

white-people's hair, and her boast, "I cut her hair," to her kindergarten teacher taught me that cutting my hair was actually a rich accumulation, a way of planting her magical fingers ever deeper in my heart.

I will grow my hair back out; we will rinse and repeat as long as she wants to plant herself in front of me and teach. I myself am still a trembling preschooler in terms of parenting, but she is the bravest teacher I could ever hope to have.

Lion Eats Sassy Girl Because He Can: Games and Second-Order Learning Within an Interdisciplinary Arts Curriculum

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Set the story in rural Nova Scotia, September 2007. It is the first day of school and a freshman boy arrives wearing a pink shirt. This wins him the attention of the school bullies, who waste no time establishing the meaning of that shirt. *Faggot. Queer.* Happens all the time. Two seniors hear about the incident and decide they've had enough. () That night they call everyone they know and tell them to wear pink the next day. When these two seniors arrive at school the next morning, when the bullies arrive at school, when the boy bullied arrives at school, they find themselves, one and all, in a sea of pink.

Note the parentheses I've dropped into the story. In gathering stories of this sort, which I do, there is a narrative device I'll call *overnight*. As in, "overnight they organized their friends." *Overnight* is part of what interests me. *Two* interests me as well. Two seniors, friends, which means banter, which means conversations likely keyed more to play than to prove. And if the opening parenthesis is one boy saying, "You know what we should totally do?" And if the closing parenthesis is the delight of wading the next morning into a sea of pink, there is still a space unaccounted for. The space between "You know..." and the placing of the first phone call. And to be clear, there was such a space also (as small as it may have been) between the "You know..." arising in the mind of the one boy and the "You know..." crossing

his lips on its way to his friend's ear. My hunch is that this space is populated by vastly differing velocities—speeding or inhibiting passage.

Can you teach me this?

To organize the wearing of pink shirts?

No. To *be* like that. To think like that.

Don't you think those things just happen sometimes?

So you can't.

I didn't say that.

So you can.

Not directly, no.

Sad epilogue to this story. Sad not for the boy nor for the bullies, but for those of us who, at a distance, love this gesture—the surprise, the full-on flipping of context. On September 25, 2007, at 2:30 PM, the province of Nova Scotia, in an effort to acknowledge the remarkable event, proclaimed the second Thursday at the start of each school year as Stand Up Against Bullying Day, on which all students and teachers should wear pink to show their opposition to bullying.

One wild horse caught, corralled, broken. One wild, spirited horse tethered to a dull, dull plow.

By training I am an artist, by profession an educator, by temperament a lover of wildness, by concerted attention a reader of context. Nothing delights me like a good move. It matters little whether a brilliant instance of contextual mischief-making arises within the arts demarcated as such, or within that thick stream of events strangely called the everyday.

A few years ago I received an invitation to design a class for a high school summer arts intensive at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. The curriculum was to cross all disciplines, and I asked myself whether this environment might support a new form of creative inquiry. I wanted to invent a classroom in which retrospective appreciation for certain kinds of moves could catapult forward into a sequence of activities that would stimulate the thinking that actually *does* such things. Thinks *of* and *toward* such things:

Homework: Bring to class a gesture you observe in the outside world. (*Outside world*, another strange name, like *the everyday*.) Next class: Recall the game rock, paper, scissors. In teams of three, perform a grafting of gestures onto game. Name the gestures. Lion, nerd, sassy girl. Determine a logic for what beats what. Sassy girl beats nerd, because she's more popular. Nerd beats lion, because he can outsmart him. And lion eats sassy girl, because he can. Bite, twinkle, fold. Bite chomps twinkle.

Twinkle fondles fold. And fold smothers bite. Pick a favorite. Learn it all around. Hold a tournament. Crown a champion.

When I introduce the task, everyone gets it right away. It is difficult, and it is doable by everyone in the room. This is a clue to me. They laugh as they try to unlearn rock, paper, scissors, even as they have to remember enough of it to play the new game. There comes into the room a quality of alertness, into faces a quality of brightness. This is another clue. Later, when I need it, I can say of addressing a particular complication: let your logic here be like what we did with rock, paper, scissors, and they know what I mean.

Three summers so far teaching this class I'm calling Artist in Action. The class a student once nicknamed Artist Inaction, the nondoing of it all. The no content of it all. The class is the offspring of previous summers. Three years earlier I'd attended a summer school run by the performance group Goat Island, gaining fluency in the canny deployment of constraint, interruption, and duration. And in the years before that I was working as a facilitator on a corporate team-building ropes course. Guys in suits given only two logs, a rope, a tin can, and ten minutes to figure out how to get across the hot lava pit (okay, wood chips in a parking lot). It's easy to make fun of such things. Painful, cheesy, and forced. And still, some remarkable things happen in that place of wood-chip hot lava.

Artist in Action is a collision of sorts. A monstrous concoction. The galloping ungainly offspring of a ropes course and Goat Island summer school. Play the team-building games, with their brightly branded tubes and balls and prewritten instructive scenarios and the start line and the finish, and drop from that into timed writing from prompts: *I never drop the ball*. And back again to the props with the instruction to form small groups and build some kind of looping action that could potentially go on forever, and then to perform these loops for three minutes. Long enough, I tell them, to guarantee we get bored. Because we want boring. At least as a starting point.

Content is the last thing I'm teaching. I do start a glossary. Incomplete.

Moiré patterns. Those things which are emergent, which are dynamic result from second-order phenomena that can only be addressed indirectly—the result of something else, of an interaction, not a thing in and of themselves. We can make the underlying pieces, the lines that will interact, can provide time and experience with these “toys,” these “games.” But we must never put an image up—a still of moiré—because that's not moiré, that's a still of moiré and with our stubborn habit of seeing *things*, we risk misunderstanding the resultant image as being something that can itself be directly made.

Context. Generalizing is to say that if pushing hard to get what I want works in one instance, then pushing hard for what I want should be done in all instances. Generalizing is like maximizing. It is saying that something which is good in one time and place (substitute for good: productive, clever, rewarding, satisfying, salutary) will be good in all times and places, which slides quickly into more is better than less. It ignores the relational nature of determining whether something is clever, rewarding, or salutary.

Gregory Bateson. Used the term “deutero” learning to talk about this second-order learning. To describe not the level of teaching, which has to do with content, but that level that is the context of content, all the hows of how content is moved, if such a thing were actually possible, content moving like freight from one port to another.

I take pleasure in teaching what I don't know. Commit myself to teaching that which can only be taught indirectly.

Return to parentheses. If what I care about is the double doubleness of parentheses—each one scratching its back on a context (be it a narrative, a school, a certainty) while facing its partner across a space held open, a space they must agree to invent together; if what I care about is the crafting of second-order moves within particular and always local contexts, then I need something with which to quickly populate a classroom such that we have a rich, patterned ecology in which to make our moves; something real but negligible, lest it be mistaken for content. Playing games with games serves us well.

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