

The Graduate School of Education
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SPECIAL ISSUE

A/r/tography and the Visual Arts

Volume 3 | Issue 1 | 2013

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Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin
Anita Sinner

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner

THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

Landscape as metaphor/metonymy for classroom spaces: an a/r/to(bio)graphical approach for researching and imagining difference

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ABSTRACT

An A/r/tographical inquiry based on the metaphor/metonymy of landscape, this paper seeks to explore, rupture, disrupt, open up and disturb notions around artistic practices and treatments of the arts in elementary school classrooms. Informed by the Reggio Emilia practice of an atelier and atelierista in preschools, the author postulates how a similar approach in elementary school could offer children ways to access learning through holistic and embodied experiences of art. Employing an autobiographical approach, informed by Miller's Timeless Learning in schools and Deleuze's theory of logic of sensation, this article seeks not to offer conclusions but possibilities and potentialities for allowing difference and otherness through art making.

KEYWORDS

a/r/tography, atelierista/atelier, metaphor/metonymy, landscape, art, Reggio Emilia

An atelier (art studio) and atelierista (artist pedagogue) in elementary school drastically alters the terrain or landscape of a school space. In this article I explore metaphor/metonymy through text and image, informed by research on the atelier/atelierista in Reggio Emilia preschools, and through the arts based educational methodology called a/r/tography. As a methodology of embodiment, a/r/tography is 'never isolated in its activity but always engaged with the world' (Springgay, Irwin, Wilson Kind 2005: 899). Using a/r/tography as my methodology, I wish to push out new possibilities, not to rigidly define or capture their meaning, but to engage, disrupt and tease out other possible renderings. I will be exploring metaphor/metonymy through my photographs of landscape, as I navigate my way through the concepts of Deleuzian notions of sensation, aesthetics, affect and representation, and apply this to my idea for the kind of learning that happens in the atelier environment, supported by an atelierista.

As well, I will be using autobiography as the basis for my ideas, and a situating point through which to explore the ways in which our personal narratives inform our process of knowledge making. As I think will be evident, as the paper unfolds, the autobiographical aspect informs the metaphorical/metonymical, and vice versa.

WHAT IS AN ATELIERISTA/ATELIER? WHY AN ATELIERISTA AS OPPOSED TO AN ART TEACHER?

In Reggio Emilia, Italy, all the municipally funded preschools have an atelier (art studio) and an atelierista (artist with pedagogical training) who work in a separate studio space but in conjunction with the other classroom teachers (Gandini 2008). With a particular emphasis on *aesthetics*, the sensual, embodied, and relational practice of working with materials, subject matter, self and other is a fundamental aspect of children's learning in the atelier. ' [T]he term "atelier" - together with the presence of an atelierista in schools - has come to have a clear shared value. It stands for the presence of something giving direction to educational thinking, in which the aesthetic dimension has a new importance and appreciable pedagogical and cultural value' (Vecchi 2010: 2). It is on this model that I am basing my research in an attempt to offer what could be possible in Canadian elementary public schools; as opposed to an art teacher who teaches to a prescribed curriculum, the atelierista observes and documents children's strategies (Vecchi 2010).

METAPHOR/METONYMY

I am intrigued by and drawn to the metaphor/metonymy aspect of a/r/tographical inquiry. As a visual artist, speaking and thinking metaphorically helps me to understand in new ways. 'Through metaphors and metonymic relationships, we make things sensible - that is, accessible to the senses' (Springgay, Irwin, Wilson Kind 2005: 904). There is a resonance in using metaphor/metonymy for probing the murky areas with/in research and teaching, and likewise for allowing other possible meanings and tensions to exist with learning. However, there is a caution when using metaphor/metonymy that must be addressed as well, and that lies within the premise that metaphor/metonymy are often culturally specific, and passed down from generations, often being *taught* in school, rather than *discovered*. How can we approach metaphor/metonymy in pedagogical situations where the students/teachers are able to feel out, probe, explore subjects, objects, ideas, concepts, in such a way that the learning is open, and even contradictory? Where the difference is not problematic but creates a shift, a rupture in thinking and knowing, as it is in the state of becoming. Where '[a]s we struggle to reveal understandings through the use of metaphor and metonymy, the tensions created in fact do not close down receptiveness but rather, allow us to perceive the world "freshly", to look for complexity, and to 'inhabit fields which previously appeared as opaque and unapproachable' (Fiuramara from Springgay, Irwin, Wilson Kind 2005: 905).

To create conditions for metaphor/metonymy, artists, researchers and teachers must be attuned to possible renderings. Listening to, rather than speaking at children is key in Reggio philosophy. Being attuned to children's languages, adults can learn from them, deconstructing their own knowledge schemas, or as Vecchi (2010) asserts:

[o]ne of the most important areas of attention for an atelierista or teacher should be learning to develop journeys for work that do not 'betray' children or their different interests and senses: and which learning to use the children's very sensitive antennae, which are capable of lending new and rich ways of seeing the world to adults. In art, metaphors are often used by children. (p. 34).

She continues:

...I believe we can all agree with the evaluation that constructing metaphors is a mental operation giving unusual, unexpected and very often, totally original results. I believe metaphor corresponds to an investigative attitude towards reality, to participation that allows our thoughts to open out and break down the rigid boundaries that are usually constructed. I see metaphor as a genuine system for organization of intellectual development; for this reason and because I think of it as 'celebration thinking', I believe it is useful and amusing to use frequently, naturally and with a light touch. (p. 34)

In Sylvia Kind's (2006) research, she used metaphor/metonymy as ways to explore issues of loss, disability, death, love and comfort, through wrapping stones in felt. Kind's use of wool for comfort and stone for sorrow is just one use of the metaphor relationship. However, is this not a cultural association that we have with these materials? Wool can also be scratchy and uncomfortable. Stone is also resilient and can be warm (think of stones used to conduct heat). Further exploration of the metaphorical/metonymical meanings of these two materials would have opened up to different interpretations and understandings. However, here is where the contiguity

of text/image provided her with another form of communicating; an opening, where metaphor/metonymy, in 'the tension provoked by this doubling, between limit/less that maintains meaning's possibility' (Springgay, Irwin, Wilson Kind 2005: 904). Kind's images of the felted stones on the shore were powerful and evocative on their own, and in this sense, the use of image in a/r/tography is demonstrated as holding a different space than the text. These images are not illustrative of the text. These images speak for themselves, and they speak their own language. They speak metaphorically.

In this sense using images is essential in communicating other possibilities which textual language does not allow in the same way. For children, being able to explore with art making in the studio, using their senses to learn, allows for other possibilities of understanding metaphor. Where one child may find the stone hard, cold and inflexible, another may find the smoothness of the texture of the stone comforting, the shape and form of the stone symbolic, or the weight of the stone compelling. For a teacher to hold out an example of an object to mean only one thing is reductive and misses *potential for difference*. In the atelier, 'poetic languages' (Vecchi 2010: 9) are valued, and metaphor/metonymy holds a prominent place in meaning making.

LEARNING TO UNLEARN

In this account of my process with image, metaphor and text, I hope to convey my 'learning to unlearn' (Vecchi 2010: 57). Using *landscape* as metaphor/metonymy for school and the classroom environment is something I wish to explore further here. Learning to unlearn in a metaphorical/metonymical way allows for a discovery through image and text where I can explore subject matter which is embedded in history, politics and personal experience, and yet attempt to come to new understandings where a new path can be formed. Not a path of clear direction but a path that allows for difference and uncertainties, for openings and ruptures.

The subject of landscape in art, and schooling, are both steeped in histories and discourses of Western ideology and Colonialism. Landscape painting originated in the sixteenth century with the Dutch masters, who captured the familiarity of the land, but with a moralistic tone of man's fragility on this earth (Janson 1977). Landscapes were the subject for the impressionist painters, such as Monet, who concerned himself with capturing light and atmosphere with colour and brush stroke (Janson 1977). Photographers such as Ansel Adams used large format photography to create breathtaking images of natural wonders like Yosemite National Park, Yellowstone, Jasper, and the deserts of New Mexico. Landscape in the visual art has traditions in romanticism and idealism. The artist is one (male) who depicts their vision of a place using their talent and skills in whichever medium, to highlight and emphasize the wonder and beauty of the land. A feminist perspective would critique this historical approach as the male gaze on Mother Nature. The (white, male) artist captures and frames the beauty of the female subject, nature in her finest and most mysterious. Where is the other heard in this?

[F]eminism will always be disabled by the principal terms of modernist art history: its formalism and historicism, its reverence for the avant-garde and the individual artist-hero, its concept of art as individual expression or social reflection, its sense of itself as objective and disinterested, its pursuit of universal values at once transcendent (of mundane social realities) and intrinsic (to the autonomous work of art, severed from the social circumstances of its production and circulation) ... Feminism is compelled to contest the established protocols of art history (and cautiously and critically to form alliances with other approaches which seek to undermine the certainties of its discourse). (Tickner 1988, in Schenker 1994: 108)

I do not intend to provide an exhaustive history of landscape art here, however, I feel it is important to set the backdrop for the relationship that I have had with landscape art and how this has shaped and informed my approach to my previous and current body of work as an artist, researcher and teacher/student.

The landscape is in one sense a metaphor for the state of the classroom environment; a territory in conflict, rife with history of colonialism, present-day politics, and neoliberal agendas. In another sense, landscape is metaphorical/metonymical for classroom as it is in the state of flux, becoming, in between states, how it is treated like a terrain, which is aggressively navigated, surveyed and developed. On yet another level, the classroom is the landscape of fertile ground, precious and fragile; requiring protection from the consumer and capitalist entities bent on controlling it for marketable profits and gains. While again, the natural and organic qualities

of a classroom can be understood as the natural landscape, a space for us to interact with, with respect and pleasure, honouring the sacredness and value of the space, and those individual lives who inhabit it.

Through my process of creating my landscape photos I challenged my own perceptions and associations of landscape photography, to come to a different understanding of what it felt like to contradict my associations and use photography as an entry point to re-interpreting the classroom as landscape. For me, learning to unlearn came through the process of undoing the “correct” ways that I had been taught and practiced landscape photography. In doing so I was also opening up myself to doing things “incorrectly” and creating “bad art”. I struggled with this approach, fearing rejection and judgment, but persevered through the metaphorical/metonymical associations, in order to arrive at new understandings and possibilities.



HOW DID I COME TO BE HERE?

I began art classes at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) around the age of ten. I remember the experience very vividly, as being one in which I was encouraged to explore materials, concepts and techniques. There were three stations, which I participated in during our semester of classes: printmaking, sculpture and painting. Out of all three, printmaking stands out the most. I remember the teacher as being very supportive and informative. She showed us technique but left us to create freely. Beyond this experience however, most of my other formal art classes were far more structured and planned.

It was crucial to me that I enroll in an arts-focused high school. In high school I took several art courses: illustration, painting, figure drawing (we were the only high school that had live nude models), and photography. The classes were all taught in an ‘art as skill’ (Kind, de Cossen, Irwin & Gruer 2007: 849) manner, whereby the teacher would instruct us on a technique, and we would practice and create a

finished piece of art in order to perfect the skill, for which we would get evaluated. While art was my favourite subject in school, and later photography, it was not a particularly exploratory or experiential activity. It was largely about doing what you were taught, in a creative way (i.e. I could choose the colours, or the objects to go into my art work, but the lesson and objective were preplanned and prescribed). On one hand, I value the skills and training that I received. I became technically proficient in many of the art forms that I learned. Comparing how several people depicted the same subject is a useful and valuable experience. On the other, I feel that I was taught what and how to create, instead of being allowed to explore materials and processes on my own. The main purpose of art class was to become proficient in a creative endeavor so that the teacher would praise you with a good grade. In class, we were told to work on our own; chatting was kept to a minimum or none at all. We were being trained to be ideal artists, who work in silence and from their own imagination, which cannot be tainted or disturbed by outside influence. Art was not a social activity and I barely recall if we had any discussions of each other's work or time to reflect on the processes.

The only class where I feel that I had the most freedom to choose what I was going to create was photography. Ironically, although I did well artistically on projects, the instructor informed me that I would never "make it" as a photographer because I didn't have the technical abilities.

When I entered university, I again chose a school for its good reputation for the fine arts. However, it was not entirely clear why I was taking the degree or what purpose it would have on my career choice. Still, art was what I was good at, so that was the reason to take it. While at university, I enrolled in painting, drawing, and sculpture classes. I also took art history courses, women's studies and psychology.

For my final year, I spent a semester in the Netherlands, studying art history and European studies. If I was going to study art history, I wanted to be able to see the painting in person, not from slides. Reflecting back on that time period, I realize now that I was choosing to have an *embodied and holistic encounter* with my subject area in school. I went to museums and spent time around the paintings and sculptures in their surroundings. I lived on the land where the paintings were created, ate the food, met the people whose history I was studying. Of course, there were centuries separating myself from the actual time period of the art work I was studying, but the main component was that I was living out my research. This was a *sensual* experience of schooling.

Once I graduated with my B.F.A., having been denied entrance into any photography courses (because it wasn't my major, I was told by the registrar's office), I moved to Martha's Vineyard to work for my father, who ran a small furniture refinishing studio. After a summer and fall learning his craft, I was yearning to learn how to work my camera. I enlisted the help of a local woman who ran her own darkroom and photo lab and began learning photography. While she did instruct me somewhat, for the most part, I played around in the darkroom, and with the camera, and learned through trial and error. This pedagogical experience, of exploring materials and processes, essentially without much outside interference, harkened back to my AGO art classes. I felt what Csikszentmihalyi (1998) terms the *flow of 'being fully immersed in an experience'* (Miller 2006: 9). Flow, as one aspect of timeless learning, opens a person up to experiences in the immediate moment (Miller 2006).

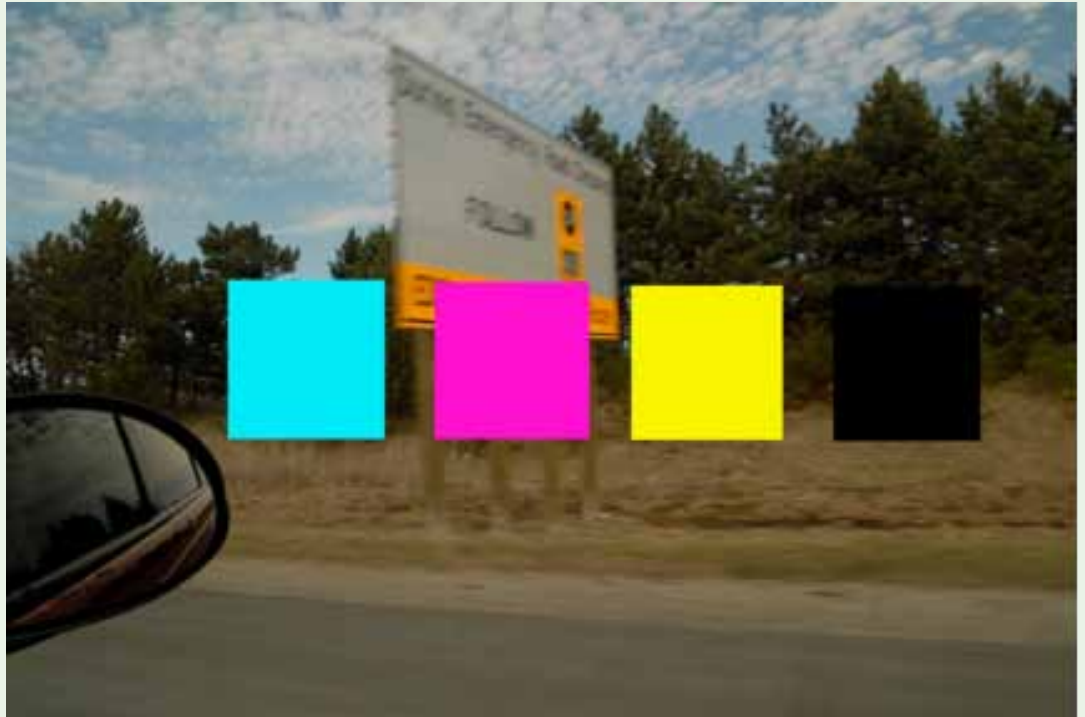
Recognizing that I was not the best photo developer (my images were either over- or under- exposed, with many dust spots on them), I decided to do what I knew how to do confidently and decided to paint over them. These became my hand-coloured photographs. Starting with hanging my first six finished works in the coffee shop where I worked, my art soon turned into a business, and I was selling my photographs and reproductions in stores and galleries throughout Martha's Vineyard, and eventually in Boston, New York, Toronto, and San Francisco.

However, I hit a point where I felt strange about being a specialist in something, which I really didn't know much about. So I decided to learn photography from the professionals. I got a job as a portrait photographer, and enrolled in classes at the New England School of Photography. Later, I took a summer intensive professional photography course at The Rocky Mountain School of Photography. It was here that I learned how to make "good" landscape photographs.

There are certain rules that you abide by when making landscape photographs. First, one must always use a tripod; you want to make sure your horizon line is straight and that you pay careful attention to what falls in the frame of your composition. Second, use a fine resolution, so that the quality is of the highest degree. Time of day is extremely important: shoot either in the early morning or early evening, when the sun is low on the horizon. Shutter speed should be fast enough to not show blur or movement. Depth of field should be sharp so that there is detail in the foreground until infinity. Use the rule of thirds when composing your image. Don't put subject matter in the centre of the frame, unless you are creating a symmetrical image. Be methodical and pay close attention to detail. Take several images; bracket for exposure.

I created many "beautiful" images.

For about ten years, I created, or attempted to create, beautiful images. There is nothing wrong with beauty, and we need beauty in our lives and in education. However, I came to a place in my life where I could no longer "capture" beauty as I felt it was a betrayal of what was actually going on. I also began working as an artist educator, after my two children were born. This too, was for me more important than creating another image to frame and put on a wall. As I engaged in my work, I became aware of several things: the lack of art in children's lives because it was not a core subject in school; the enthusiasm and positive responses that I observed when leading arts classes; the ability of the arts to reach children of various levels, backgrounds and ages; and the way in which teachers were able to both see a different aspect of a student, and even learn and enjoy the artistic activity themselves.



I became very conscious about how I taught. I would create a “demo” to demonstrate a technique for a class, but I was also aware of how children looked up to an adult and would try to mimic what they were doing. Over time, my creations became less about me and more about my interest in *what art could do*. If I made something from clay, I would squish it up again and just keep re-making shapes. As I realized my own pleasure in the sensuality of materials, I was also interested in children’s abilities of feeling their art, rather than the achievement of the final product as the outcome. Often I found that I was trying to make bad art, as I didn’t want my students to feel that I was teaching them, but more suggesting what could be done.

Back to photography...



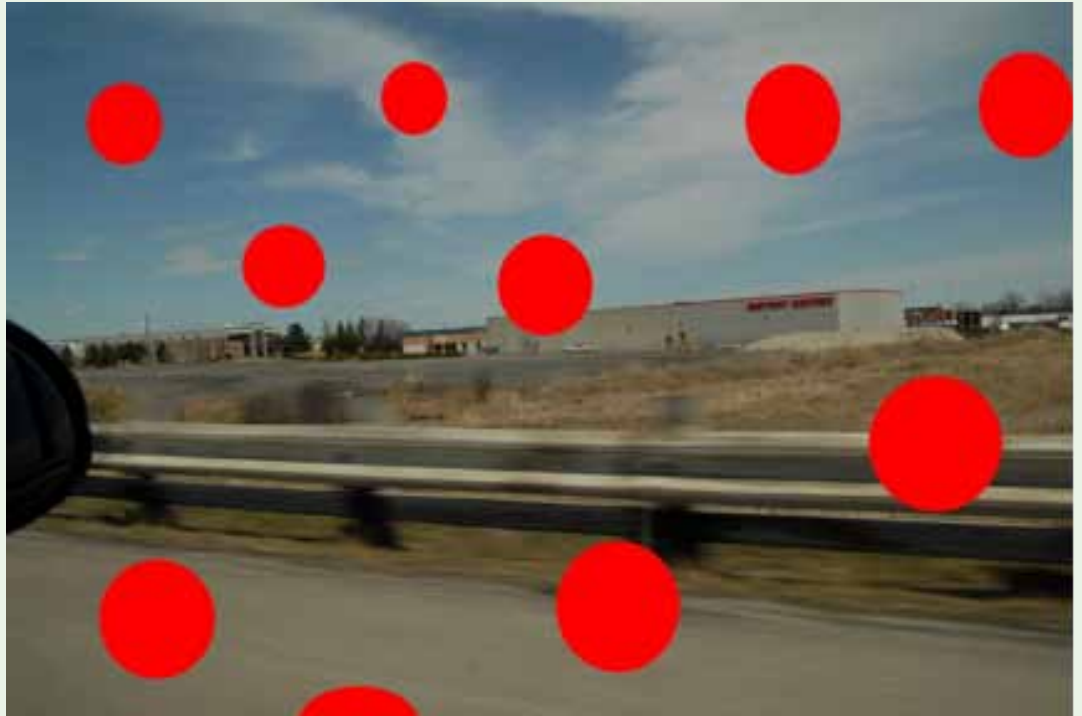
So when I created my *Landscape 2011* photographs I was deliberately undoing what I had done when previously making landscape photos. The images are examples of bad photography. They are taken from a moving vehicle, of a generic setting, through a window, barely composed, side mirror in the left hand side, and shooting (there's colonial terminology for you) randomly at "the landscape". Stuff is then added to them, another layer to take away from the purity of the photograph. This to me is the same level of care that is being given to children in the public school classroom around art and creativity. Sit 'em down, get them reading, teach them math, behave properly, don't be silly, pay attention, draw a picture to illustrate your story, be sure to colour inside the lines.



Where is the care? Where is the concern? Where is the love? Miller (2010) argues that "[l]ove, or compassion, is also missing in our education. How often do we hear education officials or academics speak of love? (265). Just as the land that we pave over and establish as much needed real estate for commercial zoning, we neglect the sacredness of that space as habitat, ecosystem, growth, potential, decay, regeneration. The needs of the economy far outweigh the needs of habitat and the ecosystem that is there. The classroom similarly gets paved over in the politics of curricular discourse; outcomes and standards. When surveying a landscape/classroom the tendency is to look at the potential, the future, as if children/habitat were commodities. Instead of allowing decay and conflict to arise and rear its ugly head so that we may mend and heal and carry on, we push the pain of our children/habitat under the surface and cover up with big box style government-approved mandates and objectives. We take the landscape of the classroom, and rather than honour the beauty of the individual lives of the children who spend their days there, we subject them to test preparations and rigid standardizations, so that on paper, the school looks like a nice big- box store facade of success and achievement. Or not.

Informed by Deleuze's theory of logic of sensation, I was propelled to explore the landscape in a way that ruptured, disturbed and dismantled my understandings of

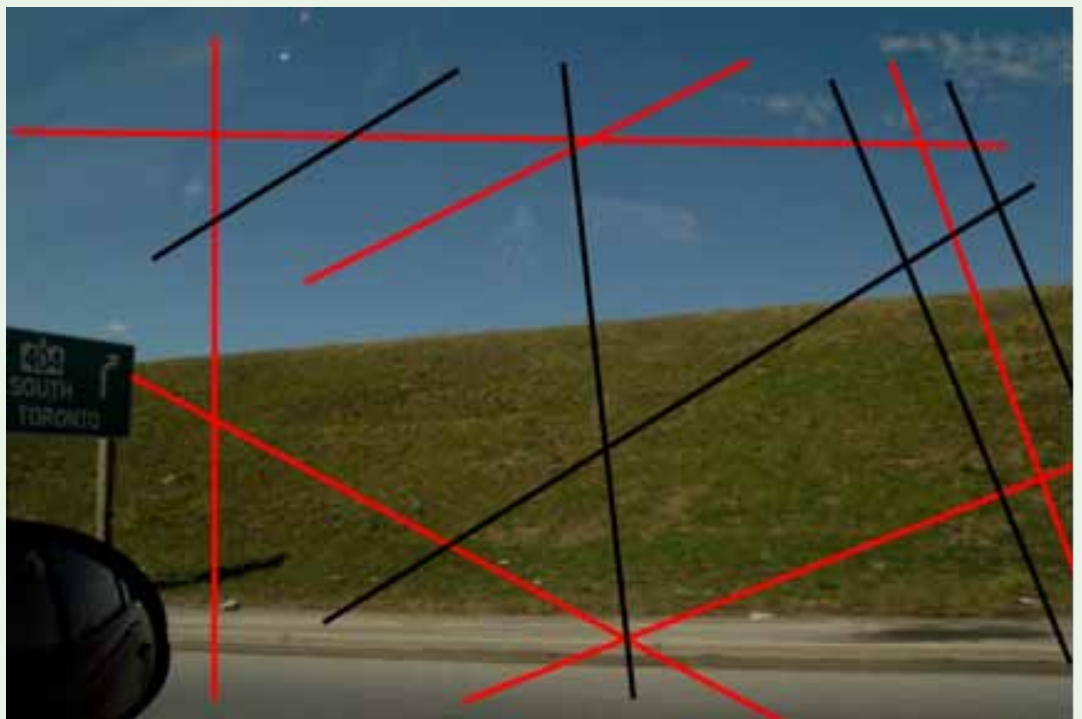
landscape/school, nature/curriculum, representation/affect. Zepke (2010) states that for Deleuze, the emphasis in art is on the non-representational. 'The task of art is to produce "signs" that will push us out of our habits of perception into the conditions of creation. When we perceive via the re-cognition of the properties of substances, we see with a stale eye pre-loaded with clichés; we order the world in what Deleuze calls "representation"' (Smith and Protevi 2011). Deleuze was interested in an art encounter as 'being of the sensible' (nd), 'artwork that created an effect on the nervous system, not on the brain' (nd).



Equally propelled by Deleuze's assertion that photographs are too representational (Zepke 2010), I wanted to explore the way in which art, particularly photography, could achieve an *affective* response, one that could be felt on the skin. How could this affective application towards metaphor/metonymy in my art work disrupt, open and allow for other meanings to emerge? In school, where is there space to show our ugliness, our scars, our wounds, so that we can learn from them and heal, grow and change? We need a space to allow for creative exploration to be able to flow as it will. Sometimes this will be rushing and surging, hardly containable. Other times, it will be quiet and serene, hardly noticeable. The space, the atelier, is a sacred space where beauty and decay both can exist, both informing the other. It is in this a/r/tographical way that I explored the concept of metaphor/metonymy through my photographs, as my way of inquiring into the territory of the current state of the classroom, and offering a way through this to come to other understandings of what could be.



The rhizome, like metaphor/metonymy, offers connections to and between things. A metaphor knows no absolute meaning, but multiple. By engaging in an a/r/topographical inquiry into my research of the atelier/atelierista, I offer no final conclusions or solutions, only possibilities and potentialities. Metaphor/metonymy allows for understanding of difference. Autobiography allows each of us to have a place in the difference. An atelierista in the atelier space in elementary school allows for the openings, cracks, murkiness and rupture in learning to happen as it will and when it will.





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