

Aesthetic literacy and autobiography

Dr Francis Gilbert, Goldsmiths, University of London

Abstract

This article explores the author's own troubled upbringing and education to develop a personal theory of aesthetic literacy. The author felt an urgent need to do this because of his experiences as both a teacher and a creative writer in the state-run English education system. Feeling that existing pedagogical approaches to literacy are inadequate, he has sought to investigate the reasons why he felt so powerfully drawn to reading and writing literature during his childhood, despite the fact that he was labelled "backward". The article utilises the disparate strands of the author's life and thinking to draw up a model of aesthetic literacy which involves concepts of appreciation and creation. In particular, it examines the ways in which the author responded creatively to emotionally turbulent situations, showing that he developed a form of "aesthetic literacy": a set of aesthetic responses that helped him understand the world and his situation. In his conclusions, he reflects on his explorations and offers a model of aesthetic literacy which might be used to understand other writers' practices.

Key words; Aesthetics, Literacy, Autobiography, Emotional turmoil, Expressive writing, James Britton, Autobiographical utterances, Creative writing, Paulo Freire, Conscientization

Aesthetic literacy and autobiography

Introduction: being a writer and a teacher

As both an English teacher and a novelist, I have frequently thought about how my own writing processes might be applied to my students. Since 1990, I have taught in 5 publicly-funded English schools, and I have often felt forced to teach English in a mechanical fashion by the demands of a test-driven, centrally prescribed system. In 2009, having taught for nearly twenty years, I opted to teach English part-time at a comprehensive and embarked upon a part-time PhD in Creative Writing and Education at an English university. For the creative part of my PhD I wrote an autobiographical novel, a loosely fictionalised account of a love-affair I had as a student in the 1980s.

Most of the material was both personal and ‘adult’ in content, and therefore was not suitable to be shared with my students (11-18 years). I was keen to investigate how my writing might inform my teaching practices in some way. And so, for the “critical component” of my PhD, I examined my own writing processes. After two years of research, I realised that “aesthetic” approaches to “literacy” education might address some of the problems I had encountered while teaching English. This, in turn, directed me to shaping my own theory of “aesthetic literacy”, which I outline in this paper.

To do this, I explore my own upbringing and analyse how certain difficult interactions with my parents shaped me as a writer. These circumstances are, of course, unique, but I aim to show that there are wider lessons to be drawn from my response to the emotional turmoil I endured as a child. Many writers have endured similar situations. By looking specifically at

how I responded creatively to this turmoil, I show how certain aesthetic responses can help one 'grow' as a writer – and also deal with the traumatic legacy of parental manipulation. For this reason, I examine both educational theories about expressive writing and psycho-analytic concepts about how children respond to trauma.

Theoretical approach

The methodological approach is that of *bricolage* (Rogers, 2012) which aims to combine different disciplines -- in my case pedagogical and writing theory with psychoanalysis – in order to arrive at a fresh way of looking at familiar subjects. Kinchloe in 'Describing the Bricolage' writes: "To be well prepared, bricoleurs must realize that knowledge is always in process, developing, culturally specific, and power-inscribed" (2001, p. 689). The aim of this paper is not to provide definitive answers but to discover the ways in which my culturally specific upbringing and my power-relationships with important people in my childhood shaped my writing. I offer a model at the end of the article which might help frame other writers' experiences and work, with the understanding this model is conditional upon a multiplicity of factors, and cannot be applied without careful thought and consideration to the unique situations it is meant to illuminate.

My approach combines auto-ethnographical observation (Custer, 2014) with linguistic analysis, drawing upon the theorising of the poststructuralist psycho-analyst Jacques Lacan (2002) and the educationalist James Britton (Britton, 1992). Using auto-ethnography has helped me situate myself within a specific ethnographic context. I am a white, middle-class child of a piano teacher and a scientist and I am, to some extent, the psychological product of their 'care-giving' and the wider social milieu I experienced. Lacan's psychological theories

are used in the paper to cast light upon the complex psychological relationships I had with my parents and the effect they had upon the way in which I formed my identity as a teacher and writer later on in life. I have also utilised James Britton's theories about how and why children might be taught to write expressively to explain why my parents' narratives had such a powerful effect upon me as a writer. I am aware that these are disparate approaches to provide a framework for the paper, but being a 'bricoleur' enables me to foreground them in such way as to highlight the factors that shaped my life and identity as a writer.

Language, narrative and autobiography: towards a theory of aesthetic literacy

The seeds of my writing life were sown when I listened as a child to what Harold Rosen labels "minimal autobiographical utterances" (1998, p. 60). Rosen writes of this particular phenomenon:

The least regarded, the least studied form of autobiographical acts is the single utterance, which while it is itself not a story, points to a larger narrative. Although it scarcely gets a passing mention it is one of the most pervasive of autobiographical acts, exemplifying more than any other kinds of text the inescapable, always present autobiographical-ness of spoken discourse (p. 60)

There is no doubt in my mind that my mother's "minimal autobiographical utterances" provoked many questions in my mind as a child: I would try to address these through my writing when I was older. From the ages of six until my late teens, after her troubled divorce from my father, my mother would make sweeping pronouncements about members of my family such as: "your father wanted to put me in prison"; "Granny [my paternal grandmother] was terrible to me when you were a baby"; "my father ruined my life". When she was angry with me, she would say; "my life would be so much easier without you". My mother, for the most part, did not fully flesh out these bold statements, but left them there to linger. As Rosen (1998) points out, autobiographical discourse of this ilk tends to "further an argument, furnish an instance, shift a debate from the abstract to the concrete" (p. 60).

At a narrative level, what my mother was telling me were tantalising fragments of her autobiography. She would sometimes elaborate upon them, reciting incidents in her life when these other family members had upset her. As I grew older I began to realise that they were only one side of the story. There might be another, competing narrative, which could well counter-act her judgements; different ways of seeing the same events.

Her comments had a profound psychological effect upon me. The French psycho-analytical philosopher Lacan argues that a child acquires language by hearing its care-givers speak. As the child listens, he/she moves from feeling and sensing the world as a whole into a process of naming the world which necessarily means that the child becomes separated from his/herself and the world. Once the child acquires language he/she can label him/herself as a name, a child, a person; the child becomes an object in the discourses supplied by the parents (2002, 79).

Lacan, like many linguistic philosophers since Saussure, viewed language as an “arbitrary” system of signs in the sense that he perceived that there was no inherent link between the sound of a word, a signifier, and the thing it refers to the signified. Random sounds are assigned to the things they signify; there is no logical reason why a furry animal with four legs is called a “cat” for example. Lacan asserted the “primacy of the signifier” (Belsey, 2002, p. 15). Once a child becomes inducted into this world of signifiers, he/she necessarily becomes alienated from him/herself; he/she begins to use the pronoun “I”, an arbitrary signifier which suggests “self-hood”. This sense of self-hood institutes the autobiographical discourse which he/she will use for the rest of his/her life (Lacan, 2002, p. 72).

For me, as Lacan points out is the case with many children (1993, p. 176), the adoption of this autobiographical discourse brought with it a heavy freight of psychological pain. I was inducted into a pre-existing familial milieu which was fractured and troubled. Because my parents separated when I was young, my mother dominated my early life and enfolded me in a familial discourse which made me feel ashamed of the “I” that spoke in my head; I became aware that “I” was the by-product of my father and my father’s family, who were, in my mother’s eyes, trying to ruin her. Thus, autobiographical utterances for me were particularly emotional and I was aware from an early age that talking about my father and his family in a positive fashion was expressly forbidden in my mother’s company and, as a consequence, forbidden in my own head as well. Things were complicated by the fact that I enjoyed the holidays I spent with my paternal grandparents and the rare time I spent with my father.

My mother’s utterances took a central “abstract idea” (Rosen, 1998, p. 60) – that she had been wronged, mistreated, bullied and ignored – and frequently made them concrete, illustrating them with fragmented anecdotes. As her eldest child, I bore the brunt of her complaints about my father and his family. Until their divorce, my parents were quintessentially aspiring middle-class: my mother was a piano teacher and later a primary school teacher, while my father, having earned a PhD in a scientific topic at a prestigious English university, was a research scientist.

My parents both had affairs during their marriage; there were frequent violent arguments between them, some of which I witnessed. My mother divorced my father in 1974, marrying my stepfather a few years later. My father was not permitted to see me or my brother for several years, except when we were in the care of his parents in their rural home. My father emigrated to work in America, researching the nature of motor memory by experimenting on

the brains of live monkeys. However, after several years of conducting this research, he gave it up and returned to England to work in business. At this time, in the early 1980s, he made a concerted effort to see his children again. After much legal wrangling over access rights, an uneasy compromise was agreed between my parents: my father would see us once a fortnight at the weekends.

The quasi-fictional autobiographical stories I shared with my mother were essentially “made-up, negative” epiphanies, in which I was frequently obliged to manufacture feelings and perceptions that did not correlate with my underlying perceptions. For example, I would say that my paternal grandmother’s harsh tone of voice had made me realise that she was a terrible woman: this was not true – I loved my grandmother. I might say that or that the shape of my father’s face and nose had suddenly disgusted me – again, not true. At one point, my mother encouraged me to rename my father “Pie-Face” because we agreed that he had a revolting face like a squashed pie; my brother and I had to call him that from that time onwards in her company.

These manufactured epiphanies fascinate me now. I can see that I learnt how malleable the world is; even heaven – my glorious holidays with my grandmother – could be contorted into nightmares if I willed it to be so.

I did not discuss these issues with my father or his family until I was fifteen. By then, I was secretly plagued by doubts and anger. In tears, I confronted my father about all the horrible things my mother said he had done to her. He sat me down and told his side of the story as best he could: his version seemed more reasonable than my mother’s, more honest, more contrite, and ultimately more believable. Thus I began to flesh out the details of my mother’s

autobiographical utterances into more fully developed oral narratives: I would tell these to my grandmother and my father. I felt extremely guilty about expressing such negative things about my mother – but the taboo nature of the discourse also energised my talk.

Later on, at university, I recounted these stories yet again to my closest friends and most fully to T., my then girlfriend, who is fictionalised in the autobiographical novel I wrote for my PhD. It was these bedroom confessions which opened the door to the way in which I was able to write about my childhood in my PhD novel.

So for me, autobiographical discourse acquired an “aesthetic” quality in the sense that talking about my family was fraught with difficulties and yet certain words like “Granny” – who I loved but could never talk about – were “luminous”; they glowed with the magic of that person. This, for me, gets at the heart of what I mean by “aesthetic”. It is anything – a word, a moment in time, a poem, a piece of music -- which provides someone with an “affective”, transformative experience (Pateman, 1991, p. 7). There are certain discourses which particularly lend themselves to the aesthetic because they are loaded with feelings and sensations which linger beyond words. They take people participating in the discourse beyond what Lacan calls the “symbolic” – the verbal/linguistic – into the “Real”, the “ineffable and the unimaginable” (Bailly, 2009, p. 98), a place beyond words. Poetry is possibly the most obviously aesthetic verbal discourse because it announces its emotional qualities with the very label “poetry”. The genre carries with it thousands of years of cross-cultural poetic baggage which means that anyone familiar with poetic discourse necessarily expects heightened language and to enjoy an “aesthetic” response.

But it would be problematic to say that all autobiographical discourse is “aesthetic” because the “aesthetic” only exists as a form of “difference” from other modes of discourse. As poststructuralist thinkers have pointed out, language is a sign system which creates meaning through difference (Belsey 2002, 10; Deleuze 1994, 345).

When providing a taxonomy for children’s writing in primary school, James Britton in *Language and Learning* (1992) outlines a taxonomic continuum which could also be applied to autobiographical discourse in general. Having explored the manifold functions and purposes of speech and the ways in which children learn to deploy diverse ways of speaking and listening, Britton inspects the ways in which the development of speech is vital for children to be able to write. He focuses upon what he calls “transactional, expressive and poetic forms of writing” (Britton, 1992, p. 174). The transactional is usually informative, factual and conceptual in nature, answering the needs of a “transaction” – a request for information, a demand for a response. The “expressive” can sway towards either the transactional or “poetic”; it can answer a request for information in a more personal, emotional way than a purely transactional dialogue. It can be less utilitarian, an expression of pure feeling, “heightening or intensifying the implicit” (p. 177). Here is his diagram of the continuum (p. 174):

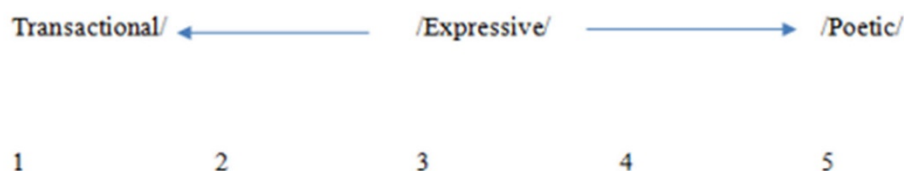


Figure 1

On reflection, I can see that the autobiographical utterances that I became part of as a child could be viewed through this continuum. The life I led with my mother as a child was usually “transactionally prosaic” in nature, as it is with most parents: I answered her requests to behave, dress and conduct my life in a certain way, and she answered my needs to be fed, clothed and housed. My recollection is that these transactions were not terribly expressive; I never felt, for example, that my mother fed me out of love or affection – although she may have felt this way.

If I was to “rank” my relationship with my mother in terms of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Petty, 2014, p. 51) I would say that she provided the needs at the bottom of the hierarchy: the “physiological needs” – food, water, shelter -- and the “safety needs” – freedom from pain. Those higher up the hierarchy – belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and self-actualisation needs – were not, in my view, met by her.

Her autobiographical discourse was shaped by the absence of love, esteem and self-actualisation. Indeed, much of what she said in her most bitter moments was that various other family members had denied *her* these very things; her parents had loved not her but her siblings; she’d been constantly criticised and undermined, and she’d never been helped by anyone to realise her potential. She’d become trapped in a life of mediocrity because her needs hadn’t been met. These autobiographical reflections were deeply expressive, full of anger and bitterness. As Philip Larkin writes: “They fuck you up, your mum and dad/...But they were fucked up in their turn/” (1974, p. 30).

I had very few outlets at home to express my emotions. In primary school, however, I had found that the creative writing and reading exercises provided enabled me to develop what

might be termed “aesthetic literacy”: this helped my “esteem” and “self-actualisation” needs. Writing stories, poems and autobiographical accounts as well as responding to poetry and fiction often gave me the chance to express my feelings about my family situation, albeit in a sublimated fashion. When I was seven and eight years old, I wept as I listened to my junior school teacher read *The Iron Man* (Hughes, 2005), *Stig of the Dump* (King, 2014) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Dahl, 2013).

The same teacher asked us to write poetry, stories and autobiographical accounts; I loved writing nonsense poems which made me laugh, autobiographical accounts and stories with endless things happening. Until Mrs G taught me, I had struggled to read and write and had been considered “backward”. Mrs G. liberated me; I felt free in her presence and the reading and writing came easily as a result. Words on the page lost their “random” quality and became meaningful. A thirst to be expressive in my writing meant that I ceased to see it as a chore but as a joy. This, for me, is the heart of what I mean by “aesthetic literacy”; it is motivating because it is a literacy which seeks to provide us with artistic outlets to express ourselves. It is necessarily expressive; this is the whole point, to give the creator the feeling that he/she is telling their own truth.

To become aesthetically literate, children need to be inducted into the genres that lend themselves most easily to the aesthetic -- poetry, dance, drama, music – but this is not to say that other subjects like maths and science do not have aesthetic elements. Numbers can be infused with expressive qualities just as much as poems. And it may well be that teaching the so-called “sciences” from an aesthetic perspective may make them much more accessible and motivating for children.

It is striking to note that some very successful scientists and mathematicians appear to speak in a highly poetic way about what they do; Einstein's "thought-experiments" which led to him developing his Theory of Relativity seem to be a case in point (Aguirre, 2016). Aesthetic literacy involves drawing attention to the wonder of whatever subject is being discussed.

Mark Johnson in his paper "Dewey's Big Idea for Aesthetics" writes of Dewey:

One of the most distinctive tenets of Dewey's philosophy is his claim that the *quality* of an experience is the key to an adequate philosophical understanding of human mind, thought, language and value. This provides the basis for Dewey's seminal contribution to aesthetic theory – his Big Idea – which is that every *fulfilled experience is individuated by a pervasive unifying quality*. (Johnson, 2013)

Johnson argues that Dewey's concept of an aesthetic experience enables the participant, the "aesthete" if you like, to feel connected to the "whole" of the aesthetic event; it is a connective experience in that it ties together the emotional, the intellectual, the psychological and non-linguistic. It is a "coming together" of language and that which is beyond language. It has a "unifying" quality. This was true for me when I felt so charged by listening to my primary school teacher read the texts I've mentioned. I connected powerfully with the narrative, the characters and the situation, feeling that they were a part of me; the text and myself were one. Above all, becoming comprehensively aesthetically literate involves the learner becoming aware of the emotional and connotative effects of language. To return to Britton's continuum, the learner must move beyond viewing language as purely a transactional medium and needs to perceive language's expressive and poetic qualities.

The sentiments expressed in Wallace Steven's poem *Angel Surrounded by Paysans* are relevant here:

Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,
Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,

Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,
And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone

Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,
Like watery words awash... (p. 354)

Stevens' "necessary angel" is the angel of poetic perception who enables us to see the world "cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set". To foster aesthetic literacy the educator must provide the learner with opportunities for them to move beyond thinking in a "stubborn, man-locked" fashion about the world, and empower them to see language as a fluid, magical medium: "watery words awash". Providing students with epiphanies through reading them potent, relevant literature – like *The Iron Man* – is vital if the learner is going to be freed from the "stubborn, man-locked set" of the prosaically transactional. Stevens takes a poststructuralist view of language, recognising its exceptionally elusive and transient character, it is "awash" with "watery words".

But there is a further element to nurturing aesthetic literacy which is political in nature. As Paulo Freire points out in order to construct significant meanings from texts the reader needs to "read the world" in a political light (Smidt, 2014, p. 90; Freire P., Macedo D., 1987). The reader needs to see how he or she is a political agent in a world that probably is oppressive in some way or other. So far, I have mainly concentrated upon examining the psychological context I emerged from which led to me finding an expressive outlet for my emotional pain in my reading and creative writing. As I became increasingly aesthetically literate during my teenage years, I became aware that I was being oppressed by having either having my voice marginalised or suppressed in the family home. My opinions were not welcome and when

expressed were seen as disruptive and offensive.

At my state primary school, my creativity had been encouraged; for secondary school I was sent to an undistinguished private school which offered very few artistic outlets. Instead I was fed a relentless diet of learning facts, writing analytical essays and taking exams. I was frightened of failure; I knew that I could expect no support from my parents and that my only real chance of escape was to bury myself in my studies. And so I did: I gained power and agency by achieving well academically.

But I felt oppressed and sought outlets for my anger by listening to the songs of Bob Dylan, The Smiths and The Beatles, and reading books by J.D. Salinger (1951), Herman Hesse (1958), Kafka (2014) and Sartre (2000), and watching the films of Werner Herzog (2015) and Francis Ford Coppola (2016). These texts, songs and films and their authors became important educators for me and they still are: they spoke for my sense of alienation and doubt about the world I lived in; they validated my anger and incomprehension; they articulated pain and love and loss. I think of them as my parents; they were far more reliable and honest than either of my actual parents. I entered into an emotional and intellectual dialogue with these authors and their work. I was conscious of the powerful feelings that they provoked in me, forcing me to dwell upon their images, their lines, their cadences, their music; I began to read the world through the lens of these cultural artefacts and still do.

When I was fifteen, inspired partly by how much I'd enjoyed writing poetry at primary school and these writers, I began writing songs and poetry which I was about the people I knew and the world around me. While staying with her during a holiday, my paternal grandmother saw that I was writing and asked to read my work: I was delighted when she

said she liked it a great deal. Thereafter, until I was twenty, I would give her my work, making collections of poetry especially for her. At the time, I was puzzled about why she – an elderly maths teacher who did not read poetry – was interested in my writing, but I can see now that she knew I needed an encouraging reader. This is also a vital element in becoming aesthetically literate; a creative person needs someone to take their work seriously.

I found a couple of friends at school who shared similar passions and together we would talk about how certain books, songs and films connected with us. I was too afraid of their mockery to show them my poetry, however: they could be harsh critics of art they did not like. This was part of the competitive discourse which was endemic in the school: people, concepts, work and life was constantly being “ranked” as to how “good” it was. Nevertheless, on one level, my friends and I assisted each other in becoming aesthetically literate. Freire said in an interview:

Dialogue is the sealing together of the teachers and students in the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study. Then, instead of transferring the knowledge statically, as a fixed possession of the teacher, dialogue demands a dynamic approximation towards the object. (Smidt, 2014, p. 90)

This “joint act of knowing and re-knowing” is central to aesthetic literacy. A work of art, an emotional experience or a special moment needs to be shared with people, to be communicated to be fully realised; to be known and re-known. The concept of “sharing experiences” is significant because the idea of sharing means that one’s “aesthetic judgement” is not imposed upon other people. Rather an aesthetic judgement about a work of art is an invitation to a dialogue about it. Aesthetic literacy is what Paul Gilroy calls “convivial”, in that diverse views about art/life are explored in a democratic spirit, with everyone’s voice and perspective valued (Williams P. , 2012; Gilroy, 2004).

Although we did not realise it at the time, this dialogue about art/literature/music that had a political significance which my friends and I did not realise at the time. When we talked about the art we liked, we spoke in an emotional way about lines of songs, parts of movies and moments when we felt that the world around us had strong connections with what we were reading or experiencing. For us, art (I use this term in here in its broadest sense) provoked what Freire calls “conscientization” or critical literacy (Smidt, 2014, p. 22; Freire, 1996, p. 49). This was particularly the case with our reading of Kafka’s *The Trial* (2014) and Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1931) which made us feel we were cogs in an alienating, random bureaucratic machine. This, for me, is part of gaining aesthetic literacy; the political cannot be separated from the emotional because aesthetic literacy involves reflecting upon why you are feeling a certain way.

Exploring a possible model for aesthetic literacy

To sum up, it is worth outlining the key components that constitute what I view as “aesthetic literacy” in the following chart:

Components of aesthetic literacy	Relevant Thinker
Autobiographical utterances: an appreciation of the aesthetic emerges from autobiographical discourse	Harold Rosen
The child becomes both reflexive and alienated when he/she learns to use his/her care giver's language to place him/herself as an object in the world, an "I".	Saussure/Lacan
The child, through the use of expressive talk, and later as a writer learns to articulate emotions, to reconstruct special moments; the child reads the world and then the text.	Britton/Freire
The learner becomes aware of the connotative and poetic power of language.	Barthes/Labov/Bruner
The learner enters into a dialogue with people about their aesthetic experiences; a democratic aesthetics is established.	Freire/Bakhtin/Gilroy

<p>A process of “conscientization” occurs where the learner becomes cognisant of the political implications of the aesthetic and the transformative effect of reading the world with a critical consciousness.</p>	<p>Freire/Foucault</p>
--	------------------------

Figure 2

To draw these facts of aesthetic literacy together, it could be useful to see how they might fit into a larger structure. I would like to suggest that there are two inter-connected “umbrella” terms into which they could fit: aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic creation. Aesthetic appreciation is intimately tied up with the Freirean notion of “reading the world”, being awake to the wonders around you, placing yourself in the context of the manifold worlds that any human being inhabits (Smidt, 2014, p. 90). An aesthetic appreciator reads many worlds because they live in the realm of the aesthetic which is always pushing the boundaries of what we know and feel. An aesthetic appreciator reflects upon new realms of experience continually; the way today’s sky is different from yesterday’s; the way the same piece of music is interpreted differently by another musician; or the way a novel conjures a new universe. An aesthetic appreciator is aware that we are constantly living in what Deleuze calls emerging “planes of immanence” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 74), new versions of the present moment, and is aware of how our experience of the world is constantly changing.

Conversely, the aesthetic creator, the artist, manufactures these new worlds for the aesthetic appreciator to value and nurture.

Thus, aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic creation become symbiotic processes which might be represented in a diagram like Figure 3:

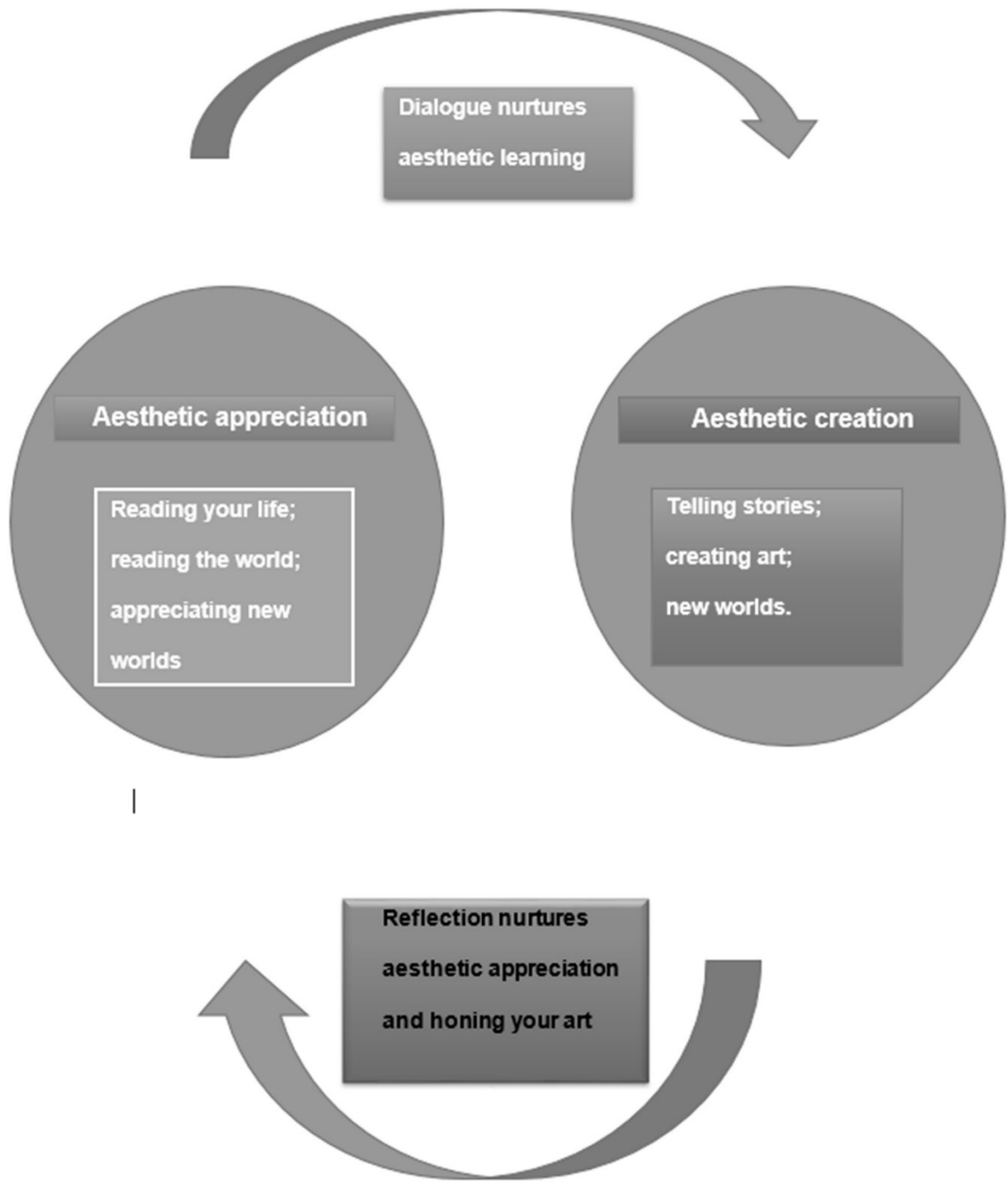


Figure 3

As a result, a dialogue occurs between the aesthetic appreciator and the creator, and a new experience comes into being. Both appreciator and creator learn something new about themselves, about the world, and new realms of experience.

This is a provisional model drawn from my experiences. As I have explained, the components of aesthetic literacy which I outline in Figure 2 all featured in my own life: my mother's autobiographical utterances had expressive elements to them. I was drawn into an emotive narrative about her life; there was a powerful story here which took me beyond the mundane and transactional, which characterised many of my interactions with her. I became self-conscious, aware of myself as part of the family narrative, an "I" with an important role to play as someone who agreed to her version of events. At primary school, however, I became aware that there were other stories, other modes of artistic expression; I felt the power of poetic language both as an appreciator and creator. I learnt that I could create my own aesthetic responses in the form of stories, poems, songs and paintings.

This lesson was not forgotten even though my secondary school did not develop my aesthetic literacy. Instead, on my own, I entered a dialogue with artists – film-makers, poets, song-writers – who spoke to me, and I wrote my own songs and poems. I realised that art could transform me and other people by sharing my own work with my grandmother and discussing art with my friends: a process of "conscientization" occurred where I learnt how I could "read" the world with more criticality than before (Freire P., Macedo D., 1987; Freire, 1996, p. 49). A symbiotic relationship developed between the aesthetic appreciator and creator within me: my interactions with art led me to create art, and my creative work made me want to read other work or to return to previous work with both a critical and a creative eye. I became more reflective of both my own and other people's art.

Significantly, becoming aesthetically literate helped me deal and process the emotional turmoil I felt by encouraging me to perceive that there are multiple ways of representing difficult situations: one story is not enough.

References

- Aguirre, L. (2016, January) *Einstein's Thought Experiments*. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/physics/einstein-thought-experiments.html>
- Bailly, L. (2009) *Lacan: Beginners Guides* (1st ed.). Oxford: Oneworld.
- Belsey, C. (2002) *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (1st ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Britton, J. (1992) *Language and Learning: the importance of speech in children's development* (2nd ed.). London: Penguin.
- Colebrook, C. (2002) *Gilles Deleuze: Routledge Critical Thinkers*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Custer, D. (2014) Autoethnography as a Transformative Research Method. *The Qualitative Report*, 19, 1-13. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR19/custer21>
- Dahl, R. (2013) *Charlie and The Chocolate Factory*. London: Puffin.
- Deleuze, G. (1994) *Difference and Repetition*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Dylan, B. (2016, January 2016) *Bobdylan.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.bobdylan.com/us>
- Foucault, M. (1980) 'Two lectures' . In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge* (pp. 80-105). Brighton: Harvester.
- Freire P., Macedo D. (1987) *Reading the Word and the World*. London: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1996) *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.
- Gilroy, P. (2004) *After empire : Melancholia or convivial culture?* London: Routledge.
- Hughes, T. (2005) *The Iron Man*. London: Faber and Faber.

- Johnson, M. (2013) Dewey's Big Idea for Aesthetics. In R. Bhatt (Ed.), *Re-thinking Aesthetics: The Role of Body in Design*. New York: Routledge.
- Kinchloe, J. (2001) Describing the Bricolage: Conceptualizing a New Rigor in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), 679-692.
- King, C. (2014). *Stig of the Dump*. London: Puffin Classics.
- Lacan, J. (1993) *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*. (J.-A. Miller, Ed., & R. Grigg, Trans.) New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Lacan, J. (2002) *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. (B. Fink, Trans.) New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Larkin, P. (1974) *High Windows*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Morrissey. (2016, January). *Official Morrissey Facebook page*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/Morrissey?ref=mf>
- Pateman, T. (1991) *Key Concepts: A Guide To Aesthetics, Criticism and the Arts in Education*. Brighton: Falmer Press.
- Petty, G. (2014) *Evidence-Based Teaching* (2nd ed.). Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Rogers, M. (2012) Contextualising Theories and Practice of Bricolage Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 17, 1-17. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/rogers.pdf>
- Rosen, H. (1998) *Speaking from Memory: a Guide to Autobiographical Acts and Practices* (1st ed.). London: Trentham Books.
- Smidt, S. (2014) *Introducing Freire: A guide for students, teachers and practitioners*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Stevens, W. (1972) *The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play*. (H. Stevens, Ed.) New York: Vintage Books.

Werner Herzog and associates. (2015) *Werner Herzog Official Website*. Retrieved January 20th, 2016, from <http://www.wernerherzog.com/>

Wikipedia. (2016) *Francis Ford Coppola Wikipedia Page*. Retrieved January 29th, 2016, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Ford_Coppola

Williams, J. (2013) Difference and Repetition. In E. b. Somers-Hall, & D. W. Somers-Hall (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze* (pp. 33-54). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, P. (2012) *Paul Gilroy (Routledge Critical Thinkers)* (1st ed.). London: Routledge.

Bibliography

Bachelard, G. (1994). *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Gadamer, H.-G. (1986). *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. (R. Bernasconi, Ed., & N. Walker, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.

Highmore, B. (2011). *Ordinary lives: studies in the everyday*. London: Routledge.

Holt, J. (1995). *Why Children Fail* (Revised ed.). New York, US: Perseus Books Group.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. London: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. London: Routledge.

Lepore, S. S. (Ed.). (2002). *The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Emotional Well-Being*. Washington D.C., US: American Psychological Association.

Nalbantian, S. (1994). *Aesthetic autobiography: from life to art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Anais Nin*. New York: Macmillan.

Scruton, R. (1983). *The Aesthetic Understanding*. Manchester: The Carcanet New Press Ltd.

Smith, R. (1971). *Aesthetics and the Problems of Education*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Spivak, G. (2012). *An Aesthetic Education in an Era of Globalisation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press.

Steedman, C. (1982). *The Tidy House: Little Girls Writing*. London: Virago.