

# *“Nothing’s Gonna Change My World”: A Conversation About Early Childhood Education*

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## **Abstract**

A conversation.

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The language and imagination of education seems, once again, to be profoundly stuck. The whole living field of education, in all its articulations, seems to be caught in an age-old movement of retrenchment, back into patterns of fragmentation, surveillance, and paranoia. The whole of education seems caught in “measuring and controlling” (Gadamer, 1994, 191), for such ways and means seem to provide an albeit false sense of security. Even in those many classrooms where courageous, intellectually vigorous, and adventurous work is being done, even there, there hangs this shadow. We need joy under this penumbra. We need companions with whom to break bread.

Understand “meditation” as it is explained in Dharmamitra’s *Clear Words Commentary (Prasphuta-pada)*:  
“Meditating” is making the mind take on the state or condition of the object of meditation.

(Tsong-kha-pa, 2000, p. 111)

Catalina Baeza Hidalgo is an early childhood teacher and educator. David Jardine had a similar job before his retirement in 2015. This conversation began as seen below. It is a testament to how, in the grand structures of

education, “things” haven’t changed much— both the troubles we face and the deep camaraderie that can arrive out of the blue. It is a testament to how teachers can, and do, break through the “bureaucratic teaching and learning systems” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 59) we have all inherited.

We’ve edited this conversation for clarity. We have also added footnotes in the conversation itself, because it is full of direct or indirect references or allusions to academic work that has sustained the authors. This work can help provide Early Childhood Educators with language, images, ideas and companionship in their (and our) efforts to do rich, pleasurable work inside the classroom and outside it as well.

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*Catalina:* You might find this email surprising. However, you have walked alongside me throughout my practices as an educator. I am enjoying your book, *Ecological Pedagogy of Joy*. (Latremouille et al., 2024)

In my teaching practices, especially in these times, I invite experiences that could reveal something about the students themselves. We engage in body practices. We walk, paying attention. We sing. We tell stories. However, when articulating meaning (as required in academic settings), many Early Childhood Educators tend to resort to a lack of complexity. Then, when it comes to practice, they freeze.

The Early Childhood field doesn’t seem to change at all. When I visit centers, educators are physically exhausted, moving from task to task with little time to pause. As you’ve always mentioned, there’s no movement to see beyond time and schedules. Scarcity prevailing. There is no moving field, just pure stagnation.

This brings me to a question: *What is necessary to see the complexity that lives under the obvious?* Responsibility and care, walking the talk, sense of volition? We keep missing the child. We keep doing the same old things. Pressure is always in the background.

There is no ecology of joy, although I can see the abundance and exuberance present—no recognition of Eros. I want my students to move past these “same old things.”

I am excited to hear your thoughts on this, but only if you have a second in your life.

*David:* What a lovely and important note. Seeing the complexity that lives. Many adults have become vaguely anaesthetized, myself included at so many times. And, given how we are so inundated these days, this makes sense. But this preys on itself and only increases, as you've witnessed. Pleasure, beauty, ek-stasis, and affectionate creation; these, I think, are pathways. More simply put, the immediacies of enjoyment. We adults, we teachers, hearing the crackle of snow under our boots and me taking my grandsons around and looking for crackle spots. Enjoining. Watching the melting waters run down the driveway, cutting rivulets with sticks, and putting the word "rivulet" up on a piece of paper— not "teaching" it, just "enjoying" it— and showing my grandsons that I noticed it and stopped over it.

The thing about the exhaustion you noted is that it feeds on itself and becomes self-enclosed and self-confirming. And I’m sad to say, this is, in part, *deliberately* done to disempower. The work of working against it is not to fight it, but to outsmart it. And that means, talking with others about things in this world that are smart enough to outsmart the dullness.

I recall teaching ECE and putting large posters on the wall above a small table with two chairs

facing the wall. The posters would look something like this:



The table would have paper and pencils, coloured and otherwise, and I would just leave it and let it work. Now the trick is this: my student teachers would go over to such tables and ask the kids about their drawings. I would always encourage them to go back and meditate *themselves* on the picture itself, because these moments are not just kids drawing, but kids, in front of a rather astounding picture, of an astounding animal with all that erupts around it if you let it.

As to your email, this means that *my* job is to become entranced by these [or whatever] pictures *myself*. I must allow myself to love this picture and be entranced by it. Joy!! I've found myself with graduate classes full of practicing teachers,

where part of our job is almost therapeutic, trying to exercise in each other the entrancing character of things. The "aesthesis" of things lends itself to lovely articulations of multiple meanings, descriptions, questions etc., so that the wall between 'academic' expectations and aesthetic involvement becomes irrelevant— that wall itself is an old, false canard.

This, I think, is the “rescuing” that is needed: going into an exhausted classroom and setting up something aesthetically attractive, quiet, and pleasurable, and just enjoying it; and, of course, on the side, listening, and even taking notes. Being able to say to one parent, "Your child talked about how this mother bear had babies nearby and was protecting them." And “Your child kept drawing ‘claws and claws and claws’; that’s what she said.” We must be able to say repetition of this sort is a real breakthrough with young children; like my grandson talking about something very, very, very, very, large. We splendour in the child’s repetition *and* we know about it for the parent’s information.

And then later, of course, have the whole class sit with you and write down everything they say.

We know that doors and windows start to open when you do this, but I, as an adult, must first go inside my own blockage, let them go, and allow the picture to take precedence. Let the clumps of moss I brought into the classroom and the butter knives I’ve distributed to dissect them take precedence. They will teach, they will smell, and if I note that smell, that is profoundly aesthetic and *intellectually* opening, creating my own insides anew.

*Catalina*: Beauty, indeed. What speaks to the creator part of us? It is who we are (it sounds a bit Biblical, but we are), an aspect that we all carry but has been dormant, conditioned, and dulled by the system.

The joy that arises from that moment when you create is the same joy we tend to take away from children, when they become recipients instead of creators. Thank you. I don't have enough words to express my gratitude for your generosity. Knowing that we have scholars/thinkers/creators who are enlightened and walk the talk with such a humble and beautiful pace makes me smile. I am attaching photos of children's work at an early childhood center. They were making snowflakes. It's a classic craft that tends to be reproduced over and over.

When I arrived at the center to visit one student, the children looked at me and asked: Who are you? (I am still working on that one or trying to work less on that one.) And then, they asked: What is your name? I answered, CAT-A, as in CAT, and then you add an A.

They dropped their snowflake craft and started to create a world for CAT-A. With the same paper, glue and scissors. With such loving attention, they created couches, boats, siblings, rocket ships, and playgrounds so that CAT-A had a home. This is basically all that is needed for the end of the world:



*David:* Ah, yes, Cat-a. Just pondering why, we sometimes almost ask “How shall I call you?” Or “How are you called?” (Jardine, 2024a) Isn’t that something? What shall we call the bear? These cuts and pastes? The teacher? Names as summoning something. This is an old and amazing superstition that is all over the place in fairy tales we tell young children. And more contemporary tales, too. Beetlejuice!

And yes, it does sound Biblical. We create God in our own image, and apparently, He creates us in His own image to be creators. I don’t *believe* either one of these, but I fully concede that we humans have repeatedly sorted and re-sorted our way through these slipstreams. Creating is so ephemeral, if you try to get a hold of it, it seems otherworldly sometimes. Words sometimes seem to appear out of nothing and nowhere and ask for some composing.

Inside those stuffed classrooms, there is little room for such considerations. They will seem unrealistic, time consuming, etc. and these teachers are not alone in feeling trapped in this way. And they are not trapped. To quote David Loy, “we have bound ourselves without a rope” (Loy, p. vii) and the systems we are in are glad that that is what we believe. It makes us exhausted and compliant.

That system *can* be outsmarted, for our sake, for our children’s sake, and for the sake of the mosses and the bears and the paintings and the dependent co-arising of this lovely world of ours. Not gigantically, not once and for all, not in every case. But those hands in that puddle prove something. My grandson drawing a piece he called “Bear Claws” proves something small and repeatable:

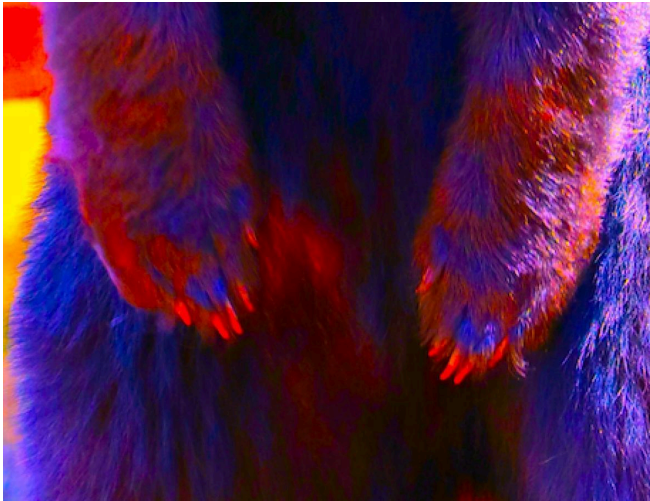


“Bear Claws”  
Atherton Jardine

I don't find that there is any *real* division between the "academic stuff," properly handled, and the aesthetic walk around in the world, even though that division can happen with some university classes. I think of a teacher inviting a locale botanist into the classroom to talk about the stagnant water in an area visited by the students, and its smells and its green scums and its various colours and how the teachers had to help the students write a letter to this person (letter writing is in the curriculum guide). So, they had to talk about what a good letter would include and sound like, and compose it and edit it and check the spelling and gather around it and send it and wait and read the response...all these are 'curriculum requirements' that get taken up in a living situation.

I have simply accustomed myself to the knowledge that every one of these considerations, every “topic” will bear fruit *if you go there*. Even the word "consideration" has hidden roots which means with [com-] with the stars [sidereal]. Under that sort of guidance, there is a lovely metaphorical inheritance we drag along with us and never really notice. When I first discovered this (rather recently, actually), I nearly gasped for joy, just like with the blast of stagnant water smell. Hah!

Fruiting bodies indeed! Here's a photo treatment I did in response to the Bear Claws drawing. Purple is his favourite color:



So, is this academic or aesthetic? Our talk of bears rising out of hibernation (around these parts, they migrate uphill into the foothills). We don't have to choose one or the other. That is the world we inhabit, full of these bristling relations *of all sorts*. Nothing we encounter is self-contained. The details of how hibernation works with all their rigorousness is itself a bristling field of relations, ideas, measures, and so on. So, aesthetics, properly handled and allowed its proper summons, make the marks on standardized tests go up (Friesen, 2010) as long as you don't treat those walks, smells, questions, sights, and sounds trivially and touchy-feely-gossipy, but as profound openings into the wisdoms of the earth.

That exhaustion you've experienced in so many folks; there is a whole range of literature that accounts for that experience in education as being a deliberate outcome of the efficiency movement and its fragmentation of our lives as educators (Friesen & Jardine, 2009). Kevin Aho (2018) even wrote a paper (Jardine, 2024b) about a book from the 1880s (Beard, 1881) that identified the course of "[then] modern living" (Aho, 2018, p. 2) as leading to what was called *neurasthenia*:

basically, the mind-numbing effects of ways of living that, I think, are directly related to the fragmentation and have been insinuated into schools and have made this situation even worse. The loss of abundance (Jardine et al., 2006, foreword by Pinar); Jardine 2017). The loss of joy in that abundance.

*Catalina:* Today I realized, when children are offered an unformed material, like clay placed in the center of a room, the more the unformed (the thinking process) tends to form in interesting ways. Too often and too easily, we do the total opposite in early childhood and education in general; we put a little chunk of clay in an individual tray paired with little pre-shaped cutters, thus compartmentalizing the thinking in advance.



David Bohm (2020) points out, knowledge grooves and compartments are a form of distortion. They hold you rigidly fixed, and lead to self-deception in the long run (e.g., schoolwork,

tasks, habits). An insight would be the opposite of this.

I'm sorry for the rant. I am thinking about categories /polarities.

A few days ago, an educator with children in the forest asked, "Do you think this tree is dead or alive?" I couldn't help but sigh.

*David:* Yes! Even though it might sound strange at first, the thinking can be formed by the clay as the children form the clay, just like this writing, here, shapes my own way as I shape it. The clay will teach their hands as the hands form the clay—will resist, push back, shape up, and become, look! A bear! Or it will simply flow and meld under my hands and that by itself can be enough.

Regarding the too easy thing of “dead or alive?” I just think for a moment how much consideration it takes for *me*, as an adult, who has considered this more than once, to *actually experience* that trees are alive, that they are cascading to me the very sort of air I need to live. And then me, out splitting wood for next winter for the wood stoves, the lines of grain, the rings, the dryness, the smells.

That educator's question is *almost* a good one, but it is too big, too clunky, too unconsidered. They need to let themselves experience this aliveness for themselves and, while we're out for a walk, put my hand against a tree and declare this experience of mine: This tree is alive! Let children experience *us* as beings who experience this world in exuberant, pleasurable ways, even if we have trouble with that original question.

As is my tendency, I'm thinking about the word “appropriate” and how we wrestle with this as educators. Questions can be *out of proportion*, ungainly, unmeasured by a good sense of the matters at hand and of those discussing that

matter. We have this funny responsibility as teachers, to measure well what we do and those around whom we do it, with an eye to their moving out into these matters themselves and making something of what is happening...such an interesting knife edge sometimes. And that we adults, having considered the matter ourselves, are full of affection for trees and their living.

As you know, there is no exact set of rules here. Trees and their aliveness—these are beautiful and overwhelming.

*Catalina:* This is great. But I am a bit weary of all the words that accompany current educational discourses, like 'interconnection,' 'togetherness,' and other terms that sound beautiful but don't quite land for some reason. Sometimes, I can sit and, perhaps now and then, get into a place that is rich and abundant in presence. But in education, it's hard to really get to the heart of the matter, where ecological thinking should not just sit on paper or get lost in flowery language. Paying attention, as you said, to particularities is a practice.

We often engage in academia with complex theories but often forget the simple act of greeting one another. Let's return to practices of kindness. Back to the basics (Jardine et al., 2008).

*David:* Occasionally, we may happen upon the fruiting bodies of this living, subterranean entanglement (if we live, or make time to go, or are taken to the places where fungi still bloom, and if we pay attention) and only then do we become aware of the vibrant webwork beneath us and, perhaps, if our earthly connection has not been severed or schooled out of us, we are reminded of the interdependent ethos of a “humus filled” existence. (Derby p. 18).

Just a lovely passage from Michael Derby, and a reminder that our “earthly connections” have been deliberately severed so often and so thoroughly.

Flowery language, in one way, but language that befits what it is trying to talk about. The harshness of much academic language—well, Michael and I think my own writing quite often, is trying to do something to a reader, not just pass along information. It is effectuating language on purpose because it wants to point to something and it “understands” that readers are often dumbed and, as you said, weary.

There's an old Aristotelian idea that both Michael and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989, p. 261) pick up -- *mensuratio ad rem*:

Both the one who understands and the thing that is understood “are” historically [and, I (DJ) would suggest, ecologically, earthily], that is, in the process of unfolding themselves over time, and neither the one who understands, nor the thing understood “are” statically present [-at-hand] independently of each other. Both “are” in their interactive development. Hence, understand is still a *mensuratio ad rem*, as Gadamer puts it, or, in another traditional formulation, an *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*, except that the “adequation” of the intellect, its measuring and fitting of itself, is never to a timeless thing that always is what it is, some brute fact, “determinable” and independent of the one who knows it. [W]e might better speak of a reciprocal *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, of the temporary adequation of two entities, intellect and thing to each other, each in their particular historical development at the given time. (Smith, 2011, pp. 24–5)

We are hinting at this here and that sometimes gets lost when we try to encourage children (and ourselves) to creatively make something of what they are experiencing. How might our experience be adequate to such a thing? I mean, what shall we make of this?



There's nothing inherently wrong with compartments: finding sunflower seeds self-organized in a Fibonacci series, this sentence parsed for grammar and sense, these radiating leaves marching out in a geometrical arrangement *that we did not make*, that is not of our own design.

I'm finding that even my own explorations/creativities, for what they're worth, seek form and shape; but good form, good shape, even though I hesitate over these words. Flowery a bit, perhaps, but also sourced to ancestries that are deeply scholarly. I recall teaching a course on Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and everyone was happy, until we got to the section entitled "Transformation into Structure," (Gadamer, 1989, p. 110) right after the section on 'Play' (pp. 101-109). Everyone loved the play part and reading parts of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Huizinga, 1955) that hermeneutics draws upon in T&M. But Gadamer's point is to show how the playfulness of understanding forms and shapes itself: creates, makes, sets up, and this process is not simply “subjective” but rather “aesthetic”: the child plunging their hands into that cold water, my grandson making his way to paper and purple pen responding to the encounter with that photo that he wants to, shall we say,

“make something of.” He was talking about what I’m doing right here, right now, playing with words, tossing them around, trying to make something of these ideas you mentioned.

But this, like most human proclivities including our leaning towards play and creativity, can become distorted, over extended, if it loses its good measure. This loss of measure can happen with swollen over-statements like “kids should be free to create” or the like. This is simply an attempt to get a hold of something and get a fix on something that we can finally agree to, with no further worries or questions. *Living a life with children with no further considerations being needed is not what happens.* Given that it is not what actually happens in our earthly lives; in school or otherwise, think about the dominance that has to be exerted by regimes of efficiency to *render it so*—teachers, students and all the living fields of knowledge. No wonder we have an ecological crisis at every turn. We’ve been schooled.

This is why hermeneutics speaks of ‘suspicion’ (Gadamer 1984; see Jardine 2024c) about such statements...carefully measuring ourselves against what is happening...the tree being dead or alive is just a clunky bit of foolishness. And “being creative” isn’t necessarily simply being cut loose from our interweaving lives and the manifest complexities of what we encounter in making our way. Again, it can sound too big too grand. It is like this:



“We can entrust ourselves to what we are investigating to guide us safely in the quest” (Gadamer 1989, p. 378). To go back to Michael’s “fruiting bodies” and subterranean entanglements, the effort of such writing is not simply to “be poetic” or some such thing, but to make how you write proper, to the oddly fruiting and entangling character of the thing you are trying to express. And, of course, to draw readers into that orbit.

*Catalina:* Here I go again. Something I’ve been noticing while reading students’ work (documenting learning encounters) is that most of it sounds smart and well-connected to theory, pleasing the other, losing themselves in the act of making meaning out of certain events. It feels like they’re trying to say the “right” thing instead of staying with the abundance of a moment, without falling into the compartments (again) of theories. In that rush, they miss the messiness, the beauty of noticing without naming it too soon, the actual texture of what’s happening with children. The writing ends up feeling repetitive and kind of detached. It sounds too polished. There is no vulnerability.

*David:* Indeed. I’m nearly done editing our conversation and will send it to you when I’ve got

this first blush done. Meanwhile, I was struck again by a line that went by and was interested in your thoughts: that we get formed as we form the clay. So, back to that Biblical resonance, when we create, we are created by what we created. I "become someone" having had this email conversation with you and as we are now creating a written paper to be sent into the great "somewhere."

So, the fervent creativity of children and, well, of us. It is a fine and useful way to talk, and powerful and potentially liberating. But it is also *always dangerous* if we start to "believe" it and lose sight of what it means that our very sight is being formed in experiencing it. In education, I found repeatedly that words or language would reify, become stuck, become what David G. Smith called, back in 1988, one more damned thing. "Oh, now we're doing creativity now, are we?" And along comes all the old, world-weary, understandable talk of band wagons and so on. It takes patience to both try to understand and forgive this impulse *and* to resist it, especially when it doesn't often extend to us in return. That's why Tsong-kha-pa called patience a perfection and notes that we humans aren't.

Hermes was always expecting a trick or setting one up – "believing" tends to harden language and hearts, whether it is talk of surveillance or talk of creativity. Note, however, that the talk of surveillance is precisely speaking on behalf of hardening itself—a sort of double helix of a sort. It feels like trying to hold my breath and speak at the same time.

No words will do, because words are dependently co-arising with our breath, and ideas and our circumstances and words, even good ones, are born and then perish if life is strangled out of them. It is why I wrote a thing called "I Am not a Buddhist."

Then you and I write about it here; trying to call up what is going on in some ECE classrooms, trying to call up how to speak of this with sympathy and affection and hope, trying to figure out what to do. In my own long years doing that, I also had to find my way to a spot where I could let my own breathing come and go and not get knocked over every time I saw wearied, locked-in practices.

*Catalina:* This is great. I have been smiling all along. This makes total sense. In the end, I must understand that leaving a ball of clay out there is never an innocent act. All this relationality needs to be tended. We need ways to tend to ourselves so we can stay with this. Somehow, we create and shape from the formless, but as we do, we also become shaped by it. A child is telling me the story of dinosaurs and how they existed long before man. He opens his eyes wide, wide open and says, "*But there was something even before that*" and he pauses. I open my eyes even wider, leaning in, and say, "*I am all ears.*" (Gadamer, 2007).

And then he says, "*Well, that, I don't know.*"

He is also shaping something here... from the same common ocean.

*David:* Yes. That photo of the child and the clay can release something in us all. An alert and considerate tenderness—this is surely aesthetic in character and needs to be remade as new encounters arrive. And we teachers need others to look up and smile when they see this; other adults whose smile lets us know we're not nuts, and things aren't hopeless, it is happening again.

*Catalina:* I am thinking again about the experience of working with paper and creating a world for Cat-a. The air was bursting with joy while in the making. Why does a child jump into this new possibility of creation? What is underneath all this?

**David:** What if there is nothing behind these seemingly happenstance aesthetic comings and goings? What if these dependently co-arising circumstances are its deepest reality? And we, and students, and balls of clay and bears and slices of cut wood radiance and so on are "in" that very same interweaving reality? What if shaping ourselves to become not only *accustomed* to this circumstance but *cultivating insight* into it is our highest prospect?

*Buddhapalita's Commentary on [Nagarjuna's] "Fundamental Treatise"* says:

What is the purpose of teaching dependent-arising? The master Nagarjuna . . . saw that living beings are beset by various sufferings and assumed the task of teaching the reality of things ( . . . ) so that they might be free. What is the reality of things? It is the absence of essence. Unskilled persons ( . . . ) conceive of an essence in things and then generate attachment and hostility with regard to them. (Tsong-kha-pa, 2002, p. 210)

For example, watching a child be charmed by what is in front of them and letting the weaving and wafting occur, and stepping in and stepping out and asking and remaining silent and all that? And we're teachers with parents nearby . . . so writing down what the child says and sharing it with parents, with assurance to them or questions to them, thinking about what might be next or deciding to wait and see . . . and so on. The absence of essence is at once the presence of threads of interweaving interdependence and our considerations of what is going on is part of this interweaving.

I, like you, have the urge to ask what is behind it all, why does it happen . . . as if there is "something else" hiding somewhere in it? Behind it? Above it? Below it? Just out of sight, just beyond the horizon, just past my loss of words . . . starting to sound Biblical again!

The old Buddhist move at this point is to say that *all of that*—including the urges to name it, to shut it down, to resolve it, to solidify it, and all the wearies over that an panics and exhaustions—is itself an age-old cluster of dependently co-arising thoughts and desires regarding why, wherefore, wherefrom, that are utterly commonplace in human being, in human history. We are fearful, we are finite, we clutch at things. And meanwhile young children puddle, and I puddle with them. Atoms and brain functioning and ADHD and forms to fill out and balls of clay and patches of moss, are here alongside God's will, divine intervention, spirits visiting, old stories told by ancestors, and developmental psychologists' stages are all trying to "why" their way through all this.

I'm going to go out on this limb while I'm here because I am fascinated for when the limb might break! Buddhism will attest that what is most hidden here, is a desire to have things stable and fixed and finished and laid out, ahead of time. We sense our finite, dependently co-arising being and it can make us afraid, anxious. We seek ways to quell this, rather than ways to understand it and give ourselves over to it. We shop instead of create and commiserate. Sorry, bad joke, because we also often shop around for ways to still ourselves. Again, this is an ancient situation.

All of these are so tempting, such siren lures, especially if we expect them to "solve" our situation. Buddhism says that dependent co-arising *is the situation*. I don't dis-believe them, but I also don't believe them either. Developmental stages are quite interesting, as is the rise of this idea in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as is the occasional usefulness of its categorizations. So, too, with children's and adults' creative uprisings. They, too, rise and fall. It feels like a god-like power to create, sometimes, and a god-like tragedy, almost, when a paper I'm writing falls to bits. And, for me, for now, the

threads can be unwound and wound back up. Too bad the Bible didn't talk much of God's failures and his recourses when that happened.

So, with the threads we have inherited about efficiency and bureaucratization, they, too, have only threads behind them, all wound up and un-windable.

There is nothing here to answer as to why this happens and, I'm finding, how it happens. I know that practice helps, deliberate bloody-mindedness in maintaining refuges and friendships that help that along (Seidel & Jardine, 2016). We get moments of insight and relief. We get caught up. We commiserate. We give up. We write emails to each other. We write. And paint and so on. These deliberately creative acts help keep me at that gap where the water flows. Some threads of Buddhism have deliberately called this gap "nothing" precisely in response to the lures that come up if we try to say more, if we try to reify. There is nothing here to "believe."

*Catalina:* This resonates with me deeply. This would involve an intense absorption of oneself with the other, or with any phenomenon, that the two become indistinguishable. In practice, it is emptying yourself of yourself and allowing the experience with all its threads to come forward in its fullness. After your email, I remembered an ongoing project with a student who was working with 4-year-olds on the solar system. She brought books, and the children made each planet out of clay. The initial questions from the children were: "How old are the stars? Is the universe infinite? What is infinity? Wow, that's a lot" ...etc. My student kept returning to the forms, the things that can be named and shaped. No space for the unknown. But still investigating and moving with children relationally.

We are both pointing to the same aspect that lives in the universe: thoughts, bears, and planets made of clay. When I ask what is underneath (not as a

location), I am pointing to a question that children are trying to figure out, too. My resistance is that it can become dormant through our constant conditioning. I am probably resisting this for myself.

*David:* It seems that the best figuring out we can do, is to step into some slipstream again: puddle walks; Pythagorean proportionalities; my son coming home after his first day of chemistry class and opening the front cover of his textbook to show me the periodic table, "Dad, have you *seen* this?" (It didn't last, but I did find out that there are multiple different shapes of tables and spheres and three dimensionalities that chemistry has produced).

Emptiness and fullness. Yep! I think it comes and goes for all of us, certainly for me and for over a quite long period of time. The thing I find tragic is that some folks have never had this way of experiencing the world, encouraged much, so they never practiced it often enough for it to bear any fruit.

I was lucky enough at the right times to have companions who leaned this way and we could commiserate with each other, share things we found—music, poets, painters, philosophers, scribes and on and on. It means that I just happened to grow up with this slight "gap" where I wasn't just face-first up against the world, but had a sort of "loosening" happen, a sort of affectionate suspicion (which, of course, sometimes turned quite angry and debilitating) where the hard surface of things in "the real world" slipped and slide a bit. See? I want to use "slided," but my spell check is too nervous!

We humans are in this odd position of being fully engulfed in the dependently co-arising, full fabric of the Earth *and* being able to deliberately experience, explore, and consider that full engulfment. It is as if there is a wee moment where we can make something of it and get

re-made in the making. Confirmed in that moment, well, here we are.

Another companion more recently found: “Geshe Pu-chung-wa said, “Even when I am buried under the afflictions, I can still clench my teeth beneath them”” (Tsong-kha-pa, 2000, p. 348)

And I just found something I’d been searching for, words from a songwriter whose work is quite lovely; one more companion, one more cluster of ways of speaking to give buoyancy to our work:

Writing. It brings me to a sense of stillness.

....

Sometimes it feels chaotic. The field of energy that is everywhere. . . .

....

There is this constant river of energy. I think it is just like choosing to dip your hand in the river and feel the water flowing, or . . . it’s just a river and it is always there. If I’m connected to it or not connected to it, the river never disappears.

....

What drives me is constantly coming to an awareness that I’m alive. I exist! So much exists. And there’s so many textures and colors and shapes and images and ideas. So much mystery. So much mystery.

...

[Artists are able] to absorb and collect so much of the energy that is around them. It is a tricky thing to try and maintain contact with your original, tender, beating heart, which is the reason you started making art, making music in the first place. (FaceCulture, 2019).

*Catalina:* Adrienne Lenker and Tucker Zimmerman share a sweet conversation on how to

allow the song to unravel. To get out of the way. That has little room in teacher training.

### **Postscript: An Ode to David Lynch [David Jardine]**

*I recently realized that my first spiritual advisor was Rod Serling, from 1959-1964 (notice The Beatles arrival around that last date).*

*Another spiritual advisor who confirmed the same odd “gap” or “space” for me was David Lynch who died in January 2025. Below is a transcript of a small part of the last public talk he gave, September 13, 2024, at a Meditate America gathering (<https://live.meditateamerica.org/>):*

Now picture the year 1968 and The Beatles have gone to Rishikesh, India to study with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in his ashram there. And during the day they're either meditating or listening to talks by Maharishi. And Maharishi starts talking about this field within as “nothing.” It's no- thing, unmanifest. And you can see John Lennon picking up on this and saying to Maharishi, “Maharishi, are you trying to tell me that nothing is going to change my world?” And they would laugh. And during that time in Maharishi's ashram, John Lennon wrote a great song. It's called *Across the Universe*.<sup>1</sup> And in that song, that line, nothing's going to change my world, is repeated many times. And people probably thought that was a downer. But John Lennon knew what it was. It's not no, nothing's going to change my world. It's yes, yes, nothing *is* going to change my world, big time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Beatles (1968). *Across the Universe*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dR4O7zvjGYU>.

<sup>2</sup>David Lynch, (2024). Last published talk, September 13, 2024  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY6u1d5qzgU&ab\\_channel=alxwls](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY6u1d5qzgU&ab_channel=alxwls)

Of course, at the ashram, it was also reported that John Lennon made his way onto a helicopter ride with the Maharishi in hopes that he might privately slip him “the secret.”

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