

Notes towards a pedagogy of be#longing: Rewilding art and design education

Item Type	Article
Authors	Poole, Simon
Citation	Poole, S. (2023). Notes towards a pedagogy of be#longing: Rewilding art and design education. International Journal of Art & Design Education, 42(4), 597-610. https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12487
DOI	10.1111/jade.12487
Publisher	Wiley
Journal	International Journal of Art & Design Education
Rights	Licence for VoR version of this article: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Download date	2026-05-21 16:33:17
Item License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10034/628202

Notes towards a pedagogy of be-longing: Rewilding art and design education

Dr Si Poole 

University of Chester, Chester, UK

Abstract

This article reflects on 4 years of research activities in the fields of horticulture and creative praxis. The initial project was a personal one and set out with a simple methodology of collecting, observing, and recording a specific genus of plants, that of *Mentha*. But as the specific question of whether a garden can, or should, be thought of as a work of art was raised it developed into an interactive, more-than-human dynamic between the researcher and multiple species. Ultimately, this led to a consideration of the positionality and interactions of the creative practitioner as critical, in order to develop a transdisciplinary praxis that explores the ecological and transformative potential of learning and healing through gardening. Through a reflexive narrative approach, the role of gardening in education, therefore, is positioned as an art and design praxis and as a partial remedy for several salient, contemporary global issues and challenges. A praxis that if not the complete remedy might at least help, in part, to remedy the damaging ecological experiences of adult and child learners alike, and as such, this article concludes with a provocation for teachers as artists and activists.

Keywords

art and design education, be-longing, creative praxis, creativity, gardening, horticulture, wellbeing

Introduction

The following article is an autoethnographic, reflective narrative. It begins from a position that, as Crouch (2007) argues, recognises research as a creative process (rather than a product), and that this constitutes new knowledge when framed

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](#) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

through praxis: 'that by framing creative processes in this way, the resulting research can then be considered as belonging to a community of social disciplines rather than constituted solely as self-knowledge, or self-expression' (p. 105). This is important given the interdisciplinary nature of the work. That said, this article is still personal, selective, and based on my own particular interests. Rather than trying to produce an empirical piece of research, I hope to foreground a creative process as a case in point and share the observations and notes I have made. These, in turn, open up avenues of possible future research, empirical or otherwise. All in all, implicit in the paradigmatic standpoint I hope to outline is that it has broader potential for development within art and design education and across the education sector as a whole.

The purpose of this article is to share my current study regarding the possibilities and limitations of gardening as a creative praxis, with particular connections to performative and visual arts. I am interested in how understanding this relationship may foster individual and collective transformation, promote an increased sense of mental well-being, and aim towards creating a more sustainable life. It may be of specific interest to and in some ways is addressed to, artists, researchers, and pedagogues dealing with the relationships between ecology, non-human relations, mental health and wellbeing, and sustainability (not sustainable development, which as Redclift 2005 points out is an oxymoronic notion). I am of the singular view, that as a concept, it has more relevance now, than ever, to everyone.

In order to understand gardening more deeply as a creative praxis, and one that should have a more prominent place within art and design education, I will examine it within the frame of the burgeoning theory of be-longing (Poole 2019); a proposition I first began writing towards for my doctorate, wherein I looked at the importance of developing a folkloric disposition within arts pedagogies. Central to folklore, the folkloric disposition I am advocating for, and the theory of be-longing, are the notions of 'community' (or any particular folk group), and that of 'place'. Be-longing is concerned with traditional culture and how individuals perceive their present place in their community, or indeed in the world, in direct relation to their ancestors and descendants, particularly when creating or artistically expressing themselves. It is directly concerned, therefore, with the connectedness one has to a place, socially, temporally, and geographically. The natural world and landscapes, or put another way, species, and ecologies, are necessary actors in this process.

Building upon these ideas, this article attempts to set an even more stable position in the development of the theory of be-longing, through the exposition of a creative praxis and its links to art and design education. As such, this article offers further notes towards a reasoned onto-epistemological position for be-longing and does so by considering the theory of biophilia (Wilson 1984) as an applied pedagogy within an art and design education context.

'Biophilia' (derived from the Greek words 'bios' meaning life and 'philia' meaning love), thought to have first been coined by the humanistic philosopher Erich Fromm, was popularised most vehemently as a concept by the eminent Harvard ecologist Edward O. Wilson, in his book of the same name (Wilson 1984). Wilson argued that humans evolved from an environment rich in natural resources, which gave rise to strong emotional attachments between people and their surroundings. This hypothesis has since been supported by numerous studies over the years demonstrating how our physical, mental, and spiritual health are linked to contact with nature or green spaces (Corazon et al. 2010; Howarth et al. 2016). Wilson

goes on to explain how humans evolved in a state of nature and have an innate tendency to connect with nature and living systems. He gives numerous reasons to evidence how we have an inbuilt need, a genetic need, to affiliate with other species.

This theory will be further outlined in a later section and is related to the case in point. First, however, I will first give some background to the particular praxis of gardening that I am drawing upon and then follow that with a methodological underpinning.

Mintopia – the case in point

Throughout my teenage years, I had a job as a landscape gardener, and to this day, it remains one of my favourite jobs. I was healthy, working outdoors, and was amongst all of the other species I lived close to, and had learnt all the dialect and standard English names for in childhood. After being a chef in Germany in my early 20s I developed a deeper curiosity for unusual produce to cook with. I became an even keener gardener when I began growing vegetables for our home kitchen on our family's allotment in my late 20s and continued to learn from other allotmentees, friends, colleagues, and importantly from my own family who have tended gardens in the same part of Cheshire, in the UK, for hundreds and hundreds of years, often professionally. Critically, my knowledge is traditional and was acquired not just by humans but 'all my relations'.

I would describe gardening as a solace for me, it's become a fascination, a way of relaxing, but a way of reflecting as well. It was certainly an activity that in no short measure allowed me to connect with my past, in the present. I find spending time in my garden extremely beneficial for ruminating over problems large and small. And as time has gone on, I've become increasingly infatuated with all the different species that I can grow in my small plot; constantly curious to understand their habits, preferences, and the different ways they flourish. Some years ago, whilst having a cup of tea on my garden bench, I was contently surveying the garden and thinking how I had now expanded my vocabulary to include the Latin names of the various plant species and was (admittedly self-congratulating myself) on the broad knowledge of gardening I had developed, but then I realised, I did not really have any depth of knowledge. So, I decided to choose a species, or genus, and find out as much as I could about it. Having a busy day job and family, I needed to choose a plant that would tolerate neglect, and one that would also be easy to care for. I chose mint, or *Mentha*, in the Lamiaceae genus for these reasons, but also because of its functionality.

I started collecting mint, and within a year I had about 10 or 12, another year later I had something like 50, and after several more years, I have now collected 187 different types of mint. In 2021, I successfully applied to become a National Plant collection with Plant Heritage (PlantHeritage 2023): an organisation whose principal objective is to maintain biodiversity.

The idea of 'Growing for Wellbeing' (Poole 2023) is central to what I do, and growing mint was again an apposite choice given how it is known, within the plantlore of many folk cultures, to be a healing herb, if consumed or even used in a sensory capacity. Obviously, we use mint in our drinks and food and so on, but even just brushing past it, can produce a calming, nearly soporific affect. All of this became particularly relevant when about 4 years ago, my dad died, it was a

difficult time for me, but what I did find was that I was spending more time out in the garden. It was a good place to reflect, it was quiet, it was still, and I found I was pottering more and more in the evenings. Looking back, I know the reason to be that it was part of my grieving process. I was going through what had happened and coming to terms with it and central to that was nurturing. And that nurturing itself was the healing quality that I needed.

In summary, after 25 years of gardening, I can irrevocably state something that may seem contradictory to the thrust of this article but is nonetheless vital to the onto-epistemological position I am advocating for: When I am gardening, I do not see problems, so, I do not therefore, see solutions either. Instead, what I see is a form of creativity that hinges on creating new knowledge not solutions. And I am creating this new knowledge collaboratively with other species. This new knowledge co-construction, this creativity, is to my mind, learning, and an approach to art and design education, of the most fundamental form.

Methodology

To provide the philosophical context and positionality for this article, and for the sake of ease, I shall quote two lengthy extracts from Castro's (2014) cannibal metaphysics. In the main because I do not think that by paraphrasing, that the depth of meaning would be conveyed adequately or as articulately as Castro manages.¹ Before I do however, I also wish to synthesise some thoughts from Atkinson's keynote speech at the 2022 iJade conference (2022b), in order to methodologically position the theoretical framework of be-longing, by which the gardening praxis in question, and its connection to art and design education, are being considered. Of particular relevance here, was Atkinson's foregrounding of pagan pedagogies (2022b) and his pedagogy of taking care (2022a). Both concepts are resonant with be-longing due to how they privilege indigenous epistemologies; this is a key point when dealing with folklore and in developing a folkloric disposition (Poole 2019).

Atkinson's (2022a, 2022b) and Castro's (2014) work connect indigenous epistemologies with learning, belonging and spirituality, and both highlight the importance of interacting with others and embracing 'otherness', in the development of these connections. The concluding provocation of this article relies on gardening being viewed as such an interaction, or perhaps more accurately as an interspecific dialogue. The following quote from Castro's (2014) work contextualises this dialogue and concerns the 'perspectivism' typical for Amerindian epistemologies, but which I propose could form an indigenous epistemology for many folk groups, if sensitively dealt with:

The ethnography of indigenous America is replete with references to a cosmopolitical theory describing the universe inhabited by diverse types of actants or subjective agents, human or otherwise – gods, animals, the dead, plants, meteorological phenomena, and often objects or artefacts as well – equipped with the same general ensemble of perceptive, appetitive, and cognitive dispositions: the same kind of soul. This interspecific resemblance includes, to put it a bit performatively, the same mode of apperception: animals and other non-humans having a soul 'see themselves as persons' and therefore 'are persons': intentional, double sided (visible and invisible) objects constituted by social relations

and existing under a double, at once reflexive and reciprocal – which is to say collective pronominal mode (=we). What these persons see and thus are as persons, however, constitutes the very philosophical problem posed by and for indigenous thought. (Castro 2014, p. 56)

The only aspect that I would perhaps develop from this initial positioning is the conflation of actors and actants, with the aim of dissuading any anthropocentric bias or agency. Castro's (2014) positionality echoes Atkinson's (2022a) forging of an educational spirituality that truly cares for difference. They both recognise pluralism as a natural state, and a strength, which can be harnessed and shared, in the case of Atkinson's (2022a) thinking, through a kind of 'Whiteheadian mode of differentially shared experiential knowledge' (Rousell 2022), and in Castro's, through an appreciation of non-humans as diverse and equal agents (2014). I would advance this synergy as a concurrently pedagogic and folkloric disposition, and one that finds further synergy in the recognition of the interspecific, political role and art that a shaman (Castro 2014), pagan pedagogue (Atkinson 2022a), or gardener in this case, might embody.

This embodiment is oppositional to the neo-liberal imperatives currently directing education; it is a disposition that, rather than embodying the non-conforming or rebellious individual, highlights the relevance of a folkloric onto-epistemology that can be 'found instead in the processual interstices of collective pedagogical life' (Rousell 2022). Each processual interstice is folklore-in-action. The embodied role is that of tradition bearer, interlocutor, and sharer of folklore:

The notion that actual non-humans possess an actual process morphic side is a fundamental supposition of several dimensions of indigenous practice, but it is only foregrounded in the particular context of shamanism. Amerindian shamanism could be defined as the authorization of certain individuals to cross the corporeal barriers between species, adopt an exospecific perspective, and administer the relations between those species and humans. By seeing non-human beings as they see themselves (again as humans) shamans become capable of playing the role of active interlocutors in the trans-specific dialogue and, even more importantly, of returning from their travels to recount them; something the 'laity' can only do with difficulty. This encounter or exchange of perspectives is not only a dangerous process but a political art: diplomacy. If western relativism has multiculturalism as its public politics, Amerindian shamanic perspectivism has multinaturalism as its cosmic politics. (Castro 2014, p. 60)

I would posit that a gardener might be thought of as active interlocutor, in transpecific dialogues and that gardening praxes are often (my own certainly is) rooted in an indigenous epistemology and folk praxis.² By folk praxis, I mean a traditional praxis that is orally learnt within a community, and that epistemological progress occurs inter-generationally and inter-specifically. All of which is critical in affording a cosmopolitical understanding in the sphere of spirituality: gardening within an art and design context affords an instauration of cosmicities (Atkinson 2022b).

The spiritual connection of paganism has recently been considered by Sonnex *et al.* (2022) when they used Ryff's theory of psychological well-being as a framework through which to explore the ways in which Paganism may be particularly

conducive to eudemonic well-being as a result of the flow experiences inherent in its praxis. This of course has resonance here, but it is the methodological similarity that I wish to draw upon. In a similar way to how Ryff's theory posits six key dimensions of eudaimonia which are then used as a framework, in the following section, I posit nine dimensions of be-longing as a proto-theoretical framework to explore the connections between gardening and art and design education.

In summary, the functional comparator of Ryff's theory, Atkinson's (2022a, 2022b), and Castro's (2014) concepts, and the 'All our relations' project, all provide methodological underpinning for this articles focus upon gardening's connection to art and design education. I propose that there is an intrinsic connection between creative praxes and ecological sustainability; that that connection is based on a genuine understanding of receptivity, feeling, embodiment, creativity, community, and being-with, and is concerned with notions that have historically been thought of as residing within the sphere of 'spirituality'. In some ways, the purpose of this article discussion is to reclaim that sphere and bring it literally down to earth, by raising the following question of personal and collective transformation as a simultaneously ecological, pedagogical, and performative praxis: How can gardening as a creative praxis within art and design education, contribute to the ecological education of tomorrow's learners and the urgent need for the transformation of human habits, behaviours, or axiological systems?

Gardening and art and design education

The relevance of this question will be confirmed in this section, and to a large degree is answered by the following nine dimensions. Primarily, this is achieved by underscoring how art and design and gardening are interconnected through their shared focus on creativity, aesthetics, and the arrangement of artistic elements, not to mention the common emphasis and critique of social issues (Adams & Hyde 2018).

Just as artists and designers create visual compositions, gardeners craft outdoor spaces by considering lines, selecting plants for specific colours, textures, and forms. Design principles like balance, harmony, and contrast influence both visual arts and garden layouts, resulting in visually pleasing and cohesive arrangements. Both fields also emphasise the interaction between form and function, as designs in art and gardening must serve practical and aesthetic purposes.

The following framework of be-longing through which these connections and issues are drawn together is rooted in my own praxis and folk culture, and should be considered a way of fostering a deeper recognition of the relationships between humans and the non-human world, way beyond mere appreciation; it is far more than a consideration of how nature inspires art, or how humans see themselves as observers or custodians of nature, especially in Morawski and Dunnington's unilateral sense (2021). It is an articulation of an indigenous epistemology, that could be of benefit to art and design education as a means of addressing the urgent need for transformation in education and possibly an educator's own praxes. At the very least, as partial remedies for a few salient global issues: the climate crisis (specifically the loss of biodiversity in most habitats, and climate anxiety experienced by school children); the deteriorating mental health of large numbers of differing folk groups; and to a lesser extent the economic decline of many nations (but specifically the UK). In short, it is a standpoint that could contribute

to the development of a more sustainable life, one might call it an interspecific, folkloric, paradigmatic standpoint. The nine dimensions are as follows:

1. *Creative process and critical thinking*: Art and design education often emphasise fostering creativity and critical thinking. Similarly, gardening involves planning, problem-solving, and adapting to changing conditions, contributing to a holistic development of creative and analytical skills. The place of critical discourse in gardening has also been much debated over recent years, as Summerley discusses in her 2010 article. The current flaw in its relatively recent emergence, however, seems to be that it is mirroring the same age-old hierarchical tension between craft and art. Opposed to this perpetuation, I would suggest that critical thinking is as important in a school garden as it is in the conceptual art garden of a stately home, and that from this paradigmatic stance, key points of criticality should include multinatural access and increased biodiversity.
2. *Design principles and garden layout*: The principles of design taught in art and design pedagogy, such as balance, rhythm, and proportion, find application in garden layout and landscaping. These principles guide gardeners in arranging plants, paths, and structures for visual harmony. This also incorporates risk-taking (Adams 2013b), gardening, like learning any art skill, takes time and a willingness to make mistakes. This is how human and non-human knowledge grows. Just as an artwork might be thrown into a skip as a first, unsuccessful attempt, a species might suffer due to a lack of something it needs, neglect, or simply other competitive, more vigorous, species dominating the dialogue. Both instances represent growth and learning.
3. *Materiality and sustainability*: Both art and gardening have an inherent connection to materials. Art students learn about different mediums, while gardeners work with various plants and construction materials. This intersection highlights the importance of sustainable choices, eco-friendly practices, and understanding the lifecycle of materials.
4. *Cultural and social context*: Art and design pedagogy often explores cultural and societal contexts. Similarly, gardening reflects cultural values and historical influences, as gardens have been shaped by different cultures throughout history.
5. *Environmental awareness and ecological theory*: Art and design pedagogy increasingly focuses on environmentally conscious practices. In gardening, ecological theories are applied to create sustainable and biodiverse landscapes, promoting awareness of natural systems and conservation. To offer a rationale for the importance of a sustainable and sustained praxis within gardening and art and design education: one might consider how gardens are vulnerable to weather phenomena, climate change and seasonality (the neglect of non-humans in this context results in a loss of biodiversity, or put otherwise, a decrease in the number of dialogic actors); and for art and design education, horticultural organisations are questioning how many other large organisations (including schools) are developing sustainability strategies to ensure the long-term recovery of nature within their sectors or disciplines (RHS 2021).
6. *Collaboration and community engagement*: Both art and design education and gardening can involve collaborative projects that engage communities. Public art installations and community gardens demonstrate how collaborative efforts can enhance shared spaces and foster a sense of belonging. Social validation and relational aesthetics are also important facets of creativity theory which is relevant to both art and design education and gardening (Bourriaud 1998; Cropley

- & Cropley 2008). Although somewhat anecdotal, most gardeners relish the opportunity to share their knowledge, gardens, hard work, and designs. This can be evidenced in National gardening schemes when gardens are opened to the public or even through the quintessential village fair vegetable growing competitions. For myself, social validation was realised by undergoing the process of becoming a National plant collection, but can also be evidenced by my desire to share my journey publicly through broadcasts such as *Garddio a Mwy* (Da 2022) or *Gardeners World* (Cropley & Cropley 2008; Proto 2022). This might also be understood inter-specially in a multinatural sense, by increased biodiversity and multiple species flourishing.
7. *Semiotics and symbolism*: The study of semiotics in art and design theory examines symbols and signs. Similarly, gardens often incorporate symbolic elements, like colours or plant choices, to convey meanings or cultural associations. In terms of expressing shared values and beliefs through creativity, this is another critical traditional aspect of be-longing. Abram (1997) can be drawn upon here for substantiation, for him, 'communicative meaning is always, in its depths, affective; it remains rooted in the sensual dimension of experience, born of the body's native capacity to resonate with other bodies and with the landscape as a whole' (p. 52).
 8. *Aesthetics and sensory experience*: Both fields prioritise aesthetics and sensory experiences. Art and design pedagogy teaches how visual and sensory elements evoke emotions, while gardening engages sight, touch, smell, and even taste, creating multi-sensory encounters. Abram (1997) again recognises the spiritual and wellbeing benefits of such encounters, especially between humans and non-humans. His view specifically contributes to how such encounters develop an individual and community's sense of identity.
 9. *Adaptation and change*: Art and design theory recognises the evolution of styles and techniques over time. Gardening involves adapting designs to changing seasons, climates, and plant growth, demonstrating the dynamic nature of both disciplines. A reflexive approach is promoted in art and design education, and it is similarly necessary when gardening (Naess 2008). There is always a need, for example, to consider the health of species in the garden, e.g., would placing a plant in a different location, afford it a greater chance of flourishing (a non-human knowledge)? This comes about through noticing, listening, feeling, revisiting, and reflexively building human and non-human knowledge of species from such activity. It is also recognised as a key aspect of creative praxis, within policy discourses, and by significant horticultural organisations (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Poole & Scott 2021; RHS 2021, 2022).

Overall, the pedagogical approaches of art and design, and gardening are intertwined, with shared themes of creativity, aesthetics, theory, and societal engagement that enrich individuals' understanding of the world around them. Learning to garden, like art and design education can be seen as a critical, dialogic, and reflexive process that takes time and is risky. If gardening is to be understood within the field of art and design, it must be understood as a creative praxis embodying these familiar dimensions.

The final sections delve a little deeper into the theory of Biophilia (Wilson 1984) to create an even greater contextual understanding of the final provocation and promotion of activism. This might be thought of as an overlaid theoretical reasoning to the aforementioned methodological foundation, which leads to the final provocation.

Biophilia

As this article focuses methodologically upon indigenous epistemology, it might seem correlational to discuss Native American or other aboriginal cultures in this context as holding biophilic beliefs throughout history; revering human connectedness with all things around us (Graeber & Wengrow 2021). But this would be disingenuous in terms of the culturally specific folk praxis previously outlined as a case in point. Instead, it would be more worthwhile to recall the Western traditions that have been side-lined somewhat as mystical, or worse, in this type of discussion, over the centuries. The notion of biophilia, although not explicitly termed as such, can be found as far back as ancient Greek philosophy when Aristotle wrote about the importance of living close to nature, indeed Epicurean thinking pedestals such thoughts (Okeefe 2014).

The notion was also prominent during the 19th century literary movement of Romanticism, where writers such as Wordsworth expressed a deep love for Nature through their works, promoting a focus on the aesthetic beauty of nature and the deepening of human connection with it (Wordsworth 1888). Through these and a variety of other historical and cultural praxes, including ancient beliefs in animism and pantheism, traditional forms of agriculture, and sacred and spiritual ceremonies, biophilia has remained a constant, if peripheral aspect of Western culture.

The notion has shifted over time as new research has emerged, leading to contemporary thought on biophilia distancing itself from romanticism or sentimentality focusing more upon scientifically grounded values such as sustainability and stewardship. In the 20th century, the environmental movement, and associated philosophical positions such as that espoused in the 1970s by Dr Arne Deike Eide Naess, through Deep Ecology and Ecosophy T (Naess 2008), helped to popularise the concept of biophilia, as did the modern architecture movement (Ulrich 1993; Pearce 2022), which sought to incorporate natural elements into the design of buildings. Today, biophilia is an important concept in the fields of architecture (Ulrich 1993), urban design (Pearce 2022), and public health (Sempik 2010). It also remains a popular theme in literature (Poole & Parkin 2022) and has been used to explain the appeal of certain activities such as gardening, hiking, and camping, throughout numerous domains, fields, disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary and cross-curricular activity (It's nice that 2022; Poole 2022a). Collectively, these various projects, writings and research undertakings popularised the idea of biophilia and helped introduce it into the mainstream consciousness.

As mentioned in the introduction it was Wilson (1984) who first popularised the term 'Biophilia', initially as a hypothesis. Decades later, and after multiple studies, current thinking like Suzuki's (Smelle 2017) attests, that there is no disputing that biophilia is real, and if only through the example of my own gardening praxis I can concur that human mental health benefits from being in the presence of other species; indeed, that we need to be (Corley *et al.* 2021). Suzuki (Smelle 2017) goes further than personal experience though, and offers numerous research examples that confirm how humanity's innate love of nature is reflected in the way people live. How folk in cities grow food and flower gardens and keep pets as companions. Other studies Suzuki (Smelle 2017) cites as evidence, include hospitals that have recognised how bringing animals into the Intensive Care Unit can help people in great distress, another discovered how even seeing trees outside a hospital window could help improve patients' physical and mental health. Indeed, the David

Suzuki Foundation conducted a study in Toronto, which concluded that the more trees a community has in its locale, the less their health care costs are.

Similar projects have seen 'reading' dogs being brought into primary schools to engage children with reading anxieties. Biophilia theory has also been used in many other educational contexts to foster a greater understanding of the natural environment and to promote the development of ecological literacy (Joye 2011; Thrive 2023).

Ultimately, what I found in my praxis, and what I am in this article advocating for, is an interspecific creative praxis, where any garden and its various species are actors of equivalent agency in the process of gardening. The kind of folkloric disposition I am arguing for, therefore, inherently considers and applies biophilic thinking, and consequently affords an insight into why creating in such a way is simultaneously beneficial for human and non-human health alike.

Call to action: provocation to teachers/artists/activists

In his later works, Wilson (2017), also discusses the shortcomings of the creative arts and humanistic scholarship that, to his mind, became more apparent in the age of STEM. He states how the disconnect with nature has resulted even in the outer reaches of science fiction presenting an extreme anthropocentrism, where nothing seems to count except for the impact on people. I would agree in part, but I do think this is a rather discriminating summation, given that the neoliberal research frameworks that such scholars are judged by enforce this type of reductive, impact-agenda thinking, and are created in the image of scientific research. Arts and humanities scholars may be complicit for the sake of survival, but I have never found consensus within the research community, on the contrary, to quote Mike Gunton, the BBC Studios Natural History Unit's creative director, teachers, artists and activists are finding: 'Creative ways of using nature's creativity to be creative' (It's nice that 2022). Nonetheless, I would agree with Wilson (2017) that one result of said shortcomings is that scholars and humans are left with little to compare, and therefore, to understand and judge ourselves by.

If, as Wilson (2017) states, the arts and humanities 'suffer from the following weaknesses: they are rootless, and their explanations of causation exist within a bubble of sensory experience', then it follows that these shortcomings would be needlessly anthropocentric and therefore weak in their ability to recognise the ultimate causation of the human condition.

Perhaps increased ecoliteracy and horticulture therapy, undertaken by learning art and design through gardening could remedy these shortcomings and weaknesses. The work of some research centres such as the Centre for Ecoliteracy (2023) are directly addressing these lacks via specific principles of praxis, for example, echoing the academy's renewed interest in 'belonging' – this is a critical facet of 'be-longing' – but while views in education are predominantly focused on quantitative understandings, metrics and measures that reduce important facets such as this – the even more critical facets such as spirituality will be left wanting (Atkinson 2022b). A failing given how such facets are acutely important, in how creative praxes develop a sense of place, a sense of connectedness, and a sense of worth. Especially so, when these are developed to form an intrinsic web for the cynosure of wellbeing (Csikszentmihalyi 1988; Poole 2022a). The neglect of these facets has led to the current crises within society and specifically within education

(Adams 2013a). Those crises mentioned at the beginning of this article are manifest side-effects of a neo-liberal agenda, which now appears to be a precursor to an increasingly illiberal, nationalistic, even fascist agenda (Petó 2023) (and the aforementioned shortcomings of the humanities and arts as disciplines). To reiterate, the crises are the climate crisis, including amongst other issues, global warming, a loss of habitat and biodiversity, and resultant eco-anxieties (Young 2023); a global mental health crisis, which has perversely led to the creative sector being leant upon to solve (which is also ungenerously thought of as a justification for the existence of the arts); and an economic crisis, due to a lack of sustainable and long-term thinking in organisations and markets.

Having outlined the onto-epistemological position of a case in point and demonstrated the synergies between gardening and art and design education. This article concludes with a call to action, or provocation. I suggest that the challenges that these three cosmopolitical crises currently affecting humans and non-humans can be met, by adopting the paradigmatic standpoint I have laid out; furthermore, that art and design education should not merely include gardening but foreground it as an essential praxis. That gardening is a critical creative practice, that can meet these challenges, and promote forms of optimism, to deal with at least partially:

- the economic crisis, by innovating beyond short-termism and resource depletion, through the acknowledgement that progress might actually be about ensuring a continued and balanced relationship with all species, for the betterment of our descendant's habitats, in short, by being not just sustainable, but generative; by being a good ancestor;
- the mental health crisis by affording all individuals the substantive freedom to undertake creative praxes which, in turn, would generate a cultural democracy that empowers individuals to achieve a self-realisation, and recognise their own agency within an interspecific dialogue;
- the climate crisis, by improved ecoliteracy, activism, and radical pedagogic reform.

As Don states nature is not something that happens on the television screen for humans to be in awe of, it is in our backyards, in our gardens: 'and the more that we encourage it, and learn to live with it, the more rewarding it becomes. Gardens have become the frontline of animal conservation and [combatting] climate change. In the last few years awareness of the importance of the natural world on human health and well-being has grown enormously, and the small but significant changes that gardeners can make, like having a small pond allowing grass to grow long, and growing plants for pollinators, have become mainstream' (Don 2020).

Teachers, artists, activists, garden with your pupils and students. Garden with your family. Garden with your colleagues. We can take back control through nurturing.

Si Poole is an Associate Professor of Cultural Education at the University of Chester; Programme Leader for the MA Creative Practices in Education; Trustee of the Mythstories museum; Co-director and Researcher at the Centre for Research into Education, Creativity and Arts through Practice (RECAP). His work currently focuses on cultural democracy; creative pedagogy; intercultural use of music; informal songwriting; and arts, and crafts-based initiatives. He has worked in 18 countries developing research initiatives and presenting interactive vocal performances. More recently, he has become the holder of the National

Plant collection of Mentha and is focusing his research on gardening as a creative praxis. Si is also Managing Director of Soil Records; Singer and songwriter with 'the loose kites' and is a published poet and author.

Endnotes

1. I am indebted to, and wish to thank, Prof Esa Kirkkopelto for introducing me to Castro's text whilst working with him and other colleagues during an eco-pedagogy project, entitled 'All our relations', in Eastern Sweden in 2022.
2. In this case, the collection and the praxis of gardening itself might be thought of as exponents of what Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen in their 1997 book 'Figments of Reality', would call 'extelligence'.

REFERENCES

- Abram, D.** (1997) *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books – A division of Random House Inc.
- Adams, J.** (2013a) The artful dodger: creative resistance to neo-liberalism in education, *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 242–55.
- Adams, J.** (2013b) Finding time to make mistakes, *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 2–5.
- Adams, J. & Hyde, W.** (2018) The critically designed garden, *The International Journal of Art and Design Education*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 348–52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12195>
- Atkinson, D.** (2022a) *Pedagogies of Taking Care: Art, Pedagogy and the Gift of Otherness*. Forlag: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Atkinson, D.** (2022b, Friday 11–Sunday 13 November 2022) Remarks on the strategic experimentation of belonging and the instauring of cosmicities [Keynote]. *International Journal of Art and Design Education Conference – Belonging*.
- Bourriaud, B.** (1998) *Relational Aesthetics* (S. Pleasance & F. Woods, Trans.). Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.
- Castro, E. V.** (2014) *Cannibal Metaphysics* (P. Skafish, Ed. & Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt17xr4vt>
- Center for Ecoliteracy.** (2023) *Center for ecoliteracy – who we do*. Center for Ecoliteracy. <https://www.ecoliteracy.org/about> [Accessed 15th June 2023]
- Corazon, S. S., Stigsdotter, U. K., Jensen, A. G. C., & Nilsson, K.** (2010). Development of the nature-based therapy concept for patients with stress-related illness at the Danish Healing Forest Garden Nacadia. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture*, 20.
- Corley, J., Okely, J. A., Taylor, A. M., Page, D., Welstead, M., Skarabela, B., Redmond, P., Cox, S. R. & Russ, T. C.** (2021) Home garden use during COVID-19: associations with physical and mental wellbeing in older adults, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Vol. 73, 101545.
- Cropley, A. & Cropley, D.** (2008) Resolving the paradoxes of creativity: an extended phase model, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Vol. 38, No. 3, pp. 355–73.
- Crouch, C.** (2007) Praxis and the reflective creative practitioner, *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 105–14.

- Csikszentmihalyi, M.** (1988) Society, culture, and person: a system view of creativity, in R. J. Sternberg [Ed] *The Nature of Creativity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 325–39.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M.** (1996) *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Da, C.** (2022) Mintopia. *Garddio a Mwy S4C*.
- Don, M.** (2020) *My Garden World: The Natural Year*. London: Two Roads.
- Graeber, D. & Wengrow, D.** (2021) *The dawn of everything: a new history of humanity* [audiobook]. Allen Lane [Audible]. https://www.audible.fr/pd/The-Dawn-of-Everything-Livre-Audio/0241539900?qid=1673191270&sr=1-1&ref=a_search_c3_lProduct_1_1&pf_rd_p=f20cf038-cbbb-4fa0-adfe-62ed184d8867&pf_rd_r=CVBQCY89QP4A1DK1QJ56&pageLoadId=ERKclC4o04eMzo3k&creativeld=41e85e98-10b8-40e2-907d-6b663f04a42d
- Howarth, M. L., McQuarrie, C., Withnell, N. & Smith, E.** (2016) The influence of therapeutic horticulture on social integration, *Journal of Public Mental Health*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 136–140. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMH-12-2015-0050>.
- It's nice that.** (2022) Rewilding creativity. BBC. https://www.itsnicethat.com/features/rewilding-creativity-bbc-earth-art-media-partnership-101022?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=intpaid&utm_content=bbcearth_rewilding_creativity [Accessed 30th May 2023].
- Joye, Y.** (2011) Biophilic design aesthetics in art and design education, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 17–35.
- Morawski, C. & Dunnington, C.** (2021) Biophilia and visual art education: two teachers narrate their own connections, *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, Vol. 22, No. 9. <https://doi.org/10.26209/ijea22n9>
- Naess, A. D. E.** (2008) *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (D. Rothenberg, Ed. & Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Okeefe, T.** (2014) *Epicureanism*. London: Routledge.
- Pearce, B.** (2022) What your gardens contribute to ecosystem services, *The Organic Way*, No. 232, pp. 24–5.
- Pető, A.** (2023) *Teaching and Writing the Truth Today: Five Options Living Uncertainty*. Brno: Czech Republic.
- PlantHeritage.** (2023) *Share our passion for saving garden plants*. Plant Heritage. <https://www.plantheritage.org.uk/> [Accessed 15th June 2023].
- Poole, S.** (2023) Mintopia. www.mintopia.org [Accessed 15th June 2023].
- Poole, S. & Parkin, H.** [Eds] (2022) *It Means the World to Us*. Chester: Chester Academic Press.
- Poole, S. & Scott, C.** (2021) National arts and wellbeing policies and implications for wellbeing in organisational life, in T. Wall, P. Brough & S. C. Cooper [Eds] *The SAGE Handbook of Organisational Wellbeing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 282–300.
- Poole, S. E.** (2019) *Living and learning through song* [Text and Song, University of Chester].
- Poole, S. E.** (2022a) *Pen-y-Graig Woodland Centre Final Evaluation Report of a Welsh Government Pilot Programme*. Storyhouse: Pen-y-Graig Woodland Centre.
- Poole, S. E.** (2022b) *Reaching Survivors Project Final Evaluation Report: For Chester Sexual Abuse Support Service (CSASS)*. Storyhouse: CSASS.
- Proto, P.** (2022, 07/10/2022) Mintopia episode 29. Gardener's world. BBC.
- Redclift, M.** (2005) Sustainable development (1987–2005): an oxymoron comes of age, *Special Issue: Critical Perspectives on Sustainable Development*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 212–27.
- RHS.** (2021) *RHS sustainability strategy: Net positive for nature and people by 2030: planet friendly gardening campaign, the rhs and gardeners tackling the climate and biodiversity crisis together*. RHS.

RHS. (2022) Bringing wellbeing projects to life, *The Garden*, Vol. 147, No. 7, p. 87.

Rousell, D. (2022) *Review of Atkinson (2022) pedagogies of taking care: art, pedagogy and the gift of otherness*. Bloomsbury. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/pedagogies-of-taking-care-9781350288324/#:~:text=In%20Pedagogies%20of%20Taking%20Care,all%20his%20most%20recent%20books>

Sempik, J. (2010) Green care and mental health: gardening and farming as health and social care, *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 15–22.

Smelle, N. (2017) Dr. David Suzuki Talks Biophilia – Niagara Falls – May 12th, 2017. YouTube.

Sonnex, C., Roe, C. A. & Roxburgh, E. C. (2022) Flow, liminality, and eudaimonia: pagan ritual practice as a gateway to a life with meaning, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 233–56.

Summerley, V. (2010, Tuesday 6 July) Can a garden be a work of art? *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/property/gardening/can-a-garden-be-a-work-of-art-2019127.html>

Thrive. (2023) Using social and therapeutic horticulture in mainstream and special schools for children and young people with SEND. *The Society for Horticultural Therapy*. <https://www.thrive.org.uk/get-training/courses-and-workshops/using-social-and-therapeutic-horticulture-within-mainstream-and-special-schools-for-children-and-young-people-with-send> [Accessed June 15 2023]

Ulrich, R. S. (1993) Biophilia, biophobia, and natural landscapes, in S. Kellert & E. Wilson [Eds] *The Biophilia Hypothesis*. Washington: Island Press/Shearwater Books, pp. 73–137.

Wilson, E. O. (2017) *The Origins of Creativity*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Wilson, E. O. (1984). *Biophilia*. Cambridge University Press.

Wordsworth, W. (1888) *The excursion*. Macmillan & Co. <http://www.earthworks.org/sublime/Wordsworth/index.html>

Young, H. (2023) *How to Support Students with Eco-Anxiety*. National College. <https://nationalcollege.com/webinars/support-students-with-eco-anxiety#description> [Accessed 15th June 2023]