

## Constructing a Pedagogy of Apparentness

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### Résumé de l'article

In this explorative essay, I discuss the complexity of apparentness as it pertains to being a teacher educator and an artist. Notions from creative and postmodern research approaches help me suggest that it is a quality of perception and not a quality of art or any other kind of text. In this exploration of how apparentness comes in and out of focus for me as an educator and as an artist, I begin with a discussion of the role of art in my becoming a teacher educator; I realize art's efficacy as a site for exploring the acts of facilitating discussions, drawing the attention of others, and raising an awareness for what we believe matters. As a painter, I reflect on and inquire into what is laudable and limited in these forays of connecting art to teaching and education. The research approach is narrative and reflective, not intent on the discovery of discreet findings, but more interested in discovering questions and in offering some ways of framing my experiences and their possible implications for educators, teacher education, art, and artists. I ponder the parallels between art and education, particularly in how viewing art can be a metaphor for classroom discussions. The essay is concerned with what we believe is apparent and mysterious, and how we engage in dialogue with the resonance and dissonance of the perceptions of others.

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## CONSTRUCTING A PEDAGOGY OF APPARENTNESS

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**Abstract:** In this explorative essay, I discuss the complexity of apparentness as it pertains to being a teacher educator and an artist. Notions from creative and postmodern research approaches help me suggest that it is a quality of perception and not a quality of art or any other kind of text. In this exploration of how apparentness comes in and out of focus for me as an educator and as an artist, I begin with a discussion of the role of art in my becoming a teacher educator; I realize art's efficacy as a site for exploring the acts of facilitating discussions, drawing the attention of others, and raising an awareness for what we believe matters. As a painter, I reflect on and inquire into what is laudable and limited in these forays of connecting art to teaching and education. The research approach is narrative and reflective, not intent on the discovery of discreet findings, but more interested in discovering questions and in offering some ways of framing my experiences and their possible implications for educators, teacher education, art, and artists. I ponder the parallels between art and education, particularly in how viewing art can be a metaphor for classroom discussions.

The essay is concerned with what we believe is apparent and mysterious, and how we engage in dialogue with the resonance and dissonance of the perceptions of others.

**Keywords:** teacher education; painting; discussion; the creative process; narrative research

In this essay, I articulate a pedagogical stance that disrupts the idea that apparentness is a given quality of things and events. I instead propose a pedagogy where apparentness is regarded as contingent on our own perceptions and not an actual quality that things or events have. My major question is, how can we enact a pedagogy where we are critically aware of what we believe is apparent? Rather than arrive at discreet findings, I propose a few themes around which inquiries can be phrased. For my purposes, I am defining *pedagogy* as our own awareness for and articulation of our stances when we are the facilitators of learning for others. In this regard, pedagogy is a complex convergence involving our principles and beliefs as educators as well as our positions of inquiry. Further, we can be facilitators of learning in various capacities: as educators, as artists, as researchers.

I define *apparentness* as that aspect of our perception (including ideas, stories, descriptions, memories) which we may at first believe is obvious and without construct on our part. Though I take up issues of apparentness in terms of art, I am not merely talking about simple instances of visually noticing that which is obvious. The focus of apparentness here has more to do with what we conceptually might think is a given. And, by overlooking such concepts for their constructions, we might not realize how *meaning* is something we are making. Looking at art and constructing meaning, or drawing students' attention to an idea in a text, involves some sense of what we think is apparent.

A pedagogy of apparentness involves looking for and undoing assumptions of apparentness as fixed givens. Even the conventions of introducing a concept, as I am now in this article, involve some assumptions of apparentness: that ideas have a sense of completion, that the larger relevance of those ideas is positioned as somewhat universal. When I started writing this article, it was an outcropping of a document I call "How It All Connects." It might have been my way of explaining my own "rhizomatic entanglements" (Irwin, 2013, p. 200). I wanted to articulate the connection between the fact that I am a high school English teacher, a teacher educator, and an artist. The connection between the first two is easy. One naturally leads to the other. The third is a creative pursuit outside of the realm of my discipline; it would make more sense if I were a poet, or a playwright. So this exploration begins with an attempt to articulate a connection between my creative and professional pursuits, through which I realized that one way of explaining that connection has to do with stances that I have about apparentness and the facilitation of learning.

Both artists and teachers are involved in the construction of opportunities to uncover, question, and interrogate, apparentness in viewers and students respectively. Teacher educators deal with the construction of apparentness in a double-layered way,

as we are inducting new teachers into understanding how they, too, create opportunities to interrogate apparentness.

Research and education share a regard for inquiry and continued learning. Art shares with both research and education in multiple ways. It is not only a site of education and research, but can also serve as an educative and research experience for the artist. And a pedagogy of apparentness is a situational, contextual process. It is a process based on memory, narrative constructs, and experiential knowledge. It is a stance towards education where we are aware of interpretation's potential to appear in the guise of factual apparentness.

In interrogating apparentness, I borrow some notions from poststructuralist theorists: "In poststructuralism, 'all categories are unstable, all experiences are constructed, all reality is imagined, all identities are produced, and all knowledge provokes uncertainties, misrecognitions, ignorances, and silences'" (Britzman, 1993, p. 22, as quoted in St. Pierre, 2010, p. 503). Britzman provides important terms to describe apparentness. In one sense it is a category: an often unrealized one that we are operating with when we perceive and when we communicate.

If we consider creative approaches, broadly speaking (art, writing, music), how do these forms construct the category of apparentness? How do they illuminate or hide what we might think is apparent?

## **Apparentness and Different Creative Forms**

Each creative form can illuminate, reflect, and cast shadows in its own way, making us aware of how apparentness can be a form-contingent construct. Just because we do not know it from experience, and just because we cannot explicate it in words, does not mean it is not real or not apparent to someone else, in some other way, and in some other context. "Wordless narrative research is a dynamic method of inquiry that uses visual storytelling to study, explore, and communicate personal narratives, cultural experiences, and emotional content too nuanced for language" (Horwat, 2018, p. 176).

Horwat's proposition can be viewed as one that reminds us of the expressive contingencies of what is apparent. The emphasis on the notion of wordless speaks to the hegemony of language's place when it comes to validating what is apparent. In turn, it challenges the kinds of experiences and truths that language forms can convey. Experience that cannot be spoken about is still, after all, experience. Visual art can bring to light different kinds of experiences than words can. Art and language can be employed to explain each other.

In addition to the varying capacities for creative forms to illuminate the apparent in different ways, the factors that contribute to how we create can, at times, be unapparent. For instance, there can be an “absent-present” (Hoben et al., 2019, p. 458), in the new notions of the self that form our processes of creative constructions:

We tell our graduate students to write a literature review as if it were a transparent, neutral task. What we fail to tell them is that writing a literature review requires positioning oneself as a scholar in academic debates, it requires negotiating the discourses and epistemologies of a discipline and it requires a writing identity that is confident enough to be critical of well-established scholars. (p. 458)

What Hoben et al. observe is how complex notions of self in relation to scholarly production can be *made* apparent to those who are learning. In this particular case, the educators recognize that part of the doing of research involves an identity stance. This might involve clearly explicable things like where we stand in relation to compelling issues. It might also involve a more intuitive (and perhaps a more imaginative) sense of how we exist in a discourse. In either case, their contention is an example of a pedagogy of apparentness because they are realizing that something they have already learned is an unarticulated given in their practice. Those of us in fields where we teach creative production can ask ourselves: what notions of self-construction might be pertinent to the various tasks of our field? How can we create learning opportunities for our students to discover, enact, and construct such notions of self?

This *writing identity* can be a corollary to other kinds of identities that involve creative construction: the *teacher identity* that students must cultivate in order to have command to steer discussions, pose questions, and take on the necessary leadership activities involved in moderating discussions; the *artist identity* to take a stance on methods, approaches, and aesthetic positions within the discourses of artistic ways of being; the *teacher educator identity* that I am cultivating to appreciate the nuances and complexities in being an educator of educators; the *convergent identity* that I am making sense of in being both an artist and an educator.

Part of a pedagogy of apparentness involves increasing our awareness for what might not be apparent to students, and this identity articulation is just one example of that. While this pedagogy involves using creative ways to illuminate what might not be apparent, it more importantly involves our own awareness of realizing what we think is apparent, so that we can construct more nuanced engagement with learning creative production. Realizing what we take for apparent involves a continuous attention to how

we articulate what matters. Making the acts of narrative apparent is one way to illuminate our own taken-for-granted sense of apparentness.

## **Making Narrative Acts Apparent in Narrative Research**

Conscious narrative research is not merely a rhetorical approach, it is a demonstration of rhetorical approaches via the awareness of and intentional opposition to fully constructed realities. It is an attempt to demonstrate the act of narrative while narrating. It is a kind of pedagogy of apparentness where we try to draw to the surface our narrative moves.

This poststructuralist notion of narrative suggests that meaning is created and does not merely arise out of the stories we tell. As Loots et al. (2013) observed, the idea that narration is merely to put events in order, “imposes a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected” (Loots et al., 2013, p. 109).

Within the field of teacher education, there has been criticism of this merely employing approach. There are the conventional stock portrayals of educators, relying on easy expectations of audiences (Carter, 1993). The portrayal of educators is thin, more like “stick figures” (p. 9) involving certain recurring character types, for instance, the well-meaning teacher who cannot change, or “The deficient teacher” (p. 9). These conventions play with movements of narrative as well as audience expectations in order to present findings and insights without expressly referencing and making apparent the acts of interpretation (Carter, 1993). Such an approach treats stock character types as part of a predictable notion of what is apparent.

More broadly, an unreflective employment of narrative relies on stock forms of narrative construct without realizing that these forms are interpretations and not facts. For instance, all of the following are interpretations: where a story begins, where a turning point happens, and how we determine who a central character is. Most, if not all, elements of storytelling are interpretive choices. What might it look like to intentionally oppose such mere employment? What might it look like to use narrative while simultaneously directing the reader’s attention to the interpretive acts of narrative? In this next section, I attempt to employ this approach.

## **The Story of Apparentness**

If I say what this story is about, I am already relying on a narrative device of truth construction. Even if it is my story, am I the only one who can say what it is about?

I will begin this story with a moment of discovery. While at the MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) one day I was drawn to a machine-like creation of Marcel Duchamp called the *Rotary Demisphere* (1925). I was interested in the apparentness of its mechanisms. You can see how it works, how a belt across a sphere turns another sphere. Like this piece, the wheel in the mind is turning, or being turned by, the experiences around us; however, the apparentness of our own mechanisms that turn our experiences are not so easily visible. There are contexts acting upon every experience. It was 2014. What was the inner rotary that drew me to this piece? And, really, can we be drawn to anything without some other pre-existing context resonating with the new experience?

Michielsens (2000) suggests that we frame memories according to our current ways of interpreting: “as time goes by, the frame of reference, the vocabulary, the connotations of concepts and of value systems change” (p. 184). These ways of interpreting include narrative constructs as well as our current understanding of what ideas mean. While a certain memory might have happened, we are choosing where to place emphasis within the current frame of what matters to us.

I was about to teach a methods course at a college in the English Education program. I had been a high school English teacher since 2001. I was inured to having a constant, if not subtle, awareness for the ways in which the texts around me could be incorporated into my teaching. What was new to me was my emergence into being a teacher educator, into teaching others how to draw attention and to realize how what they thought was apparent would influence how they drew attention.

When I saw the sculpture, *Rotary Demisphere* (Duchamp, 1925), I began to imagine a meta-discussion I could have with my methods students (whom I had not even met yet). It would be a discussion about how to lead discussions. “Why do you think the artist wanted us to see how the piece works?” That would have been one of my first questions. But I would have used this question itself as a centerpiece to talk about how we lead discussions and how we draw the attention of others.

Think about all of the things that I assumed with this question. I assumed something about what the artist wanted. I assumed something about how the work of art worked. At the time, I was concerned with the question: How do our questions about texts set agendas for students? This is a very important inquiry that draws our attention somewhat to the notion of apparentness. But it was sometime later that I realized the power of this question: How does our notion of apparentness steer us towards the questions we pose?

I was steered by certain things that I believed about the sculpture and about art. It was a moving sculpture. And it seemed to me that the viewer could see how it works.



Now that I really think about it and take a step back, how the motor works is not apparent. The actual mechanisms of the motor are housed in a construct. I accepted how the motor worked. Apparentness involves an acceptance for what we already have a context for explaining.

This is something that I can state clearly now, but it was not so apparent to me at the time. What I was clear about was that moderating a discussion was an improvisational performance, requiring a readied awareness to play on, play with, oppose, draw out, harmonize, and create dissonance with. But the ways in which our own taken-for-granted treatment of apparentness as a given could influence student learning was a vague notion for me.

### **Decontextualizing; or, Not Realizing that Telling is a Text**

In this example, what I thought was apparent about Duchamp's work was actually my interpretation of the art. The sense of apparentness was constructed: it was a text. If we consider the hyper-literal meaning of the word *decontextualize*, it means to not acknowledge that something is a text, and that it has all of the features of texts. Texts are constructed, discursive, and open to interpretation.

This decontextualizing can happen in various pedagogical capacities. As educators, we can overlook the contingencies that influence a given lesson, or the meaning of a class discussion. Similarly, in qualitative research, the interview can often be regarded in a decontextualized way. Scheurich insists "that the interview interaction is fundamentally indeterminate" (Scheurich, 1997, p. 73). Though the site of Scheurich's contentions is a focus on research interviewing, he situates these contentions in a broader challenge to "the conventional, positivist, view of interviewing" (Scheurich, 1997, p. 64). He is concerned, in other words, with the constructions involved in the acts of finding out and in the acts of reporting what we think we found out; acts that are crucial to teaching, and to the construction and exploration of texts (including art). He is specifically addressing a kind of communication dealing in inquiry. This has a parallel to education, as inquiry is central to classroom discourse and curriculum design. And he is concerned with the representation of that inquiry as researchers publish their writing.

Scheurich's central contention is that researchers represent what happens in interviews and simplify the interview to a set of mere verbal occurrences, without a reverence for the complex ambiguities that influence what happens, and without regard for the ways in which they construct notions of truth.

Researchers construct a “decontextualized interview” (Scheurich, 1997, p. 63), one that is removed from surrounding contingencies. Scheurich uses a metaphor to explain this construction and illustrates how apparentness is a quality of perception:

The bricks of the construction are the reductive monads of meaning, coded in categories in the transcript. These bricks are formed, however, from a mold that is then shaped from the researcher’s conscious and unconscious assumptions and orientations. (p. 63)

There are similar terms that address what Scheurich (p. 63) calls a “mold”: a frame of reference, a blueprint, an architecture, a way of mapping, a narrative system, a conceptual definition, a paradigm, a belief system. Such systems provide ways of forming notions of truth; they are part of the subtle machinery in our knowledge construction. We can proceed with these systems without addressing them, not realizing that conclusions may often be representations of our own interpretations: “While these generalizations are said to represent reality, in my view they mostly represent the mindset of the researcher” (p. 64).

An intentional pedagogy of apparentness would directly inquire into such ways of framing. For example, what framed my reading of Duchamp’s *Rotary Demisphere* (1925)?

There were two contingencies at the time that I was aware of, and a third that became apparent later. There was what drew me to the piece in terms of discussing art, and then there was the hypothetical scenario of discussion meant to teach Education students. These first two contingencies, much like the two spheres in the piece, provided the comforting notion of apparentness wrapped up in a good presentation. Movement upon movement was at play: two perceptual concerns on my part. The third contingency has to do with this question: as an English teacher, why focus on art?

Art can be a compelling site for beginning teachers to practice moderating complex discussions. As a high school English teacher, I was used to drawing attention to various aspects of written texts. What was a new challenge for me was how to experientially convey to my methods students that the ways in which we lead discussions about texts are themselves interpretations. Pedagogy, to me, was not about a specific approach to teaching a given text, but the recognition that how we lead others to construct their own interpretations and how we moderate and manage dialogues in the realm of interpretation is premised on *what we see* as interpretive potential in the text.

Sometimes, what is apparent to us arises out of what we are looking for. I was looking for something that allowed for more immediacy in collaborative dialogue than the discussion of literary texts. The pause between questions and comments that is required as we look down at a written text seemed to me to take a slight step away from what we all see simultaneously. This notion had to do with my understanding of art at the time. I liked the idea that students could be on their feet and surround a painting while discussing it. There is no equivalent to literally surrounding a work of literature. It seemed that having art function as a text made the act of drawing attention more central than with written texts because we are all looking at the same work at the same time. Of course, the claim that we are looking at the same work of art has a simultaneous truth value to it. In a literal sense it is true. But in terms of apparentness, it is open to question. And this is the reason for discussion in the first place, to give space to draw out some of the resonance and dissonance. But there are just as many reasons why we might need to return to the internal when looking at a work of art. And there is a back and forth between the inner space and the dialogue. All of this is hardly apparent, simultaneous, and difficult to uncover. Participating in a discussion about any text (artistic, literary, or otherwise) requires the capacity to draw the attention of others to that which they might not otherwise notice, to that which we think is apparent. It is not an act where we tell them what it means, but rather an act concerned with raising awareness for the potentiality that certain factors can, after all, contribute to meaning. So my concern at the time was a kind of pedagogy of apparentness. I wanted new educators to realize how their interpretations set the agenda for their students' interpretations. But what I did not realize was that the whole premise of the exercise rested on a mapping of meaning regarding art that I had. I was aware of wanting my students to employ a pedagogy of apparentness. But I was not fully aware of how to employ such a pedagogy in my facilitation of theirs.

## **Apparentness and Teaching Decisions**

Sometime after the visit to the MoMA, while I was planning for the methods course in the university library, an art exhibit on the third floor of the library became apparent to me in a way it never had been before. Though I had spent hours in the library that summer, walking past the exhibit many times, it was only after the MoMA visit that I saw the potential for engaging with the art as a site of inquiry in my methods class.

I was eventually able to hold one session of my class in the library, allowing my students to choose a work of art, construct a few questions about it, and then create an impromptu discussion with their classmates, in which they led them through an inquiry on the work of art.

In returning to my lesson notes for “Session 8: Library Art” I was interested to realize my emphasis on real intrigue and inquiry:

So, here’s what you’re going to do. Take some time to browse and choose a work that you’d like to lead a small discussion on. This will be gallery style, right here, tonight, in groups of four. Choose a work because of your perception of its interpretive potential, because it draws you in, because there are questions you really have about it. Remember, leading an inquiry doesn’t require you to have deep knowledge of the piece. You only need to think about the meaning that could potentially be arrived from an inquiry. (lesson preparation notes, 2014)

My purpose at the time was to make the act of discussion moderation more transparent, so that my students could look at the actual things they do as discussion moderators. Further, I wanted them to notice how *what they believed mattered* would be the key within which the discussion was composed. I realize now that I placed an emphasis on how apparent intrigue was for them. But there are other approaches that could have been contrasted. If I were to redo this activity, I would set it up so that, on a second round, I would prompt students to choose a work of art where they might be able to simultaneously consider the work of art and the act of discussion. They might choose different works of art. Or, there could be a session where they are asked to choose a work of art for which they anticipate the apparentness of the discussion becoming blurred. The point is that I now realize how the language of my prompting can more effectively situate the activity as one of experimentation with realizing what we think is apparent.

I am also aware of the construct of the story, of the need for a moment of epiphany as a device. The fact is, I am not sure if the MoMA episode happened first or sometime after I had taught the methods course in the library. I could be projecting onto the past as a way to draw attention to moments of discovery. When and how things become apparent might not be so easy to explain. I cannot escape “the way scenes are organized, the grammatical resources employed and the choices made about social positioning” (Loots et al., 2013, p. 109). I am aware of my need to illustrate to the reader. We have to shape the story somehow. But, by disclosing the fact that it might not have happened this way, I am shedding light on my interpretation of the past, and not the past, per se. This, to me, is what the poststructuralist notions can do for narrative. What we choose to tell is inextricably bound up with why we are telling. I begin with the MoMA, because I am able to realize now all that was not in my construct of apparentness at the time in terms of art.

## Apparentness and Being A Painter

Sometime after teaching this course, I returned to painting after a fifteen-year hiatus. It has been a few years of painting now and I see nuanced differences between visual constructs and linguistic ones. For instance, visual constructs do not have to rely on conventional orders of reading. In reading written texts in English, we move left to right, top to bottom. While literature may challenge other notions of conventions in terms of human experience, the interplay between space, the eye, and movement was central to some of the challenges I was posing in my own art, though my understanding of this came later. For example, the painting in Figure 1 plays on viewers' sense of ordered reading. The images are based on photographs I took in different locations at completely different times and not necessarily in the order in which they are portrayed. The lines between the panels (a convention that we are familiar with from graphic novels and comics) connote a sense of chronology, as well as cause and effect. It is difficult to move away from the order when the lines are presented in a scenic way

**Figure 1**

*Panels of narrative*



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But a painting can allow for other effects when converging images from different times. Figure 2 is more of a painted collage, the order of viewing is less imposed on and the connotation of simultaneity is more possible.

**Figure 2**

*Experimental self-portrait #2*



To tell this as a well-constructed tale, however, is to do the decontextualizing that Scheurich critiques (1997). When I painted this painting, I initially intended to paint a large singular portrait. The central figure did not seem as accurate as I wanted, so I decided to add other images. I had no conscious intention at the time other than playing around with images. The result seems to imply a story about the subject depicted. But it was years later that I saw the potential to compare this painting with Figure 1 and contrast how each uses multiple images in different ways.

It was years later still that I realized more dilemmas between what we see and what we can portray in an image. As an English teacher, I was steeped in questions surrounding the dilemmas of portrayal in language, (such as: how can language portray the passage of time, or the emergence of feelings, or the conjuring of thoughts?), but I had not yet realized similar dilemmas between what we see and what we can portray in an image. For instance, a conventional canvas or image-scape is bound by four edges and four corners, boundaries that no human eye has. At the same time, there is no conventional artistic image-scape that can replicate such features of vision as peripheral vision (which we are always partially aware of), or even overlooked facts like how you always see a ghost-like image of your nose.

But beyond the practical limits of art in rendering visual experience, I had not fully realized that painting was not only a visual medium, but a tactile one. Statements by other artists of their own such realizations seemed sensible to me only in conceptual ways, not yet in physical ways that related to my practice as an artist. For instance, when I heard Helen Frankenthaler explain the interplay of the canvas and the paint as pictorial elements, I understood it conceptually, but not in terms of physical tactility: “A red-blue against the white of cotton duck or the beige of linen has the same play in space as the duck, or that duck assumes as important a role as the red shape” (De Antonio & Tuchman, 1984, pp. 82-83). On a conceptual level, Frankenthaler is telling us that the classical contexts of atmospheric painting, where we look at objects depicted within a setting, are now thrown into question as we look at each elemental force presenting itself: “The plate that the apples are on is as important as the apples themselves. It isn’t as if background meant the background is a curtain or a drape in front of which there is a table on which there is a plate on which there are apples” (De Antonio & Tuchman, 1984, p. 83). From a purely pictorial point of view, this made sense to me as one way in which abstract expressionism questioned the hierarchy of elements in a picture. But I did not yet realize how this is also a declaration about the value of the physical object of the painting—of the canvas and the paint presenting a physical reality. My experience with my own practice of such tactility allowed me to have a sense of epiphany when I returned to Frankenthaler’s words, years later. It is not so much what Frankenthaler actually means, because the phrase *actually means* signals a belief that



apparentness is outside of the viewer. It is about how her explanation changes in its meaning to me. My understanding now is about her insistence on the words “as important as” (De Antonio & Tuchman, 1984, p. 83). This is another iteration of the idea that apparentness is about the individual’s perception, about where we place importance. It took me years of painting and a precious amount of accident to fully engage with the meeting place between texture and image, and to realize paintings not just as renderings of imagery but as physical art objects.

The accident began with a clearance sale on canvas rolls. The art store was discontinuing them, and they were on sale at a steep discount. I bought about 20 rolls (including some unprimed ones, which I had no idea what to do with) for less than \$400 in total.

It took me years to go through these canvas rolls and I began with the primed ones. When I finally got to the unprimed ones, I experimented with the application of gesso. The accident happened when I had only a thin amount of gesso left but an abundance of acrylic medium. I mixed the two and primed the canvas with this convergence. This thin coverage drew my attention to the surface of the cotton, to the actual texture of it. I noticed how beautiful the color was when the cotton texture was still noticeable. Suddenly, the cotton canvas became an interactive part of the process. It became one of the mediums I used. Rather than the classic description, *acrylic on canvas* I realized that, for me, it was all about, *acrylic with canvas*. This eventually led me to apply paint directly on unprimed canvas. I tried painting on unprimed canvas years earlier but could not see the value of it in my own artistic terms. In a sense, my earlier foray was me taking on the approach as a prescription.

When it eventually became a genuine approach for me, not only did it emerge out of an accident, but it emerged within my own need to conceptualize an art practice that asserted that art was not only a visual practice, but a practice of object making. Some of the first works where this looser use of gesso happened were in the abstracts appearing in Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6. Note that Figures 3 and 4 are the same painting, as are Figures 5 and 6. The closer angled pictures allow the tactility and variation on the surface to come across more clearly.



**Figure 3**  
*Untitled April 2019*

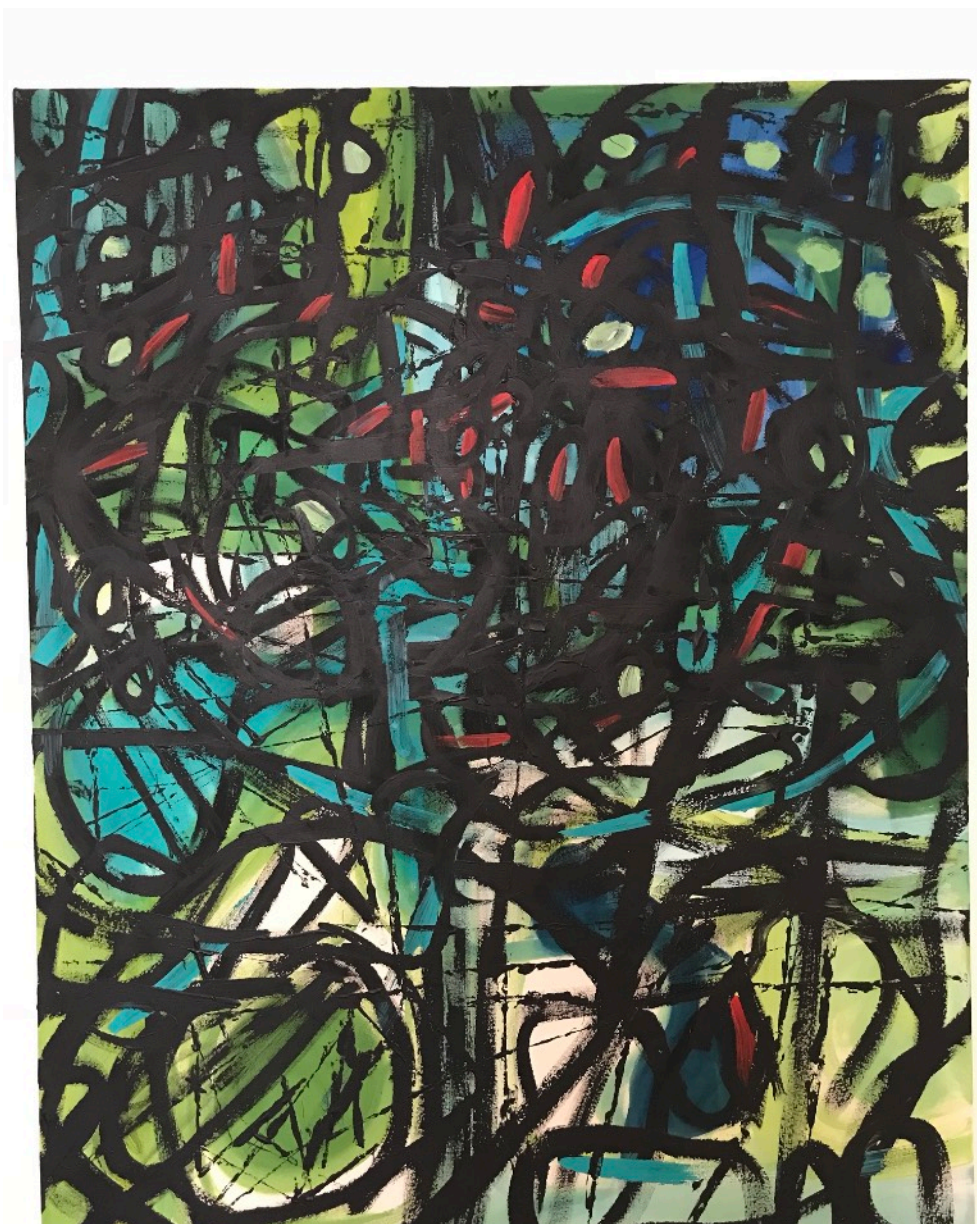


**Figure 4**  
*Untitled April 2019*

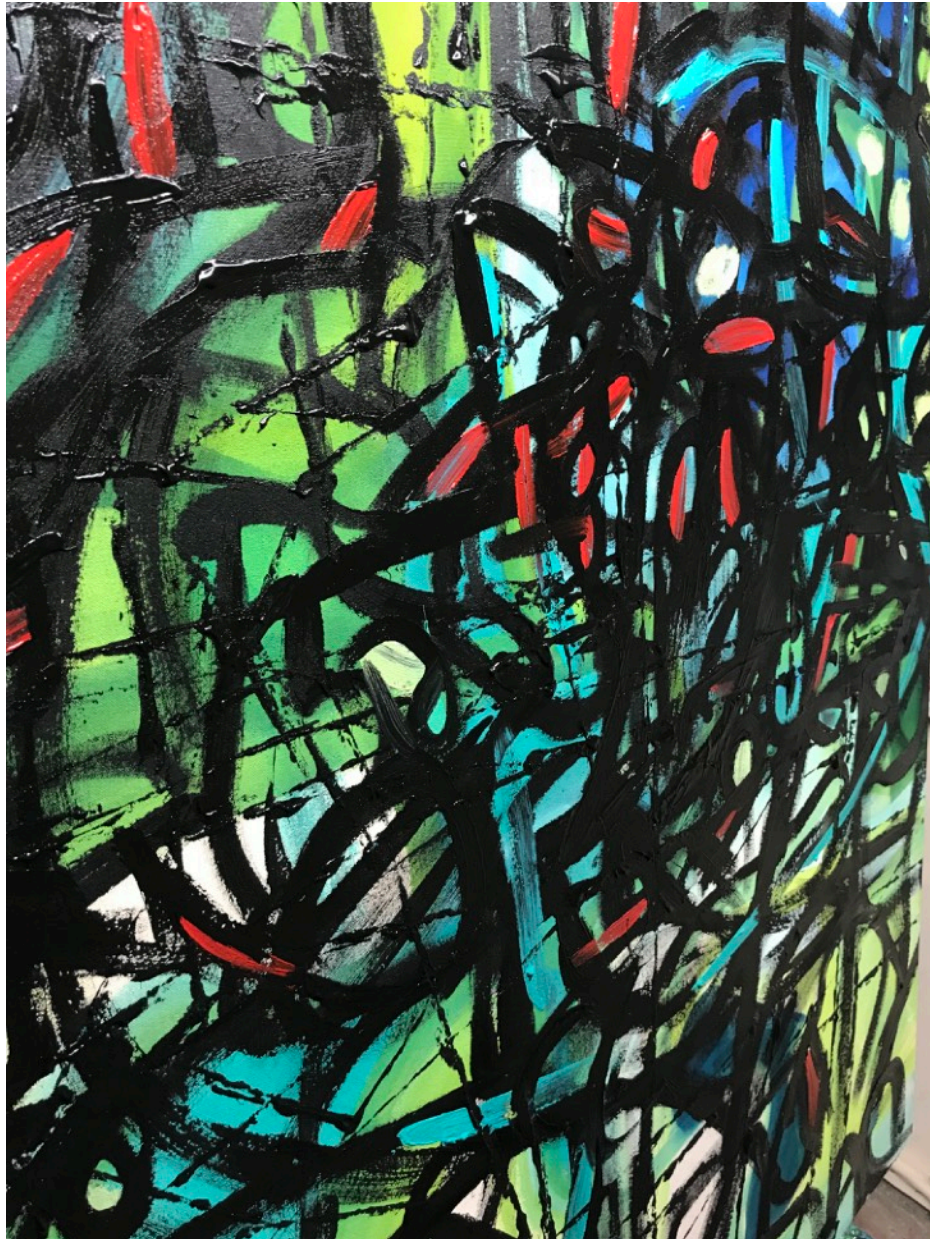




**Figure 5**  
*Untitled July 2019 #3*



**Figure 6**  
*Untitled July 2019 #3*





Figures 7 and 8 are different angles of the same painting; a more recent abstract where I do not even use gesso. This is where the practice eventually arrives.

**Figure 7**

*Untitled December 2019*



**Figure 8**

*Untitled December 2019*



Most recently, Figures 9 and 10 reveal a new turn in my understanding of paintings as physical objects. The bass guitar string stitched through the upper part of the painting was not intentional from the start. The painting fell down in the garage and was pierced by something, a box corner perhaps. I have developed the sense that any incidental damage that happens to one of my paintings (a tear or some paint while in the studio) is not damage but is an actual change in the piece. I decided to *repair* or further alter this painting with yarn, but I could not find any around the house. My son plays the bass and I had kept the old set of strings.

**Figure 9**

*Acrylic and guitar string*





**Figure 10**  
*Acrylic and guitar string*





This accident helped me arrive at what might prove to be another venue in my construction of paintings as objects. But for me, the apparentness of these approaches as practices had to come out of the time and experience spent with the materials. It is about the necessity of physical presence with the materials in the process of the making. The physicality of paintings as objects, rather than as mere images, makes physical presence a necessity.

## Apparentness and Being Present

I have come to understand the necessity of physical presence in my own construction of art. But I often wonder the extent to which art can assert the value of presence for viewers. The images of art that are so ubiquitous on our digital devices are incomplete. They are images in only one sense of what an image is. Often taken as a straight-on photograph, the images lack a sense of the physical existence of the painting. Such a rendering of art involves various kinds of decontextualizing: descaling, and de-placing. Unarticulated constructs of apparentness lead us to the sense that we have seen a work of art, simply because we see a picture of it on our devices.

How can art demand a viewer to be present? In a day and age when anything can be visible anywhere, what makes here count? And how can we engage in the *here* as a contextual construct involving interpretation, and not as a set of apparent facts?

I believe these questions are as central to the art world as they are to education. In many ways, art and education are facing a similar challenge of in-person presence. One of the most compelling reasons for seeing art in person is how art allows us to respond in open-ended and collaborative ways. Looking at an actual painting allows the viewer to see from the side, from the bottom, from other angles. In person, we can experience the way light alters the painting at various times of day, or the way the placement of the painting in the space can alter its meaning, as it is contextualized differently in relation to other works of art, and other objects around us. Scale is mutable when art is photographed. But scale becomes an incredible force—whether small or grand—when we see the actual work. I was amazed by how small I thought the painting *The Persistence of Memory* was, the first time I saw it (Dalí, 1931).

In turn, I was in awe of the grand scale of works by Jia Aili in the *Combustion* exhibit at Gagosian (Aili, 2019). Whether we are talking about scale, placement, the impact of light, or even seeing an occasional thread on the side of the canvas, these in-person acts of seeing allow us to engage in improvisational ways with the art. What is apparent can become challenged as the physical reality of art throws into question our

conceptual frames of reference. We, as engagers of art, become more than mere viewers. We engage not just with the art, but with the certainties and uncertainties of perception itself. Similarly, live discourse invites unpredictable maneuvering and improvisational decision-making as students navigate between expression, thought, and the ideas of their peers.

The viewing of art can be used as an extended metaphor for the ways that discussions can engage us, and the movements in a discussion can have parallels to the way a viewer considers a work of art in person. Look at it up close, from various angles, consider its contrast to what is around it. Look from far away; look at other works, and then return. It might have been these parallels that also made the exercise from the methods class a point of interest to me. But it was also about my own belief in the necessity of rich discussions in classrooms that led me to be on the lookout for ways to explore such practices with the methods students. Our angle or position of viewing will influence how we lead others to interpret. In wanting the Education students to be aware of their own interpretations and how those interpretations influence teaching, I too was enacting an interpretation of teaching itself: that teaching is about exploring interpretations, constructing ideas and embracing ambiguities, within the collaboration of our uniquely combined presence.

## Conclusion

A pedagogy of apparentness is a path of inquiry and not certainty. It involves raising questions about our constructs of apparentness insofar as those constructs facilitate learning (for ourselves and for others). Rather than provide discreet findings, I propose a few themes around which inquiries can be posed to develop a pedagogy of apparentness. They include: the form within which we are working; a reflective employment of narrative; actively not decontextualizing; and the promises of art.

If we consider the form within which we are working, we can ask questions about how this form works as well as questions about what might be less apparent to those we are inducting. How can this creative form shed unique light in ways that other forms might not? In what ways might self-construction be a subtle and crucial part of various aspects of practice?

Different forms of creative construction are capable of bringing to light that which is apparent in different ways. What might be regarded as apparent in one form (the clarity that language can provide in verbalizing things) might not be possible in other forms. And yet, these other forms may be well suited to express other aspects of knowledge and experience that language might not regard as apparent. There is the

possibility to construct meanings that are in the margins of words; meanings that are real, yet not articulable.

A reflective employment of narrative can involve posing questions about how we story experience. How is my use of narrative conventions an act of interpretation? Where am I placing value in choice and positioning as I construct my narratives? How might we be relying on narrative conventions in order to construct meaning?

Actively contextualizing and working against decontextualizing can involve narrating from a position of interpreting what we think is apparent. By intentionally contextualizing what we think is apparent, we can use narrative to directly inquire into our ways of framing what is apparent. We can ask questions about purposes, our experiences, about the context that contributes to what we are deciding is apparent.

As artists, we can intentionally make apparentness the subject of our art as I did in some of my paintings (by making the order of narrative part of the subject matter). We can realize the aspects of the forms that we work with and how certain features become apparent to us through practice. More broadly, we can question the very definition of art as a visual medium and consider its possibilities as object making.

My unofficial title for my methods course was *The Text of Teaching*. I thought that teaching was like a text for my students, but I see now it was a convenient parallel for me. As I emerged into being a teacher educator, drawing an analogy to teaching English helped me understand my new role. But the analogy was incomplete. I realize now, if teaching is a text, it is not only like a written one. It is also like art, or music, or any other kind of text. And while it is like all of them, it is also like none of them. It is a text that can be read in many directions. But beyond being a text, it is an act. I realize the dilemma in treating an act like teaching solely as a noun and excluding the doer—a corollary to the limitation of merely calling art a visual medium or believing in the factual accuracy of the “decontextualized interview” (Scheurich, 1997, p. 63). In these instances, language and what we think is apparent can limit acts of noticing for ourselves and others. Our habits with language surrounding creative processes can be opened up. We can view process inquisitively and with a sense of awe. We can look at the ways that our processes define the forms within which we are working (art, education, research). We can ask ourselves what we think is apparent and seek to articulate the frames of reference that steer our attention. In so doing, we might possibly challenge, revise, and reinvent what we believe is apparent.

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