

Art, Education, and Self: Six Stories from Peter London

By Dr. Peter London



I begin my talk on the occasion of the donation of my professional papers to the Special Collections Research Center at Southern Illinois University with my sincere appreciation to several people who have been instrumental in bringing this all about. The idea of donating my professional papers to Southern Illinois University came first came about in conversation with Sally Gradle, who along with Barbara Bickel of the Art Education program here at SIU, invited me to a keynote address to the regional art education association that the art education was hosting in 2014. That talk had to do with expanding the career possibilities of art teachers to include all members and institutions of the community, not only the conventional career of public schools teaching. That talk and the ensuing discussions raised the issue of dearth of material in our field that dealt with broader concepts and practices of the arts to enhance the quality of life for the artist and for the many various members of the community. I mentioned that I had been collecting my own papers on just these issues my entire professional career, and

perhaps.... That conversation eventuated in the founding of *Artizein*, an on-line journal dealing with such matters. Subsequently, and because of the enthusiastic agreement and ensuing support of Pamela Hackbart-Dean, Director of the Special Collections Research Center at SIU, the many particulars of officially consummating the donation of the papers was accomplished. Pamela deserves my deepest appreciation for generously approving and arranging for the collection to be accepted, transported, and now in the process of being archived, soon to be made available to students and researchers. Finally, my thanks to Aaron Darrisaw, a PhD candidate in Philosophy at the university currently archiving the many boxes of material of the collection. My sincerest appreciation to all.

A Prelude

When I started out, I suppose much like other people, I didn't know how to get anywhere I hadn't been before other than being taken there by my parents; and even here, it was mostly to other members of my family and Coney Island, a twenty minute trolley ride from our place. Around this time I began to observe people who were doing things that I thought I might like to do, but I had no idea of how one got to do those things. Everybody seemed to know

what he or she were doing and seemed to me doing whatever it might be quite well. Relative to the many things other people were doing; driving a car, going to work, fixing things, cooking cleaning, buying things with their own money- (how one got money was another mystery) I could do very little, and didn't know how one got to be like them. Everyone seemed to be already in their proper place; everyone seemed to be already fully formed, knowing how to do things. The whole world seemed to already be in its steady and perpetual state. It hadn't occurred to me - yet- that all things changed over time into different things; if they did change, it was clear just how they went about changing. Much later still, the question arose for me: How I might change, from the person I found myself to be and become the person I thought I might prefer to be? As Buckminster Fuller once claimed, Space Ship Earth did not come with an operating manual, and I did not seem to either.

I wasn't particularly un-happy with my life, but I certainly did not want to be that same kid for eternity. Powerless, surrounded by family not at all of my choosing nor liking, in a rather forlorn neighborhood in Brooklyn - at that time

very un-cool place to be, terrible in school, skinny, and with a nagging mom.

My life – as it has mostly assembled itself, came into current shape, and continues to assemble itself in much the same manner; by bumping into people- and some things- that brought me to a threshold, a doorway, a door that was seemed to me to be ajar, the other side of which

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was more air, more space, more light, than I was familiar with before. That's not quite true; most often I did not at first notice that it was a doorway, or that is was ajar, or what might be glimpsed on the other side. No less for ME to be on the other side. At first, again, I suppose like most other people brought into confrontation with something new, it initially appeared to be only Other, only Foreign, only Alien, only Distant, only not me.

The patience of the door keeper, holding the door ajar long enough for me to catch my breath, refocus my eyes, learn how to open and close, open and close the door, made all the difference between me turning away from that door and stepping through it to the other side. On fewer occasions than what was presented to me, I would say to myself, “Oh, I didn't know that was there. Oh, that's how you do it. Oh, I

want to go there, do that, *be* that. I'll give it a try."

I retained these papers, from initial course outlines and lesson plans, then lectures and articles finally books on the matter of art and its teaching, over the years because I thought it might be helpful for someone else, also just starting out and finding that they too seemed to be missing an operating manual on how to get from here to there, to have an account of how one person – like them in this regard, assembled, over time, the welter of their experiences and subsequent reflections into a body of work that – generously evolved from simple and local accounts to ever more inclusive and interdependent patterns, from blurry vision and weak expression to something more clearer and crafted. Immodest claims, I know, I know, I know.

Although any one or several such accounts of my writing and art work may not be particularly meritorious, the arc of their evolution over fifty years might provide *a story* of how such things came about, and in a way, how many things come about. Not how to do it, but how this particular fellow composed an operating manual for getting from here to there.

Having had the good fortune to still be around after 75 years, I have come to know a rather large number of people with whom I have close relationships; and I now believe my personal aleatorical system/life, of planning and failing, searching and groping, gathering and losing, is how a lot of lives are similarly fabricated. How, as teachers, our initial experiences might

make their way into lessons and eventually whole courses, then upon reflection and further research, articles, and lectures, after much subsequent feedback and editorial comments, further embarrassing reflections and more careful research, books. I thought this tracing of one- as it turns out quite, typical life, with all its many steps and missteps, coming upon illuminating lights from others, and humbling reactions to what I thought - up until such moments, were really decent ideas and efforts, might be of help to someone who at the outset of their career also found themselves without an operating manual.

I think of the papers, not any one in and of themselves, but now assembled into the shape of a door way, a portal of sorts, for someone who might be curious about, as I have been, the question: How does one compose a life as an artist, Likewise for those inclined to the highest form of philanthropy: Teaching: How does one go about becoming such - without throwing up one's hands and saying, really, this is all too much, I simply cannot do this sort of thing. A thought that passed my mind many times, and well into my career. Perhaps, given that many of you are also teachers, such a thought passed by your mind as well. Many times. Maybe just now.

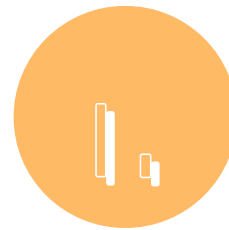
This talk then is composed of a few of such stories that brought me to such doors, and further, pointed out the door handle and how to operate it. They are not stories that appear in the collected papers, because in the midst of my career, I thought they were only incidental, not really

causative. Now that I have stepped back from full engagement with teaching, and have had more time to reflect on things, I have changed my mind and now believe they ought to be acknowledged as significant struts to this arc from here to there.

Six Stories

As an academic, I well know the lowly esteem in which personal stories usually are held in academia. After all, stories fail to meet the standard criteria of scholarly acceptability; offering no corroborating citations, an absence of broad samplings or longitudinal studies, no evidence based observations, and no argued conclusions; no methodology that brings about repeatable findings. So you might well dismiss the following stories; originating as they do from a sample of one, whose entire study was conducted by that same “one” as having little currency in the world beyond that “one”. You may be correct. The stories - you will soon discover - are not particularly exceptional; no unusual circumstances, talents or especially good luck were involved. I imagine, such accounts likely occur to many others. Their importance, I have belatedly come to understand, describes a more complete, a more plausible arc of the meta-story of this collection of papers; intending as they do, to provide a reader with how things come about, or in any case, how things came about for this artist and teacher as he fabricated a life and career ping-ponging along over the course of three quarters of a century. The stories, ordinary happenings,

really, acquired their meaning as they became cumulative and I could begin to perceive – perhaps only imagine – an accreting arc that *to me* affirmed earlier inclinations and prepared the way for subsequent choices.



Peter draws a train riding in the grass

When I was in Kindergarten or the first grade, our teacher invited us to draw a picture of some portion of a story that she had just read about trains. It might have been “The little locomotive that could.” I drew a picture of a locomotive puffing along a green meadow dotted with colorful flowers. When it was my turn to show my drawing, the teacher said, Well Peter, what a nice drawing. Trains travel on railroad tracks resting on a bed of crushed rocks to keep the train steady. But your picture of the train riding across a meadow with flowers is much prettier. Good job.”

Many years past before I came to realize that this episode was one of the pivotal ones of my life. Perhaps it actually worked upon me from that time on but at a subliminal level, who knows. In any case, it lead to a dawning that reality- or my life- is composed of a number of realities. One was the world in which all things obeyed the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, time,

and parents. Another world was the one of my own making. This world- quite real to me- could be evoked any time I wished it into being. It was as real as the picture, or anything I made in the “other world,” even if it was confined to a sheet of paper or a lump of clay. From that time on, I live in at least two worlds, the one everyone else shares (a portion of themselves) with me, and the world I evoke into being by the dint both of my imagination and my hands. This extra world, and I suppose everyone has at least one of these too, allows me a form of space and a range of abilities – like flying, invisibility, invincibility and such, - if I so wish, that the other shared world does not. Thank goodness.



Uncle Herm bestows upon me the title of “Artist”

My Uncle Herm was the scion of our whole family. Although he too was a salesman like my father, he was the head of some higher level of the firm. And lived and acted accordingly. He had the biggest house; he had a rose garden; he had a (baby) grand piano; he had a dining room; his daughters took ballet and piano lessons. When they played cards and talked about things, his views prevailed. Not in a pushy way, but everyone knew that he really did know best. He was modest about his abilities and

successes and wore the office of the head of family comfortably. When I was still in the early grades in school, Uncle Herm took notice of my abilities to draw and paint. (My only noticeable abilities) and dubbed me, “Pete the Artist”. So named by Uncle Herm, everyone else in the family understood me to be, if not an artist, then at least, *artistic*. Everyone else now seeing me that way, I began to see me that way too; Pete the artist. Up until that point I had been just me who made things; drawings, Popsicle sculpture, things made out of string, or glued together, or sidewalk chalk drawings. Lots of kids did this sort of thing but to be honest, mine were nicer. Anyway, Uncle Herm thought so, and now everyone thought so and now I was an artist. And now I am still an artist, still making stuff that, in all honesty is actually nicer than most people make stuff.



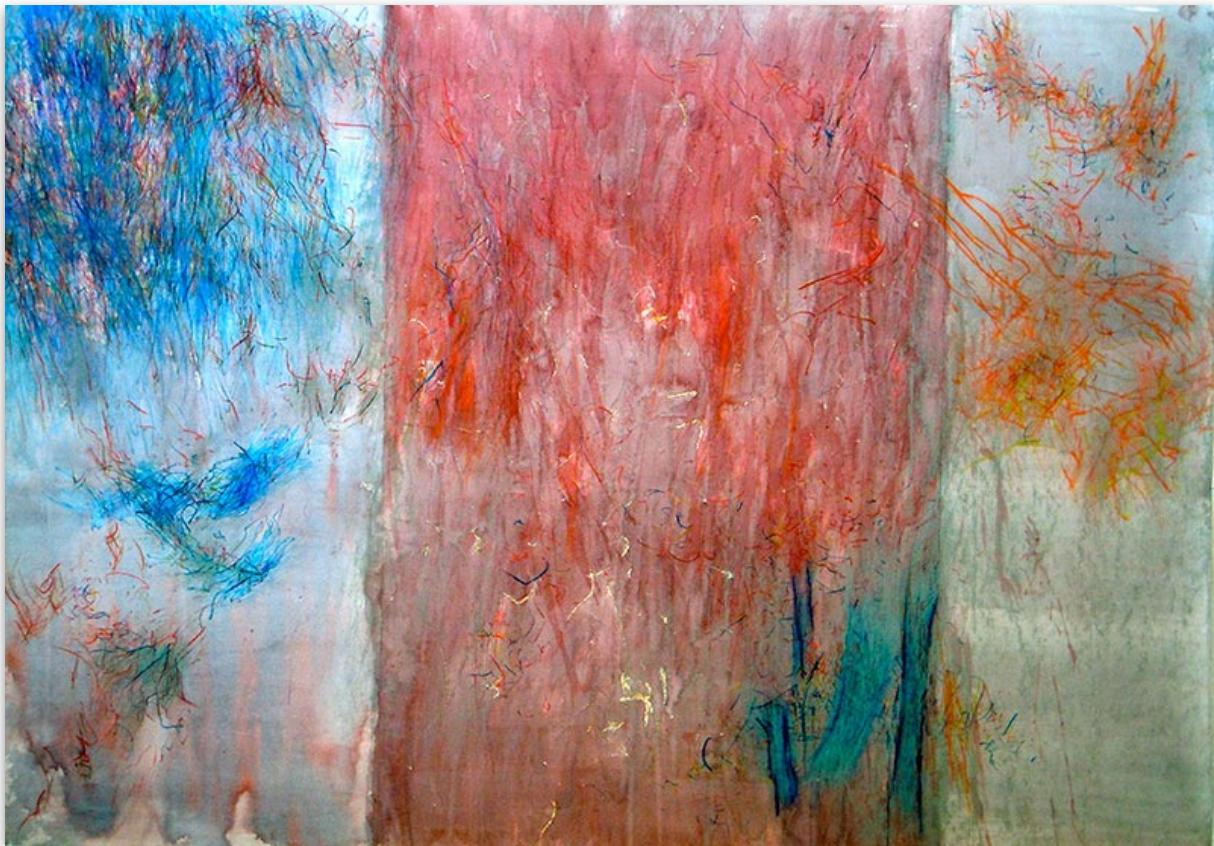
What I saw from my studio window

My first studio was a bedroom in our two bedroom apartment. Against one wall was my easel. At a corner to that was a glass topped table that served as my palette and held all my paints, solvents and brushes. A large north facing window cast a constant and cool light on both my palette and easel – a perfect setup for an artist. Sitting or standing at the intersection of the easel and

palette allowed an easy gather of paint on my brush, rag, knife, stick or whatever, a quarter turn, and the application of same onto my canvas - or whatever. In the midst of working on a piece, on the way from loading my brush with paint from my palette, and bringing it to the piece, the scream of sirens and the skidding of an ambulance just below my window as it

their dedicated attention. In a few minutes, the hospital doors closed, the people disappeared, the ambulance was gone, the play over; for me.

Still staring at the now empty parking lot, my hand suspended over my palette interrupted from its journey to the (needy) painting, I began to feel queasy. I looked at my loaded brush and the thought



pulled up abruptly to the emergency entrance of the hospital that was directly across the street. The doors to the ambulance and the emergency entrance flew open; a crowd of medical folks poured out, with all kinds of gadgets and tubing. They bustled this way and that; swarming over and around the draped stretcher; finally hurrying inside with the object of

came to me, "What has this to do with *that*?" I began to feel that I where I was sitting, in my studio, was somewhere else than where life was being lived. Not at that time, but over a period of time, I had the growing impression that what I was doing with my life; painting pictures, and what life was doing to people, had little to do with each other. More exactly, my work in

this life had little to do and little effect on lived life.

At this point in my story, I need to make a brief but important digression. This story took place in 1960's in New York City, a period of time in which Abstract Expressionism reigned. I had just completed a Masters of Fine Arts from

“But what about all that was not me.”

Columbia University and had been weaned away from figurative imagery and had adopted, first reluctantly, then with the enthusiasm of the newly converted the ethos of non-literary, non-literal, formalism.

The sources of my art were now introspective improvisations on relations of color, forms and space; explorations of the many attributes of, for example, red, or green or blue. To be perfectly honest - not an easy thing for me to do, although I abandoned my earlier expressive figurative imagery, and adopted more ethereal explorations of pure color, form, line, and composition, I harbored the remnants of figuration and I was more a converso than a converted. Hidden tendencies of which, at the time, even I was not aware.

What indeed did my practice of art have to do with the rest of life? I did know, of course, what my art had to do with my life. My art was my way of seeing, of understanding, of conveying what I saw,

thought, felt, and hoped. Creating my art was the means by which I fabricated my identity, formed my Self. OK. Good. Essential - for me. But what about all that was not me. How was I - as an artist - lending a hand to the rest of the world, to participate in Tikkun O'Lam, to help heal the world, at least try.

This encounter with the world of not me at the very instance that I was otherwise completely absorbed in the world of only me, created a severe schism in my worldview. Me on one side - the rest of the world on the other side. Me and whatever talents I had as an artist on one side, the rest of the world - needing many things, on the other. Could anything I had and could do as an artist, be applicable to the other side? This question would remain a constant irritant throughout my life, remaining so today.

The perspectives of John Dewey and Buckminster Fuller have formed major structures of my own thinking on art and teaching- and much else. And so it is of sincere gratitude to Southern Illinois University, and to Pam Hackbart-Dean, Director of the Special Collections Research Center, in particular, that my own work joins those of John Dewey and elements of Fuller's work here in SIU's Special Collections. I believe my collection of papers, covering the course of some sixty years in the fields of art and art's teaching, show how ideas formulated in previous periods from other stunningly original and fertile minds, continue to shape and inform theory and practice in contingent fields in subsequent generations.

John Dewey

Dewey's "Art as Experience", analyzed how experiences understood as encounters with the world that subsequently create more inclusive and detailed fields of view of reality than experienced before, was a landmark book for me, and many artists and teachers of the arts. His careful description of the parallels between any full experience that brought about enhanced behaviors and the creative/artistic processes, provided me- and my colleagues, a dynamic model of creative/artistic learning and therefore teaching. Dewey's thesis also provided a structural bridge between the work of the artist bringing about their creations and the work of every other worker in the world bringing their creations into the world. The following two stories are illustrative of the many experiences I underwent that eventuated in a greater integration between my life as an artist and the rest of my life, than that moment in my studio when my brush hovered between the painting and the emergency room.



Colleen becomes my Prime Minister

The year is 1965, the city, New York City, the high school, one in which several hundred mostly Afro-American young men and women were bused in from a

predominately Black neighborhood, to a mostly white neighborhood and its just opened local school. There were some tensions and dicey moments, but for the most part the youths, their teachers and the administrators were far superior in creating a more perfect union of all members of the school community than the general population had or ever since has the will and the skills to realize. Far better. The various accounts of this pivotal and tumultuous period of public educational reforms make up key components of the Civil Rights movement in America, and the difficult stories they tell comprise a great phase of American history, the lessons of which are still to inform contemporary policy and living conditions.

The holiday season was approaching and I introduced the next art project by opening a discussion with the class about gifts; their meaning, the rewards of receiving and giving. Since at the moment the topic seemingly had nothing to do with art or school, but something that they actually were interested in and had given a lot of thought to, the discussion was quite animated and even searching. The general consensus was that contrary to popular opinion, it was better to receive than to give.

"That's bullshit." said Colleen, an Afro-American woman in my basic art class.

"Y'all just sayen that to be smart. You know, that's what us kids are suppose to be sayen. But you know that's just bullshit." Commotion; the rest of the class yelling and laughing and banging about.

“Oh yeah? It is the truth, Colleen, so don’t you go acten as if you is different and you so high and mighty!”

“I aint sayen I’m high and mighty and nothen like that, big mouth. All I’m sayen is, and you’ all know it the same, that given to folks who need somethen is better than getten all kinds a shit that you don’t need or even want.”

“What you talken bout? I know you like stuff like everyone else here, so getten stuff is good. Given stuff is good too, only not as good!” Lots of laughter and banging about.

“Here’s what I’m talken about, meat head! I know this here family, real poor. Lots of kids, and they got nuffen. Just nuffen but shitty clothes and stuff. So one day I’m walken down the street, and a couple of these kids is playen outside wearen crappy cloths and such, playen with sticks or sumpthen in the street. And as I walk by, one of them, a little girl bout four or five looks up at me and says, “Hello misses, you’re pretty.” Lots of laughter from the class and more banging about- but not as much as before.

“Well you know what she mean, she aint sayen that I’m actually pretty [although you know I am.]” Howls of laughter, but they know this is a story being told by a master story teller, so they get back into their listening to a story behavior.

“What she sayen is you look good and we look like shit. So I say to them, thank you, that’s very nice of you to say that, you made me feel very happy, bye bye. And I went right back home and I got a couple of nice little outfits for both those

kids out of our closets and came back to those two kids.” Now there was quiet in the room, no fussing about.

“And I came up to them and said sumpthen like, ‘Hey kids, we was just goen through some of our stuff the other day that we no longer wear, and I thought it might fit you kids. Here, see if they fit.’ And right there in the street the kids put on the clothing- a little blouse and skirt. And they looked at each other, and they looked at me, and they said, “Thank you miss.” And then they ran home laughing and skipping.”

Silence in the class. “That’s what I’m talken bout.” “Aw right, she be right, dat’s de way it is. Sister be right.”

So instead of designing and making things for ourselves for the holidays we made things that were going to be gifts for others. But for whom? The class talked about this for a while, and then someone said,” My brother is in the hospital nearby here, and we visit him every day, He’s on a ward for only children, why don’t we go there and give those kids our presents?

Rather than design and make toys or playthings that we thought interesting, we decided to first go to the hospital, meet the children, talk with them about what they miss most being in the hospital and what they might like for the holidays. Then we would design and construct the gifts, then we would go back to the hospital, host a holiday party there and give our presents to the children. A huge undertaking. An enormous undertaking for an art teacher who can barely get through a lesson in lettering without some catastrophe.

Kids, I said, I don’t think we can

really do that. We have to get all kinds of permission and get on busses and I don't think I know how to do all that and.... Aw Mister London, sure we can do it. Sure you can do it. Ask Mr. Beck.

So I shared the story with the chairman of my department, Charles Beck, who would become the parent of much of my subsequent life. After hearing me out- always seriously, Charlie said "Go back to Colleen and make her the Prime Minister of External Affairs or something. You keep your position as art teacher. She can do everything that needs doing. She will work it all out with the administration. Walter, (the Principal) knows her and loves her. I had her in a class last year. She helped me run the class, did a terrific job. Let her run the show."

"Charlie! This will involve getting in touch with all sorts of people at the hospital, arraigning bus transportation, permission slips, raising some money for the party, and a million other things, how am I going to let a kid be in charge of all this? I can hardly get through a lesson on soap sculpture using popsicle sticks without somebody getting hurt?"

"Peter, you see Colleen as a kid, a student in your art class; and she is. She is young, but Peter, she is not a kid. Colleen is a rare person, one who deep in her core being was born to high office. Had history been different, had people been different, she and her family would not necessarily be here in New York, she and her friends bussed from their own neighborhood to an

alien one every day. (Remember, this was the 1960's and bussing to achieve racial balance in the public schools was a social reform that achieved whatever good it most certainly did achieve by way, however, of significant social trauma for all members of society.) Colleen has the bearing of one who people naturally turn to.

When she speaks, people know she is speaking the truth. They listen to her. They take her counsel. They trust her. Peter, let's face it, they don't trust us, why should they, it's clear that most kids do not. (Again, remember, this was the 60's.)

"Charlie! Are you saying that I should...?" "Peter, I'll find the funds for the project. Put Colleen in charge." I did. We went to the hospital, everyone who got on the bus at school got off the bus at the hospital, and everyone got back to school- on the same bus. We talked with the children. We came back and told our stories of the children we met. We talked in a fashion that I had never heard my students speak before; care full, insightful, unpretentious, movingly. We designed and made toys and such we thought the children would like. We made them as well as we could. We went back to the hospital with our presents, had a little party and gave our presents to the children; the nurses, aids and parents joined in too. Everything worked out fine. When we (all) returned to school, Colleen and I met with Charlie and told him the story.

Charlie said, See, Peter?

Colleen said, See, Mr. London?

"See . . .?"



Charlie Listens, students speak

Charles, a tall man, always in shirt, jacket and tie, shined well-worn shoes, near to retirement, walked with a long slow gait, a rather uncool looking gentleman. Charlie believed that there were kids in school whose souls were dying because no one ever noticed how our society- maybe inadvertently, maybe not, connived to kill those same souls in their children. He believed the soul thrived on an atmosphere thick with freedom to be just who one really is. And the schools and for that matter parents and churchmen, and politicians and businessmen, and all the rest of our society, didn't want that at all. Didn't want the raw and original and untamed person in their midst, and did everything they could to squash that out of them, and put in its place something else, something tame and ordinary and expected something secondhand. But Charlie thought that what was original and a gift and absolutely good was the soul of the person. He also believed that the arts, in all times and all places, were humankind's magnificent response to things when the soul of one person was in danger of being crushed by another person- or group of persons. The arts when fully understood were the voices of the soul

struggling to appear and be taken into account. That's why the arts tug at your soul, because the arts speak from and to the soul.

Charlie believed the soul was now in jeopardy, that we were losing our essential gift and contribution to the universe for shallow and ephemeral profits. This selling of the great thing for small if gaudy change, deeply affected him, and he saw a great deal of education as being in the same awful business. The art program in the midst of our culture's main soul suffocating enterprise, schooling, could be an oasis for such dying souls, and that is what he tried to create in the art program that he chaired. But who could he tell this to? Not easy to say to his fellow teachers, not easy to describe as such in the course descriptions. How then to attract just the kids to his classes who needed this soul saving the most? Not many such kids were in the habit of taking art courses.

So Charlie's created a number of advanced art courses. His thinking was this; an advanced course was like a graduate course, conducted by individualized instruction based upon the particular and mutual talents and interests of both student and teacher. If the best and the brightest were optimally served by such individualized instruction, why not the worst? With no confining preset curriculum or one style pedagogy, Charlie could fit how and what he taught to how and what the student could learn and needed to know. He believed this simple truth was the basic unit of all education. And, it gave Charlie the opportunity to work within an

environment that was sufficiently ripe for anything to happen at any time so that he could always be right by the side of each of his students and only when they required him all of the time. In short, the term “Advanced” opened the door wide enough him to do just about anything. He thought that that was the proper degree of freedom that everyone who sought the best on behalf of others required and deserved.

Charlie recruited students who about to fail out, drop out or on the way to being kicked out of school for his advanced art courses. You would think with students like that Charlie’s art room would be pandemonium, like mine. But no it wasn’t, it was quiet, ordered, with the ne’er do wells all hunched over their desks, rubbing and scrubbing away at work that can best be described as exotic. Charlie would go from student to student: Hello son, he’d begin, not being able to remember anyone’s name, and besides, to be called Charlie’s son was an honorific, for he did treat everyone as is they were his only son and his only daughter, for young women, he called them “young lady”, - Charlie would sit down at their work table, move within shared confidences distance and have a talk to them in hushed tones. The student would nod seriously, say something in return, and get back to work. That was it. How did this guy take a bunch like this and transform them into an elite group of art students. How did he do it? I asked Charlie. He said, It beats me, why don’t you come in and watch what’s happening and maybe you could tell me. I did. All I could see was this. No presentations to the whole class, no

motivations or demonstrations, no threats or cajoling, just Charlie going up to each person, looking them dead in the eye, telling them what had to be done, asking them what they thought the possibilities were of them doing something about that, giving them all the time they needed to think their responses through, listening more carefully to their responses than they were even offering them, slowly considering their responses, respectfully responding in turn, asking if there was anything he could do to help them do what they had in mind to do, fully supplying it if he could, then providing them the necessary time and space and material to do what they had to do. When the work ran its course, or they had a question or request, he received them as fully and politely as before. He listened respectfully and fully, they began to speak and act respectfully and fully. He weighed every word they said to him, they weighed every word they said to him- and eventually to each other. They did the same thing with every mark they made because he did the same thing with every mark they made.

After the class, I told Charlie what I heard and saw.

Damn! Charlie said, is that it?

I said, I think it is.

To learn more about the relationship between Mr. Charlie Beck and Peter London, visit Peter’s blog titled “Charlie & Peter” at:
www.charlieandpeter.blogspot.com



*Buckminster Fuller Listens to
someone who stutters*

Buckminster Fuller's "No More Secondhand God," was the matrix, not only of the title but also for central perspectives for my own book, "No More Secondhand Art".

Fuller proposed the notion, much like that of Ralph Waldo Emerson before him, that if one was the sort of person who was sincerely interested in meeting God, why not go right out and seek the master of the universe yourself. Why look into books for what other people's tales of what might have happened to them upon such a meeting? Why not meet the world directly. Whitman said much the same, so did Dewey. I find this first hand seeking and saying is the general attitude of most people who entitle themselves; artist.

My papers trace my attempts to meet the world first hand as an artist and to try to find ever more approximate means of portraying what happened to me as a consequence of such close encounters. This story is of an encounter Bucky had with a young women that I witnessed and it was in its way my encounter with him.

I attended a weekend lecture/demonstration by Buckminster Fuller held

in a large auditorium hosted by Harvard University, with several hundred people attending and filling the large hall. By the conversations and questions from the audience and Fuller's responses, it seemed to be an audience comprised of highly informed academics and other professional in the many disciplines that Fuller's work addressed; physics, engineering, chemistry, cosmology, local and global historical trending, political science, geo-politics, bio-physics, metallurgy, higher mathematics, communications, ethics, and the like. Fuller's agenda for the three day lecture was to describe underlying structures and dynamics of how things work and evolve at all levels of magnitude on this planet, in any case, and perhaps in other regions of the cosmos as well. At the outset of this three day, eighteen hour presentation, in a kindly effort to ease our discomfort of the magnitude and intricacies of such an undertaking, Fuller advised the audience not to worry unnecessarily if somewhere along the lecture, involving as it must, sections of specialized knowledge, and original vocabulary, we might get lost. Don't worry, he told us, the real story is actually made up of an arc of many sub stories, and we will come to observe the architecture, the tensegrity of the interlocking system of systems he was aiming to describe. And then for three days, from nine to five, without once sitting down or referring to notes, Fuller let us have it. I followed the particulars as best I could, I can't believe I was alone in failing to understand each portion of lecture nor how each piece of information fit with all others.

Non the less, I shared in the palpable growing excitement of everyone else in being witness to an incrementally resolving panoramic view of how things work and evolve. Something was cohering not only in the lecture, but also in the lecture hall. I could see in the faces and postures and murmuring throughout the hall that something of great importance seemed to becoming clearer concerning the nature of a few first principles undergird all matter and energy, create, maintain and evolve the manifest world. Or so it seemed to us that day.

A two or three hour lecture/demonstration would be followed by a question and response interlude. The questions were highly ornate, and Fuller's responses seemed satisfying to the questioner and many in the audience. The questions and comments from the audience seemed to me much more esoteric and obscure than Fuller's own lectures, and I waited for him to resume leadership of our panoramic journey. In the afternoon of the second day, quite far along the path, but not at all in view of where we would eventually arrive, there was a final hand raised for a question.

It was from a young woman not far from where I was sitting, about half way up from the stage and the back of the hall. She tentatively raised her hand, then lowered it, raised it again and seemed unsure to go ahead with her question or let it pass. Bucky noticed her and asked her if she had a question for him. In a soft and stuttering voice she said she thought she did, mumbling and stuttering something.

Bucky said, "I am sorry dear, I am quite hard of hearing and so I cannot hear your question. I'll just come up to where you are so that can hear you better." And with that, he climbed the two dozen or so stairs to her row, then came to her seat, cupped his hand behind his ear, looked at her full in the face a foot or so from hers and said. "There dear, I can see and hear you better now, what was your question?" The young woman began to shake, bent over, holding on to her chair. She took some long breaths and she began to talk. At first her speech was again hesitant, soft, and stuttered. Bucky remained listening, only listening-not encouraging, only focused on listening to her with no sign of impatience; just cupping his ear, looking at her full on, no expression on his face other than undividedly attentive. The young woman unbent, loosed her grip of her chair, She looked at him, she took some long breaths, and she told him her question. She did not stutter.

Bucky said, "Thank you." and responded to her question. I don't remember her question, or Bucky's answer. I do remember everybody sighing, looking at one another, tearing up. I did too.

Not quite an aside: On Listening

Listening turns out to be a more active and facilitating engagement than the usual passive function it is assigned. But Listening, of course, is a much more powerful agent than that. Listening creates the critical function of providing a mirroring, feedback response for the speaker with which to observe themselves.

Hear what they are thinking, observing the effects of their ideas in the manifest world. The listener opens a space for a would-be speaker, inviting them to enter the manifest world, to be heard, to become accountable for their thoughts, to become present.

Eric Fromm noted that violence is in proportion to the life unlived, violence against the Self, then anyone and anything in reach. We can likewise say there is violence in proportion to the life unspoken. The listener prepares the ground for the would be speaker to speak.



“Story” 7

One final story, this time it’s not really a Story at all, but more like an Encounter, or an Experience, an Encounter I had with the observation that Abraham Joshua Heschel made about the nature of the human capacity to Know, our inherently limited and distorted capacity to meet and therefore to treat the world. [The idea is at the foundation of all of his writing and most conspicuously is found throughout his writing, but in particular in, “Man is not Alone.” It is often referred to as “radical amazement.”]

Heschel observed that everything that you will ever encounter in this world is different than, more than, and better than,

you will ever know it to be. Different, More, and Better than you *can* know it to be – including your *self*. The closer you approach the “other”, the more this becomes apparent. Positioning this proposition as a lens between yourself and the world, immediately transforms both the world and your Self to be something different, and more and better.

“More” and “Different” are rather easy to acknowledge, still difficult to adjust to and behave accordingly, but accessible.

MORE*than*.
DIFFERENT*than*.
BETTER*than*.

“Better” proposes something quite different and although it still seems true enough for even casual consideration, “Better” opens onto an entirely other plane of existence. Calling us to quite radically enlarge our apertures of concern, and act in ways that are barely imaginable for us today. I believe this plane of existence is proximate to the plane that the arts work within and the evidence of this plane of “Better” is what the arts bring to the plane of not different, not more not better, the plane in which we mostly dwell, that is, the plane in which everything consists of interdependent, interpenetrating pattern whose origins and destinies are entwined. But more about this perhaps at another time/occasion. This lens

has suited me well as an artist-type, as a teacher, certainly as a parent, mate, and friend, with me on one side of this lens, the rest of the world on the other. The world that is forever different, more and better than I will ever know it, keeps the door ajar. Refreshes that early refrain I initially consigned to mere naïveté:

“Oh, I didn’t know that was there.

Oh, that’s how you do it.

Oh, I want to go there,
do that,
be that.

I’ll give it a try.”

I hope these papers invite that kind of reaction.

I hope that making these papers widely available will provide the opportunity for someone else to also say; Oh, I didn’t know that was there. Oh, that’s how you do it. Oh, I want to go there, do that, *be* that.

I’ll give it

a

try.



Above: Peter London in the “classroom” leading a Drawing Closer to Nature session.



Peter’s students working on encounters.



