

AN ARTS-BASED CONTEMPLATIVE PAUSE

INTRO TO PART 2: CREATING RESTORATIVE CARING & LEARNING SPACES

SUSAN WALSH & BARBARA BICKEL

BIOS:

Susan Walsh is a writer/poet, arts-based researcher, and student of Tibetan Buddhism and contemplative photography. She is also a Professor of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Susan wrote *Contemplative and artful openings: Researching women and teaching* (Routledge, 2018) and co-edited *Arts-based and contemplative practices in research and teaching: Honoring presence* (Routledge, 2015) with Barbara Bickel and Carl Leggo.

Barbara Bickel is an artist, researcher, and educator currently practicing in Calgary, Alberta Canada where she co-founded Studio M*: A Research Creation Lab Intersecting Arts, Culture and Healing in 2017. She is an Associate Professor of Art Education Emeritus at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA. To view her art portfolio and arts-based research online visit <http://www.barbarabickel.com>

what is a contemplative arts practice?
(not all arts practices are necessarily contemplative)
awareness perception absorption
attending to what's going on with self others relationships
breathing sounding writing movement play stitch words

preconference as transitional space
co-create collaborate transition together
deepen strengthen individual collective practices
opportunity to share collective wisdom
experiences practices insights
heartful connection

how do we speak?
silence wonder uneasiness
some solitude
practices sitting walking stitching
everyone offers a contemplation a reverie?
gathering embodying performing creative scholarship
what does *contemplation* mean?
(may be different in different wisdom traditions)

invitations call for offerings
what might they look like?
question quotation song music
urban setting walking moving
outside dress comfortably

call for contemplative co-creation of spaces for
silence gentleness wonder uneasiness

(found in notes from brainstorming/planning meeting with
Carl, Susan, and Barbara, and Artifact A)¹

We share with deep gratitude Part Two of this special issue of *Artizein: Arts and Teaching Journal* that attends to arts-based and contemplative practices in inquiry and teaching. Co-editing this two-part special issue entitled *An Arts-Based and Contemplative Pause*, has been a gift of co-labour that we have been transformed by. For as Lewis Hyde wrote so beautifully in 1979, “it is when art acts as an agent of transformation that we may correctly speak of it as a gift. A lively culture will have transformative gifts as a general feature.... And it will have artists whose creations are gifts for the transformation of the race.” (pp. 59-60). The 20 contributors to both parts of this special issue are part of a lively culture. Together with the authors and the journal layout designer Greg Wendt² we have co-created the ensuing two-part issue of *Artizein*, within the notion and practice of a gift economy that foregrounds love, gratitude, abundance, openness, and transformation.³

As we noted in the introduction to Part One,⁴ a vibrant group of approximately 50 artists, researchers, and teachers gathered together for a day-long pre-conference event in May 2017 in Toronto, Canada, as part of the annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE). The pre-conference was commissioned by the executive of the Arts Researchers and Teachers Society (ARTS) as an opportunity to extend and deepen conversations about contemplative arts practices; the event was planned and facilitated by Diane Conrad, Carl Leggo, Barbara Bickel, and Susan Walsh. Central to the intent for the pre-conference was the desire to create a retreat-like space-time for colleagues to gather in ways that felt nourishing, restorative, heartfelt, compassionate, and filled with love and care for others and for ourselves.

We trust that you, as readers/viewers/listeners, will receive the gift and enter the *pause* of Part Two and, in doing so, extend the gifts within each of us further and further.

Our introduction to Part One focused on how we remodeled in a contemplative way the peer review and editing process of the journal. In Part Two, entitled *Creating Restorative and Caring Learning Spaces*, we offer insights and artifacts from our planning process for the retreat, as requested by some retreatants who felt that the latter would be helpful for others who seek to transform traditional academic conference spaces: indeed learning spaces of all kinds. In doing so, we share glimpses of what emerged during our planning process through found poems from some of the artifacts of the latter: meeting notes, the call for proposals, emails sent to retreatants, some notes from the day of the retreat, and our outline as facilitators (see Appendix A). Throughout the introduction we weave these found poems as remembered moments that emerged in a collaborative planning space held by clear intentions for co-creating a restorative, caring open retreat (as noted above)--a space that expanded and grew ever richer as the retreatants shared their work online in advance of the retreat and then gathered together as co-creators for the event itself. In this introduction, we also comment on the unique--and complexly varied “Canadian”--context of this special issue. We then introduce the authors and their work who collectively comprise Part Two.

As editors, we have been entrusted to share in the creative process of writing and revising with each of the authors in both Parts One and Two of this special issue. We have come to regard editing as a teaching and learning process that is a form of gift giving, that is, in itself a receiving of gifts that enriches us all and extends outward. We have appreciated hearing from many of the authors that they feel similarly inspired! Throughout the fullness of our editing process, we have often unexpectedly felt and at other times consciously invited the presence of our dear friend, colleague, co-retreat facilitator, and co-editor Carl Leggo, to whom Parts One and Two are dedicated. Sadly, he passed from this earthly realm shortly after Part One of this special issue was published. Part Two is offered as rich soil left by Carl, soil that he composted with diligence and care during his more than 30 years in the academy (Leggo, 2002). We recognize the seeds of his teachings embedded in the writing of the artist scholars in this special issue. His generosity of spirit resounds, rebounds, guides and inspires throughout these pages.⁵ May we continue to cultivate the soil of transformation and change entrusted to&with us.

envisioning: creative collaborative space
respite restoration

gratitude for proposal offerings deep appreciation
rich experience heart wisdom
share all offerings in advance online: please read

contemplative and artful engagements
indoors and outside individually and with others
afternoon co-curated open space
sign up sheet to host conversations or
lead small groups in contemplative arts activity
not presentations participatory
and everyone:
please bring very short poem to share

in the spirit of co-creating
a contemplative arts-based space together,
Carl, Barbara, Susan, Diane

(found in emails to retreatants)

It is always a bit of a risk to plan a conference in a city you are visiting. As facilitators we gratefully relied on the ARTS Special Interest Group (SIG) preconference chair, Diane Conrad, to take care of the location and food arrangements. We (Susan and Barbara) arrived a day early to visit the space and to plan the set up for the next morning. Upon arriving at the space we found ourselves stepping out of the elevator into the centre of a beautiful open spacious room that was to be our retreat space. Simultaneously we realized that the quiet secluded sanctuary-like environment we had envisioned would not be possible in this open public space. Upon speaking with the friendly staff we found out that the large gathering room and kitchen were open and shared with members who might use it on the weekend, that two of the rooms on the same floor were booked for other events at the same time, and that there would be a move-in of a new organization taking place on that floor during the retreat day. When we expressed dismay that there was a contemplative

retreat taking place--and that furniture being carried through the space in the midst of it would be very disruptive--phone calls were made to arrange the move-in time for the lunch break with a promise to set up false walls in front of the elevator doors to keep some privacy.

We sunk down into one of the comfy couches, our minds racing on the edge of what felt like an imminent teaching calamity, took deep breaths and gave each other and ourselves permission to let go of the vision we had so carefully pre-planned for the retreat. This was an unexpected *Happening* and, as such, presented us with an opportunity to practice contemplatively and live creatively in the moment with open minds and flexibility. We contacted Carl, who in his calm and careful way assured us that all would be well, and went back to our dorm room to re-work the outline for the next day. Exhausted at the end of this long day we went to bed with the strategy to draw from our creative contemplative practices--such as ensuring group grounding practices during morning and afternoon transitions of the day, and to arrive earlier than planned for the set up of the space.

In the morning we awoke knowing we needed to be especially focused and grounded to hold the sacred intention of the retreat space, in what we now accepted would be a semi-private space for the more than 50 retreatants. Upon arriving with our two roommates we found the door to the building still locked and so spontaneously went to the park across from the building with a desire to connect with the land we would be spending the day upon. Standing in our small circle holding hands we took ourselves through a meditative grounding and centering ritual of calling in the four directions and supportive energies to be with us for the day-long retreat. Feeling clear and focused by this short ritual we greeted Diane and Carl who had now arrived and entered the building to begin preparing for the day. We met the facilitators of the workshops taking place in the other rooms and were happy to find that the workshops were in alignment with the spirit of our day--one on Indigenous perspectives and the other a therapist training workshop. Diane gave her attention to the kitchen and began the set up of food she and others had thoughtfully purchased to be nourishing and fresh, and we (Carl, Susan and Barbara) began creating small meeting nooks of chairs, tables and couches throughout the large open room. When the small gathering spaces were set up, Barbara went into the one enclosed room we had designated for large group gatherings and individual quiet space and began to lay coloured tape on the floor in the pattern of a labyrinth path: a creative task that is a meditative anchoring process itself of finding the labyrinth shape to fit the room: transforming the room into a sacred holding space for all those who arrived to walk and sit in its womb-like form. With Barbara still laying the path as people began to arrive, Carl, Susan, and Diane welcomed them. As people entered the space they greeted each other: new acquaintances were made, long time colleagues excitedly embraced, folks snacked on the breakfast offerings, and some wandered through the space, checking out the labyrinth room, and the outdoor patio. The retreat was beginning with an ease that was markedly in contrast to our initial distressed encounter with the space the day prior.

Music was woven throughout the day with Vicki Kelly playing her Indigenous flute to mark each transition, to assist the shift from small groups to large group, from individual contemplative arts practices to nourishment breaks, to the lunch and back again, and to the closing final gathering of the day. Diane was a steady cornerstone in the open kitchen area, a small central figure ever present, caring for any arising needs as she attentively watched over her colleagues throughout the day. Carl, having become familiar

with working collaboratively over the years with his two vigilant female co-facilitators, allowed us to take care of the details of the day's process and came in at his designated times in the outline. There were a few quick conferences between the four of us to make slight adjustments to the day's unfolding, but for the most part, the preparation and trust in the process and the openness and good intentions of those attending the day carried us all in its flow.

Numerous aspects of the pre-conference retreat came together to make it an event that those attending told us they would like to replicate in the future. To assist this, we offer an overview of qualities and aspects of the event that might shape future contemplative and arts-based learning spaces for conferences. First, a base of trust and willingness to flow with "what is" is essential for organizers. This can be supported by engaging arts-based and contemplative practices for short periods during planning meetings; starting the meeting off with these practices works really well. It is also helpful to have a commitment to one's own practices to draw from throughout the planning process and during the event. A combination of on-line conferencing, email communication, shared google docs where also part of our planning process.

embody and perform
creative contemplative scholarship as Happenings
relax into the day with all its moments
whatever arises
do so with gentleness
care towards
ourselves and one another
silence solitude space
walk labyrinth, sit, make art, write, walk outside, eat, pray
nourishment for your body and spirit
restorative reparative respectful
a space of retreat

balance group with individual practices
in the context of our own lives
the world living in chaos
not-knowingness
peacefulness, confusion and feeling lots is okay
notice that and
notice the habit worn ways
of doing conferences
encounters with confusion, frustration
it is okay to leave and go to another session
whatever unfolds is exactly what should unfold

(found in Artifact B, planning notes of Carl, Susan, & Barbara)

The conference participants were also able to prepare and connect prior to the day of the retreat. To encourage their preparation for the day, with permission, we made available all of the short collaborator proposals in a shared google doc. online and recommended that everyone become familiar with the offerings. We had more submissions and participants

than we expected. The submissions included a diversity of contemplative arts practices such as semiotic choreology, body charting, Miksang photography, Tarot card reading, meditation, and sounding. We did not pre-schedule presentations based on submissions, rather we worked with an “open space” concept, and on the day had a whiteboard with blank boxes and times, where those who came prepared and felt called in the moment to present an arts-based and contemplative offering wrote it into the schedule. This meant that some who thought they would present did so, and others decided on the day not to present. Making decisions on the day can be stressful, and we encourage giving contemplative practice time for people to make decisions prior to signing up to offer a “gift.” Given that this is an unfamiliar way of conferencing, as organizers we were required to have a fair amount of communication with participants in multiple forms such as emails, and verbal instructions.

For the event’s physical space we found that having a variety of areas available for the day (some created and some already there) was helpful: small comfy couches and chairs, kitchen table small group gathering areas, a balcony off the main room, a downstairs area with tables and chairs, an enclosed room with a labyrinth, a kitchen, and a park across the street. If people wanted to be alone, they could be, and if they wanted to be with others there where multiple spaces available. They could be indoors or outdoors as they desired. The day was premised on taking care of ourselves as a foundation. Having multiple spaces and reminding people that they had freedom to move as they needed, assisted in allowing self-care, and, we believe, expanding the capacity for co-engagement and learning.

To bring the spaces alive, the day included an open gathering time, a welcome and group grounding and small group *Lectio Divina* practice, unstructured breaks in the morning and afternoon, 15 minute individual contemplative arts practice times in the morning and afternoon allowing for individual integration of the experience, two 45 minute engaged workshop sessions, an unstructured lunch break with wide choice of fresh and healthy food supplied, and a large closing gathering. As this was the ARTS SIG pre-conference, after the pre-conference there was a short break and the annual general meeting of the organization took place. This introduction to the journal includes as an Appendix the outline we created for the day. We share this with a desire that more conferences co-created as restorative and generative spaces of learning such as this can emerge in the field of higher education and beyond.

day of co-nurturance
emptying ourselves to prepare to receive
connection with new people
receiving and listening
attending to one another
with open hearts

(found in Artifact B, planning notes of Carl, Susan, & Barbara)

This Two Part special issue was birthed after realizing that what was generated at the conference did not need to end with the conference. We invited all participants to submit arts-based and contemplative articles to allow them and others to dwell on the experience more deeply. We are delighted to have a total of 20 contributing voices extending the practice of arts-based and contemplative practices in research and teaching in this special issue.

“The circular nature of the process around the Medicine Wheel begins and ends with the centring place of inward awareness and contemplation”: this issue opens with Indigenous poiesis and *Vicki Kelly’s* offering of “an appropriate orientation to the world and to learning” that acknowledges reciprocal relationships with “all our relations.” With fragility and strength *Yoriko Gillard* offers up her tears that come from the oceans and rivers as a liminal space to reflect on painful emotions of the past and to contemplate giving service to society for a truthful future. Relationality, co-becoming and copoiesis stitch themselves into being through the socially-engaged art of *Barbara Bickel* where wit(h)nessing ourselves and each other leads us to known and unknown co-encounters within matrixial borderspace(s). The embodied ecological movement and poetic encounters of *Celeste Snowber* within a Botanical Garden lead us next into a place of deep connection with our bodies intertwined with the earth’s body.

giving is receiving
receiving is giving
breath - write - make art
connect with yourself

(found in Artifact B, planning notes of Carl, Susan, & Barbara)

We trace the journey from one country to another in the writing of *Arianna Garcia-Fialdini*, where a visual and spoken rendering unfolds in *Mi historia, My story, Mon histoire* as she drinks tea and reflects on her immigration experience to Canada surrounded by her immigrant activist art community. *Momina Khan* poetically and visually shares her Muslim call for *Salah* in her *Lectio Divina* practice entered during the pre-conference, also the first day of Ramadan, that is an “epoch of unbridled spirit tenderly wrapped in creative and contemplative ways of being present in the moment.” Music leads us next into a meditative inquiry as it is dialogically and playfully engaged between *Ashwani Kumar* and *Adrian Downey*; Ashwani ponders the learning, playing, and composing process of Indian classical music, in particular the raga. Within their dialogue we are invited to listen to the sounds of the harmonium at play. The Buddhist teachings of the lion’s gaze through the lens of contemplative filmmaking as conceived and practiced by *Robyn Trail* brings us full circle in this issue to practices that enhance awareness and perception. He shares two examples of his contemplative films, giving us the opportunity to enter and experience the moving contemplative process of the filmmaker. As an American artist scholar responding to neighbouring Canadian artist scholars across merely human-made borders, *Peter London* becomes the weaver of both Parts One and Two of the issue; his is the last moment of contemplation as he offers his closing reflection on this special issue of *A Contemplative and Arts-Based Pause*.

The authors of both Parts One and Two of this special issue of *Artizein* speak from what is a rich, complex, and diverse “Canadian” context of those whose academic work integrates spirituality and art; theirs are the voices of graduate students, school teachers, artists, university professors--emerging and established--all of whom share deep commitments to being, knowing, and not knowing through contemplative arts practices. They bring differences in spiritual beliefs, culture, and language to their work. They represent an array of citizenship perspectives; some are Canadian born, some have emigrated to Canada, and some studied in Canada and then returned home. They create art in different mediums such as film, photography, music, dance, writing, performance and textiles. We believe

that the retreat that spawned this special issue demonstrates the possibilities for intentionally co-creating respectful and compassionate spaces for conversations across difference and similarity. A sense of yearning for such spaces clearly emerged at the end of the 2017 ARTS pre-conference retreat day. At the large closing group gathering, we discussed the question, “What are we yearning for?”--as posed by one of the retreatants. In the found poem below, we close our introduction by sharing with you the collective insights that arose in response to the question. We hope that these and other words and ideas resonate as open invitations to co-create together more intentionally compassionate and caring academic spaces--at conferences and everywhere. May we learn to co-create and gift each other in ways that are beneficial for the wider good and for the earth.

“... with gifts that are agents of change, it is only when the gift has worked in us, only when we have come up to its level, as it were, that we can give it away again. Passing the gift along is the act of gratitude that finishes the labor (Hyde, 1979/2007, p, 60).

what are we yearning for?
more time more connection more love (be the love)
more days weeks that are nurturing supportive
personal individual time for contemplative practices naps
create what we want (do it!)

(em)bodied practices something physical
being outside soccer game hike
writing with community
specialist input to raise our skill levels
working across generations in intentional ways
conversations about building and sustaining collaborative
contemplative artful communities in academic settings mentoring
witnessing with&for one another’s work and being
understanding our responsibilities as witnesses

what are we yearning for?
to lift each other up affirm community
create open safe(enabling) structures
arts-based research in collective bargaining
arts-based research considered in promotion and tenure process
more full professors in arts-based research

we yearn
to relax and flow together
acknowledge generosity of spirit in others and ourselves
plan more time together

(found in the notes collected from the final whole group gathering, ARTS retreat)

Appendix A

ARTS Pre-Conference Outline 2017

A Co-Emergent Arts-based Contemplative Retreat Day
to Enter Radical Creative Possibilities

Developed by Carl Leggo, Susan Walsh & Barbara Bickel

Pre-conference Email to participants:

Invitation to attendees to lead an offering and bring any needed supplies for 5 – 10 people

Send: *lectio divina* chapter to attendees

Share link to all submitted abstracts with everyone

Bring: quote, comfortable clothes, and any articles or book chapters to share on contemplative arts practices

Bring: favorite short quote or short poem for a *lectio divina* practice

Bring: materials to work with on the day eg. art materials, writing materials, journal, musical instruments, computer

Email 10 people to lead a *Lectio Divina* small group process on the day

Prep & Set Up:

Visit the space the day before

Set up labyrinth (taped path on the floor)

Create a sharing space for eg. publications

Paper sheet on walls for afternoon session lists and for sticky-note responses

Print group process questions

Bring meditation bell

OUTLINE FOR THE DAY

Morning

8:45-9:00 - Participants arrive

Music as people arrive

9:00 - 9:10 - Land acknowledgement prayer

9:10 – 9:30 – Grounding practice – 2 – 3 minutes followed by 15 minutes

Individual contemplative (emptying) practice of their choice eg. walk labyrinth, sit, make art, write, walk outside

9:30 – 9:45 - Welcome - Vision for the day: a retreat space that is restorative and reparative and respectful. This is a pre-conference day not the first day of the bigger conference – a day to take care of yourself. What do you need today? Receiving and listening and attending to one another with open attention. Following a similar flow of the book *Arts-Based and Contemplative Practices in Research and Teaching: Honouring Presence* – being in the energy and moment of the day.

Explain co-curated offerings for the day

“chart” on the wall with places for people to sign up (throughout the morning and lunch), if inspired, to host a conversation or activity pertaining to contemplative arts practices. Number of spaces based on number of attendees to the conference (3-10 people in each offered session).

9:45 – 9:55 – **Pair sharing** Introduction of name and embodied response to theme

9:55 – 10:15 – **Introductions** in large group

10:15 – 10:40 **Lectio Divina practice***

Small groups of 4-5.

Engage a *lectio divina* together as a small group. Working with poems/quotes

10:40 – 11:00 – **Large group share insights** from the small group *lectio divina*

11:00 – 11:40 – **Small groups** (3-4 people) - discuss how the following questions relate to the offerings contributed:

What is a contemplative arts practice?

What does contemplation mean?

Why are contemplative arts practices important?

Write observations on sticky notes and contribute to group conversation (1 reporter from each group offering 2 insights that emerged). Sticky notes placed on a large wall chart so that ideas can be viewed by others throughout the day. People can take photos of these charts.

11:40 – 11:55 – **Large group sharing** of what came out of small group discussion on arts-based contemplative practices.

11:55 - 12:00 - **Contemplative practice** to transition into lunch.

12:00 – 1:00 **Lunch Break** – contemplative practice of eating

Food as nourishment for your body and spirit. Aware of how conversation during lunch is enriched by the food.

Afternoon

1 – 1:15 – **Group grounding exercise.** Transition to silent **individual practice** of an arts-based contemplative practice eg. walk, sit, make art, write

1:15 – 2 - **Small theme group 1** with facilitated offerings from curated morning. Go to station where you are called to engage. Session areas are numbered.

2 – 2:15 – **Nourishment Break**

2:15 – 3:00 - **Small theme - group 2**

3:00 – 3:30 - **Large group** – shared reflections on offerings from the day. Reporting back from different groups. Time limited sharing from each group. Note taker

3:30 – 3:55 - **Where to from here?**

3:55 – 4:00 – **Contemplative closing** – sitting in silence – sharing gratitude and appreciations

* Mesner, K., Bickel, B., & Walsh, S. (2015). *Lectio Divina: An invitation to readers*. In S. Walsh, B. Bickel, & C. Leggo (Eds.), *Arts-based and contemplative practices in research and teaching: Honoring presence* (pp. 20 – 22). New York: Routledge.

Notes

¹ The found poems in this introduction were culled from various artifacts that were gathered during the planning process for the ARTS pre-conference retreat (Toronto, Canada, May 2017) and also notes from the retreat day.

² For a 5 minute video about Greg Wendt's process of the layout design for this special issue of Artizein, see <https://vimeo.com/331273254>

³ See Introduction to Part One of the special issue for more about the gift economy (Bickel, Walsh, & Conrad, 2018).

⁴ Please see the full issue of Part One of this special issue of *Artizein* (Bickel, Walsh, & Conrad, 2018) at <https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/atj/vol3/iss1/1>

⁵ As previously noted, Carl Leggo was a co-facilitator for the 2017 retreat, a co-editor with Barbara and Susan of *Arts-based and contemplative practices in research and teaching* (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015), and originally, a co-editor of this special issue of *Artizein*. Carl passed from this physical plane in March 2019 because of cancer (see his writing about this in Part One of this issue, Leggo 2018). We and many others who knew him or were touched by his work and contributions to the fields of Arts-Based Research and Education continue to grieve the loss.

References

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