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Space, Place and Spirit

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Space, Place and Spirit

Imagining the Everyday

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Abstract: Thomas Moore's Care of the Soul, Lucy Lippard's Lure of the Local and Gaston Bachelard's The Poetics of Space, while written from different perspectives, share resonance in their consideration of thinking about everyday life, the spaces we inhabit and the importance of imagination. When these three factors come together it is possible to envision the world anew with greater heart, soul and humanity. This paper aims to creatively engage the reader and stimulate thinking about the kind of world we prefer to live in through combining images and words relating to the spaces we inhabit.

Keywords: Everyday Life, Social Work, Art, Spirituality, Community

... a metaphor gives concrete substance to an impression that is difficult to express ... An image, on the contrary, (is a) product of absolute imagination (Bachelard, 1958, p. 74)

In connecting the arts to everyday life, this paper links two forms of creative expression and practices—art and social work—with social action and the creation of meaning. As the visionaries of alternative ways of seeing and self expression, the works of artists—and the work of social workers as artists—speak to the pressing need for social change, peace and justice which ‘requires that we have an eye and an ear for the world’s suffering’ (Moore, 1992, p. 273). ‘We strive for justice because we find things intolerable: justice is its own end. The task of criticism (in art and in social work) is to make way for justice’ (Osborne, in Ashenden & Owen, 1999, p. 57). As artists, however, there are ways, besides criticism, in which we contribute to people’s well-being. Art and social work, done artfully, brings an essential aestheticism that makes the living of every day life special and meaningful. While global visions

of changing the world are important, we must not overlook the immediate and every day while searching for utopian goals.

We have to pay attention to local concerns in the knowledge that we live in an imperfect world where some problems are insoluble. Here art can enrich everyday life. In this paper we are interested particularly in art which is practised within the context of communities and within the everyday lives of members of community, that is, art that is frequently identified as akin to social work (Paul Virilio, in Pinto, Bourriaud et al, 2003, p. 118; Kester, 2004; Kwon, 2004). It is from this community based perspective, informed by our values and professional codes of ethics, that we, as social workers, identify artful work as having a moral dimension. Part of this moral dimension is our concern with social justice. In giving new meaning to tolerance, reciprocity and equality, a social aesthetic offers the basis for a truly humane community (Light & Smith, 2005, p. 35).

Thus for us, art, or the artistic aspects of the work that we do, is part of our struggle for social justice. It offers another vehicle to connect with people in their every day lives around issues which are of ma-

for importance to them. In short, for us art is not simply a product but a process of engagement which has aesthetic and ethical dimensions guided by a quest for social justice. Hence 'arts practice' in civil society, by which we mean the daily lives of people in communities as our point of contact and engagement, is part of our contribution to the democratization of daily life (Giddens, 1992)

We are mindful here that we are expressing some strong ideological and political claims. We believe that art is 'multiversal'. For the purpose of exploring the dynamics of *relational art* (Bourriaud, 2002)—that is to say art as a vehicle and process of community engagement—rather than romanticize art, it is helpful to see it, following Heidegger, as involving struggle and tension; as such, art can be, in and of itself, a political act (Kester, 2004) and a struggle for truth—and there are many paths to truth. It is this that highlights the importance of an ethical imperative in art for, when we use it as a vehicle for engagement with the world around us, we convey messages or make certain representations of life explicit; often we draw on other people's experiences and sometimes even invade their life space. How then does an artist assume a situated ethical perspective rather than a detached—this is merely art as depiction of the way I see it kind of—perspective? How do we invite artists—and social workers—to view things from within another's worldview, culture or everyday life experience?

The Notion of the Everyday

Critical theorists see the notion of the 'everyday' as a context of contest and debate. Highmore (2002) aptly captures this tension:

The tradition of theory that I pursue here can best be characterized by a stubborn refusal to underwrite some of the most everyday meanings that are attached to the 'everyday'. So while it is common practice to describe everyday life as a scene of relentless tedium, this tradition has often tried to register the everyday as the marvelous and the extraordinary (or ... both

extraordinary and tedious). Similarly, if it is more usual to associate the everyday with the self-evident and the taken-for-granted, this tradition has stressed the opacity and the difficulty of adequately attending to it ... much more stress is placed on the everyday as a site of resistance, revolution and transformation (Highmore, 2002, p. 17).

Our position in relation to everyday life is consistent with that of Kaplan and Ross (in Gardiner, 2000) who suggest that everyday life is the place which 'harbours the texture of social change' (Gardiner, 2000, p. 19). This position coheres with the notions of the everyday promoted by the Surrealists who incorporated 'poetry, dreams and the marvellous' (Gardiner, 2000, p. 34) in their pursuit of sublime beauty.

Their version of the marvellous was firmly located in the here and now. Like the key theme in the writing about everyday life of Bakhtin (in Gardiner, 2000),

... the values and meanings that most directly shape our lives emerge from the existential demands of daily living and our immediate interpersonal relationships. The everyday therefore constitutes the central ground upon which our judgements and actions, particularly those of a moral or normative character are exercised (p. 43).

Thus 'in making the world a meaningful place, one that is steeped in personal values, the sub-

ject actively engages with and alters in lived situation; and, in so doing, continuously transforms itself' (Gardiner, 2000, p. 49).

A New Turn

Coming from a profession which is situated in the social sciences—with a strong ideological and emotional pull towards the arts and humanities—we chose to draw on three writers who offered rich potential for a different language of engagement—one not about status, gender, race and class but about imagining and desiring and dreaming—one of hope and inspiration rather than criticism. This might stand at odds with our stance of art as struggle—as a fight to make public society's discontents. But from a social work perspective, we need the language of art to balance the overly technical—and critical—taxonomy our proceduralized work environments engender. Importantly, such a language offers another way to engage with clients through questions of space, place and spirituality rather than psychological and sociological constructions of human behaviour and the social environment which dominate the social work discourse. While this might not be new to an audience of artists—though we suspect it might be because our reading of the art literature tells us it is very much informed by contemporary social science theory—the reader must grasp that it is new for social workers.

What social workers do bring to the area of 'art as engagement', however, is an understanding of 'ways of engaging' through 'arts practice' as a community development, capacity building, and sense making activity: There is an art in learning to see our work 'in terms of the immediate task at hand' (Berman, 2000, p. 237) realizing that everyone is merely trying to make the best of their lives. We can work toward peace and equality, a closer relationship with the environment and deal with diversity by opening dialogue through art accepting that certain problems can only be improved upon. They cannot be eradicated. We accept that there is no utopia and that art is struggle. We make no apologies for these ideological claims for, as practitioners in touch with the real world of client problems and limited resources, we have to believe in possibility. Like Deleuze, we believe that living involves affirming possibilities and that art has the potential to create the conditions wherein new connections can be made and in which new possibilities emerge. We see art as a way and means to create and open up possibilities.

A Poetics of Engagement

In Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul*, Lucy Lippard's *Lure of the Local* and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* we found three diverse but related sources on the way in which people create meaning in their lives. We saw in their work, the possibility to open up ways to engage with some oft avoided subjects within our professional domain, namely, spirituality, culture and community, and phenomenological experience bent as we are on scientific explanations of reality and human experience. These sources epitomise a form of political engagement through art in a way in which we believe people construct meaning in their everyday life. Starting with Gaston Bachelard, we learn the value of direct experience or engagement with the world and of the

use of language to take us beyond descriptive definition and to re-imbue our lives with meaning, to embrace the meaningful world—or spiritual life—which ‘exists beyond our personal ... conceptions’ (Moore, 1992, p. 267). Bachelard provides rich metaphors which give concrete substance to impressions and experiences that are difficult to express. They invoke images. They stimulate the ‘absolute imagination’ (Bachelard, 1994, p. 74). Through his poetic use of language and his evocative imagery, Bachelard transforms the ordinary and everyday into something special. In Dissanayake’s (1995) terms he makes it *art*.

In Lippard, Moore and Bachelard, and many other writers besides, we found ‘data’ to be mined for ‘rich metaphors’. We were captivated by Bachelard’s metaphor of ‘home’ as a ‘nest for dreaming (and) ... shelter for imagining’ and Lippard’s (citing Witold Rybczynski, p. 28) ‘setting for an emerging interior life’. How many of us ever think when we engage with others at a professional level, to talk about the ‘house in which they were born’? Yet imagine the richness of understanding that can be engendered by seeing ‘home’ as Bachelard does, as more than a

place we inhabit but as ‘an embodiment of dreams’ with ‘nooks and corners’ which offer ‘a resting-place for daydreaming’ (p. 15), a means of transporting us into a world of safety and calm or fear and anguish. As Lippard notes, we ‘journey through the outer landscape to find the inner landscape’ (p. 15) which can ‘nurture the soul’ (Moore, 1992, p. 278) or uncover the demons that prevent us from living fully

in the present. Lippard says art is a way of living the ordinary while *sensing the extraordinary* (Lippard, 1997, p. 14), the special qualities of ‘place’ embedded in everyday life which evoke emotions of pleasure or pain, as the case may be, and imbue everyday life with metaphysical meaning. For her, the real challenge is to reinstate the spiritual with that which is close and familiar (Lippard, 1997, p.17). While Lippard (1997) and Light and Smith (2005) see ‘familiarity and the everyday (as being) at the very heart of place’ (p. 40), there is much that we fail to pay attention to or deliberately avoid, such as painful memories—which we keep hidden—within our everyday lives. Highmore (2002) reminds us that transformation comes from exceptional or what he calls ‘non-everyday’ experience (like hidden pain). More importantly, art is a vehicle that can bring to the fore that which we must confront and deal with.

If everyday life, for the most part, goes by unnoticed (even as it is being revolutionized), then the first task for attending to it will be to make it noticeable. The artistic avant-garde’s strategy of ‘making strange’, of rendering what is most familiar unfamiliar, can provide an essential ingredient for fashioning a sociological aesthetic

... provide a productive resource for rescuing the everyday from conventional habits of mind (Highmore, 2002, p. 23).

Art disturbs what is often perceived as homogeneous or 'ordinary' in everyday life; it can work to disturb 'smooth surfaces'—pre-given or taken for granted understandings of the world. It can shake us from our reverie; remind us of the need for change. Thus Highmore (2002) talks of the importance of uncovering the 'extra ordinary' in everyday life. These are difficult notions to incorporate into current academic debates (Lippard, 1997, p. 14).

However, most of the time, life is uncertain and we search for stability and meaning. Here, as our three favoured authors so clearly remind us, the *spiritual* landscape is part of the world we live in—part of the everyday—and does not necessarily lie beyond it. Thus the place where we live—'around here and out there' (p. 25), as Lippard says—the view from a favourite window or the memory of a childhood home—offer rich association for deep and meaningful engagement.

'Place' as the Locus of Engagement

Lippard's focus on 'place' as a locus of engagement with the lives of others in our community gives power to the 'lure of the local' and reminds us of the importance of a 'sense of community': 'Whatever the future may have in store, one thing is certain, unless local communal life can be restored, the public cannot adequately solve its most urgent problems—to find and identify itself' (John Dewey, in Lippard, p. 28). Social workers appreciate the importance of 'community' and we believe must share with artists working in this context.

Our sources, though, are not without their critical edge for we are mindful that 'sometimes a house is not a home'. Sometimes home and family are used euphemistically to create the idea that people all get along fine depending upon one another. Likewise community is used to denote self-reliance whereby people in poor neighbourhoods can look after themselves (Lippard, 1997, p. 23). Our engagement does not rule out wariness of idealized dominant cultural clichés about home, family and community. When we look 'out there', community draws us into others' lives and awakens us to *difference*: The personal becomes political.

When we look 'out there' at community, we see landscape as a 'hermeneutic narrative' in which meaning and understanding is constructed through the community's story—its mythologies, histories, lived experiences, and ideologies, 'the stuff of identity and representation' (Lippard, 1997, p. 33) as a safeguard against *displacement* and anomie. Much as Lippard gives weight to our 'sense of place', she is ambivalent about its use as a cliché—a kind of intellectual property—a way for non-belongers to belong momentarily. At the same time, a serious sensitivity to place is an invaluable social and cultur-

al tool, providing much needed connections to 'nature' and to cultures not our own. For all places exist somewhere between inside and the outside views of them and contrast with, other *different* places. A 'sense of place' is a virtual immersion that depends on lived experience and a topographical intimacy that is rare in ordinary life and educational fields. As Ellen Dissanayake (1995) has observed, the function of art is to 'make special' and art is a vehicle which raises the 'special' qualities of place embedded in everyday life, restoring them to those who created them.

Gretel Ehrlich captures this beautifully when she says 'I like to think of landscape not as a fixed place but as a path that is unwinding before my eyes, under my feet ... (as) our unwitting autobiography' (in Lippard, 1997, p. 9).

For artists and social workers, 'landscape' then can be read as a community's 'autobiography', as a holder of memory, culture and history (Rebecca Solnit, in Lippard, 1997), of what we choose to remember as we modify the past living in the present (Ralph Ellison, in Lippard, 1997, p. 77). However, most people do not have the time or inclination to ponder the meaning of place, especially if they have always been there (Lippard, 1997, p. 43-44). Thus as artists we must draw this memory from our community and use it as a means of creative engagement. We can ask 'What happens or happened here?' (Lippard, 1997, p. 50) and the answer will always be a story, a narrative, which articulates relationships between the teller and the told, here and there, past and present, which will be reconstructed in the telling and remembering. Thus 'landscape' here is a metaphor for the 'background of our lives', the canvas

on which our life is lived and which art might capture or release—give life to—in the narrative or story which is told.

The Essence in the Notion of Home

'(A)ll really inhabited space,' writes Bachelard 'bears the essence of the notion of home' (p. 77). While Lippard connects us to *community*, Bachelard brings us even closer to *home* which, for him, 'serves as a portal to metaphors of imagination' (Stilgoe, foreword to the 1994 edition, p. viii) and memory. Everyday metaphors we use—like coming out of my shell, feeling cornered, and boxed in—are all evocative of home as 'the spaces we inhabit' and the memories of our experiences in those places. We reach into the far corners of our minds to regain a memory—passages to cellars and attics where feelings and experiences are stored. With evocative images such as these, Bachelard (1994) shows how language can serve and delight. It makes us revolutionaries for we are not so much concerned with holding onto the precise meaning of words and with using 'them as the countless little tools of clear thinking' but rather to use them as poets do, with 'daring' (p. 146). The reductionism or miniaturization of language—in preoccupation with the precise meaning of words—obscures or restrains the tendency and will of imagination to connect microcosm to macrocosm, to link the smallest detail to the immensity of the cosmos. We might see, for example, the seashell as a metaphor for 'house' and ponder its location in community and our relation to it. We feel protected

in the house of our imagination such that we might artfully dodge people and circumstances which rob us of our feelings of self worth and our sense of pride in community. Thus for Bachelard—and for us—the poetic use of language enables us to “listen” to the design of things’: a ‘curve that warms’ or ‘an angle, a trap that detains the dreamer’ some of which ‘one cannot escape’ (p. 144). How wonderful and how transforming is imagination when ‘language dreams’ (p. 146). Thus we must allow *imagination* to redeem the geometrical contradiction of miniature images which do not actually represent reality and let representation become ‘nothing but a body of expressions with which to communicate our own images to others’ (p. 150). Thus for philosophers, like Bachelard and Schopenhauer, for whom imagination is a basic faculty, “(t)he world is my imagination.” The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it ... (o)ne must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small’ (in Bachelard, 1994, p. 150). Hence ‘imagination is never wrong, since it does not have to confront an image with an objective reality’ (p. 152). There is a kind of ‘innate optimism in all works of imagination’ and a belief that ‘the human imagination never invent(s) anything that (i)s not true’ (Bachelard, 2004, p. 153). Thus Cyrano de Bergerac ‘always hoped to find readers worthy of his imagination’ (in Bachelard, 2004, p. 153).

Why, asks Bachelard, ‘should the actions of the imagination not be as real as perceptions (or observations)?’ (p. 158) for intuitionists ‘take in everything at one glance’ (p. 159); they don’t need to analyse details then re-integrate them into the whole. Miniature—imagination—or ‘the *causality of smallness* stirs all our senses’ (p. 174) such that a perfume or taste ‘can create an entire environment in the world of the imagination’ (p. 174). ‘Dreams, thoughts and memories weave a single fabric. The soul dreams and thinks, then it imagines’ (p. 175). The poet heightens imagination. She can make the invisible visible, the inaudible heard.

Poetics teach us the importance of words and imagination. It is a circular route to finding ourselves and to growing and helping others grow: ‘when a poet knows that a living thing in the world is in search of its soul, this means that he is in search of his own’ (p. 201). Taking care of self bring us closer to others for ‘through every human being, unique space, intimate space, opens up to the world’ (Rilke, in Bachelard, 2004, p. 202). Such communality or ‘(s)pace, vast space, is the friend of being’ (p. 208). We are social animals. We want to draw people in but, at times, we also want to keep our distance with good reason for, as critical social theorists remind us, physical space is ‘not “empty” or “neutral” (but) (r)ather, ... the site of power and contestation *par excellence*. Under late capitalism, space ha(s) been transformed into a mechanism of social control’ (Gardiner, 2000, p. 107).

But Bachelard is writing metaphorically, and perhaps idealistically about *home*: We could be in a room anywhere, out in nature, in someone else’s house, or at work and still feel *at home*. All that is required is ‘truly to inhabit the space’ (p. 77-78) which is not necessarily a physical place but a space in our imagination. Though we ‘experience the house in its reality’, we also

experience it – through our imagination – in ‘its virtuality, in thought and in dreams’ (p. 78). Bachelard is interested in this ‘virtual house’, in its poetics; as such it is ‘a place that satisfies the heart and imagination, a place that may or may not look like a house at all and yet evokes feelings and fantasies of home’ (p. 78). In general, ‘we can cultivate enchantment by designing a deeper sense of home in all buildings’ (p. 83) which become an expression of the home of our imagination: ‘There is no reason why we couldn’t evoke the cosmos, our great home, with a dome or an arch, or like Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, make the stage of our home the whole world’ (p. 83).

Soul food

This idea of *enchantment* links Bachelard’s *Poetic of Space* with Moore’s *Care of the Soul*. Both are concerned with how we live our everyday lives and find meaning in the spaces we inhabit. This necessarily has an aesthetic dimension for ‘an enchanted life has many moments when the heart is overwhelmed by beauty and the *imagination* is electrified ... The soul has an absolute, unforgiving need for regular excursions into enchantment’ (Moore, 1996, p. ix).

Moore (1992) says that ‘(theological) tradition teaches that soul lies midway between understanding (awareness) and unconsciousness, and that its instrument is neither the mind (intellect) nor the body, but *imagination*’ (Moore, 1992, p. xi *italics added*). Renaissance philosophers often said that it is the soul that makes us human. We can turn this idea around and note that ‘it is when we are most human that we have greatest access to soul’ (Moore, 1992, p. 9). And we need this because happiness is the ‘efflux of the soul’ (Whitman *Song of the Open Road*) ... ‘it pervades the open air, waiting at all times ... (and when) it flows unto us, we are rightly charged’ (*The Whitman Reader*, p. 88). Thus caring for the soul is a remedy, for in dwelling on soul, in imagining its interweaving of our lives, we transform our symptoms, maladies, and discontents. Such ‘symptoms are transformed by imagination’ (Moore, 1992, p. 76) and by creativity, ‘another potential source of soul in our work (and our) everyday lives’. Writing from a spiritual perspective, Moore treats the notion of soul and ‘caring for soul’ as self-explanatory or

implicit and this might be seen by critical social theorists or evidence based

professionals to require deeper interrogation or critical analysis. But the point is that we are trying to take an insider perspective, accepting that spirituality is important in people's lives, whatever their beliefs or practices. There is sufficient evidence to show that in times of trauma and loss, it is this spirituality which gives people the strength to carry on, to face life's difficulties and to find meaning in painful experiences. It is in this context that spirituality and creativity become linked. And *art teaches us to respect creativity and imagination*. As Moore says, 'art is about arresting life and making it available for contemplation. Art captures the eternal in the everyday and it is this that feeds the soul' (p. 303), that feeds our need for meaning and purpose in our life, our spirituality.

Following Ellen Dissanayake (1995) art draws attention to the 'special' qualities of *place* embedded in everyday life and connects well with Lippard's idea of the lure of the local and the need for community. Most of us see 'housework' (a metaphor for daily living) as non-creative for all too often we 'imagine creativity ... as exceptional achievement' (Moore, 1992, p. 303).

(By) bringing our very idea of creativity down to earth, it is no longer reserved for exceptional

individuals or their brilliance. In ordinary life creativity means making something for the soul out of every day experience. Sometimes we can shape experience into meaningfulness playfully and inventively. At other times simply holding experience in memory and in reflection – in our imaginations – allows it to incubate and reveal some of its insights in our every day lives (Moore, 1992, p. 198).

This reflects the problem experienced by the Zen Buddhist Monk and the Schopenhauerian artist where each 'seems capable of transforming everyday aesthetic experience into something extraordinary'. Thus the realm of everyday aesthetic appears to reach beyond its ordinary limits (Light & Smith, 2005, p. 17).

For Moore, caring for the soul requires that we *see* things for what they are rather than for what they can do. For Plato, 'care of the soul' – *techne tou biou* – means 'the crafting of life'. It implies skill, attentiveness and art – or living 'artfully' – attending to the small things that keep the imagination engaged in whatever we are doing, for imagination is the very heart of soul making (Moore, 1996, p. 285). It is in pausing and *taking time* to appreciate what's right in front of us and to genuinely connect with the ordinary that we encounter 'soul'. It is interwoven into the texture of our lives – we can feel it, touch its surfaces, and experience it intimately (Moore, 1992, p. 287).

Like Berman's (2000) 'paradox' care of the soul is in the here and now – in the lived present, or, as Aristotle would say, in the life lived fully – Socrates' unexamined life might not be worth living but the lived life certainly is! There is no paradigm for understanding soul for 'as the things of the world present themselves vividly I watch and listen. I respect them because I am not their creator or controller. They have as much personality and independence as I do' (Moore, 1992, p. 268). Moore's conception of soul as unfolding resonates with Bachelard's poetic and metaphoric use of words and Lippard's (1997) longing for place where 'my soul feels at home and fills my psychological need to belong somewhere' (Lippard, 1997, p. 7), my antidote to alienation – 'the pull of the *place where we live*' (p. 7 italics added). Aesthetically speaking this view is reflected in appreciating the attachment that we have to place as it constitutes part of the essence of who we are (Light & Smith, 2005, p. 49). This stands in strong contrast with Highmore's (2002) notion of strangeness, discussed above.

Yi-fu Tuan (in Lippard, 1997, p. 34) refers to the emotions or affective bonds attached to place as *topophilia*. If it is true that our 'spontaneous attraction to place is our immediate emotional response to the landscape of our lives' (Lippard, 1997, p. 7), what does place mean to you? What places do you love? Where do you feel you belong? Where do you feel at home? Are the places we love the spaces where we feel most at home? When you go away from this place do you miss it? If so, what do you miss about

it? Where did you spend your childhood and does that still feel like home? Or have you made another home for yourself, in another place, another time where your childhood remains but a memory of times past, of another you? Does it still anchor you or are you anchored in some other place you now call home?

As we have seen in Moore (1992), we attach value to specific places wherein our souls reside, where we feel at home, at one with the world, and at peace with ourselves. Our homes are the places where our everyday lives are played out where we are struck by the 'lure of the local', the area where we exercise, relax, shop, socialise, spend time with friends, even work. What then is your relationship to the place where you live? Is your identity in any way changed by it? Is it part of who you are? Or does 'nature' or 'art' or some other activity provide the nourishment for you that social life cannot? Does 'home' have to do with the known and familiar – our land, our place, the local – or is it some far off place of memory, dream or communion with nature? Conversations about home, place and spirit—about connections and longing or other artistic pursuits, such as drawing, painting, poetry, music and drama, can engage people in an immensely empowering and affirming way by giving weight to their lived experience—by accepting their interpretation and understanding, the meaning they attribute to their lives.

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