

Unlearning and Emergence

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Being an artist at any stage, but especially at the emerging stage (which possibly lasts an artist's lifetime) is an experience of uncertainty and exploration of many meandering paths in the search for a stable-enough creative practice and modus vivendi.

Teaching young and emerging artists over the last 15 years has led to my interest in the process of unlearning as much as of learning. Becoming an artist seems to be an unlearning of linear, analytic thinking that we are taught at school and getting in touch with something more akin to the synthesising non-linear knowing of babies and children. This is what William James called the 'blooming buzz' of an undivided unity of experience prior to subject/object split of language and the differentiation of self in polarisation with the world, something that we all are trained in as inheritors of Western modes of apprehending reality and which underlie nearly all learning and thinking. The dichotomy of observer and observed is not rich or inclusive enough to encompass what artists do. Art is not fundamentally about, it is a process of making explicit, of embodying the inherent aesthesis or radiance of world into organized and particular productions.

Becoming an artist means to emerge, to differentiate, to arise out of the great pool of experience, to be aware of ones own unique being in the world without tearing the fabric of experience. Unexamined Western rationalism creates a vicious separation of mind and nature in the words of psychologist Monia Brizzi. It is the job of the artist, (and also, for similar reasons, the scientist and the philosopher) to repair that split, reweave the rainbow, unlearn the habits of separation.

Becoming an artist is learning to be both empirical and rational, developing through rigorous exercise acute observational powers and prodigious internal structuring systems that are needed for critical and responsible creative practice. It is necessary to see the whole in the fragment, and the fragmentary nature of the whole. Artists need to stand-under things and cast the net of their senses over things. We need to operate from a radical empathy, seeing themselves as part of the world we are reformulating in their work. An authentic voice arises from this engagement, from developing good creative habits that engender a sense of constant wonder and rigorous questioning. Voltaire said 'celebrate those who seek the truth, fear those who find it'. Art practice is an ongoing inquiry into the world that encompasses ones own situation as part of the world. There is no closure, no point at which an answer will bring an end to questioning. As Lou-Andreas Salome so concisely put it - "The further we walk toward the horizon, the further the horizon retreats."