

The Tender Heart

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This writing begins with eight images of artworks by four Adelaide artists: John Barbour, Louise Haselton, Anton Hart and Aldo Iacobelli (Figures 20–23). These works are not ‘examples’ of ‘the tender heart’; the artists do not discuss their work in this way. However, for me, in each of the artists’ practice there seems an extended-play affect, a spun-out aspect (or impression); intensities gather as the substance or consistency of the work, and groups of work, is distributed or spread, as if kneaded or turned over and over by hands—not solid visible hands, but those of a subtle-body with other sense-desires (other skin/animal pads).¹

Firstly, and briefly, and before *the tender heart*, there is ‘the heart’ and what is meant by (using) ‘the-heart’, as heart-thinking is an ancient thinking. The heart was once believed to be the organ of perception; perception, or sensation, comes from the Greek word ‘aisthesis’—breathing in, taking in the world, in wonder, shock, amazement; the view before one was met with an aesthetic response. The heart was also the place of the imagination. In an aesthetic heart response sensing and imagining the world, facts and fantasies, were not split from each other. ‘Heart’ then, in this context, is not the sentimental subjective romantic idea of heart. It is the forgotten heart, one that has been replaced by the brain or intellect as the centre-of-understanding. With this view of the world, and making sense of the world, it is possible, writes James Hillman, whose work on the heart is the primary source here, to recognise ‘that each thing smiles, [and] has allure’.² Hillman was trying to reorientate the practice of psychology, and in turn the practices of creativity, by reconnecting with the heart of the sensing kind: ‘a way might open again toward a meta-psychology that is a cosmology, a poetic vision of the cosmos which



20 John Barbour
Mercury, 2011



21 Anton Hart
detail from *Burn Out 1*, 2011

fulfils the soul's need for placing itself in the vast scheme of things',³ The heart (that is moved, that trembles, warms, melts opens (and is tender(ed)) sees things, and sees the suffering of things. Hillman is writing about a particular education (in psychotherapy) but more generally his ideas bring into focus the learning and teaching of creative practices:

training ... requires sophistication of perception. Training [a new training] will be based in the imagining, sensing heart ... [training] the eye and ear, nose and hand to ... craft well ... And our questions will be addressed to *what* things are, and *where*, and *who*, and in which precise way they are as they are, rather than *why*, *how come*, and *what for*.⁴

Thoughts about the tender-heart arrive obliquely, like spells and rituals, and within a dimension of time and space where the whole body is of another material, or condition, and hears, as a result, other voices. Thoughts about the tender-heart are complex, ambiguous and irreverent; the tender-heart knows it is in the company of all other hearts.

Art is a world-making endeavour that can bring unlikely, ungainly, broken, and discarded matters and textures and colours and atmospheres alive (and into other-life for themselves); art can let fall (away) certain structures of certainty, for example, 'subject-object, left-right, inner-outer, masculine-feminine, immanence-transcendence, mind-body'.⁵ This is not radical or new thinking; it is moderate, sober and old, a turning, a re-turning; this returning is a turning toward the world, toward its every-very-face, so as to regard it as it re-gards us, face to face, or heart to heart. This is a matter of language, of what we speak, and how we speak—not about 'our-feelings' but, rather, about what is-there (and not an abstraction of what is-there), and in the face of 'is-there', a making-process that is fluid, evanescent.⁶ So as to make the world another world, one that is actually present in its own wild imagination, borderless, cosmic and transitory.

What could be the politic that creeps along the surface beneath or above or in parallel with the surface of the circumstances of collapse, war, speed, exhaustion and so on,

where the opportunity to have one's voice heard is slim—but this slimness is a place, somewhere and everywhere.⁷ That is, its form or voice is yet to be invented (or has always been being invented), or is already being invented by gatherings on the terrace⁸—the unsignposted place, or ground, that comes about, that transpires, that one is shown (taken to) by the friend, the enemy, or the 'shaman'.⁹

All the future has of us is fragments, as we do of the past, and artists make some of those fragments; fragments carry in their cells unique combinations of ideas, concerns, fears, obsessions and images through time, to emerge at distant critical events as unimaginable chances for joy, quiet and peace as well as pain, noise and war; they 'speak' and dream (us), in other words.

In 1989 John Berger wrote of defeat and revenge in an essay for an exhibition called 'Miners', of paintings and drawings by the Stampe brothers, at the Cleveland Gallery, England. He wrote:

when gradually you realize that They are out to break you, out to break your inheritance, your skills, your communities, your poetry, your clubs, your home and, wherever possible, your bones too, when finally people realize this, they may also hear, striking in their head, the hour of assassinations, of justified vengeance ... And nothing could be more human, more tender than such a proposed vision of the pitiless being ... executed by the pitiful. It is the word 'tender' which we cherish and which They can never understand, for they do not know what it refers to ... I would shield any such hero to my fullest capacity. Yet if, during the time I was sheltering him, he told me he liked drawing, or ... she told me she'd always wanted to paint, and had never had the chance or the time to do so, if this happened, then I think I'd say: Look, if you want to, it's possible you may achieve what you are setting out to do in another way, a way less likely to fall out on your comrades and less open to confusion. I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that often art has judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past suffered, so that it has never been



22 Louise Haselton
Greek Chorus, 2011



23 Aldo Iacobelli
Architectural Drawing VII, 2010



24 Kerrie Stratford
Change, 2011

forgotten ... Art, when it functions like this, becomes a meeting-place of the invisible, the irreducible, the enduring, guts, and honour.¹⁰

Tenderness is remembered and restored in acts; heartness is ‘how’ a thing goes (how it moves) in thought, or in the world — as attention paid to what-is; sense, says Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘must be signified in all possible ways, by each and every one of us, by all “individual” or “collective” singularities ... by all that can make someone somewhere ... [make] sense ... [receive] sense ... [or leave] sense open’.¹¹

The heart and tenderness have to be imagined.¹² The heart, as the source of tenderness, is not the heart that is inward looking, it’s the heart that is outward looking, seeing the world with ‘wondrous-strange’ eyes. The tender heart places itself in the world. D. H. Lawrence wrote: ‘The wonder is without me. The wonder is outside me ... I look with wonder, with tenderness, with joyful yearning towards that which is outside me, beyond me.’¹³ The thinking heart has to see the world thinking back; see the exactness of each thing with its own imagined heart — the animal among animals the thing among things, the heart in empathy with all hearts.¹⁴

This writing ends with a painting by Kerrie Stratford (Figure 24), an artist who lives in regional South Australia. Her images connect the personal, animal, vegetable and thing world. They are like incantations, compounds of wonders, of strange dark goings-on, and fragility. Anything can happen and affect anything else; the state-of-the-heart, its openness to joy, fear and sadness, is radiant and imminent. The images teem with differences through repetitious and renewed mark-making, the composed scenes hold a sense (a disposition) that they have ‘come-to-light’, brilliant, for a moment, as a ‘stage’, a stilled-life, along the way, seared into the air. They are images in-between this life and that life, this time and that time, male and female; we see what we cannot see. Henri Corbin, writing on the creative imagination of the Sufi poet Ibn ‘Arabi, says of making images appear:

this precisely is the function of ... our creativity, to make them appear, that is, to give them being. Here our

creativity merges with the very core, the *heart*, of our being; what we cause to appear, what we project before us and beyond us — and also what judges us — is our [creativity], our *enthymesis*.¹⁵

This ‘making appear’ of images is a tender-heartedness, an encouragement, toward the work of world-making that the imagination is endlessly ‘making appear’ *to-us* instant to instant, touching literally what we (by ourselves) cannot touch — our thoughts as we receive them.

Notes

- 1 This writing is composed like a set of cards (with Brian Eno’s cards ‘Oblique Strategies’ in mind — chance instructions for making creative works), each a miniature or fragment-essay.
- 2 J. Hillman, *The Thought Of The Heart and The Soul of the World* (New York: Spring Publications, 1998), 109.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 112-13.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 129.
- 6 Jean-Luc Nancy writes that art ‘brings forth a desire that is neither the desire for an object nor the desire for a meaning but a desire for feeling and for feeling oneself first — a desire to experience oneself as irreducible to a signification, to a being or an identity. A desire to enjoy ... the very fact that there is no unique and final form in which this desire would reach its end ... A desire to enjoy, in sensibility, the very fact that there is no unique and final form in which this desire would reach its end.’ J-L. Nancy, *Philosophical Chronicles* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 61-2.
- 7 On the ‘the eighth climate/place of nowhere’ and ‘the place that one is taken to’, see H. Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis. Or the Imaginary and the Imaginal* (1972) <<http://henrycorbinproject.blogspot.com.au/2009/10mundus-imaginalis-or-imaginary-and.html>>.
- 8 Terrace, from Latin *terra*: earth, earthy, earthy, earth-born.
- 9 Perhaps a kind of surrender to the impossible, to an anxiety or suspicion that there is something to be done that is non-declamatory; instead, is within the process and then the work (as if by magic), and is unsure and unnamed, extending outward — open-handed, willingly stupid and unanticipated.
- 10 J. Berger, ‘Miners’, in *Keeping a Rendezvous* (New York: Vintage International, 1992), 8-9.
- 11 J-L. Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 165.
- 12 Tenderness as a touch gives pleasure in the heart-to-heart intention of it, its message. Nancy writes: ‘By means of the touch of the senses, pleasure surprises and suspends the enchainment of signifying senses’, Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 134. In this surprise and suspense, that comes and goes, as an interruption of the supposed fabric of continuity, presence as magic, as magical empathy emerges, as sensuous surface, or as impossible oscillating surface, non-sensible,

- non-representational; surface after surface catching the ghosts, giving ghosts—who pull at our hearts—places to gather and talk.
- 13 D.H. Lawrence, in Hillman, 12; James Hillman borrows from Henri Corbin and Alfred Whitehead among others. Hillman's focus is a particular kind of psycho-analysis that attends to the soul of the world; this focus includes practices of creative making, of how we touch that soul with artefacts that leave out bodies and have lives of their own. I'm interested in when-and-how the heart-felt comes through artworks into the affective circulatory realm of materials and arrangements—into the tactile and visual atmosphere of being-with others where experience becomes part of the thinking feeling body (and part of the body of the world), physically and emotionally; we write and speak of what we see, which in turn is affective, and can decrease or increase a work of art's potential to unfold as life over time.
 - 14 The heartfelt is not the confessional 'I', not the person-singular, not the report of my-experience via my-expression—this sort of report, of our single-said actions, separates us, peels us away, from the 'huge full world', Hillman, 35; this heart exiles imagination, being subjective and guarded.
 - 15 H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970), 236; *enthymesis* is a Greek word that 'signifies the act of meditating, conceiving, imagining, projecting, or ardently desiring', of having something present in the heart, in the soul, in thought, Corbin, 222.