

Creating An Architecture Of Well Being: The Relation Of Wildness To Creative Intuition

LORI RYKER, PHD

The poet and activist Gary Snyder, who worked summers in the Sierran back-country, illustrates the experience of disconnection and the need to be connected to the world through activities in the world. Working on trail maintenance and simultaneously thinking about other things, he says, “I was reading Milton and I had some other reading, and I was trying to go out on the trails during the day and think about things in a serious intellectual way, while doing my work. And it was frustrating. . . Finally, I gave up trying to carry on an intellectual interior life separate from the work, and I said to hell with it, I’ll just work.”¹ Snyder is not suggesting that we give up on intellectual pursuits. Rather that we are intent upon things, one at a time. Concentration and focus upon one thing results in a type of meditation. A relationship is built out of the thing and the self. Discoveries are made while we create and become, experience and reflect upon being. Such a relationship requires full participation in the world.² Snyder recognized his own lesson for becoming the same summer he was working in the back-country. He calls it mindfulness. “It is very close to what I am thinking of, in a very obvious way, of the act and the thought being together. And in that sense, there is a body-mind dualism if I am sweeping the floor and thinking about Hegel. But if I am sweeping the floor and thinking about sweeping the floor, I am all one. And that is not trivial, nor is the sensation of it trivial. Sweeping the floor becomes, then the most important thing in the world. Which it is.”³ When Snyder gave up the modern propensity for carrying on more than one activity at a time, maintained by the separate activities of mind and body, he gained “something much greater. . . being completely there, having a whole language inside of me that became one with the rocks and with the trees. And that was where I first learned the possibility of being one with what you were doing, and not losing anything of the mind thereby.”⁴

The oneness Snyder speaks of is what Alfred Whitehead calls participating in the extensive continuum⁵ through creating/becoming; “the realization of events disposed to an interlocked community.”⁶ In such a process we return to a more primal state, we are “present in another entity.”⁷ The extensive continuum is the world the self is a part of, the cosmos.⁸ Whitehead claims that our creativity and becoming is one and the same. This is an important connection to make because it helps us to understand that the relationship of creating/becoming to the consciousness of being is indebted to the extensive continuum yet recognized through the individual.⁹ For Whitehead the participation in the continuum doesn’t leave off at the individual but involves societies. Each society develops unique cultural patterns that make legible participation in the extensive continuum, and defines their civilization.¹⁰ Each civilization is defined by its engagement in the qualities of Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art and Peace.¹¹ The full engagement of these qualities result in a harmonious, involved society participating in and “feeling” the continuity of the World. Engagement is defined by our sense and intent in activities through mind and body.

When Snyder is caught in the body-mind dualism, he is, according to Whitehead’s position, disengaged from experiencing the immediacy of the world and involved in intellectual abstraction. The disengagement of the mind from the body, the person from the experiences of the world, results in a “disjunction” from the extensive continuum and the loss of understanding why we are here at all.¹² Our “disjunction” with the extensive continuum leaves us without the ability to feel, to be “present in another entity.” Snyder’s dualism results from his experience of the “mode of presentational immediacy.” In such a state we rely on knowing the World through the limiting process of sense perception via perspective and spatial shape.¹³ This mode is articulated through the rational intellect and abstract reference. By employing only our rational processes and knowing the world primarily through abstract reference we disengage the mind from the body. Architects predominately consider the world through such a mode. As such, they develop their knowledge, perceptions and understanding of the world through this limited and disengaged process.

Although Whitehead could not foretell the type of manifestation,¹⁴ or the degree of this condition in our era, he anticipated modern Western civilization’s rejection of the cultural characteristics of Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art and Peace for what the philosopher David Strong refers to as heedless thinking, which encourages the consumption of “devices” that are built upon mind-body dualism. Heedless thinking is the consideration of the things in the world as a “mere means to some other and more important end.”¹⁵ This mind

set, Strong claims, does not recognize the inherent meaning or value of the thing itself. Heedlessness results in seeing nature, for example, only as raw material ready for use. This use of nature is dominated by a “framework of technology,”¹⁶ supported by a particular idea of “freedom and prosperity.”¹⁷ The “technological idea of freedom is . . . one of disburdenment,” while prosperity is marked by the objects of a “status symbol.”¹⁸ “The ironic consequences of this vision of freedom and prosperity can be” recognized in the “peculiar way technology transforms or, more specifically, dominates nature and culture.”¹⁹ Consider an experience of the Grand Canyon. The living condition of the Grand Canyon is brought under control by its limitation and reduction through the devices of guide books, pre-determined trails, tours and fixed view-finders. The Grand Canyon becomes a commodity to be consumed in finite instances: views from the North Rim, vistas out of the windows of the Bright Angel Lodge, and natural features pointed out by guides. The signs of prosperity from visiting the Grand Canyon are collected in post cards, T-shirts and other mementos. The compartmentalization of the Grand Canyon into separate things or events “disburdens” people of the need to discover the place on their own and experience its living condition. Strong claims that “[t]he ideal device is one where, from an experiential standpoint, a commodity can be enjoyed unencumbered by means.”²⁰ We enjoy the Grand Canyon without the means of personal investment or intent.

Devices dominate our existence these days; they are almost our entire reference from which we know life. The characteristic of the device is that they only answer to temporary needs, needs drawn out of our cultural alliance with utility, economics and mindlessness. Our deep and full experience of the world has been exchanged on a grand scale for limiting experiences such as Disney Land and the Mall of America. Devices result in “alienation” which leads to “disengagement, diversion, distraction and loneliness.”²¹ Devices are built upon one another, further separating us from the world, from reality. They serve to disguise the fact that we have fallen into endless repetitions of our learned cultural patterns. Although we see these repetitions as highly creative acts, they are more like nervous and insecure habits, like smoking. There seems to be no choice but to smoke, no other life than the one being lead at the time. We have sacrificed the defining characteristics of civilization for false securities, and in so doing are disengaged from the extensive continuum and deny our immediate and intuitive *being in the world*. Heedless thinking and devices cover over our need and ability to participate in and understand creativity/becoming.

Whitehead’s metaphysics focuses on the creative/becoming that occurs in a general organic process. His metaphysics develops the mind/body condition that one must be in to participate in universal becoming/creating, focusing more on universal interrelation itself, than the creation of an artifact. Yet, I find a strong alliance between the universal creativity/becoming that Whitehead writes of and the creative acts of an individual that brings forth an artifact. The alliance does not arise from the artifact produced from the creative act, although the artifact is important in another way, but the process itself. The process of creativity aids in an individual’s participation in the universal continuum, as a way of manifesting specificity; a moment in the continuum, and resolving the duality experienced between the creator and the world.

Before discussing how creativity serves to bind the creator and world together we must first understand from whence creativity originates. The modern era has been focused on the processes and individuality of the human being which has led to the claims of many characteristics belonging exclusively to the human species. One of these is creativity.²² I find this claim to be inaccurate. In its inaccuracy we are kept from comprehending how it binds us together with the world. Based upon the evidence of biologists, anthropologists and human ecologists,²³ creativity is not only a chief characteristic of the human species, it is a chief characteristic of all species and phenomena in the world. In order for creativity to be exclusive to the human species, it would have to be a culturally derived characteristic. I do not believe as Descartes did, that other animal’s activities are merely automated and the rest of the world is inanimate. Creativity does not grow from our self-referential existence, is not unique to us, cannot be developed from civilized laws, Cartesian methods or scientific processes.²⁴ In fact, our failure to recognize the origination of creativity causes it to be stifled by our constructs and the predisposition to abstract reference.²⁵ If we consider that creativity is a chief characteristic of the world, Whitehead’s metaphysics takes on its essential meaning, because the creativity of the world is a reciprocating process in which we all engage. We are not only bound to the world through our creativity but creativity provides for all of and in the world to commune through their making. Our origins in the world, before gaining civility, comes from our wildness.

What keeps us from recognizing and activating this creative potential in our era, is the primacy we give to one way of coming to know the world, namely, reason. Reason and abstraction pre-condition and limit our frame of mind. When our ancestors created 2,000 to 10,000 years ago their lives were spiritually and

biologically involved in the lives of other's, while their knowledge was not solely based in reason. Such a condition requires full investment in the moment and place. When we are drawn into an experience of the world without the predisposition of reason, we are fully merged in the moment, and we experience the ecstatic condition of "being present in another entity" as did our ancestors before us. Such an experience is only possible when we are not limited by the pre-conditioning of abstract knowledge, and the effects of devices. The artifacts that result from such a sense of the world are in themselves, a communion with the world, a means of participating in the world similar to totemic rituals where the creators become their creation. Experiencing such artifacts or natural phenomena without the abstracting limits of pre-text are part of the wild and living landscape we experience. Free from the deadening pre-telling of the thing through the abstraction of secondary references, we come to the moment on our own.²⁶ We are transformed by the totality of the experience and we recover a bit of something archaic deep within us, inspiration.²⁷ Adventure returns us to the wild and propels us into a creative state.

If creativity is not a chief characteristic of civility, rather a chief characteristic of the wild, then we create not out of our belonging to civilization but from our belonging to the world. Understanding the origins of creativity helps make sense of Thoreau's words, in "wildness is the preservation of the world." His concern for the preservation of "wildness" has imbedded in it the concern for the loss of origins. The wild, for Thoreau, did not mean wilderness or wildlife, although these places and beings embody wildness. Rather, wildness holds within it the lessons of learning, the inspiration drawn from adventure, the birth of creativity, not repetition. From knowing wildness we come to know the fullness of the self, all that we are and can become. To lose wildness in ourselves is ultimately to lose our place in the cosmos, to lose the ability to understand and appreciate all in the world. Wildness is something we grow further and further away from as we become more and more civilized.

Understanding the necessity of and conditions required for full participation in the world helps us to understand that the potential loss of wildness and consequently the demise of the World, is brought about by our activities made separate from the world, the experienced separation of mind and body and the perceived separation of humankind and world. We reduce the experience of the world's fullness through our own devices.²⁸ When we experience the world through fractured or disengaged relations, the value we are in search of are the norms our cultural conditioning has prepared us to appreciate, not the wonder of the experience we feel when rationally unprepared. There is no *adventure* in this pre-conceived condition, no "unplanned event, the encountering of risk, or otherwise remarkable event." What is emphasized is not the wonder of the experience, but the thing itself. The object of the painting, the object of the house in the landscape. It is the objects of the experience that modern civilization preserves rather than the experience. These static things without their context lose their wildness, their living condition.

If disengagement with the world results in our loss from the fullness of creativity/becoming, how are we to mend disengagement if we cannot return to the archaic indivisibility of the self in the world? How do we regain the wild in ourselves? The awakening will come from expanding our understanding of the world and the self from our current conceptions and engaging in the world through the full experience allowed by adventure. From this awakening our wildness will be regained, and creativity will come forth.

As I stated earlier, adventure is not a casual activity but has intent. It is not thoughtless or uninvolved. Intention brings forth the process of being fully in the world, not the object of the process. When Gary Snyder is invested in the adventure of cutting trails or sweeping a floor he is bound, mind and body, to an event, to a place and the world. We can discover the interrelation of the world by sweeping the floor, gardening, chanting, meditation, or drinking tea. Here again our immersion in modernity's abstraction fails to help us understand what these processes could mean. Yet the intentions, the mindfulness of these adventures, can completely transform our lives. Each can awaken our archaic past within us. Let me give evidence of these transformations. Snyder claims that "[w]alking is the great adventure, the first meditation, a practice of heartiness and soul primary to mankind. Walking is the exact balance of spirit and humility." It is "also a teaching of mindfulness and preparedness."²⁹ Consider Thoreau's stay at Walden pond, or walking in the Maine woods. He was well aware of the potential misunderstanding of why one walks when he wrote: "The walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise, as it is called, as the sick take medicine . . . but is itself an enterprise and adventure of the day."³⁰ The same activity employed to go to the grocery store can transform us when undertaken with the intent of adventure.

From Thoreau's adventure at Walden Pond grew *Walden*. From Snyder's adventure in the backcountry grew his poetry. The relationship between adventure and creativity brought together and manifest in an artifact is the link between culture and wildness. When the artifacts are collected and reflected upon a unique language of

civilization results and the dichotomy between wildness and civilized dissolves. From creativity is produced an artifact which can communicate the wild, the whole world in a specific thing. We can do our own walking, or follow Thoreau on his journey. We can hike into the backcountry or reflect upon Snyder's poetry. This is not to say that both experiences are essentially the same. In the former, we experience original nature, the world, directly. In the latter we come to experience the world through the artifact in its manifestation of beauty. The creator employing the unique patterns of a particular culture, draws from the immediacy of his or her creative intuition to create a thing. The thing made allows us to transcend its specificity to return us to the experience of the infinity of the World. Both experiences provide us with an experience of the transcendental character of the infinite in the finite.

Leonardo Da Vinci, at the dawn of the Renaissance, considered these two types of experiences. DaVinci found wholeness in Nature. Facts most often recognized as isolated measures he saw as "concrete beings and events . . . infinitely and multifariously interconnected and superimposed upon one another."³¹ While others of his time were considering what was *necessary* in nature, DaVinci and Galileo similarly concluded that "Nature is necessity."³² Drawing from this conclusion, DaVinci finds that poetry and art *have* necessity. He does not find art to belong only to truth and poetry to be mere fable or fiction, because he sees poetry as "a genuine and indispensable organ for the understanding of reality itself."³³ He finds that art and poetry are born from the necessity of nature, a condition to which the mind is a part. Through the participation of the mind a "basic relationship between artistic imagination and reality, and between 'genius' and 'nature'" arises.³⁴ What the artist communicates, he claims, is the "ultimate foundation" of nature. "True artistic imagination does not soar above nature into the realm of mere fictions or fantasies but, rather, seizes upon nature's own eternal and immanent laws."³⁵ The beautiful manifest in art, is the revealing of nature, "in its highest determination."³⁶ Beauty, if we recall Whithead's words, is one of the five characteristics of civilization. Beauty's "relevance is both to the constitution of nature and the products of a man-made society." Through the experience of beauty things contribute to a strength of "feeling the whole, and the whole contributes to the intensity of feeling the parts," arriving at the "perfection of Beauty."³⁷ The "ultimate foundation" of nature that DaVinci recognizes is not merely the various objects of nature but nature's process of the extensive continuum. What turns the Cosmos, the continuum, is Beauty, the manifestation of which we share with all species and phenomena.

Through the creation of second nature we have the ability to embody the ultimate foundation; the process of the extensive continuum. From the artifact beauty is manifest. The experience of beauty allows us to feel the interrelation and wholeness of the world, and return us to the wild. Thoreau wrote that to "discover" beauty "[y]ou have got to be in a different state than common." The "common" Thoreau refers to is the modern state of mind. The abstract, utilitarian, scientific and economic treatment of the world. The different state that he intended was the wild, the condition of unmediated feelings of the self and world. It is these experiences that are required for the engagement of our creativity.

DaVinci's insight helps to introduce us to the observations the human species has of nature, and how powerful these observations are when the foundation of the world is created through art. I will now turn to Jacques Maritain for an explanation of what powers are at work when we create. Maritain claims that "poetry and poetic inspiration's] primal source is our spiritual unconsciousness or preconscious." The spiritual unconscious emanates from the soul gaining its power through the filtering of intuitive information to the imagination and finally the intellect.³⁸ Although the spiritual unconscious involves the intellect, it does not participate in its "instruments of rational knowledge" and "the processes of production of concepts and ideas. . ."³⁹ Rather, the spiritual unconscious participates in another "kind of life" that is also "cognitive and productive" which "carries it along toward the manifestation of the creativity of the spirit . . . shaped and quickened by creative intuition."⁴⁰ The product that results from this creativity is poetry. Poetry, different from the product of rationality, is "knowledge in act"; nonconceptual knowledge.⁴¹ This knowledge that Maritain refers to is an "inherent knowledge . . . immanent in and *consubstantial* with poetry, one with its very essence."⁴² For something to be consubstantial means that the thing is formed directly into being from the poetic intuition, not formed by rational knowledge of things. Therefore, poetry does not come forth from rationally learned truths, but arises from the connatural (*with-nature*, in the transcendental sense) knowledge with the world. It is a thing from within the poet, connatural with his or her very being. In the poet creativity acts free from particular aims "for it only tends to engender in beauty."⁴³ In order for this condition to be met the creator, desirous of creating, grasps his or her own subjectivity in order to know. "For poetry means first of

all an intellectual act which by its essence is creative, and forms something into being instead of being formed by things . . .”⁴⁴ Yet the poet cannot know his or herself purely through subjectivity. Maritain goes on to say, The poet remains empty to himself if he does not fill himself with the universe. . . In other words, the primary requirement of poetry, which is the obscure knowing, by the poet, of his own subjectivity, is inseparable from, is one with another requirement - the grasping, by the poet, of the objective reality of the outer and inner world; not by means of concepts and conceptual knowledge, but by means of an obscure knowledge . . .⁴⁵

From Maritain’s explanation we can recognize that our current practices and the cultural patterns drawn out of modernity’s exclusive reliance upon rational systems for knowledge destroys our ability to “engender in beauty;” to come to poetic knowledge. The primacy given rationality negates the value and necessity of consubstantial knowing for creativity, and subsequently devalues the immediate experience of adventure, and the feeling of the world and the self in the world. Our architecture, devoid of poetry, is reduced to only the building of practical and specific aims. As such we lose touch with the transcendental knowing of the self, and the ability for architecture to be an “instrumental vehicle through which reality is grasped” is lost.⁴⁶

A primary concern of this paper is drawn from the question of the way we come to know, how we create, and how creating effects our well-being. Our exclusive reliance on logic and reason results in limited knowledge. Through this path, it was thought, we could find the definitive answers to the unknown in the World. The result, however, is quite different. The methods required of this knowledge fracture and separate the world into objective aspects and push aside the spiritual condition through which we become and create. The effect of this type of knowing is that we experience the world and our selves through only secondary terms of concepts and abstract reference. These terms, in modernity, have found their way into the objects we make, serving as the devices that further separate us from knowing and feeling the immediacy of the world, while we spiral further away not only from our humanity but more importantly our wildness, the resting place of our poetic intuition. Our lives and experiences are fractured and disengaged. Our days are full of stress, ugliness and hate. Across the mythical abyss from our constructions of abstraction lies another knowledge of the world and self that is felt simultaneously by intuition and grounded in our spiritual unconsciousness. The knowledge of beauty through uniquely manifest materiality allows us to know ourselves in the infinity of the world.⁴⁷

We can find our way again to this knowing. We start simply. By seeking out our own intent experiences of the world, we join the self and the world through adventure, and we regain our full sense of being in the world and awaken wildness, calling forth our becoming and creative intuition.

Notes

1. Gary Snyder, *The Real Work: Interviews and Talks 1964-1979* (New York: New Directions Book, 1980), p. 8.
2. Refer to Morris Berman’s book *The Reenchantment of the World* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 70. According to Berman through nonparticipating consciousness “knowledge is acquired by recognizing the distance between ourselves and nature.” Whereas participating consciousness is an “ecstatic merger with nature.” I believe that we cannot return to a reality that is only shaped by participating consciousness nor can we continue to live in a reality that is only constituted by non-participatory consciousness, but we must move between both to provide a grounding for how we are in the world. I call this balance full participation.
3. Gary Snyder, *The Real Work: Interviews and Talks 1964-1979*, p. 8.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
5. William Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion Eastern and Western Thought* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), p. 831.
6. Albert Levi, *Philosophy and the Modern World* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1958), p. 501.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 512.
8. The Greeks understood Kosmos, World and Beauty to be the same thing. See Frank Stewart’s book, *A Natural History of Nature Writing* (Covelo, CA: Island Press, A Shearwater Book, 1995).
9. Albert Levi, *Philosophy and the Modern World*, p. 503.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 520.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 525.
12. William Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 830-832.

13. Albert Levi, *Philosophy and the Modern World*, pp. 513-514.

14. Whitehead claims that the race was awakened into progress by a great deal of perfection. This ideal was an immense advance upon the ideals which the surrounding civilization had produced. It was effective and realized in a civilization which attained its proper beauty in human lives to an extent we have not surpassed before or since. . . With repetition in successive generations, freshness gradually vanished. Learning and learned taste replaced the ardour of adventure. Hellenism was replaced by Hellenistic epoch in which genius was stifled by repetition. . . For two thousand years the Greek art-forms lifelessly repeated: The Greek schools of philosophy . . . arguing with barren formulae: Conventional histories: A stabilized Government with the sanctity of ancient ceremony, supported by habitual pieties: Literature without depth: Science elaborating detail by deductions from unquestioned premises: Delicacies of feeling without robustness of adventure. (Albert Levi, *Philosophy and the Modern World*, p. 526)

15. David Strong, *Crazy Mountains: Learning from Wilderness to Weigh Technology* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 65.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

22. William Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, p. 147.

23. Paul Shepherd in his book *Nature and Madness* (San Francisco: Sierra Clubs Books, 1982) discusses this idea in relation to children's development.

24. Gary Snyder is keenly aware of the modern assumption of creativity when he writes of communication and language. In *The Practice of the Wild* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), p. 17 he writes, "[i]t would be a mistake to think that human beings got *smarter* at some point and invented language and then society. Language and culture emerge from our biological-social natural existence, animals that we were/are. Language is a mind-body system that co-evolved with our needs and nerves. Like imagination and the body, language rises unbidden. It is a complexity that eludes our rational intellectual capacities. . . without conscious devise we constantly reach into the vast word-hoards in the depths of the wild unconscious. We cannot as individuals or even as a species take credit for this power."

25. Edith Cobb and Paul Shepherd both dedicated their research to this concern. In different ways they identified the loss of creativity and confidence that was caused by modern culture.

26. This condition of deadening or "flattening", in the words of Charlene Spretnak, is characteristic of modern education. The teacher is the guide, the text book is the guide book. The goal is to ensure that the event or the thing is explained in a quantitatively measured way. Each student is to gain the same information, understand the lesson in the same way. Competency is measured in this way. Experience of the event or thing is denied and spoiled by the pre-telling- the conditioning of a particular expectation. The potential becoming, the transformative powers of the experience, is destroyed by the pre-telling of the world. We are in such a hurry to impart knowledge, for learning, that we miss the potential to become wise through the experience in the world. We lose the wild quality of the self in the world.

27. Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 13.

28. David Strong, *Crazy Mountains: Learning from Wilderness to Weigh Technology*.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

30. Carol La Russo Ed., *The Green Thoreau* (San Rafael, CA: New World Library, 1992), pp. 30-31.

31. Cassirer, Ernst. *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), p. 155.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 525.

77. 38. Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), pp. 76-77.
39. Ibid., p. 79.
40. Ibid., p. 79.
41. Ibid., p. 80.
42. Ibid., p. 81. Refer to p. 85 for a thorough explanation of consubstantial.
43. Ibid., p. 81.
44. Ibid., p. 82.
45. Ibid., pp. 83-84.
46. Ibid., p. 87.
47. Ibid., p. 88.