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| **DESCRIPTION** | **INTERPRETATION** | **ANALYSIS** |
| On 6 March I travelled up to Lancashire. I used to work in Preston, commuting from London, and still have friends there. There is an eerie familiarity about taking the train “up North” from Euston. A possibility of an endless chain of reflections and feelings opening up. I am conscious of not wanting to do that. Can I be matter-of-fact about this trip? There is also the school. A primary school. Such a big part of my life. My mother was a primary school teacher and deep into her 80s still carries that identity very strongly (my father taught physics and chemistry at high school). My grandfather was headmaster of a boys’ school for nearly 40 years in the middle of the 20th century and in the town where he lived was simply known by everyone as “the master”. My uncle was the principal of one of the teacher training colleges for primary school teachers in [NAME OF COUNTRY]. It is a world I know so well and which yet is strange to me. So many feelings and memories from my own childhood are stirred up when I enter the space of primary education, and that is not even to mention my memories of being in primary school myself. And I am always vaguely aware of a normative pull towards teaching, teaching young children especially.  Before getting on the train I gave a talk in [an] early childhood studies seminar on our project. I talked about Bloch’s remark that “home shines into the childhood of each of us but no one has been there yet”. To me this means a lot. It helps to overcome both nostalgia for and dismissal of (one’s) childhood. In the discussion there was some criticism of my use of the term “childhood”, as if it has a core meaning. After my talk and before getting on the train I had a session with my analyst. I mentioned the discussion in the seminar of my use of “childhood”. My analyst started laughing, a very rare occurrence indeed, when she pointed out that the seminar had “childhood” in the title. | I don’t come to a situation in a neutral way. I am attuned like this or like that, otherwise nothing can have any meaning and I can’t engage or relate to anyone or anything. | I wanted to leave all of this behind, out of the equation, and see if I could be new, and myself, in this school, in this situation, and look ahead instead of looking back. I wanted to leave these remarks out of my notes but I think it is necessary to add them, perhaps precisely because I want to leave these origins behind. True genesis comes at the end, not the beginning. [Journalist] told me a few months ago that sometimes we have to cauterise some part or thread of our life, to keep life open and possible and even to allow that thread to keep what was good about it. Now, at middle age, I feel I can say that what once was is no longer and be at peace with it. |
| When I walked from NORTH WEST station to the school in the morning I ended up in the middle of the school run. I heard the twittering and chattering of voices, the cars, the parents and I felt a nervousness in my stomach as if it was my first school day perhaps. |  |  |
| When we went into our first class, year 3, many of the kids called me by my name. They were happy to see me and I was happy to see them again. One of them said that I had been away for too long. “It’s been two years since you were here”, he said. I said it hadn’t been two years, but it had been too long. Time away makes me feel anxious very quickly. How long have I been away from others, people I love, how long have they been away from me, at various points in my life? Isn’t it all too much, this business of encountering? So much happens in the narrowest interstices of lived time. | I feel that communication is suffused with trepidation, timidity, shyness: how momentous it is, or can be, to utter a word and hear a word. I want to use the word “scheu”, “schuw”, and I think there is no English equivalent for it. Are we shy enough? Do we realise what happens when we relate? So much misery comes from our obliviousness to this dimension of communication. It precedes ethics. It has nothing to do with morality, yet all depends on it. | Buber felt this when he encountered a tree as much as a human being or God. I want to make people see that communication is a tremendous occurrence, all the time. People should walk around taking special heed when they open their mouths to each other and yet speak freely. |
| [TEACHER] explained that the children are going to observe what they do when they plant the trees. She asked if the children knew what “to observe” means. One of the girls raised here hand and said, with a marked Lancashire accent and the rhythmic, paced prosody of stating the obvious, “it means keeping a close eye on something”. The words rang out like a bell in my ear and I smiled. I also thought how often will she have heard those words from her parents, I wondered: “I’m going to keep a close eye on you”. But most importantly the poetic beauty, the material directness of the words, as if they were embodied and sharply contrasted to this strange, abstract word that came floating into the room, “to observe”, stood out more than anything else that day. | I can be freed to my language when I notice how children, when they learn to speak, very often take over the local accent or dialect from the place where they live. Their language continues to develop and becomes more and more polished and standardised as they grow up. But that early phase of making your own space in your language is local, embedded, embodied, rooted in the soil of immediate speech. We enter our language through speaking and hearing, here and now. | What can the experience of coming to live in language tell us about the life of trees, and our lives with nature? The words of the girl in class stood out from everything that was said that day and I still hear them in my mind. I want to find a way of expressing what that experience meant to me. |
| [Human geographer] and I had a conversation about the concept of “tree” and about speculative realism. He used the word “mobile”: can we make the concept of the tree mobile, remove if from its association with colonising epistemologies and overcome the split between the tree and the rhizome? The forest does that already: it is both and more than both at the same time. We noticed that speculative thinking, as a kind of imaginary of concepts, has a place in what the project is trying to do. We noticed how strongly the children are infused with a kind of scientific discourse. When asked about trees, the first thing they say is “oxygen”. Can our speculative method do something to open up more possibilities for a rhetoric of trees? Later [artist] and I spoke about the same thing. [He] remarked that so much of the language we hear and have around trees has to do with what they are for, how they are useful for us. We lack a language, as a society, as a culture, that does justice to what trees are in and for themselves. But is this not needed as we imagine the Treescapes of the future? | How we are brought back at all points of our journey to questions of language. But we are also learning to see language as on a par with the rest of reality, not a special domain that is unlike material reality itself. This is a blind spot, as I am trying to articulate something but can’t find the words for it. |  |
| Many children enthusiastically showed the worms they were digging up. Animal life captures their imagination more than plant life. The trees are there for the animals, and for us, it seems, in their minds. |  | One of the challenges of our project is to do justice to the relation between plant life and animal life, at the level of our lived experience. With plants we enter a level of consciousness that is different from waking consciousness. I recall a remark by Bloch, about his early reading, as a teenager, Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, saying he read it “botanically”, misunderstanding and yet understanding it, and that he “heard the nightingale sing in it”. What does it mean to read, speak, relate, botanically? Can we do some work around this? |
| I noticed that there were quite a few children who worked in pairs planting trees. When the pair was a boy and a girl I couldn’t help thinking of Adam and Eve and the tree in the garden of Eden. But they didn’t plant that tree at all. | You can be too high up on the ladder of inference. Not everything has a meaning: a refreshing thought. This was me again, my overdetermined past as a child of the educational establishment. The light that shone into my childhood. | Perhaps that has to do with botanical thinking. Relatedness outside of symbolic representation. If so there would be a new sense of freedom we can find among the trees. |
| We worked with three groups. They all had a rhythm and dynamism of their own. Group one was full of buzz and creative chaos, full of energy and noise. Group two left the least impression in my mind. I waited too long to write this up and have difficulty remembering what they were like as a group planting out in the field behind the school. Group three worked like a harmonious, dedicated whole. The children managed the whole session pretty much by themselves and were attentively going about their business. They also filmed a lot and used the voice recorders naturally. | As trees do not exist in isolation, so do people. Groups are real. | We can overcome the split between independence and co-dependence by noticing that in human relations as well as in natural relations there is a possibility of combining freedom with connectedness. I want to reserve the term “communication” for that type of relationship. |