

Consider the verb to become.....it is action, yet seems to have no end. It is constant , as in becoming.....

At the dawn of the Renaissance, science was beginning to construct a view of nature as divisible and abstract in order to arrive at its necessity, BUT Leonardo DaVinci and Galileo simply concluded that “Nature is necessity.” DaVinci recognized the wholeness of Nature. Instead of abstract he saw nature as tangible “beings and events . . . infinitely and multifariously interconnected and superimposed upon one another.”³¹

From this perspective Leonardo Da Vinci considered how we came to know the world., He identified two types of experiences. One he called **First Nature**: that experience we have directly of the world, such as watching the sun set, or taking a walk in the woods. The other, DaVinci called **Second Nature** : the experiences of the world through something somebody makes, an artifact, like a poem, piece of music or built environment.

DaVinci Saw Second Nature as a critical means to grasping nature itself. Because the artist communicates the Ultimate foundation of Nature – its interconnectedness – through expressing the relationship created between imagination and reality.

Our experiences of First and Second nature offer the potential of a transcendent experience: The experience in which we feel we are a part of the world, belong to the world.

These experiences engage us in the world, and encourage care and responsibility.

Most of us choose a designing life because we want to positively effect how people engage in Life experiences.

Why am I showing you this?

ultimately these environments we experience influence how we prioritize our lives, and the choices we make. And I believe that these environments instead of supporting our engagement with the world, disengage us from the world – the PLACE we live.

And if we are disengaged from the world. – how can we make thoughtful decisions about the world, and how we live in it?

I believe that we arrive at these solutions because our own assumptions regarding our lives and practices are disengaged : Instead of recognizing the things we make as **cultural contributions**, we see our work as “service” and economic “drivers”

I would like to challenge you to consider that the design of our environments, communities, the transformation of the natural world, as an ART. Like music, painting and poetry – if we could realign our practices and commit ourselves to this view, Second Nature would be quite different from the one that I have been showing you.

The Last time I spoke I discussed the relationship of profession to practice. Profession being the calling out of a belief, and practice being the action of that belief.

Tonight I would like to talk more about **practice and its activities: myth, and the creative process**. And how these activities relate to both the experience **of** and the creation **of PLACE**.

PRACTICE practice is a repeated activity.

Ultimately, the reason we practice something is so that we become “good” at an activity or behavior. Yet, the process of practice is rarely recognized, discussed or appreciated, as if the END somehow arrived on its own. and the product becomes the “thing” we come to appreciate.

Before, or after, or in between....we tend to ignore, or under evaluate.

Instead we simply want record-breakers, home-runs and Golden Globes, andthe end event, action or thing.

But if practice is actually valued as a continuum instead of an “end” then a practice is a way of being and doing that “constructs” who we are....who we become and what we do.

For instance, most of us need to practice at improving a characteristic trait every day. Such as, being thoughtful or patient. In this sense, to be a good person, we cannot point to one act of thoughtfulness or patience, but a lifetime of practicing. And when we look back upon our lives we can recognize our qualities that are practiced the most.

The greatest value in the practice of life is the interrelations we have – not US as the single object. Not just the ARTIFACT we make.

Most of you in the audience tonight are practicing to be designers. You are already in the process, you are already living the life of practicing at being a creative person (designer). Despite that internship or license that the state or fraternity requires you to hold in your hand some day.....your practice had already begun. And You are in the process of creating culture.

And as you practice you make choices to enable futures practice. You Aid your process by the choices you make, For instance to contemplate through model or computer, to use a pencil or a mouse, to consider the landscape abstractly or experience it, to value the experience of others or only consider your own interests.

You make a choice for your design process, your design practice, integrates with your day to day practices.....

If you ride a bike to school or choose to take a car, if you walk in the rain, or stay in doors...if you eat fresh vegetables or frozen ones. These decisions make a practice of life. And the choices you make can engage you in the world. Or Disengage your experience and sense of being in the world.

These practices contribute to making a life, and they are acts of creativity – creativity in action and process. *(If creativity is truly the finest expression of engagement with the world. Then how we practice living, offers the opportunity to be fully engaged, and consequently fully creative, as DaVinci notes, the “basic relationship between artistic imagination and reality, and between ‘genius’ and ‘nature’” arises....when we are engaged.....)*

Yet somehow the ultimate responsibility of our creativity often alludes us....

I think The Philosopher Alfred Whitehead provides clear direction to the value of creativity When he said that each civilization is defined by its ENGAGEMENT in the qualities of TRUTH, BEAUTY, ADVENTURE, ART AND PEACE.

I am mentioning this not only because these engagements tie to the Creative Practice, but to also point out that these qualities have no specific tie to Economics or Services. Whitehead described these engagements through “positive” terms of practicable qualities. I believe he described it this way, because our species always reaches toward an ideal. Progress and evolution is thought about in positive and ideal terms . This “reaching” is an ancient imbedded characteristic....

I think about Odysseus whom Homer created in our image, the *Odyssey* provides an allegory of human life and experience. They are mythic – superhuman experiences that we tie to our mortal lives.

The mythical experiences of Odysseus provide a narrative from which the experiences of universal love, hate, pain and recovery are portrayed. They unfold to portray a WORLD VIEW, practices, beliefs of a particular Civilization. Yet the *Odyssey* is written in allegory , a less factually specific language, a more inclusive language (like poetry) that allows us to interpret our own adventures as a way to discover ourselves, our truth, and the path we must take to fulfill ourselves, and honor our lives, aspiring to TRUTH, BEAUTY, ADVENTURE, ART AND PEACE

The *Odyssey* is an ADVENTURE not for one person, but for a civilization:

I would like to focus for a moment on Adventure _ the act, in the arrival of something important for society, it is the seeking out of chance. (*The TURE part of the word, tells us that the original intent/understanding/meaning/value of the activity was seen as a cultural contribution, not a total benefit to the INDIVIDUAL.*) So we should consider ADVENTURE in this way, as WHITEHEAD points out: Adventure is an engagement for a cultivation of a society.

ADVENTURE is without guarantee, and holds within it the potential for success or failure as an end. But Adventure is an act, process – a practice toward an unknown/particular achievement. Involving our intervention, interaction, and interpretation of the World in which we live.

Yet Adventure can be found in the simplest of experiences?

The poet, Gary Snyder, writes about the practice of walking.....

Snyder claims that “[w]alking is the great adventure, the first meditation, a practice of heartiness and soul primary to mankind. Walking is the exact balance of spirit and humility.” It is “also a teaching of mindfulness and preparedness.”²⁹

ADVENTURE ENGAGES US IN THE WORLD.

And out Creativity is inspired our by Adventures. Each of us is inherently creative, and when we create/take risks with intention/ we are practicing and making a reality, we are *becoming* the world in action. Remember, I asked you to think about the verb “BECOME” to begin to be..... Adventure, provides for discovery, interrelation, surprise, evolution, newness, interpretation, **all** gained through personal experience.

When we are engaged in the world. Our experience of Adventure is then shared through the expression of our experiences through the creation of ART.

Creativity is a particular intention toward engagement with the world, it is an act of meditation. What I mean by this is that creativity requires intent between the creator (you) and the **world** (the place we call home...) which results in a relationship – with the world.

Thoreau recognized this difference of intent when he described his experiences in the world that lead to his writing :

“The walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise, as it is called, as the sick take medicine . . . but is itself an enterprise and **adventure** of the day.”

Our creative abilities allow us to dissolve the *common* separation we most often feel of ourselves when we are casually Living our lives. Creating is born from a different mindset, a different practice.

And Adventure is the key to arriving at this different state of mind. It is RISKY.

When we no longer strive for adventure, no longer take risks, we are not engaged in the world and consequently the striving toward TRUTH, BEAUTY, ADVENTURE, ART, AND PEACE dissipates. . The civilization that results is one that disregards how we are belong to the PLACE in which we live.

In her book, *The Lure of the Local*, Lucy Lippard describes the difference between creative work that is *about* place from that which is *of* place.

OF: is the relationship between a part and a whole: "the sleeve of his coat".

ABOUT Is more like a summary, that describes a situation, "I was thinking about you".

When we create “About” a place, we references the subject, which helps us recall the subject or gain insight towards it. But when we create of the PLACE, the result becomes the place.

The difference between *about* and *of* for our built environment is of critical matter when considering that - - as I mentioned at the beginning, the environment we experience and make our lives in – effect our engagement in the world.

the poet and teacher Richard Hugo, and the contemporary painter Russell Chatham both think about how we create PLACE.

If we are simply making summaries of experiences about a place, we never arrive at the Necessity of the place, its truth, realness, actuality – as we experience it.

In his book, *The Triggering Town*, Hugo clarifies the essential issue of the creative subject for aspiring poets. Most specifically, the issue of concern is the state of mind of the creator combined with the medium of expression. Hugo is interested that young writers recognize the value of words beyond their discursive use.

In such written context the words are only employed in the most pragmatic and simplistic terms. When writing a poem “the relation of the words to the subject must weaken gaining flexibility and interpretive opportunity.

Hugo clarifies the condition of weakening when he gives students the example of writing a poem of a town as the triggering subject, inferring that deep within our psyche the “poem is always in your hometown.”

The problem for creating poetry is that we know too many particulars of our hometown which hold us back from letting go of the subject we know in order to find the essential drive of the poem. The “hometown often provides so many knows. . .that the imagination cannot free itself to seek the unknowns.”

And with our focus on aspects we get caught up in writing about a place – rather than creating something that is of the place. It is the same dilemma for those that design environments.

To create poetry the creator must take “emotional possession of the [unknown] town” making it their own. In making the town your own you let go of the loyalty to (facts) that would otherwise preoccupy you when creating. Hugo goes on to say that “if you have no nostalgic send of the place, of it for the duration of the poem” we more easily invests in the language of expression.

This is the point where myth making arises, we know our hometown, but by loosening the facts of it, we can create something that belongs to it. That **becomes** the place.

Hugo’s suggestions to poets may seem quite distant to the instruction required of the design student. Yet there is a major similarity to the profession’s practice and preparation for design. Designers are taught to record data, remember it and prepare to draw from it for the forthcoming design. All of this data collection is relevant to the place, and helpful to the creator in one way, while limiting in another.

From these observations we know the discursive characteristics of the place

too well, the place comes to us defined by the facts and the “conditions” of its definiteness. We remain focused on the facts and find it difficult to make the place our own. Our obsession is tied to the information we gain about the place, and we construe that from this obsession and careful consideration we will create place or for the place.

Instead, what happens is the three-dimensional retelling of facts, in a somewhat stylized form. Designers who are interested in the cultural and natural qualities of the place miss the opportunity to extend the place and instead their buildings are abstractions that “map” or “read” particular conditions that slip from creating an engagement with the world .

From our over reliance on fact and rationality we exclude myth, inspiration and intuition from our practice of the creative process. We simply pass over the personal and subjective condition of creating and step directly into the factual. We engage in what DaVinci observed as “isolated measures’ of nature instead of the discovery of the necessity of nature. And we miss the opportunity to make art of the place. In Hugo’s words we are not the poet creating poetry, but the reporter recording the conditions we find.

To create *of* the place, to supplant the facts of the locale in order to give place your own impressions requires engagement in the place. Engagement is both a mental and physical *being* in the place. – as Thoreau described walking.

Such engagement is a commitment to place that results in a commitment of caring, that encourages the interrelation of the person to place resulting in a unique, yet inexplicably universal, response by the creator.

The response, the creation of art, embodies the place, its specificity, while at the same time it calls out something beyond the place, the timeless, the boundless qualities of the universe that make significant the place itself- the art that results from this practice communicates the **necessity of Nature**, the world.

The life of the painter Russell Chatham offers a way to understand what I am talking about. Chatham has painted expressions of place for over forty years. In his lifetime, he has taken two landscapes for his “triggering subject.” The first was his childhood environment of Northern California, specifically Marin County and the Point Reyes area. The second is Montana, the environs that have been carved by the Yellowstone River and bound by the Absaroka and Gallatin Mountain Ranges. He left his native California primarily because it became too costly for him. Chatham is unique to most painters of our time in that he has not sought fame, and has squarely rejected the critics and museum structure.

By choice of subject, Chatham is defined as a landscape painter. While he does paint landscapes, he does not follow the tradition of documenting places, of packing them in with nostalgic qualities or simply recreating what is already “out there.” And while Chatham squarely and honestly states that all creation is derived from something else, he will also tell you that he paints from memory. Chatham’s works hold with them the places of their titles, yet they are not pictorial representations but link the viewer through **his** sense of the world. In this way Chatham is not pre-occupied with the facts of the place, but allows the place to linger

within him. This lingering brings the place deep within him, into his soul. He lives a myth and Chatham *becomes* the places that triggers his imagination and he consequently paints them. Quite simply Chatham says, "I paint the way I see things."

When speaking of his inspirations, he says that he must be able to go where he paints. From within his memory he occupies the space beneath the tree if he is painting the tree, or walks the meadow or along the river bank. It is this intimacy both first-hand and remembered that bears out Chatham's creating *of* the place. he says,

*I couldn't tell you what the poetic feeling is that I get with a landscape, but I just know that it is there. A painting should be a poem, a thing which cannot be translated out of its original state: **it is what it is**. The origin of a true painting is the spirit, the soul of the painter.*

Chatham's practice of painting, did not come with out effort. When he arrived in Montana he found the landscape so foreign that it took two years for him to gain a sense of the place, to begin to paint it as it was for him. Chatham's sense of the Yellowstone valley has magic for those who both experience his work and the place of his work.

Jim Ferguson , when he came to experience the landscapes of Chatham said, "I notice this evening as we are driving through the Yellowstone River Valley, that the land has come to appear like a Russell Chatham landscape, as if in some peculiar and elementary way he has altered my perception of it, defined and enriched it."

What can we learn from Home, Thoreau, Snyder and Chatham?

That we must PRACTICE at being engaged in the world

We must take RISKS to enable creativity
And to contribute to our society through the creation of ART>

And we must remember – as Whitehead said, that a civilization is not defined but is services or economies, but by the qualities of TRUTH, BEAUTY, ADVENTURE, ART AND PEACE we engage in.