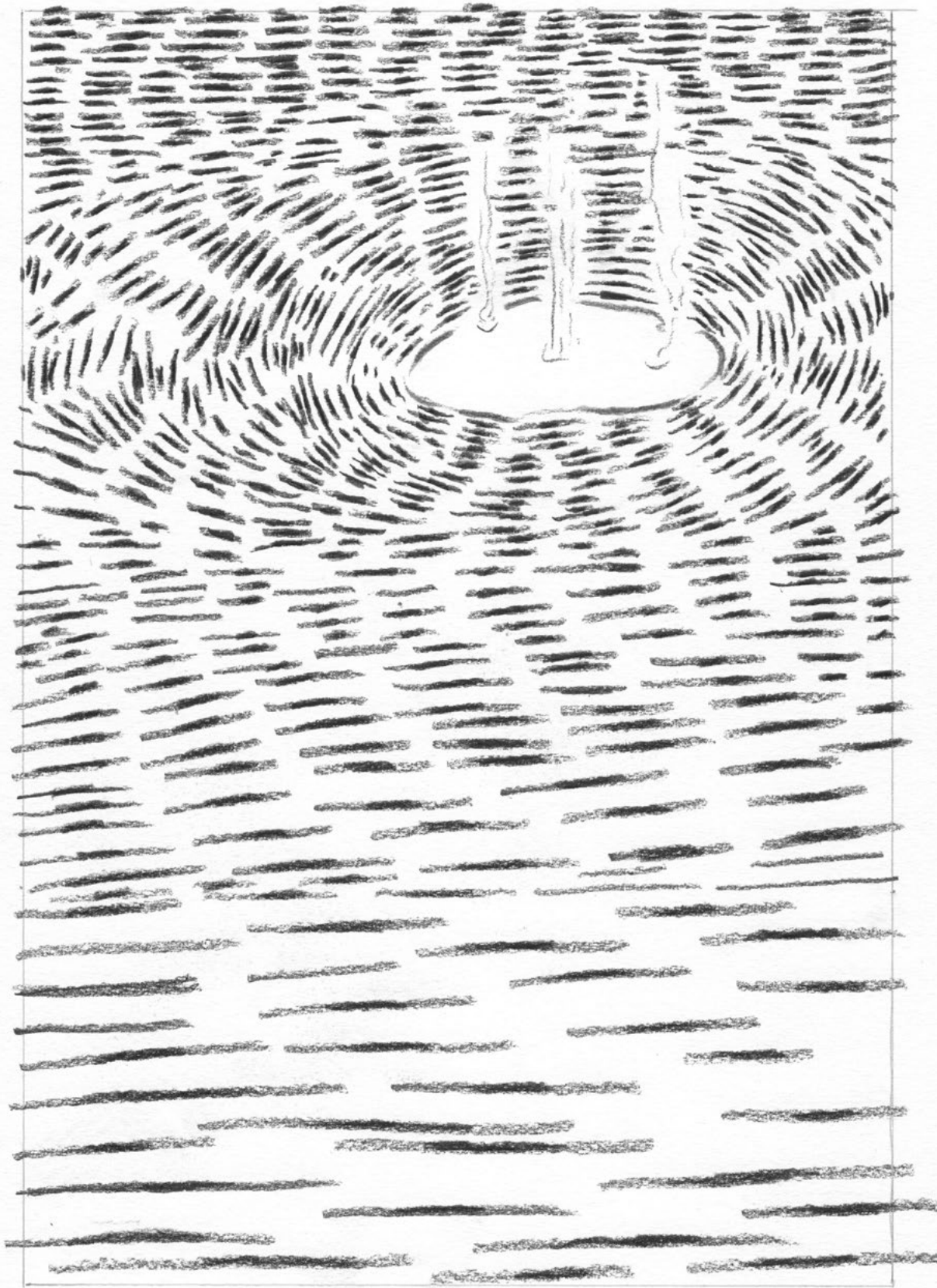
To listen in, you can register for two of Zvi Szir's Podcasts:

“Rethinking the Threshold”: <https://zviszir.supercast.tech/> and “Occult science for Artist”: <https://neuekunstschule.supercast.tech/>

Or join the Patreon page (where you will find a lot of lectures and other material) https://www.patreon.com/zvi_szir_excursus?fan_landing=true



Image by Ella Lapointe, Ink on Rice Paper



61

optic island

28.09.21

Image: *Optic Island* by Zvi Szir

Correspondence

Student Learning objectives Repressive restraint or potential path to freedom?

As a long time supporter of the work of *Free Columbia* I am pleased that we have the instrument of a newsletter to support the institution's fine work.

While reading the report on the panel discussion "Wholeness in Learning: M.C. Richards' Challenge to Education Today" in the Spring 2021 issue of the Newsletter, a statement came to my attention and I felt, in the interest of dialogue, the obligation to provide an additional perspective. That statement is highlighted on page 8:

"student learning objectives," "outcomes." That's the language in which we are supposed to define the goal of education. This amounts to specifying in advance, knowing in advance what students will know at the end of the course. I can only do that if the students are completely deprived of any agency in the learning process, any responsibility for their own learning. The teacher becomes the demiurge of the learning process.

In my experience, *student learning objective* refers simply to the statement of an intention on the part of a teacher (or student) for the student to attain some capability. No deprivation of agency is necessary; responsibility for learning on the part of the student need not be diminished.

The student learning objective is a critical concept for clear thinking and action concerning educational questions. It identifies one of the essential elements of any educational activity—the intention that something in particular be learned.

The use of this concept is exemplified by another statement (also highlighted) which appears on page 5 of the report:

One of the things Mary Caroline Richards says about the task of education is that, through learning to build the capacity to experience the particularity of things, we actually become ripe for a life of love and service.

This is, in fact, an example of a student learning objective, moreover one that is enriched by reference to the value that would be realized if the objective is attained.

The creative use of student learning objectives is an insufficiently recognized path to renewal of educational thinking and action. This is the direction that Wil Doane and I took in our book *Knowing the Learner: A new approach to educational information*. How refreshed attention to student learning objectives can become a key to overcoming conventional and outworn thinking and practice in educational institutions was a guiding theme of the book. Indeed, thoughtful reflection on student learning objectives (i.e. exploration and consideration of the capabilities that we intend students to develop) always has the effect of turning our attention back to the student.

Paul Zachos, PhD, Director, Research and Evaluation
Association for the Cooperative Advancement of Science and Education (ACASE)
Saratoga Springs, NY

