Radical Empiricism and the Extended Self

Exercises in Creative Cognition

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When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.
John Muir

“We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep.”
William James
What do we offer to our students to maximise their creativity and resilience?

Bringing aspects of phenomenology, pragmatism, process philosophy and existentialism into the classroom as tools for understanding creative process and relationship with world.
mindlessness/mindfulness
leveraging neuro-diversity
disability/superability
desegregating mindbodybrainworld
emancipating unconscious conscious
Concepts

Radical Empiricism
- Experience not simply data stream but complex meaningful process
- Allying observer and observed within experience
- Connecting what may appear unconnected
- Seeing relations as things and things as relations

Epochè
the practice of unknowing, suspending what we think we know about something so that we can see it afresh in an as open as possible encounter.
Gestalt
The qualities of experience, including observer and observed constituting a meaningful, coherent totality.

Worms eye/birds eye view
Seeing and being in this dual perspective simultaneously

Apperception
reformulating our unique relationship to new things, revising our categories of thought.
The world within experience is identical with the world beyond experience, the occasion of experience is within the world and the world is within the occasion.
The categories have to elucidate this paradox of the connectedness of things:
-the many things, the one world without and within.
AN Whitehead, Adventures in Ideas, p. 228
World is interrelated with the person at every moment. A continual dialectical process goes on between world and self and self and world; one implies the other, and neither can be understood if we omit the other. This is why one can never localize creativity as a subjective phenomenon; one can never study it simply in terms of what goes on within the person. The pole of world is an inseparable part of the creativity of an individual. What occurs is always a process, a doing — specifically a process interrelating the person and his or her world.’

Roll May, The Courage to Create
Just so, I maintain, does a given undivided portion of experience, taken in one context of associates, play the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of 'consciousness'; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective 'content.' In a word, in one group it figures as a thought, in another group as a thing. And, since it can figure in but both groups simultaneously we have every right to speak of it as subjective and objective, both at once.  
William James, Radical Empiricism
It is not the mind that imposes its forms on material objects, but rather the latter that give shape to the forms of thought.

Tim Ingold
Cosmoscope, Durham Lumiere November 2017
Exercises

What is a Thing?...
Observer Observed...
Voronoi Aesthetics...
Where does London end?...
Where do I End?...
Extended Self
What is a Thing?
Describe an object-to-hand as fully as possible. Include its history, its physical attributes, what it is used for, what it relates to, how did it come into being, how long will it endure, what is it’s significance?

We see that we cannot isolate an element without losing its meaning, purpose and function. What we name a ‘thing’ is a transitional state within a process. ‘Things’ are transient nodes in an ceaselessly transforming spatio-temporal-relational manifold.
Observer Observed
Draw a diagram of you in relationship to everything you can see right now as you are doing the drawing. Observe and give weight anything in your visual field, no matter how close or distant, significant or insignificant.

Voronoi Aesthetics
Working from the above, reduce the things to a point and draw the boundaries between them rather than the things themselves.
Voronoi system
Where Does London End?
Draw a map of London from memory embedding it in its surrounding countryside as much as possible. Include as much relevant detail as you can think of, personal geography, streets, railways, rivers, parks, squares. Where does London end?

Where Do I End?
Do an x-ray drawing of your body including, for example, sense organs - points of interface with the world, blood vessels, bones, nervous, lymphatic, digestive, pulmonary systems. How do you and the world interpenetrate and interact? Where do you draw the boundary between you and the world?
Extended Self

Draw a diagram of people that are affected by and affect you.
Think about someone who might be thinking about you.
Think about someone who is deceased.
Where do you end?
Where do they end?
Life and its negation are beaten up inextricably together. But if the life be good, the negation of it must be bad. Yet the two are equally essential facts of existence; and all natural happiness thus seems infected with a contradiction. The breath of the sepulchre surrounds it.

William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience