

Toward a Peaceable Kingdom



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The Peaceable Kingdom, S.R. Sheridan, oils, 48x60, 1987

Isaiah 11:6-9. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, And the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the seas."

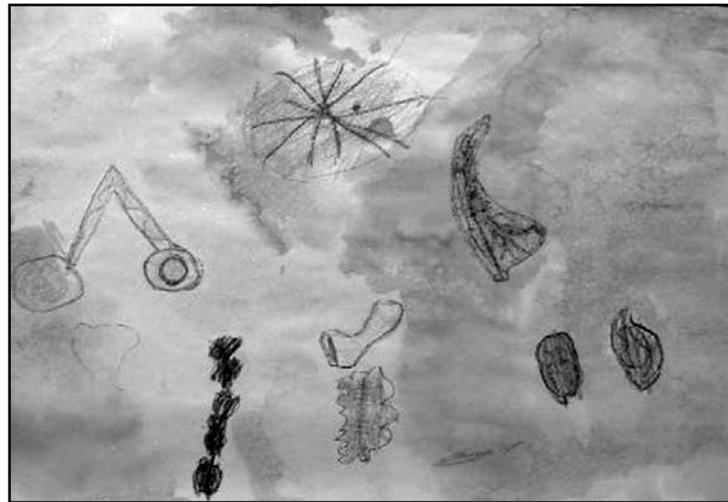
Growing Past Ancient Neurochemistries

“Multa pexit, hic Brugelius, quae pingi non possunt.”

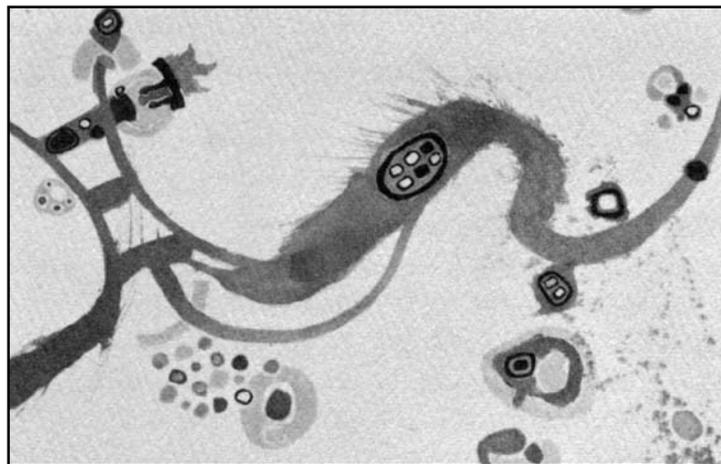
Abraham Ortelius wrote this epitaph for his friend, Pieter Bruegel, the Netherlandish painter.

“Much he painted which cannot be painted;” that’s what Ortelius wrote. Have you seen Bruegel’s painting “Hunters in the Snow”? Or “The Corn Harvest”? Or “The Return of the Herds”? Is there a painting by Van Gogh or Mary Cassatt or Renoir which you especially love? The paintings that are beloved through time are the ones ***that paint what cannot be painted.***

Much the child scribbled which could not be drawn. Much the child drew which could not be said or written.



Ben, 2008, age 7



C. Ronald Becthle, watercolor, 2006, age 82

Language is a pseudopod

Language is a pseudopod for an organism that reaches for the unknowable, using symbols. A cell reaches out in response to neurochemical signal pathways. It doesn't think about the unknown. The unknown doesn't exist for a cell. It has to go in the direction indicated by the neurochemistry of the environment. It does not make decisions about extending a pseudopod. Whither it is called, it goes.

If a cell is cut off from its environment, it dies. Humans have a resilience beyond the rules of biology. Because of language, they can survive separation from the substrate (loss of a parent, a spouse, a home, a job, their health). Human brains can invent new ways to connect. The human brain can even create a safe place to be inside itself, a place where pain and loss go away, a place where the mind finds peace.

That is what art does for us, literature, music, mathematics. Prayer, therapy, meditation, give us peace, too. But this book is about literacy and emotional health and control. It is about how marks change minds, creating order where there was disorder, creating meaning where there was confusion, peace where there was conflict, beauty where there was ugliness, health where there was sickness. We can achieve a balanced system, not only physiologically, but psychologically, through literacy. Language is our outreach system for a special mitosis, a special symbiosis, a special relationship with the world.



The Chinese Horse, Lascaux, France. Reprinted by permission of Yvonne Vertut, Copyright by Jean Vertut. All rights reserved

The Wall Painting: Old and new technology

The Paleolithic wall painting “The Chinese Horse” - reminds us that human beings think using pictures and other symbols - not just spoken words. With the invention of the printing press, the symbol system we describe as text became dominant. Humankind focused on reading words, relegating pictures to children's storybooks or scientific illustrations. Until recently, images have



Nate and Ben Allen, 2007

Within a generation or two (all the time it takes for such a change) static words, numbers, notes on a page may not be interesting to children or even visible.

Still, let's remember "the wisdom of Solomon" (Pennsylvania University's Solomon!) about the human visual system, striving to design more eye-like image processing, and more ear-like aural presentations for children! And let's also continue to think about children's drawings as appropriate image processing for young brains.

The method and the content of the child's own handmade drawing springs from the exact capabilities of his/her visual system. For the child, his/her own image production is perfectly timed and perfectly complete for the child.

With practice, handmade visual information becomes better timed and more informational. If Solomon is right, "screen thinking" (both television and the computer) is teaching our children to see less information, faster, at neurally inappropriate rates. Since the young brain is adaptable, or "plastic," the child's brain will learn to accept "screen thinking," and, in time, will accept screen thinking as how his/her visual system should see. One thing is sure: the child's seeing and hearing systems will adapt to screen thinking.

The Logic of Environmental Pressures

The logic of environmental pressures on genetics is that, over time (as several generations of research with male bird's spring courting songs prove), human vision will change to accommodate the "screen vision" of the computer and the television. In the process, brains in transition will have some problems. We do not know if these problems with attention, emotion, intimacy and literacy will persist or will somehow resolve themselves.

The fact that our brains and other mammals' brains are continuous is good news. We share many of our multiple intelligences with other creatures and, in fact, we fall far short of their intelligences in terms of visual skills, physical skills, and emotional skills. Emotionally, animals provide stellar models for us. For instance, most of us fall far short of the emotional sensitivity and responsiveness and the faithfulness of Golden Retrievers.

served text instead of the other way around. Only on cave walls and in art museums do images stand alone, sufficient as meaning.

Currently, image-processing technology, including television and computer images, makes new kinds of image-text presentations possible, including kinetic, screen-based modeling impossible to achieve on pieces of paper. In fact, the child might be described as "post-textural."⁶² Children's visual and verbal experiences are increasingly electronic, leaning heavily toward image, away from text.

⁶²Baetens, Jan. 2003. "Looking at McLuhan: 'Remediation, Iconophobia and Denial of the Body' in *The Medium is the Message*, narrative Online Magazine of the Image [8] visual narrative, Issue 5.

Still, unlike Golden Retrievers, we can speak, using words and we can draw and write. We have the possibility of controlling rage, panic and fear, seeking new solutions to emotional situations in ways animals can not. In this lies our salvation.

When they are watching television, children have no chance to exercise their imaginations.

War is an emotional problem, whatever else it may be. Could it also be a visual problem? Could it be part of the way we've learned to see?

Eyes located farther apart, out on the side of the head, were designed for animals who are prey-like deer, for instance -- giving them a wider visual field. Eyes located closer together, on the front of the face, are designed for predators, providing sharper focus for judging exact location. Our eyes are close together on the front of our faces; we're predators. Long ago, we humans were preyed upon by much stronger animals. One of our biggest fears was of being eaten. Our larger brains and our weapons have helped us to think and to act like predators. Still, despite the placement of our eyes in the middle of our faces, part of our creaturely heritage is to feel like prey (Sam Sheridan, *A Fighter's Heart*, 2007, page 62).

Then, there are the distractions in our visual world; many stimuli are competing for our attention. Most often, it's the lighted screen. Try talking with someone while sitting in a room where the television or the computer is turned on. It's pretty hard to fight the visual "draw" of the lighted screen! The lighted screen is our flickering fire, with all the pull of the fire's ancient visual fascination, but none of it's warmth!

We can't change the position of our eyes. On the other hand, we can turn off the television when we want to talk with someone. We're capable of changing how we use our eyes. Semir Zeki writes that our eyes seek universals. If we see the Other as Us, for instance, all humanity as a unity, all life, animate and inanimate as a unity, that's one way to start seeing universality. Would seeing all life as a symbiotic, mutually dependent unity change our fearful/predatory nature? Would we choose peace instead of war?

Changing Brain Chemistries

To change how we see, our brain chemistry, species-wide, has to change. Because it's hard "to teach an old dog new tricks," it makes sense to start new ways of seeing with the very young. Jaak Panksepp (*Affective Neuroscience*, 1998) gives us a fine starting point with his analysis of our emotional circuitry: rage, fear, panic, seek, play. By concentrating on SEEK and PLAY as neurochemically positive emotions, we may be able to grow past antiquated, non-useful drives, needs, feelings and behaviors. We must change how we see and feel before we can change how we act. This means that children's computer games should focus on SEEK and PLAY themes, not on violence, fear, panic, and destruction.

Rage Control and the Possibilities of Peace

Rage control is a problem for many of us, including young adults. Because the frontal lobes of the human brain do not mature until the age of twenty, or even twenty-five,⁶³ teenagers lack the

⁶³Wallis, Claudia; Dell, Kristina, with reporting by Alice Park/New York. "What Makes Teens Tick?" *Time Magazine*, May 10, 2004.

Saving Literacy

judgement necessary to control emotional behavior, including rage. Drawing and writing provide strategies for helping the young brain work with negative emotions, intelligently.

One of the major issues for the 21st century will be how we conduct our relationships on personal, national and international relations. Rage surely is counterproductive to all such relationships, shutting off, as it does, drives toward playful/peaceable, inventive/seeking solutions.

We need mental tools to help us know and understand, empathize and compromise. We need peaceable strategies for a peaceable kingdom.

Brain science shows us that there are no return circuits from SEEKING and PLAY back to RAGE, PANIC and FEAR. Brain science also shows us that we have two distinct selves in our brain, the left hemisphere "I" self and the right hemisphere "We" self where all distinctions are erased between us and the other.⁶⁴ Drawing is a right-brain activity. Along with other non-verbal activities, drawing helps us to access a non-divisive consciousness, experiencing the brother/sisterhood of man. Clearly, strategies for accessing our holistic right-brain consciousness states are useful to living together on this planet in mutual agreement and support.

In the final analysis, it is not just the "spatial" and "non-verbal" aspects of the right hemisphere of the brain that make right-brain experience so valuable to the human endeavor. It is the right hemisphere's ability to merge our consciousness with the consciousness of "All that Is" that makes this side of our brain so valuable to our existence. Speech and literacy (and spiritual practice) allow us to translate that appreciation for our connectedness into action. The right brain inspires us to appreciate the oneness of our world and humankind; the left brain allows us to take action in behalf of our world, including humankind.⁶⁴

Surely, we must come together as families. We must grow beyond our divisive differences personally, locally, nationally, and globally. We have the necessary tools embedded in our brains, hearts and hands.

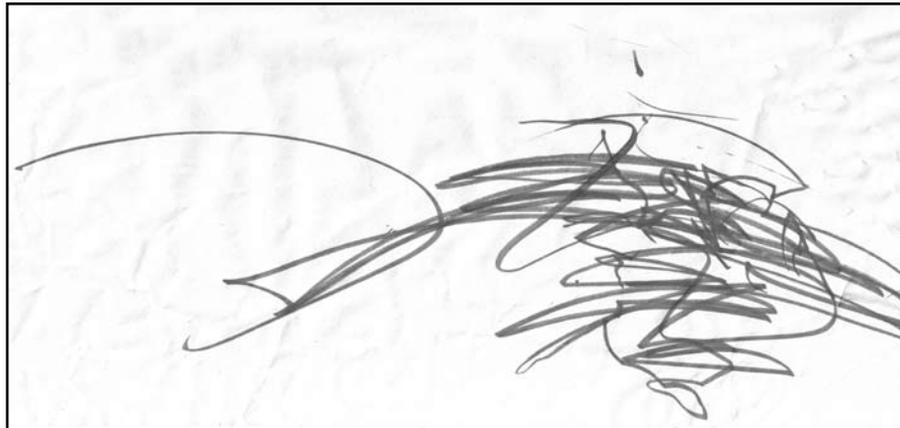
A Prayer

May we humans, including parents, other caregivers and children, come closer together in mutual understanding and respect. We are in need of practical methods for self-knowledge and reconciliation, including how to evolve beyond rage, and fear. Our souls are unsteady in an unsteady universe. As the potters of the clay of our own souls, we require new methods for self-centering. May marks of meaning guide our hands.

⁶⁴Taylor, Jill Bolte, "Powerful Stroke of Insight," a video, www.ted.com/index.php/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight.html



Isabel Guzmán Meyer at age one, scribbling two-handed, executing a proto Strange Attractor scribble-brain stirring, © Deborah Guzmán Meyer, 2009, reproduced with permission of Isabel's parents, Gregory Meyer and Deborah Guzmán Meyer.



Isabel 8/15/09

Isabel and Strange Attractors

One year-old Isabel's two-handed scribbles astonished me! Yet another little child executes the brain/body patterns which will give rise to literacy and symbolic thought! This two-handed, outward-spiraling mark-making happens over and over again right before our eyes! Scribbles carry our prayers.

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Six year-old Nate watching one year-old Isabel scribble. © 2009 Deborah Guzmán Meyer



Nate, 6 years old, self portrait, 2009



Nate, 6 years old, drawing his family for entry into 1st grade.

