

Tracking a Course in the Landscape of Environmental Education

Meri-Helga Mantere

(Excerpted from Mantere, Meri-Helga ed., 1995, "Image of the Earth. Writing on art-based environmental education" (translation of: "Maan Kuva." Translation by Marjukka Barron). pp. 3-17.

The development of environmental consciousness was first understood as an important area of art education in Finland some 25 years ago. Since then, the methods and issues which have been emphasised have changed and become more diverse. There is a difference in seeing art as a tool of environmental education, seeing art as environmental education and seeing environmental education as art. Each alternative is possible and tones the content and activity in a different way.

Artistically-oriented environmental education is at its best, or at least its characteristic features are best brought forth, when the artistic and creative perspective runs through the teaching project from the planning stage to the evaluation of the results. This presumes that the entire environmental education process is accentuated by the manner of observing, experiencing and thinking customary to art. This way, the artistic contribution is not restricted merely, for example, to the illustration or animation of factual information on the environment. Instead it truly offers a view and approach of its own both towards the environment and towards education. My aim is to describe environmental education following the holistic ideas of art-based environmental education. My intention is not to contrast or contest the scientific and artistic approaches. First and foremost I am dealing with a choice of viewpoint and, of course, a challenge to experiment with different thought patterns in developing environmental education.

TEACHING AS ART

To view teaching as an artistic or near-artistic activity is possible and natural because, among other things, it involves various spheres in which characteristically artistic elements, such as rhythm, space, temporality, sounds, movement and pictures, create an aesthetic

union. At its best this touches one's feelings and activates images and creativity, and gives meaning to one's thinking and work. For instance, aiming at functional unity of content and form, or consciously building up a beginning, ending and climax, are examples of fundamental questions in the art of teaching as well as other art forms. The colour and quality of the teacher's speech, the choice of words, body movements and body language in general, the paraphernalia of the surroundings, the resonance of the surfaces, the spatial impression created by colours, light and objects, the temporal rhythm of the whole and many other aesthetic factors affect what and how we learn. Form is a message, not merely on a visual, superficial level, but in a much deeper sense. Form bears meanings, which we consciously and unconsciously interpret. The social atmosphere and dynamics of the learning situation, the participants' lifestyles and experiences and manners of expression, and improvisation – essential in real life situations – are all also obviously both artistic as well as educational factors.

If we accept that teaching is art or an art-related activity, preparing it is also inevitably more or less artistic by nature. Among other things, this means that the sentiments and experiences, the knowledge already obtained and absorbed, the outlines and experiments, and the insights and visions of the designer or scriptwriter of the teaching process form an essential basis of the whole. At the same time they are elements of the preparation. Working on a personal level and having an individual touch are self-evident features in creative artistic work.

Let us assume that I, an art educator, am once again beginning a new environmental education project, hopefully improving on the previous one, even if only slightly better. Where should I begin with my students? Not that the beginning in itself is enough. One must progress, learn, evaluate, progress again and bring everything to a meaningful conclusion, sufficiently completed, even though the actual process

as a learning experience is more important than the finished work. Anyway, the process can itself be taken as a piece of work if it is perceived and conceptualised as such. At least it has a beginning and an ending. The pedagogical creation can also be evaluated didactically using principles similar to those used in art critiques (1). So, the designer of the teaching process must visualise the whole picture right from the beginning, set goals or at least directions, see it all in his or her mind's eye. But one must have a starting point, either spiritual or concrete, and that will set the tone for the entire process.

THE ENVIRONMENT IS NOT AN OBJECT

As I begin a new project on environmental education, a field of untold possibilities opens up before me. There are many possible approaches and I feel a responsibility and uncertainty of choice. When I experience something similar in front of an empty canvas, I can resolve the difficulty by beginning without conscious effort, for example, from a spontaneous inner or outer movement. But is it possible to start this learning situation in an analogous way? After all, I am not starting out alone on this journey, I am taking a group of other people with me in a pedagogical context. I cannot paint, experiment, cover up, remove or change the future teaching situation as I please, unlike with the canvas in the privacy of my studio. In an environmental education project the object of the activity and research is really not an object at all. The environment is, of course, the entire field, and I am there also, a participant in it and at the same time at some place defining the point of view and horizon. Or, in the words of the environmental aesthetic Berleant:

“Most often we are at the centre of that field, the zero point of spatiality, as Merleau-Ponty called it, not because we are most important but because we are necessarily its perceptual source. Furthermore, environment, as we now realise, is more than what surrounds us, so that this degree zero, the radiant point from which the environment extends, is part of and continuous with environment. Yet to identify this point as the source of environment on some occasion is not to elevate the human position or to embrace some kind of subjectivity. Our awareness is also part of our organic, bodily presence and at the same time social. And all are bound in a dynamic nexus with the physical conditions in which we act and the magnetism of their features. Environment arises out of the

reciprocal interchange between my self as the source and the generator of the perception and the physical and social conditions of my sensations and actions. When these coalesce into coherence, we can speak of an environment. Environment is not the construction of the perceiver or the geographical character of a place, or even the sum of these. It is their original unity in active experience.” (2)

In practice, my artistic planning process involves exploring and evaluating the temporal, material and economic resources which set concrete limits to my teaching situation. Maybe I am also musing about how one could overcome these limits if necessary. And what about my students, these actual individuals and this particular group, should they be involved already now in the art of planning? It would be one way of opening the project. I decide that the time for working together is later. First I want to take my time and feel where I stand.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF TRADITION AND THE FOCUS OF THE PRESENT

I can, of course, lean on tradition in planning the course. In any case, even if I didn't, the tradition would still play an important part. I am not detached and independent from it. Attempting even moderate detachment requires sufficient familiarity with the tradition, so that the detachment is an organic disconnection, and not, for example, naiveté or dilettantism brought about by ignorance. In the latter case one might believe to have come up with something better than before, when in fact one is simply repeating traditional platitudes, adopted unconsciously.

Environmental education, which has included, amongst others, the critical study of the environment and ecological viewpoints, has been a part of art education in Finland for already a quarter of a century (3). Using their own methods and concepts, professional art educators have taken part in the ever expanding front of environmental educators. However, connections to the scientifically- and socially- oriented branches have been limited until recent years. In the minds of many individual art teachers and in the profession's collective memory there are experiences of how information about the exploitation of nature, the ill effects of fanatical consumption, global pollution and the demolition of old building complexes reached the vigilant art pedagogues at the turn from the '60s to the '70s. Teachers drew conclusions concerning their own

teaching. As they were times of social activism, the issues were viewed through the language games of social activism and propaganda, and the cultural production of images. Up-to-date art educators wanted to open the eyes of their pupils and, besides traditional artwork, introduced assignments using short briefings on some single topic issues as openings. It was new and refreshing to see, or at least assume, that art and art education could take an active part in social debate. Before long, even before the '80s, this led to a dead end. The use of conscious, threatening environmental scenarios and political topicality as intellectual fuel proved to be a questionable idea. The typical environmental clichés produced by pupils during these years speak for themselves. But in the archives we can also find pupils' works from the '70s in which the artistic and ecological viewpoints are combined in a startlingly fresh and effective way (4).

As a counter-reaction to social criticism, many art teachers turned to safer traditions. To some extent this included modernist inspirations and new technology. At the same time intellectual models were more or less consciously sought in new learning theories and especially from experiencing and studying new art movements. If not earlier, the ARS-83 exhibition introduced and encouraged new thinking among art educators, which was also reflected in teaching. The viewpoint shifted from social issues to a person's inner thought patterns, the personal and archetypal world of signals and symbols, the ambiguity of interpretations. Neo-expressive art and, later, post-modernist escapades became visible in the work of art instructors. Many were fascinated by the thinking of C. G. Jung, and the brain researcher Matti Bergström became a popular lecturer as he spoke of connections between art education and the understanding of values. Environmental art and conceptual art have further changed artistic thinking and art education. However, a practical, traditional and, in a way, simple idea of teaching basic techniques of visual expression, the basic visual variables and the history of art, also prevails in everyday art lessons at school. But in which direction does the rich tradition of my line of profession point or push me towards in my role as an environmental educator? I find that while familiarity with tradition gives a certain background and firmness, turning towards it also lacks something essential which I badly need. Should I call it, for instance, a 'here and now' game, a focal point of creativity? It is daring to take a step outside tradition into the midst of today's challenges knowing that one bears tradition within oneself.

ART EDUCATION AND ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

We must have the courage to ask ourselves whether we as art educators are doing our share to create an ecologically meaningful and sustainable lifestyle. Concern about what is happening to the prerequisites of life on mother ship Earth has not eased during the years; it is quite the contrary. Isolating feelings of concern from one's own pedagogical work or suppressing such feelings is not a solution. Giving in to feelings of helplessness and despair would be giving up creativity and renouncing life. Believing in the omnipotence of technological know-how in solving problems would also be self-delusion. As individuals there is little we can do, but in order to make our work fulfilling, it should have the right energy and direction. Characteristically, artistic activity gives a form and a channel to the feel and insights of the times and the potential to open one's eyes and heart. Art stands as a movement against insensitivity and indifference. It creates images of hope and revival. But of course aspirations and needs are also a part of the versatile art world. Commercialisation and market-ideology, on the other hand, produce their own forms of hardness, selfishness, short-sighted utility and oversized egos. The theology of success and personality cults do not take ecological responsibility seriously. However, a polish of green is well suited to their fashionable image.

In this terrain I will move from the path of criticism in another direction, where one initiates new phenomena rather than grumbles over current ones. Of course the criticism of society and the art world, and a creative production can be combined into one undertaking. I could guide my group to study and become aware of the absurd and tragicomic aspects of our time. I know that interpreting our times and surroundings through caricatures, for example, is not a bad idea. But the theme is not convincing enough for me to persuasively lead others in this direction. I can direct enough of my energy into my teaching work only if I have confidence in the meaning of its content and form. Otherwise my pedagogical contribution will be impotent.

What if I carry out something I have tried before? Something that worked well, or an interesting pedagogical programme or structure in written form? Am I a producer of something new or a reproducer of something old? Luckily I can rely on creating new colour, interpretation, actual and innovative experiences here and now, inside a given form or structure. This is what is going on in the performing arts all the time. This also happens when a familiar, meaningful work of art repeatedly leaves a powerful

impression on you. It is relieving to remember that an old form may awaken you time and again, like an old object that you are delighted to take into your hands. The incessant chase for novelties, on the other hand, reflects the ecologically questionable nature of our present lifestyle.

STILL ANONYMOUS YET EXISTING

I am still looking at alternatives and weighing choices. I almost feel stage fright. I feel a desire to back out, and on the other hand, I sense a task ahead. It is also tempting to carry out something simple but impressive which would be more easily and quickly gratifying than working up from contemplating the basics. But some inner demand, and a thrilling feeling that something fascinating, fun, meaningful and productive may be ahead takes its victory. I close my eyes and take a deep breath.

This time I do not want to rush and take the efficient teacher's 'result-producing' 'get-on-with-it' attitude: 'Working is everything', 'just get started, it will sort itself out'. I feel composed, settled in my being and from here I start imagining and thinking and scrawling on the visual plane of my mind, or I simply begin watching the paint strokes of my thoughts. I arrange an imaginary installation in a spaceless space, a project of environmental education, which I decide to name, so that it can become firm and obtain an individuality of its own, an existence in its immateriality. This would make it easier to communicate with it. Anyway, an environmental education project is a long and boring phrase to have to keep repeating. I decide to call the project Nex to mark its nameless existence. How does this Nex take shape, its beginning and form depending on my decisions and actions? What does it look like? What does it want and where is it going? Does it have a voice? What about a characteristic odour?

A NEW WAY OF LOOKING

Around me in the physical and social, spiritual and material reality and at the same time in myself there are ample possibilities for Nex. But how can I see the essential and necessary ingredients clearly when they are inside me and outside me at the same time, and when most of them can only be perceived by one's heart and the faintest motion of thought? Anyhow, everything is in continuous motion, changing slowly or quickly and connected by various networks. As many things seem to be taking a destructive direction, one must suspect that there is something crucially

wrong or at least deficient in the modern outlook and the way of experiencing and giving and gaining information in our world. Should we devise or make prevalent some completely new yet undefined way of looking at and perceiving our environment and the human being within it? Or perhaps we can use a more holistic ancient method, which tends to be forgotten or disregarded? Zen, Tao, Christian mystics and alchemists may have tried to speak of it; nature healers, wise old folk, many noteworthy artists and many others have certainly tried through their being and work. Theodore Roszak's words feel right:

“How clearly we understand the world depends on the emotional tone with which we confront the world. Care, trust, and love determine that tone, as they do our relationship to another person. Our sense of being split off from an 'outer' world where we find no companionable response has everything to do with our obsessive need to conquer and subjugate.” (5)

In Gestalt therapy (6), which aims at the integration of the body and mind, and where the word 'ecology' was used already in the 1950s, the core of psychological growth and healing lies in the principle of being in contact with one's current actuality, the immediate here and now of bodily feelings, emotions and surroundings. Gestalt therapy views artwork as particularly integrating, because the field's material characteristics, sensations, imagery, alert awareness and skills combine into an intuitive functional unit. When taking place simultaneously, acceptance of the material reality and circumstances, immediate contact with the changing environment represented by the artwork, intense involvement in the activity, and sensory-motor integration mark high quality mental activity.

The possibilities of creative artistically-oriented environmental instruction to strengthen the experiences of one's physical existence and being in contact with actuality are obvious, as is its role in deepening interaction between the environment and the individual. In practice it can, for example, begin by going back to basic feelings, sensations, quietness – really listening to one's self, and the other, where the other can be another person, but also non-human nature. When one's own expressive actions rise from this basis, they strengthen true-to-life basic values. Furthermore, development of the holistic Gestalt thinking provides an ability to see interrelations between phenomena and relations between figures and backgrounds, a possibility to experience and understand the dependency between details and entities. On the other hand, respect towards

unconnected factual information, isolated and restricted branches of knowledge and school subjects, and emphasis on the divergence and competition of individuals or units at the expense of communality increase insensitivity towards the environment.

I can hear my computer humming and my left ear is ringing and there is a pain in my neck. Have I dwelled somewhere in my speculations so long that both my body's needs and the reality of beginning Nex have been left aside? Luckily stretching exercises help and I have enough willpower left to turn my eyes onto my immediate surroundings, to see what is to be seen right now.

ONE'S OWN STEPS

In my mind's eye I can see the 25 or so learners with whom I am beginning this project. I contemplate what I might happen to know about them or what I assume, what they rouse in me as a group and individuals. I imagine the room where I will meet them when we begin. I also see how I will be there and then how I will have a demanding task: the cultivation of sensitivity, understanding and wisdom; towards the environment. And my tool is Nex, which is not only a tool but also life. I see traces and clearer pictures of earlier productions related to environmental education, and my own fumbling journey to the present stage of my environmental understanding also flickers by.

Deep ecological studies (7) emphasise becoming conscious of one's personal environmental experiences, sharing them with others and, in this way, developing a deep ecological consciousness. Self-reflection is an often-used term in contemporary pedagogical texts. I have indeed myself become aware of the fact that studying my own path of learning and, for example, visualising it, identifying the meaningful steps clearly enough, helps me to understand something more general about the learning process, something that I can also adapt in my teaching. Let it be that each of my students' and my own background and ways of experiencing are different and that different learning strategies are suited to different people.

I see how objects and buildings, whose external design had interested me before, changed into reflectors of mental images and ideas about human nature; their position became interesting, not only in our culture but also in nature's cycle. I also see how the concealed fate of lavatory waste and the essential nature of ground water one day presented themselves to art educators as inspiring aspects of life, as soon as Steve van Matre (8), the prophet of earth education,

pointed them out to me in his enjoyable stories. I see the works of Teuri Haarla, Kaarina Kaikkonen, Jussi Kivi, Tarja Pitkanen and many other environmentally conscious artists, whose ways of communicating with the world I have found touching. Furthermore, I remember how I have become aware of aspects about my relationship towards nature, which would otherwise have been left unfound, while making some of my own installations in the woods. As I was in the forest in between the trees mounting a light gauze canopy which had been dyed with earth colours, a quiet dialogue took place between my cultivated and primitive selves. Moreover, I enjoy thinking about the energy and altruism of the young environmental education activists I have met in the Association of Environmental Education. These are reaffirming recollections, which are good to look upon. On the other hand, it is more difficult, for example, to look at my own consumer habits which leave much room for improvement. A certain harshness and realism is brought into this gallery of experiences by feelings aroused by nature's wild strength, 'cruelty' and uncompromising character. For example, news about the Estonia catastrophe or floods and earthquakes horrify and nauseate people and the mechanisms of security and control granted by civilisation seem more than necessary. The dark and the cold are as much a part of nature as the blossoming apple trees. The tameness and sunny one-sidedness of many 'wonderful nature' - projects and summer art camps set in the bosom of nature make one wonder, as does the cool 'value-free' nature expertise which I have come across on several occasions and which concentrates on prediction and control. Perhaps we should learn to know and accept the fears caused by nature and naturalness better and in a more finely-tuned way. Perceiving hidden emotions is also a way of being in contact, and recognising your feelings leads to wisdom. The mechanism of control, submission and exploitation may not be dischargeable if its deep basis is repressed and unknown. Artistic activity offers an irreplaceable opportunity to express and process one's fundamental feelings, the unconscious mental activity, not only in art therapy, where it is a matter of course, but also in artistic environmental education.

Being a board member of our city flat's housing corporation has also illustrated environmental issues in a rather concrete and healthy way. Watching over oil consumption, renovation solutions, yard maintenance, water bills and waste management is apparently distant from my aesthetically-oriented main flow, but only superficially. Each decision made by the housing corporation has its own economic, ecological, aesthetic and ethical dimensions, even though for some reason only financial language is used in the

board meetings. What if the discussion and decision making were to be prescribed by the beautiful dimensions of aesthetic experience, social creativity and a lasting lifestyle? I imagine the renewed board of our housing corporation, a decision-making organism consisting of four men and myself. The economic realities still exist, but one could be released from many habitual solutions and look for new approaches. So far I have not started to divert the board onto a new course, maybe I am not ready to do it yet. But the valuable experience the housing corporation offers me and my imagination has strengthened my views about the essential influence that the hegemonic language has on environmental matters.

BOOKS AND COLTSFOOTS

Who and what else can I thank for what I understand about environmental matters? A quick glance at my bookshelf reminds me how Reino Kalliola's old texts inspired me to think about the relationship between biology and aesthetics, and Yrjö Sepänmaa's new works helped me to analyse the connection between the aesthetic nature and ethics of things, in a way that I found acceptable. Henryk Skolimowski, Suzy Gablik, Thich Nhat Hanh, Arne Naess, Viktor Papanek (9) and many other writers have succeeded in teaching me something essential on environmental matters. I feel gratitude. And then all of a sudden, without apparent logic, I see before me an image as clearly and almost with the same intensity as when I was three years old – the first coltsfoots of spring by the muddy road in Lauttasaari, and I feel the joy and the warmth of the sun and the smell of the earth (A coltsfoot is a small, yellow flower. In Finland, it is the first wild flower of the spring). For a moment I stop to wonder why this image arose in my mind at this moment and so clearly. It reminds me of its existence every now and then, whether as the same or as a slightly changing image I cannot tell. This time it may have just come to remind me that it is among my most important teachers.

Of course the procession of environmental teachings and teachers that has come my way is not limited to the above mentioned. This is a somewhat random sampling, but it makes some simplifications possible. Learning about my surroundings and my aesthetic relationship towards the environment has progressed when:

- a) the teaching has been timely, taking place at a moment when I have been ready to hear and see and brave enough to look,
- b) the experience has been aesthetically and ethically evoking,

- c) what has been seen, heard or experienced has been taken in through many channels (senses, feelings, cognition, aesthetic values, spiritual values, action),
- d) it has been possible to link the experience conceptually to broader ecological values and meanings rather than simply to individual or personal ones,
- e) it has been possible to work artistically or in an art-like fashion in immediate interaction with the environment,
- f) the new ideas, theories or information which I have read or heard have been presented in a language with which I am sufficiently familiar, or
- g) I have been able to share, exchange and check my environmental experiences and observations with other people using means of discussion, writing and visual art.

These observations on learning also take an effect on how I imagine, construct and structure Nex. At the same time I remind myself that I am not doing it alone, but together with my students. After all, they are the ones who will carry it out, and it will no longer be my Nex nor Nex at all. It will look like them and they will give it a name.

EXTREMES AND OPPOSITES

I also realise that the circular continuum or field of my inner and outer surroundings is transparent, layered and abstract as well as concrete; consistent while paradoxical. Even though there are no extremes, as such, in the surroundings – rather, it is round – there are areas in certain conceptual circles which place themselves opposite each other in the circle of learning. When beginning Nex, at least the following opposite solutions are clearly noticeable. For example, I can start by approaching a location in a way that the encounter is as unreserved as possible. For some, giving way to unreserved experiences is difficult, while for others it is easy. There are methods by which we can develop openness. However, it is important to start the project with personal perceptions and sense-based experiences, which immerse into the environment and are as unreserved as possible. From there one might go on to seeing broader connections.

On the other side of the circle I see a purely conceptual beginning. My students and I would start to study the differences between the subject and the object, the self and the other, the natural and artificial, the organic and non-organic; the concepts of values, conflicting interests, biodiversities, mutual good and

evil, a beautiful and an ugly environment; the relationship between being and doing; the principle of leaving something undone or the progress of evolution and cultural evolution. We would then aim at illustrating and examining the chosen principles or interesting ideas in artistic outlines. One can step into the circle of experience-based learning at any point, but what would be the best point bearing Nex in mind?

The common belief, according to which children's environmental education should be based on sense perception, while sixth graders' and adults' environmental education should rather be scientific and conceptual, is prevailing but false. Naturally the age of my students has a large effect on how we move around in the worlds of concepts and ideas. Luckily children still have the inborn talent of immediate and emotional experiencing. They also wonder about ideas, such as justice or injustice. The fact that the characteristic way of an adult to relate to something he or she is learning is on average unsensual and simply sensible, may actually not be due to adulthood as such. Rather, it is a result of the same misguided understanding of human nature and knowledge and machinery that enables the destruction of our environment and the mechanisation and withering of our inner selves.

In the deep study of environmental matters and the development of an ecologically durable environmental relationship, fresh, changeable and renewable sensorial experience, emotional orientation, experiencing, immersion, identification and subjectivity, as well as information, concepts, understanding values and practical work in social interaction are necessary. They can combine and interrelate in the creative artistic process.

DESTINATION IN VIEW?

So, my students will become wiser with Nex. I will also become wiser. We will thus become better, at least a little better, inhabitants of our surroundings, I assume. What else could be my aim in teaching? Before I make my decision on starting, perhaps it is best I clarify my aims in environmental education.

Official teaching schemes define the aims on a general verbal level. But the aims are interesting and appropriate only if I adapt and design them myself to suit this concrete product. There are many levels on which things are taking place in the environment where I exist: on some I have a minimal influence, on others a little more. In some areas my involvement is conscious, in others unconscious. All of this is part of

some bigger dance, whether we call it evolution, life or something else. In this whole I see my pedagogical plan, Nex, not so much a packet, a course, a study unit or programme than an image of movement and change. It cannot have a definite point or moment of beginning or ending, because no event appears from nothing or disappears completely. Still, some sort of moving or pulsating composition starts taking shape at some point and at some instant, while at another it starts losing form, dissolving, uniting in new forms. With conscious efforts and direction of one's energy, it is possible to distinguish the beginnings and endings more clearly. What happens in between can also be clearly definable and strong, standing out against its background, or it can be vague, transient and fading. Both conscious and unconscious influence can take an effect or leave things unaffected. As a matter of fact, I find it difficult to rationalise what is going on. I believe the same goes for everyone else. So, in this world embracing something which I do not understand very well but imagine, feel and have inklings about, how do the aims of Nex take shape, where do the spiritual as well as material values and form of my goal fit in? At this moment they seem to be in my hands and at the same time they are inevitably a collective collage.

AN ARTIST'S INTUITION

I find that in setting goals and choosing direction I can only listen to my intuition. I trust that my intuitive choices are comprehensive and well-founded enough and that no insuperable conflicts arise that would prevent operating with my highly-regarded sources of information or common sense or consistency. Of course it is possible, even probable, that I am accused of subjectivity, unscientific procedures and self-righteousness, when I say I can only trust my instinct, the knowledge of the artist.

Whatever instinct involves, it is a wholeness of being in and having a relationship with one's surroundings, simultaneously external and internal in some wavering equilibrium. It would be absurd to offer my own intuitions as such to my students or others to believe or adopt. On the other hand, if a critic agrees on listening to me and having an actual dialogue with me, I would probably find the words or visual means to describe the relationship of my choices and decisions with the 'official goals', the relationship between my visions and knowledge and the common goals of our society. This Nex is an attempt to work with 25 people within the given limits of time and resources in a way that we learn something, that makes us a little wiser in our way of taking part in the ecological and cultural surroundings, and in a way

that what is learned is reflected in practical life. I could define a wiser way of taking part as seeing and experiencing our own small but meaningful spiritual and material share and task in the protection of the earth and in the promotion of well-being. Since my professional skills lie in the realm of art: art education, art therapy and aesthetic environmental education, they are inevitably visible in the way I work. In addition, it is also significant that Nex takes place within the general and officially accepted structures of art education and environmental education. It would be environmental blindness to deny the importance of these structures but ultimately I myself have to decide what I incorporate in art, environmental education and a single project. The goals materialise and become clearer as the course begins to unfold in actuality.

ONE MORE CHARACTER TO ENCOUNTER

That is enough focusing on the conceptual environment. Paying excessive attention to it takes us away from art and necessary practical solutions. An excessive immersion in theory may represent a fear of confronting life. Although lively science, juicy concepts and theories that smell of the soil are also sure to exist.

So it is time to stop reasoning, writing and conceptualising and take action. Trusting one's pedagogical professionalism, one must start physically outlining the object of examination, study and activity; make inspiring warming-up exercises; present the task, problem and aim as interestingly as possible (for example by using visual media or maybe an appropriate story); point out where necessary information can be sought; suggest models of action, tools, materials and techniques; ask for preliminary ideas and visual solutions, and have challenging and motivating discussions along the way and at the end. No, it is not quite time to begin. There is still one character which I want to make visible enough, into a clear picture before I begin, so it will not catch me unaware later on.

I am dealing with a character, which also rises from the landscape of environmental education. I want to make it clearly visible in order to get to know it better, be in contact with it, admitting its right to exist but also its relativity. This character is the 'bogeyman' of threatening scenarios and guilt, always lingering nearby when we are discussing environmental matters, awaiting its opportunity. Its stock of threatening scenarios and apportioned guilt is inexhaustible, and unfortunately many environmental threats are real and the accusations justifiable. I doubt

that shutting the mouth of this character and burning its picture portfolio would be wise or even possible. And who or what am I to say that it is not allowed to express itself. The reason why I do not want it to gain too much power and space is because I have observed that where it has a lot of power it does not give others much room to express themselves. Its grip on people and situations creates moralism, sacrifice, the suffocation of creativity, a dull atmosphere, narrowing of viewpoints and rigidity. Having broad viewpoints, creating images of hope and becoming conscious of a self larger than one's own small ego offer more to environmental sensitivity and the essential ecological creativity. I would also like to point out that when an audience is presented with a picture of a charming, commanding and happily consuming independent status hero, while on the other hand ecological responsibility is portrayed by a guilty or accusing pale character frightening people with or staring at threatening scenarios, there is surely no doubt who they would rather join. One can still declare environmental responsibility in speeches while following the status hero in practical choices of lifestyle or at least fantasising about him. Not only are there needs to go shopping, but also basic real needs of belonging to a community; care, beauty and honesty exist even though they are often passed over, because satisfying them may be harder than carefree consuming. Perhaps only compulsory or voluntary material scarcity can bring communal values forth as a living reality. Images and social reality that appeal to peoples' real needs must be found to represent life preserving, ecologically sustainable values (10). This is a challenge for pedagogical creativity. I create an image, where Nex is spiced by hope, humour, ingenuity, practicality and co-operation, despite the reality of I threatening scenarios and guilt, or maybe transforming the ballast of these into energy.

I am ready to begin. I feel confident and well prepared. I walk in amongst my students, curious to see what will happen. I relate with words, with pictures and by being who I am, about what I think and feel. I ask them what they think and feel and express in their surroundings. At some point I suggest we examine and illustrate the topic 'The good life' (11) using artistic means. Of course there are no ready answers, a couple of suggestions on what artistic study methods and portrayal techniques could be is enough. My students either agree with my suggestion or they do not, they start to move or object. Both alternatives are natural. We have begun. We are moving, stopping and moving again. As we know, we all walk in our own fashion.



REFERENCES

1. The teaching situation as an object of art critique-like evaluation, cf. Elliot W. Eisner: *The Educational Imagination. On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*. Macmillan, New York, USA 1979.
2. Arnold Berleant: *Environmental Criticism*. In *Berleant: The Aesthetics of Environment*, p.132. Temple University Press. Philadelphia, USA 1992.
3. An example of the early activity of Finnish art teachers in environmental matters is the theme 'Environment and Art Education' which was chosen for the INSEA Congress (International Society for Education through Art) arranged in Finland in 1971. The main speakers dealt with aspects of nature conservation. See the congress proceedings INSEA 71 published by the Association of Art Teachers, Finland.
4. The historical archives of the Department of Art Education, The University of Art and Design, Helsinki contain a remarkable collection of student works covering various decades. Research on the history of art education is also carried out in the department.
5. Theodore Roszak: *The Voice of the Earth*, pp. 41-42. Simon & Schuster, New York, USA 1992.
6. The first overall presentation of the principles of Gestalt therapy was Paul Goodman, Frederick Perls and Ralph Hefferline: *Gestalt Therapy*, Delta Books, New York, USA 1951.
See also Meri-Helga Mantere: *Mielen kuvat (Images of the Mind, in Finnish)*, pp. 116-118, University of Industrial Design Helsinki and Government's Printing Centre, Helsinki, Finland 1990.
7. Courses in Deep ecology are arranged in Devon, England, at an institute called Schumacher College where, among others, the Norwegian eco-philosopher Arne Naess has worked as an instructor, cf. Arne Naess: *Ecology, Community and Life-style*, Cambridge University Press, New York, USA 1989.
8. The Association of Environmental Education, Finland, is making the programmes and methods developed at the Institute for Earth Education, America, better known in Finland. The director of the institute is Steve van Matre, cf. Steve van Matre: *Earth Education - A new beginning*. The Institute for Earth Education, Warrenville, Illinois, USA 1990.
9. The reference includes the following works, which are interesting from the point of view of aesthetic environmental education: Reino Kalliola: *Suomen luonto vuodenoikojen vaihtelussa (Seasons in Finnish Nature, in Finnish)*. WSOY, Porvoo 1951; Yrjö Sepänmaa: *Kouneuden käsite & Ympäristö kokonoistoideteoksena (The Concept of Beauty & The Environment as a Holistic Work of Art, in Finnish)*. State Technical Research Centre), Espoo, Finland 1991; Henryk Skolimovski: *Eco-Philosophy: designing new tactics for living*. Marion Boyars, New York, USA 1983 (1981); Suzy Gablik: *Reenchantment of Art*. Thames and Hudson, New York, USA 1991; Thich Nhat Hanh: *Peace is Every Step, the path of mindfulness in everyday life*. Parallax press, California, USA 1989; Arne Naess (see reference 7); Victor Papanek: *Design for the Real World*. Thames and Hudson, London, UK 1972.
10. Responding to real needs and a change in the relationship with the environment, cf. Naess, mentioned above and Bill Devall: *Simple in Means Rich in Ends*. Green Print, London, UK 1990.
11. Aspects about 'the good life' are dealt with by, for example: Yi-Fu Tuan: *The Good Life*. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, USA 1986. Haig Khatchadourian: *Natural Beauty and the Art of Living*. In: *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 16, No.1, Spring 1982, pp. 95-98. University of Illinois Press, USA. Marcia Muelder Eaton: *Applied Aesthetics*. In *Eaton: Aesthetics and the Good Life*, pp. 66-93. Associated University Presses Inc., 1989.