

The Landscape of the Lines of the Hand: Imagining the Storied Memories of Sensorial Experience of Place

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The lines of life are various; they diverge and cease, Like footpaths and the mountains' utmost ends.
Friedrich Hölderlin (1966)

**'Artist's hand'. Axel Poignant, 1941.
National Gallery of Australia,
Canberra**



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Abstract

Some of the most striking accounts of the inventive power of imagination come from former prisoners who have spent time in solitary confinement. In these testimonies, they relate how their imaginative capacity enabled them to keep their sanity, even in the most arduous circumstances. Somehow they managed to find a way to keep a very basic sense of social and cultural relations intact, by picturing themselves in a richer world than the one afforded by the concrete walls of the cell block. There is the astonishing story of the experience of the brothers Midhat, Bayazid, and Ali Bourequat who spent 18 years in a Moroccan prison. Here they were able to muster the power of imagination in a most dramatic way. The only way to survive their ordeal, according to their own testimonies (Hiddema B: De hel van Marokko: “We hebben Hassan beloofd te zwijgen”. *De Groene*, 7. <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/de-hel-van-marokko-we-hebben-hassan-beloofd-te-zwijgen>, 1994), was by imagining they were somewhere else. In their own 2-by-3-meter cells, the prisoners forgot about the thick walls locking them in and celebrated their birthdays, weddings, even births, and whatnot. Their minds were inexhaustible in creating diversions. One of them was by taking each other for walks in Paris. Gradually all the other inmates, sitting in their other dim-lighted prison cells, “walked” along with them. Thus they shut out reality completely: their world was what they invented. That was their salvation (This account is based on (Hiddema B: De hel van Marokko: “We hebben Hassan beloofd te zwijgen”. *De Groene*, 7. <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/de-hel-van-marokko-we-hebben-hassan-beloofd-te-zwijgen>, 1994, February 16)). It is this radical human ability to imagine worlds wholly other to the one that one is present in, which is foregrounded in the artful workshop that is the theme of this chapter.

Keywords

Power of imagination · More-than-human · Environmental understanding · Art-based environmental education · Artistic experiences · Artful workshop · Sense of place

The Human Faculty of Imagination

A shorthand definition of imagination is the ability to picture, in the mind’s eye, something that is *not* there. In this chapter, I will argue that this human faculty offers a great potential when seeking new ways to (re)connect people to nature. Fostering our relation to the more-than-human world through artistic process is key in the practice of arts-based environmental education (AEE). This form of education aims to develop environmental understanding and responsibility “by becoming more receptive to sense perceptions and observations and by using artistic methods to express personal environmental experiences and thoughts” (Mantere, 1995, p. 1). The guiding idea here is that artistic experiences improve one’s ability to become aware of phenomena in the world; they can help one in coming to knowing and understanding. Practitioners in AEE hold that artful activities can be of particular high value in facilitating the learning about, and with, the environment. Characteristic for AEE-teachers is that they attempt to support fresh perception and the personal enjoyment and pleasure of perceiving the world from the heart. In today’s world, this often doesn’t come about naturally. To achieve that, says Meri-Helga Mantere, who first coined the concept of arts-based environmental education in 1995, it is necessary to stop, be quiet, have time, and feel psychologically secure in order to perceive the unknown, the sometimes wild and unexpected. She underlines the importance of openness to sensitivity, and finding new and personal ways to articulate and share one’s environmental experiences, “which might be beautiful, disgusting, peaceful or threatening” (Mantere, 1998, p. 32).

One of the cornerstones of AEE is the search for creative new ways of relating to the world through direct experience, by engaging the senses as fully as possible. And, as said above, artistic process is appreciated as an invaluable catalyst in enhancing such contact.

However, it can also be that an AEE process—rather than seeking a bridge to the world “out there”—starts with what we *already* carry with us. In this regard, it may be helpful to consider what artist Joseph Beuys said of working with the phenomenon of afterimages. An afterimage is a ghostly apparition of a complementary color that appears after one has gazed for some time at a hue and then shifts one’s eyes away to an uncolored surface. This afterimage continues to appear in the eyes for a length of time after the period of exposure to the original image. Afterimages allowed Beuys to work with what was *not* there, evoking it to presence. When an interviewer once asked him: “Mr Beuys, why do you work chiefly with alien, grey materials?” he replied, “Yes, Beuys works with felt, why doesn’t he work with colour?” And then he went on to say, “No one asks whether I might not be interested in invoking the whole world of colour in people as *counter-image*. In other words, to provoke in them as counter-image a world of light; a clear, light-filled, under certain circumstances supersensible, spiritual world, through something that looks quite different. For one can only create afterimages or counter-images *by not doing what is already there....*” (Beuys, quoted in Beuys & Harlan, 2004, p. 98, emphasis added).

It is now nearly two decades ago that I first conceptualized a workshop which I called *lines of the hand*. Only in retrospect I can now say that its underlying principle resonates with this remarkable approach of Beuys, of trying to evoke what is not there. We see the lines on the palm of our hands every day, but we seldom really pay attention to them. As we know, the hand lines have been a source for divination for centuries, and usually associations are made with fortune-telling booths and the pseudoscientific practice of chiromancy or palmistry. Here, a consultant-specialist reads the hand palm and envisions the lines that crisscross the palm as a microcosm on

which the person’s life path can be foreseen. The so-called *life line* is the prominent line that begins at the base of the thumb and runs upward to the forefinger. Other major lines are the so-called *head line* and *heart line* (cf. Fairchild, 1995).

The *lines of the hand* workshop, however, has nothing to do with such divinations. It can be performed both indoors and outdoors, and even in virtual space, as I learned during the COVID-19 pandemic (more about this below). Each environment has its own qualities, affordances, and limitations. In its core, *lines of the hand* is an artful workshop that foregrounds the arousing of curiosity and making and doing something worthy of exploration without the need of bringing in any set of elaborate toolkits or procedures. On the whole, participants are merely asked to follow a simple “protocol” (Masschelein, 2012)¹. They are invited to access and value the imaginative capacity that each of them *already* carries with them, at any given moment, and to engage with this as fully as possible. During the years, I have facilitated *lines of the hand* for a diversity of groups, all (thus far) only composed of adults. Participants ranged from artists and art education students to people who have previously—according to their own accounts—rarely taken part in artmaking activities (e.g., employees in environmental conservation organizations). Below I will first describe the workshop through its different stages.

Design of a *Lines of the Hand* Workshop

Commonly, *lines of the hand* will take about one and a half hours. I found that the ideal composition of a group is around 20 people. Then you have a “critical mass” conducive to the process: with such a size, several smaller subgroups can

¹ A protocol, to Jan Masschelein, is a clear guideline which one follows that has no clear “end,” no destination. It is a kind of path, he says, that leads nowhere; it is like a cut that opens onto a world. The protocol thus helps to suspend too-familiar stories. Basically, it “offers a certain chance that something will appear and communicate, that something will be disclosed” (Masschelein, 2012, p. 367).



Figs. 3.1 & 3.2 Drawing one's palm lines with the "wrong" hand. (Photo: Ceciel Verheij)

be formed—but not too many either. The workshop preferably takes place in an outdoor environment but can also be carried out indoors.

When all participants have found a comfortable place to sit, the session can begin. As the facilitator of the activity, I usually start out by pointing out that this workshop will be about the kind of embodied/visceral/tacit knowledge we build through sensory experiences out on the land. What are our memories of these, and how can we access this domain through our imaginative capacity—even when we find ourselves in a different nexus in time and space at the very moment we try to do this? With and through this activity, I invite participants to dwell for some

time in their own imagination, to explore what kind of sensorial experiences they can retrieve from memory or conjure up spontaneously while making this effort. At this moment in time, I often narrate the story of the Bourequat brothers in prison camp "Hell," as a compelling example of how rich our imaginative capacity can be.

Then it is time to move to action. I give each participant a small square of cutup white cardboard (size 12 by 12 cm), and I ask them to make on it a rough pencil drawing of the main lines on the palm of one of their hands. To create the drawing, they should use their unschooled non-writing hand (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). My reason for encouraging them to use the "wrong" hand is to



Fig. 3.3 Participants tell each other how they imagine themselves to be in the landscape of the lines of the hand. At Schumacher College, United Kingdom, 2010. (Photo: Jan van Boeckel)

cause an estranging, defamiliarizing effect and to create a threshold so they don't set out to copy the lines as precisely as possible. I make sure the participants don't spend too much time on drawing the lines, as the sketch shouldn't be too elaborate and detailed; the rougher it turns out the better. I ask the participants to form subgroups consisting of four to five persons each. The members of each small group are now to exchange the cards with each other, so everybody temporarily receives the hand line drawing of someone else. This uncommon circumstance, of subsequently working with someone *else's* drawing, tends to make the setting at once more intimate and reciprocally involves the participants on a more personal level. I request that each small group assigns one of its members as their reporter. The task of this person is to later disclose to the group at large what has come up in the conversations in their specific subgroup. Each small group is now soon to find itself a quiet space, a location separate from the rest. But before dispersing in differ-

ent directions, I share a set of simple instructions. Once they are on their own, the small group's participants should individually spend some minutes meditating on the drawing of the rather abstract lines each of them holds in their hands. And when they do that, they should try to experience themselves as being *in* a landscape, a landscape that is suggested, as it were, by the lines on the paper. They should try to imagine and feel the different sensory experiences that being in this particular landscape may bring along. It can be a landscape setting that one remembers, but it can also be a place suggested by the lines that is completely made up. Subsequently, the members of each group are to tell each other about how it is to be in this imagined terrain: one after the other, until all have had their turn (Fig. 3.3).

When all small groups have completed their verbal exchanges—and I check this by walking around from one group to the next—I ask everybody to reassemble again in the large group. As soon as everybody is seated again at this central

place, I invite the reporters to share, for all, what emerged in each of the subgroups. To stimulate rich articulations in this session, I might ask them questions like: “What were the kinds of sensory experiences that participants talked about?” “Which ones came up first?” “Which were easier to describe, and which ones more difficult?” “Was there a difference between participants who talked about finding themselves *inside* a landscape, and those who *looked at* a certain landscape from a distance?” Their answers provide openings for a dialogue between the reporters and me on themes like our (culturally biased) predominantly *visual*-centered relationship to landscape, compared to ways of perception of people in the so-called primarily oral cultures. Visually centered people tend to regard landscape as something that unfolds itself *in front* of us, as a map we hold in our hands (Ong, 1982). Another theme might be what the reason could be that apparently fewer people tend to mention what they smelled, touched, or tasted. What does this say about how we relate to our sensory experiences?

When these initial stages of the workshop have been completed, I ask the participants to return the card with hand lines to the person who initially drew them. The idea is that each participant now individually makes a short walk in the local area, taking their drawing along, in search of a physical location that would, in some way, “resonate” with the lines that they drew on their card at the start of the workshop. They should look for some kind of reverberations, a resemblance in patterns, in what they encounter. This could, for example, be in the shapes one finds in the bark of a tree or in the structures in scratches on the surface of a rock. Patterns could even be found in the lines of jet aircraft exhaust plumes in the sky. Once such resonance is found at a certain location in the terrain, they should remain there for a while. This specific place will be their location for what comes next.² While they are at this

spot, I invite them to write a *haiku*-like poem³ on the back side of their card. In these three lines, they should ideally try to respond in words to the “gift” they’ve received of one of the other participants trying to articulate how it was to be in a landscape they imagined on the basis of the forms suggested by the drawing of one’s own hand lines. And then, when a participant has finished compiling a haiku, he or she then goes back to the large circle of where the whole group once again reassembles. When everybody has returned, the poems are recited by their authors, two times in a row. (But only if the participant concerned would be inclined to do so, there is no pressure, see Figs. 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6) If time allows, we have a final concluding conversation on how this activity possibly made sense (or perhaps *didn’t* make sense) in the context of seeking ways of connecting to the natural world or developing novel forms of sustainable education. When taking up such themes, there is no obvious connection to the constituent elements of the workshop itself, but it is precisely this circumstance of *non*-association that afford the triggering of an unexpected, often animated and therefore likely more interesting dialogue (cf. Van Boeckel, 2020).

*Travelling with my loved ones, my family
Crossing borders and observing landscape
A wonder of change how it smells differently*
(Anonymous, participant in *lines of the hand*,
Wageningen, Netherlands, 2020)

Lines of the Hand in Practice: A Session at Schumacher College

As part of co-teaching the course *Children and Nature: Rediscovering a Sense of Wonder* at Schumacher College (an international college for ecological studies in the United Kingdom) in the summer of 2010, I facilitated *lines of the hand* on the lawn, near to an enormous horse chestnut

²In cases where the whole workshop is done indoors in an urban area or in virtual space, it makes less or no sense to search for such resonating patterns in the nearby environment. Then, I would suggest they just find themselves a comfortable place where they can sit for a moment on their own, apart from the rest of the group.

³*Haiku* is a form of poetry that originates from Japan and consists of short, unrhymed lines. It typically has aspects of the nature as its subject matter; it is a way of looking at the physical world and seeing something deeper. A haiku poem generally presents a single and concentrated image or emotion. It should leave the person attending to it with a strong feeling or impression.



Figs. 3.4, 3.5 & 3.6 Participants of *lines of the hand* in Lahemaa National Park, Estonia (2017), read their haiku poems out loud. (Photos: Ceciel Verheij)

tree. On this sunny afternoon, 17 people participated. Below, I present a selection of the accounts that were given by the group reporters at the plenary group gathering, halfway of the unfolding of *lines of the hand*. Sarah,⁴ the first one, presented the following testimony of what participants in her small group had shared about imagining themselves as being in the landscape of the drawn hand lines:

We were struck by how many of us saw water in landscapes and also by how evocative the experience could be. Everyone talked about sounds, and what they could see and feel. As for myself, I saw an expansive delta from far above, kind of like a map, going out into the sea. And enormous creatures would be hiding in the water. Huge flocks of birds. From above they are tiny, with a flush of colour. One of us saw an oak tree, at a very specific

place along the River Dart. With the tide out, the ferry having just gone past. Wildlife on the edge, with the smell of water and mud. And the whole image being very calm and peaceful but alive with the buzzing of insects. And we had a landscape in the Rocky Mountains, with a waterfall streaming over the rocks: there was a refreshing spray. The tinkling, crystal sounds of the quieter bits, and the roaring of the louder bits. And finally we had a desert landscape. Almost a story, walking through the desert along a rocky edge. On one side is a ravine and a landscape with lizards and dry scrubby plants. The hot feeling of desert where you know it is teeming with life. But you have to look for it carefully because in a desert it is more hidden. And through the ravine one can see the ocean blue ahead, the sparkling sun on the waves. But to get there you have to go half under, half over a dangerous overhanging rock.

After this first report, I initiated a dialogue by asking open questions on what has just been shared, such as whether people in this group also talked about things that they *tasted*. “No, taste didn’t come up; it was sounds: the calling of animals, the sound of water.” “And touch?” I

⁴Sarah is not her real name; to protect the privacy of the participants, all names have been anonymized by inserting a fictional name.

informed. “No.” “Any smells?” “Yes,” Sarah replied, “one talked about the smell of the mud, and the smell of the water.”

I then attempted to take the conversation to another level: “Was there a difference between people that saw themselves as being *in* the landscape, and those who were looking at it from above, or saw it like a map hanging on a wall?” “Yes, there were differences,” Sarah reported. “There were two of us who were very much looking down from above and there were three where there was definitely a sense of being *in* the landscape.”

Later, the other reporters, on their turn, recounted what was said in their respective subgroups and I had a short conversation with them as well.⁵

After this, it was time to move to the next part of *lines of the hand*. I asked everybody to give the card with the drawn hand lines back to the person who first drew them at the beginning of the session and to find themselves a fitting place to write a haiku. And when all had finished doing this and had returned to the group at large and there they subsequently read their poems out loud for each other. Below are some of the three-line poems that were then presented:

*Beauty is lines of life
I see a dividing line
Creation is one continuous line*

*I am honoured
to feel the vastness of the ocean
in the palm of my hand*

*The flower’s breast opens.
The insect enters,
moved by the unknowable.*

*A tree stump lies,
where the ospreys fly,
by a far-off lake in the high lands.*

*A crooked branch across the threshold.
Dreams come in through the woody arch of bark.
Find deer, smell of musk,
a shaft of light in the dust.*

*The chasms of my life.
Open like cracked earth in summer.
Only the water of your gaze
makes them swell with meaning.*

All participants did choose to read their poem at some point. I asked them what they got out of this experience. Mabel started off and said: “It was nice. I actually found it quite easy. I never wanted to write poetry, so for a minute that came to me with great scepticism. If I’d been out on my own, if I hadn’t been doing this and somebody would have said to me: ‘Write a few lines of poetry,’ I’d still be walking around the garden, I wouldn’t do it! I found this a really, really good exercise.” William felt that what we did was in fact quite delicate: “It is that willing suspension of the distance. You’re actually going to go with it. As soon as someone would question it, or be cynical, then it dissolves. It’s a sensitive thing.” Veronica said that she believed that to draw the lines of your hand is not something that one can actually be very cynical about, because one is so concentrated. “You don’t see the point, from the beginning, to write a poem; I think that without having done that [i.e. making a drawing of the hand lines, JvB] it would be harder for someone to get into this.” Louis comments that he feels that “it is kind of like an enticement into creativity, because creativity is quite challenging for a lot of people. Sharing their creativity with others is a big challenge.” In response I say that for me this is an important point as well; that it has often been my experience that the person in the facilitator role for artmaking activities like these provides people, in effect, with a valid “excuse” to allow themselves to be a little “childlike.” Participants may find themselves doing activities that don’t seem to make a lot of sense, certainly not at the moment when they commence performing them. But when a teacher says “*please* do so”—I suggest to them—and other people around you also start to engage with the process, one may feel a bit more comfortable doing it as well. One seems to need a gentle push to move oneself across a mental threshold. With the sharing of these observations, we then concluded this particular session of *lines of the hand*.

⁵For a more extensive rendering of these reports, see Van Boeckel (2013).



Figs. 3.7, 3.8, 3.9 & 3.10 Selection of images of drawings of lines of the hand that were shared among participants in virtual space. Wageningen, the Netherlands, 2020. (Photos by participants)

Lines of the Hand in Virtual Space

In May 2020, I facilitated a session of *lines of the hand* completely online, and about 70 international students in the course “Environmental Education for Sustainable Living” at Wageningen University & Research center participated in it. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, students as well as teachers were in (self-imposed) quarantine at their homes, and the only way to conduct the workshop was to carry it out in virtual space. Because of this circumstance, the cards with drawn hand lines could

not be exchanged physically, so these (see Figs. 3.7, 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10) were swapped by email between the students who were divided in 14 subgroups. The subsequent breakout sessions in these small groups were also performed online. Clearly, doing *lines of the hand* in isolation and via screen generated its own challenges. In the chat box that was open during the session, student Rebecka mentioned: “At the moment I felt peaceful and happy. But now I’m sad because I want to be there in that landscape of my memories (my home).” And student Karis commented:

I got a rather negative feeling from looking at the picture [of the drawn hand lines, JvB], really. I cannot explain it properly but I think I just projected my current state of mind caused by the pandemic toward the picture. But I think it was also because there were no colours in the picture and it was grey. I actually first had very positive feelings of being in nature but then there were more negative feelings.

However, the nostalgia of longing to another place where one could be with the senses fully open also brought about that the impact of the workshop, paradoxically, was perhaps even *stronger* than if would have taken place in the open air. Luuk Huijgen, one of the course facilitators, noted afterward that several students mentioned to him that they felt the workshop provided them with a strong reminder that creative and experiential aspects are critically important in a learning context. And the main teacher of the course, Professor Arjen Wals, reflected as follows on the impact of the course (of which *lines of the hand* was but one part):

Somehow, we created an atmosphere in times of COVID-19 that inspired the students; the role of emotions, relationality and empowerment was more prominent than ever before. It was almost as if the 70 students were yearning for this. In part this is the time we live in, with the lockdown; in part it is also the way we designed the course and performed as teachers. Students developed a closeness that I could not have imagined in advance. When we informed them that we had to go online with the course it was mostly “Zoom and Gloom” but now that I see what actually happened, I can only be grateful for how it went and what it opened up. (A. Wals, personal communication, June 21, 2020)

Here is a sample of the kind of haikus that the students created⁶:

*water traveling from high to low,
birds are flying to wherever they go
I love being here, living in solitude and slow*

*A field full of flowers
Flowing down the grass so green
The sound of music*

*When I was little,
I thought you represented the initials of my name.*

*With time I came to realize that,
You represent my world.*

They take a flight

*Over the side of the mountain
Two birds with one Stone*

*Rivers flow out of lines
Bringing people back to their childhood memories
All within my hand palm*

For me, as facilitator of this session, I was positively surprised how a space of vulnerability and intimacy could also open up in a session where everybody was in touch with one another only through virtual means, and all sat on their solitary islands behind their home screens. In a way, it were these constraints that in fact *enabled* a deep sharing, thinking, as it were, not outside but inside of the box: what can we still do, how can we work with all senses and evoke meaning and authenticity, *within* the confines of these limitations?

Lines of the Hand and Sustainable Education

From the accounts above and also on the basis of numerous other occasions where I held the workshop, one can gather that the experience has been significant to several of the participants as an altogether new way of surrendering oneself to an artful group process. In the following, I want to reflect on ways in which this encounter with the imaginative capacities of oneself and of others is perhaps more than “only” a refreshing and thought-provoking new practice. As I said, one of the aspects that, to me, make *lines of the hand* meaningful in the context of developing new approaches in sustainable education is that it challenges participants. It encourages them to yield to *not*-knowing, to working in a Beuysian sense with what is *not* yet there.

When we reflect on how art may be of help to people in understanding issues of sustainability, a first important consideration is what we actually refer to, when we use the word “art.” Is art a *means* through which we can further the agenda

⁶The workshop is documented at: <https://padlet.com/luukhuijgen/eelslinesofhand2020>.

of education for sustainable development? Or does art have an autonomous status, at odds with any form of instrumentalization of it, even when it is enlisted in efforts to reach ends that are seen by most people as *intrinsically* beneficial, such as reaching a more sustainable society? The adage *l'art pour l'art* (“art for art’s sake”) seems fixed in stone. As Suzi Gablik (1984/1997) recalls, it was composer Arnold Schönberg who went so far as to declare that *nothing* done for a purpose could be art. Elsewhere, she describes how she was trained to view art as a specialized pursuit, devoid of practical or social goals. One could not tinker with what was taken to be a kind of “theological law,” namely, that art was “inherent purposelessness” and “value-free” (Gablik, 2000, p. 39). Gablik believes a change is welcome in the paradigm from which art operates. She is interested in how making art can include more than just the concerned artists themselves and in what ways art can actually *build* community. As she sees it, art can speak to the power of connectedness and, in a “connective aesthetics,” establish bonds. It is this view on artmaking that to me finds expression also in *lines of the hand*.

The common view is that sustainable development rests on three pillars, namely, an interplay of ecological, social, and economic development that does not impede development options of future generations. Sacha Kagan (2010) has a different, more comprehensive idea of what sustainability entails, arguing that this triptych is overall too static and reductionist and has little regards for an *aesthetics* of sustainability. He advocates for a new holistic way of looking at sustainability which includes the dimension of cultural sustainability, and in his view this will require finding ways to handle its complexity. In “cultures of sustainability” (Kagan, 2010), education and art evidently are key elements. It has been argued that education is not like a “black box,” external as it were to our efforts to reach a more sustainable society. Rather, education itself is very much at the *heart* of this endeavor. For this reason, Stephen Sterling suggested that we move from “education for sustainable development” to “sustainable education” (Sterling, 2003). In a world that grows more and more complex and is

wrought with entangled wicked problems, we may urgently need a different kind of education. A way of learning in which it can be seen as a quality, for example, to be able to withstand—even if for just a little while—the pressure to make a quick “either-or” decision. Here the famous statement, attributed to Einstein,⁷ applies: “Problems cannot be solved with the same mindset that created them.” In short, what is asked is to be able to face, and to not be put down by, really rather overwhelming challenges often of a rather paradoxical nature.

In *lines of the hand*, participants are, as it were, “put on the wrong foot” (Van Boeckel, 2013, p. 219, 378) by and through the surprises that the unfolding of the workshop has in store for them and none of these are communicated on forehand. There is, in effect, a series of hurdles that participants need to cross which may go against or contradict their expectations. When they—in all likelihood—would expect that they will be asked continue to work with their *own* drawing of their palm lines, they are asked to hand the sketch to someone else. Subsequently they are confronted with the nonsensically sounding invitation to picture themselves as being in a landscape that is to be imagined on the basis of a few crude pencil lines. Later they, again unexpectedly, receive their own card back from another participant and the next request is to go and make a walk into the natural terrain at or near to where the group finds itself and to look for lines or markings that seem to resonate in some way with their drawn hand lines. Finally, they are prompted to read the haiku they have put together out loud in front of the rest of the group. The only way to do all this is to surrender oneself fully to the workshop’s process: to trust it and to not act on the basis of what one *assumes* to be the most fitting or comfortable thing to do.

⁷It remains doubtful whether or not Einstein ever really said this. Will Varey (2009) maintains that no actual source to this popular Einstein citation can be found. Varey found only one statement that Einstein made in an interview in 1946 that seems to come somewhat close: “A new type of thinking is essential,” he said, “if mankind is to survive and move to higher levels.”

In a letter that he wrote to his brothers in 1817, romantic poet John Keats (1899) first expressed his idea of “negative capability.” Asking himself what quality went to form a “Man of Achievement”—such as Shakespeare—he came upon the view that such a man is, first and foremost, “capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats, 1899, p. 277). Basically it is the ability to accept that not everything can be resolved. Keats had a high regard for receptive intuition, for which the intellectual self could be standing in its way. Negative capability can be understood as an ability to contemplate the world without the desire to try to reconcile contradictory aspects: embracing uncertainty and ambiguity and being willing to live with mystery. What this requires is being able to remain in a state of restlessness without at every instance impatiently looking for additional or newer information. This is what is demanded of participants when they join in—or perhaps more aptly put, *surrender* themselves to—a *lines of the hand* workshop. In contrast to this is the generally prevailing practice in group workshops that participants are informed on forehand on what the learning outcomes, the “deliverables,” will be. And usually they often will anticipate that at the end a neat “take-home message” will follow. None of this, however, is going to happen in *lines of the hand*.

Next to Keats, others have also argued that there is a certain quality in maintaining a tolerance for doubt. In the words of Os Guinness, author of *In Two Minds*, “To believe is to be ‘in one mind’ about accepting something as true; to disbelieve is to be ‘in one mind’ about rejecting it. To doubt is to waver between the two, to believe and doubt at once, and so be ‘in two minds’” (Guinness, 1970, p. 25).⁸ And Rebecca Solnit, in her *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, sees its value in our current times, as follows:

⁸It is in this respect worth taking a closer look at the word doubting. Its most common meaning is the act of hesitating between two things. Doubt stems from the Latin *dubitare*, which on its turn comes from the Aryan root *two* (this origin is also found in the German word for doubt, *Zweifel*, which also comes from *zwei*, or “two”).

...to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery. ... It is the job of artists to open doors and invite in ... the unknown, the unfamiliar ... To calculate on the unforeseen is perhaps exactly the paradoxical operation that life most requires of us (Solnit, 2005, pp. 5–6).

The capability to be in two minds is, I believe, something that can be nourished to some extent by AEE activities. Typically, in such sessions, there are instances where participants are faced with unexpected crossroads; here they might find themselves, at least for a certain length of time, in the doubt of how to go on. I believe there can be intrinsic value in being able to dwell (at least temporarily) in this state of mind, of getting stuck and then not to panic. From here, one can subsequently try to cross the threshold that first seemed insurmountable. And then later, looking backward, one can possibly have the satisfaction that one *was* able to accomplish this, after all. It is for this reason that the protocol of *lines of the hand* is not given away to participants prematurely, and neither do I provide any mention of its learning outcomes or aims. This twilight zone of not knowing what to expect but yet finding oneself being part of a process that is set into motion can cause participants to feel somewhat embarrassed and/or exposed. One’s inner critic, our “watch dog” that barks when it perceives a threat, might show itself and warn us: “Ah, but if you would do this you will be making a fool of yourself,” or “Don’t make yourself any illusions, *you* are not a poet!” It is only by immersing oneself further into the activity, “without any irritable reaching after fact and reason,” that one can later take a step back and reflect on what this whole experience was about, what it meant to be part of it at this nexus in time and space. An important aspect here is that such meaning-making can only be done by oneself: nobody else can fill in for you what you were supposed to get out of it.

The negative capability that is asked of the participants in *lines of the hand* is to go along with the “absurdist” suggestion that the few lines on the square piece of paper actually *represent* a landscape in which one can situate oneself. If

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they would approach this solely in a rational way—from a one-sided leaning on what Gregory Bateson called “self-conscious purposiveness”⁹—many of them would probably immediately cast it aside as a children’s game of make-believe. Crossing this threshold and participating *nevertheless* then means also to surrender oneself to a process without having any notion of where it will go. And it is this quality, I would hold, that may be of great value in the “postnormal times” (Sardar, 2010)¹⁰ we have entered, bringing about both extreme and increasingly frequent states of flux, anxiety, and other manifestations of what has been termed the “ecological emergency” (Mickey, 2016). Sustainability concerns are most often described as “wicked problems”, write Lotz-Sisitka et al. (2015, p. 73), “characterized by high levels of complexity, ambiguity, controversy and uncertainty and uncertainty both with respect to what is going on and with respect to what needs to be done.”

However, it is not a given that one will be able to jump over the mental hurdles that pop up through one’s participation in the unfolding artful workshop. Some years ago, I took part in a gathering on STEAM education¹¹ with various stakeholders inside of modern library building. About 40 people partook in the session of *lines of the hand* that I facilitated. When it came to the point where I invited the participants to imagine themselves being in the landscape of someone else’s hand lines, a woman stood up and said “I just

cannot do this, this is too difficult for me.” In response I said that of course it was fine too for her *not* to participate; there shouldn’t be any pressure.

Memory and a Sense of Place

If we want new generations to care for the natural environment and their cultural heritage, then fostering “a sense of place” may well be of key importance. What does it mean to be attached to a certain location, a landscape, a watershed, an ecosystem? Mindful of the additional dimension of “culture” in thinking about sustainability, it can be argued that an important additional and often overlooked element here is how we can encourage people to feel connected to and to care for places in nature, for landscapes—and, maybe the most abstract level, for places with a high value in biodiversity. Such relationships may undergo deep changes in different phases of one’s life. The felt bond to a place, at any moment in time, is partly informed by prior experiences and shaped through our memory. What do we carry with us as a “storied remembrance” of places where we have been before and of the sensory perceptions we have felt there? *Lines of the hand* is grounded on the idea that “memories of the senses” (Seremetakis, 1994), of how it was to be in a certain terrain, can be evoked through art and imagination (Fig. 3.11).

One could, however, argue that, strictly speaking, *lines of the hand* is not based on prompting the participants’ imaginative capacity, but that it is, essentially, a *visualization* exercise. In *Webster’s Dictionary* the verb “to visualize” is defined as “the act or power of forming mentally visual images of objects not present to the eye.” And indeed, most of the renderings by participants of their imagined experiences in a landscape summoned by meditating on the drawn lines on the cards tend to be overtly ocularcentric. Julian Pas reminds us that there is a small but important difference here between visualization and imagination. For the object of imagination, he maintains, is “something not only absent, *but never wholly seen before*” (Pas, 1995, p. 175,

⁹The concept of self-conscious purposiveness that Bateson introduced is a key phrase in his work. Bateson-scholar Noel Charlton explained it clearly as follows: Through the centuries, we have learned “to identify single goals for our purposes.” This is then coupled with that “we have come to think of causality as a series of straight-line effects, without allowing for all the interpenetrating influences and effects flowing between us and the wider living world” (Charlton, 2008), p. 1.

¹⁰The concept of postnormal times is developed by Ziauddin Sardar, who refers to our present era as a transitional age: “an in-between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have yet to be born, and very few things seem to make sense” (Sardar, 2010, p. 435).

¹¹STEAM education is an approach to learning that uses science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking.



Fig. 3.11 Evoking sensory experiences in natural landscapes through one's imagination. Tallinn, Estonia, 2019. (Photo: Ceciel Verheij)

emphasis added). I myself would hold that the evocations are perhaps a mix of visualization and imagination, as whatever we assume we extract from our “well of remembrance” inevitably is, to a greater or lesser extent, distorted through the bias of our hindsight. And there is also the factor that in my instructions I explicitly suggest to participants that if they so desire, they are free to conjure up an entirely fancied landscape or place where one has never been before.

I find resonance here in the work of Italian Reggio Emilia pedagogue Veia Vecchi. One of her research interests is in how materials can be used in education—her own focus is early childhood pedagogy—to investigate reality and, more specifically, to trigger memories of earlier personal experiences. She calls to mind a well-known phenomenon in the psychology of perception and that is that certain shapes, colors, or other sensorial experience can simulate other forms of reality, substituting for these as it were. The choice of materials—such as, in our case of *lines of the hand*, the paper, pencil, and of course the organ of the hand itself—opens a space for allusive connections to such realities, “re-evoking, narrating or representing them in personal multisenso-

rial memory processes” (Vecchi, 2010, p. 32). In encounters between humans and materials, our minds are capable of connecting very different planes and levels: “a sense can call to mind a memory and narrate a reality by recollecting it” (ibid.). *Lines of the hand* foregrounds the relationship between our imaginative capacity and the memory of the senses: by the exciting of the former, through an artmaking activity, the formation of gestalts of the latter is triggered.

At the end of the very same session in the library that I mentioned above, a male participant reported that he’d had the most astonishing experience: when he tried to picture himself in the landscape of lines, he suddenly felt he was sitting by the side of a brook, as he remembered he had once done as a young boy. But while imagining this, he felt he was actually *sitting* there again, by the water. He mentioned that this was for him a rather overwhelming experience.

In *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Paul John Eakin (1999) suggests that our concept of the self is fundamentally driven by the stories we tell about ourselves, which he calls our “storied selves” (cf. pp. 99–141). Building further upon this view, Sarah Katherine Foust

Vinson (2010, p. 14) speaks of “storied memories” as the memory narratives that drive such stories. She is interested in examining how memory becomes narrativized and storied. It are our narrative frames that shape our autobiographical memories. All the time, there is an interplay going on between our stories, histories, and memories. Ultimately, she says, our memories are central not only to our identities but also to our humanity. Leaning on Ender (2005), she states that this is the linguistic sense-making activity that *defines* the very conditions of our existence. It is a basic human activity to share our storied memories of the past with others and to articulate our memories in useful narrative forms: “Throughout this process of creating our identities, we are engaged in the continual task of revising and editing our life-histories and stories to give our lives meaning” (Foust Vinson, 2010, p. 318). Foust Vinson refers to Ulric Neisser who in 1967 put forth the now widely accepted notion that only fragments of experience are encoded in autobiographical memory; by consequence, rememberers must seek to *reconstruct* their memories and personal histories, and when doing so they refer to the elements of their autobiography in the form of a narrative, a story, of their personal experience. The border between memory and imagination is narrow. Foust Vinson points at the usual distinction between narrative and story: psychologists and scientists speak of memory’s narrative structures, she says, whereas stories are generally associated with imagination and creativity. She herself uses the terms interchangeably, as, in her view, memory becomes both narrativized *and* storied. Rememberers are also crafty creators—hence her new concept of “storied memory.” Our storied self is a powerful presence, a point that was once compellingly made by Hungarian novelist György Konrád: “To the question, ‘What is the meaning of life?’ everybody answers with their life’s history” (Konrád, cited in Claeys, 2020, my translation).

Our memory works in mysterious ways and informs our understandings when trying to make meaning of our experiences. The attachments we develop to places, our felt sense of belonging, provide us with a rich array of hints of smells,

sounds, views, tastes, and feelings. Most of the times, this happens unconsciously and memories manifest themselves at sudden moments, as Eeva Kilpi (2004) lyrically described:

Memory has a hundred ears, a thousand eyes, and most of its eyes are shut, for one has to look forward. But once in a while one of the eyes of memory unexpectedly opens, and then one sees events from the past as if they happened now, everything is alive and close, and you feel that you can recall any moment of your childhood whenever you want. But that is not so, memory has a will of its own, it is like another being that has grown into us, like a twin being that walks beside us and sometimes performs services for us, sometimes betrays us. (Kilpi, cited in *Touch of Memories*, 2004)

Remarks in Closing

An important aspect of arts-based environmental education is to facilitate and to encourage participants to open their senses more fully in and to their environment. As mentioned earlier, such education involves methods that support fresh perception and that aim at an openness to sensitivity (Mantere, 1998). *Lines of the hand* is, at first glance, in a marked contrast to this, for one is asked to turn one’s attentiveness, one’s sensitivity, *inward*, if you will, rather than to the circumambient universe (Lawrence, 1936/1971)¹² around us—the sensuous terrain where we happen to be at the very moment in time that the workshop is taking place. Nevertheless, I would suggest that it is a relevant endeavor in the context of pondering our sensory and aesthetic relationship to our environs—but then approached in an *indirect* manner. The process is aimed at enhancing the participant’s openness to environmental experiences; in this case, the participant’s relationship to the more-than-human world is, as it were, approached “from the inside out.” During

¹²D.H. Lawrence (1936/1971, p. 175) established the following connection between a work of art and the artist who produced it: “The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment. ... And this perfected relation between man and his circumambient universe is life itself, for mankind.”

lines of the hand, all aspects of how it feels and what it means to “be” in a landscape of one’s own conception have to be retrieved from memory, evoked by the imagination, and further enriched by all the intersections between these two realms. In this sense, the activity can also be performed inside of a building or even in virtual space (bearing in mind that our walled-in environment-at-hand tends to afford sensory input to our perceptual systems that is less rich and diverse, compared to when we would partake in an outdoors workshop).

A basic epistemological assumption for offering the workshop is that participation in it allows participants to explore how rich the power of imagination potentially can be and how easy (but at times also, how hard) it is to imagine and/or retrieve memories of past sensorial experience. *Lines of the hand* brings along the additional challenge of formulating these storied memories in words to others. To many people, doing all this may feel childish or ridiculous. Nevertheless most participants tend to commit to the process as they go along with it, but for this to happen it seems essential that they feel that their experience is contained and held in a safe group environment. It is a space of a (respectfully) shared intimacy: another person talks about the landscape “identified” in the drawing that you made of your hand lines, expressing what he or she possibly heard, felt, smelled, and touched being there. Making a personal poem in response to this, at a location where one finds resonating elements in the environment, only deepens the experience further. Ideally, it is my hope that it allows for increased understanding of what Gregory Bateson (1972) meant with being sensitive to “the pattern that connects” the elements of the world: the relationships between the lines of our hands, the morphology of our hands, and the forms and expressions that we find in the natural world around us.

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Author Queries

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Queries	Details Required	Author's Response
AU1	Please check if presentation of “Friedrich Hölderlin (1966)” is appropriate.	
AU2	Please confirm the placement of “‘Artist’s hand’. Axel Poignant, 1941. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra” in this chapter.	
AU3	Please note that reference citation is not allowed in the abstract section. Hence it has been retained as per style for reference.	
AU4	The sentence “In contrast to this is the generally prevailing practice in group workshops that participants are...” has been revised as per correction. Please check if okay.	
AU5	Please check if presentation of quote is appropriate.	
AU6	The sentence “Sustainability concerns are...” has been revised as per correction. Please check if okay.	
AU7	Please check sentence starting “It are our narrative frames...” for clarity.	