

Archetypal Symbols in the Painting of Bill Rane
and the Writing of Jacques Derrida: Teleological
Implications for Educators

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Introduction

I am here for some recreation. Recreation naturally flows and follows from that which is taken apart, that which has been deconstructed. Deconstruction is not the same as destruction; yet, when something is taken apart and left in pieces, it is worthless to the purpose of its construction. When it is put back together the same way, it may be cleaned, polished or repaired, but it remains that same. Only when it is re-created is there something new, something different, and something previously unknown. Recreation is not the destruction of the old but rather the use of the old for creating the new. Whether we are talking about buildings, tools, and machines, or ideas, language, art and life, what has been constructed by humans may be deconstructed and what has been created may be re-created.

This pedagogical dance celebrates the re-creative lifework of New Mexico artist Bill Rane (1927-2005) and French Continental philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). While Bill Rane and Jacques Derrida lived in the same time, they did not share geographic space or a common vocation; one a painter in the western United States, the other a renowned philosopher in the continental tradition from Paris, France. Nor is there any evidence that Bill Rane ever read or even knew of Jacques Derrida, or that Derrida ever knew of Rane or viewed his painting. Nonetheless, we find a remarkable convergence between image and text, symbolic icons and historical and philosophical motifs between the art of Rane and the text of Derrida. This presentation utilizes Bill Rane's art and quotations from published interviews with Derrida to draw parallels between art and philosophy. The purpose is to explore and discuss possibilities of convergent meaning for educators and education. Possibilities for recreating education

are found in themes common in the work of both Rane and Derrida. Both incorporate ancient wisdom, sacred icons, and traditional symbols as a point of consideration of what might become, what may be. Thus, we are using the work of two different men, an artist and an intellectual, to stimulate a conversation on possibilities for what education may be. In a teleological conversation, we want to consider what end purpose of education is possible? While looking toward the future with an affirmative “yes,” both Rane and Derrida embrace the sacred wisdom of the past while eschewing idols and ideology.

This presentation is not a critique of Rane’s art or an analysis of Derrida’s philosophy. Both the images and the quotations are de-contextualized. Especially with the Derrida quotes, I am not attempting to interpret or apply the text. Rather, we are searching for relationships between painting and spoken (now printed) language. My intent is a consideration of teleological possibilities for education. Teleology, from the Greek word *telos* (end, purpose, completed state), is defined by the *Dictionary of Philosophy* as the study of phenomena exhibiting order, design, purposes, ends, goals, tendencies, aims, direction, and how they are achieved in a process of development. In the sacred traditions, teleology refers to the end goal of human existence frequently referred to as the kingdom of God. While interpretation and debates of the meaning of the kingdom of God are many, for the purposes of our educational discussion, teleology is used as a term for consideration of the end purpose of education as process of development. What is it that we are doing at the deepest and most fundamental level when we educate? In other words, teleology represents our effort to get at the heart of the meaning of education as a social project.

In the introduction to their book, *Derrida and Education*, Gert Biesta and Denise

Eg a-Kuehne suggest that Derrida’s work addresses several fundamental educational issues including sameness and otherness, inclusion and exclusion, control and freedom, educational rights and responsibilities, conceptions of humanity and humanism, and education and justice. While this is an extensive list from Derrida’s extraordinary body of work, there is a common educative element of bridging the gulf of human separation. Derrida’s relevance for education is his continual focus on human relationships; relationships between the body and the self, the self and the other, and the self and nature. For Derrida, the answers are never fixed and thus a proper response to these issues is both unknown and impossible. In a similar vein, Bill Rane’s art also explores human relationships through the utilization of ancient themes of human life pointing with beauty to a future of unknown possibilities. Rane’s paintings are not landscapes, abstractions, or one-dimensional patterns; rather, they are multi-layered, multi-textured, color-filled images of humans living in love and relationship with others and the natural world. They are, in other words, explorations of self and other. As with Derrida’s philosophical view of life, there is always something waiting to be seen, waiting to be discovered, and something to come within a Rane painting.

In a moment, I am going to present a slide show with images of Bill Rane paintings and quotes from Jacques Derrida. The images were selected because they symbolize, convey meaning, and reflect the quotations. When each image is presented, I will give you about thirty seconds to view the image. I will then read the attached corresponding quote followed by another period of observation. When the slide show is concluded, I would like us to discuss a teleology (or getting to the heart of the matter) for education that considers human relationships; again, relationships between the body and

the self, the self and the other, and the self and nature.

This presentation and discussion is an intentional effort to renew and energize discussion on the meaning and purpose of education in contemporary life. Jonas and I are particularly interested in the relationship between philosophy, arts, and education as a lens to humans living in relationship. We would like to invite you to join, participate and expand this discussion. The best way to participate is to have conversations whenever possible. You may also participate with us through our website (still under construction):

<http://www.postseculareducationforum.net/>

More information on the life and work of Bill Rane is available at:

<http://www.billranestory.info/>

Now, please sit back and enjoy this time of recreation!

Derrida Quotes and *Rane Images*

(Taos Studio) In my memory, what I write resembles a dotted-line drawing that would be circling around a book to be written in what I call for myself the “old new language,” the most archaic and the most novel, therefore unheard of, unreadable at present. This book would be something completely different from the path that it nevertheless still resembles. In any case, an interminable anamnesis whose form is being sought: not only in *my* history, but culture, languages, families...

[This is another painting that at the time created seemed “out of place” and “too easy” compared to the body of the other contemporary work of the period. Bill in late life said, “I don’t know when a painting is done.. often. But usually when you have transcended yourself in some way. When you have got something that is still kind of a mystery to yourself. Maybe the layering [in my paintings] is the many takes you [I] have on something. One of the important things in paintings are the accidentals. Are you going to incorporate an accident as the dog-- his tail in the paint. A good painting should have this—a

place where the painting escapes from you, you circled it and recaptured it, you should leave it there, I don't do any "housekeeping" on a painting. It is the process of the mind, trying to get light--the virtue of changing your mind a hundred times. It is kinda contrary to teaching. You have to go beyond even the concept of teaching. My most valuable time painting is when, and I know it but it doesn't ever comfort a person, when I really feel that my painting is incomprehensible, derivative, hokey, incomplete, I don't have the slightest idea of what I am doing, all of the study I have made doesn't add up to anything, I know I am going to get a good painting, only I don't really or those thoughts wouldn't be real. Deliverance. Comes. Every time. It is a blind step, always—it is blind. Stepping off the, on to, the foggy bank onto a boat, I don't know if there is a boat there or not, but it is. And if you cannot take the step, then you . . . do not. And this is all of the mind anyway... there is no mind, no boat, only your metaphor."

(Five Graces) I have the feeling there is loss when I know that things don't repeat and that the repetition I love is not possible; this is what I call loss of memory, the loss of repetition, not repetition in the mechanical sense of the term, but of resurrection, resuscitation, regeneration. So I write in order to keep. But keeping is not a dull and dead archiving. It is at bottom a question of infinite memories, of limitless memories which would not necessarily be a philosophical or literary work, simply a great repetition.

(Adam Creating God) You cannot address the other, speak to the other, without an act of faith, without testimony. What are you doing when you attest to something? You address the other and ask, "believe me." Even if you are lying, even in perjury, you are addressing the other and asking the other to trust you. This 'trust me, I am speaking to you' is of the order of faith, a faith that cannot be reduced to a theoretical statement, to a determinative judgment; it is the opening of the address to the other. So this faith is not religious, strictly speaking; at least it cannot be totally determined by a given religion. That is why faith is absolutely universal.

(Geese Over Copala) No doubt, there is this irrepressible desire for a "community" to be formed, but also for it to know its limit – and that its limit is its *openness* and its *overture*: once it believes that it has understood, taken in, interpreted, *preserved* the text, then something of that text, something in it which is totally *other*, escapes or resist it, something which calls for another community, and lets itself be totally interiorized in the memory of a present community.

[For Bill the geese over Copala (a small town in the Sierra Madre of Mexico above the Pacific Coast) fly sometimes south, sometimes north, but they always

fly. Community, in that sense, might seem static, compared, but Bill might say that it too “flies” sometimes “south”, sometimes “north”, but it always “flies”.]

(The Effect of the Moon on Historical Certainty) I just wanted to suggest that these reading grids, these folds, these obstacles, these references and transferences are, as it were, in our skin, right on the surface of our sex, at the moment when we claim to be treating our “own circumcision.” In short, because there is no raw nature nor any opposition which can hold out between nature and culture, only the difference from one to the other, well then, a text in which the name of the other would be absent always looks like it is dissimulating, erasing, or even censoring.

[Whether in his work or in his life view, Bill always maintained a love for the “blank” canvas. The “blank” view, for Bill, opened up a greater possibility as here, the “effect” of moon on “certainty”—“historic certainty”—no less. This quote expresses his view well “I am fan of erosion. It removes enough of the old to make room for the new. It leaves a place on the strand for the next artist among us. Art is the graffiti of change.”]

(Carnival del Noche) One is always reckoning with what one perceives of the cultural field. But even if this reckoning negotiates in a very cunning fashion, it always places itself in the service of a more untamed, more disarmed, more naïve desire, in any case, of another culture which no longer calculates, and certainly no longer according to the norms of the “present” culture or politics. One is coming to terms with somebody, with *someone other, dead or alive, with some others who have no identity on this cultural scene.*

[In this work, the “night carnival”—the title and the “wild” interaction, of color and even form, point up two seeming contrasts: what Derrida might call “culture” and the unpredictable and even lustful nature of the “noche/night”]

(Melanie’s Moon) Why don’t we liberate ourselves from the very “liberation”? Why don’t we turn our ears toward a call which addresses and provokes *above all else*, above and whatever says to “me,” my “body,” as a “man” or “woman,” or my sex? To turn one’s ears to the other when it speaks to “whom,” to “what,” to this “who” which has not yet been assigned an identity or, for example, since we have to speak of it, to either one sex or the other?

[This painting, a high Middle Taos piece, synthesizes and represents an old theme of many of Bill’s works... the male and the female as one or as “once”—in embrace. Eventually Bill added even “horse” in Man, Woman, and Horse. Here the triple synthesis is with...Moon. Not only is the male/female synthesized but also the so called antimate/inantimate.]

(Horses and Sandpipers) Each time I begin a new text, however modest it may be, everything falls apart in the face of the unknown or the inaccessible, a crushing feeling of clumsiness, or inexperience, and of powerlessness. Anything I had already written is instantly annihilated or rather, as if thrown overboard.

[Often with Bill a work that seemed out of place to his other contemporary works or that seemed “too easy” for him to achieve became the painting, eventually, most regarded from any given period. That is the case here with this painting. Bill created this image as if painting with his left hand singing and without thought at all. “I love to operate with whim, with hunch and with caprice, spoil things, destroy things; deconstruction is more important to a painter than construction...to get rid, to progress, to let what is there to come through. Your mind is a top dog guardian. In painting you try to break that.”]

(Woman at the Third Temple) I love repetition, as if the future were entrusted to us, as if it were waiting for us in the cipher a very ancient speech—one which has not yet been allowed to speak. All this, I realize, makes for a bizarre mixture of responsibility and disrespect. My attention to the present scene is at once intense, desperate, and a little distracted, as if anachronistic. But without this bizarreness, nothing seems to me desirable today. We have gotten more than we think we know from “tradition,” but the scene of the gift also obligates us to a kind of filial lack of piety, at once serious and not so serious, as regards the thinking to which we have the greatest of debt.

[Bill loved repetition but eschewed presenting the same work again. His words: “I am trying not to repeat the patterns that I have gone over before—it is hard, you are locked in. I hope that my (new work) will be different, but, of course, it won’t be that different. It comes from things that have impressed me, things that I have loved, I think they have all influenced me. The French painters, of course, ancient things, Japanese things ... I don’t hesitate to mix things. I accept influences readily... I am interested in the process not the product. I could have been happy working the same painting my whole life.”]

(Man in Yellow Hat) ... in the case of culture, person, nation, language, identity is a self-differentiating identity, an identity different from itself, having an opening or gap within itself. That totally affects a structure, but it is a duty, an ethical and political duty, to take into account this impossibility of being one with oneself. It is because I am not one with myself that I can speak of the other and address the other. That is not a way of avoiding responsibility. On the contrary, it is the only way for me to take responsibility and to make decisions.

