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

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Jan van Boeckel

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

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

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7	Abstract	Keywords	52
8	Some of the most striking accounts of the	Power of imagination · More-than-human ·	53
9	inventive power of imagination come from	Environmental understanding · Art-based	54
10	former prisoners who have spent time in soli-	environmental education · Artistic experi-	55
11	tar confinement. In these testimonies, they	ences · Artful workshop · Sense of place	56
12	relate how their imaginative capacity enabled		
13	them to keep their sanity, even in the most		
14	arduous circumstances. Somehow they man-		
15	aged to find a way to keep a very basic sense		
16	of social and cultural relations intact, by pic-		
17	turing themselves in a richer world than the		
18	one afforded by the concrete walls of the cell		
19	block. There is the astonishing story of the		
20	experience of the brothers Midhat, Bayazid,		
21	and Ali Bourequat who spent 18 years in a		
22	Moroccan prison. Here they were able to mu-		
23	ster the power of imagination in a most dra-		
24	matic way. The only way to survive their		
25	ordeal, according to their own testimonies		
26	(Hiddema B: <i>De hel van Marokko</i> : “We heb-		
27	ben Hassan beloofd te zwijgen”. <i>De Groene</i> ,		
28	7. https://www.groene.nl/artikel/de-hel-van-		
29	marokko-we-hebben-hassan-beloofd-te-zwijgen , 1994), was by imagining they were		
30	somewhere else. In their own 2-by-3-meter		
31	cells, the prisoners forgot about the thick walls		
32	locking them in and celebrated their birthdays,		
33	weddings, even births, and whatnot. Their		
34	minds were inexhaustible in creating diver-		
35	sions. One of them was by taking each other		
36	for walks in Paris. Gradually all the other		
37	inmates, sitting in their other dim-lighted		
38	prison cells, “walked” along with them. Thus		
39	they shut out reality completely: their world		
40	was what they invented. That was their salva-		
41	tion (This account is based on (Hiddema B:		
42	<i>De hel van Marokko</i> : “We hebben Hassan		
43	beloofd te zwijgen”. <i>De Groene</i> , 7. https://www.groene.nl/artikel/de-hel-van-		
44	marokko-we-hebben-hassan-beloofd-te-zwijgen , 1994, February 16)). It is this radical human ability		
45	to imagine worlds wholly other to the one that		
46	one is present in, which is foregrounded in the		
47	artful workshop that is the theme of this		
48	chapter.		
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57	The Human Faculty of Imagination		
58	A shorthand definition of imagination is the abil-		
59	ity to picture, in the mind’s eye, something that is		
60	<i>not</i> there. In this chapter, I will argue that this		
61	human faculty offers a great potential when seek-		
62	ing new ways to (re)connect people to nature.		
63	Fostering our relation to the more-than-human		
64	world through artistic process is key in the prac-		
65	tice of arts-based environmental education		
66	(AEE). This form of education aims to develop		
67	environmental understanding and responsibility		
68	“by becoming more receptive to sense percep-		
69	tions and observations and by using artistic meth-		
70	ods to express personal environmental		
71	experiences and thoughts” (Mantere, 1995, p. 1).		
72	The guiding idea here is that artistic experiences		
73	improve one’s ability to become aware of phe-		
74	nomena in the world; they can help one in com-		
75	ing to knowing and understanding. Practitioners		
76	in AEE hold that artful activities can be of par-		
77	ticular high value in facilitating the learning		
78	about, and with, the environment. Characteristic		
79	for AEE-teachers is that they attempt to support		
80	fresh perception and the personal enjoyment and		
81	pleasure of perceiving the world from the heart.		
82	In today’s world, this often doesn’t come about		
83	naturally. To achieve that, says Meri-Helga		
84	Mantere, who first coined the concept of arts-		
85	based environmental education in 1995, it is nec-		
86	essary to stop, be quiet, have time, and feel		
87	psychologically secure in order to perceive the		
88	unknown, the sometimes wild and unexpected.		
89	She underlines the importance of openness to		
90	sensitivity, and finding new and personal ways to		
91	articulate and share one’s environmental experi-		
92	ences, “which might be beautiful, disgusting,		
93	peaceful or threatening” (Mantere, 1998, p. 32).		

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

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

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

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

147 The *lines of the hand* workshop, however, has
148 nothing to do with such divinations. It can be per-
149 formed both indoors and outdoors, and even in
150 virtual space, as I learned during the COVID-19
151 pandemic (more about this below). Each environ-
152 ment has its own qualities, affordances, and limi-
153 tations. In its core, *lines of the hand* is an artful
154 workshop that foregrounds the arousing of curi-
155 osity and making and doing something worthy of
156 exploration without the need of bringing in any
157 set of elaborate toolkits or procedures. On the
158 whole, participants are merely asked to follow a
159 simple “protocol” (Masschelein, 2012)¹. They
160 are invited to access and value the imaginative
161 capacity that each of them *already* carries with
162 them, at any given moment, and to engage with
163 this as fully as possible. During the years, I have
164 facilitated *lines of the hand* for a diversity of
165 groups, all (thus far) only composed of adults.
166 Participants ranged from artists and art education
167 students to people who have previously—accord-
168 ing to their own accounts—rarely taken part in
169 artmaking activities (e.g., employees in environ-
170 mental conservation organizations). Below I will
171 first describe the workshop through its different
172 stages.

Design of a *Lines of the Hand* Workshop

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

¹A 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)

180 be formed—but not too many either. The workshop
181 preferably takes place in an outdoor environment but can also be carried out indoors.
182

183 When all participants have found a comfortable place to sit, the session can begin. As the
184 facilitator of the activity, I usually start out by
185 pointing out that this workshop will be about the
186 kind of embodied/visceral/tacit knowledge we
187 build through sensory experiences out on the
188 land. What are our memories of these, and how
189 can we access this domain through our imaginative
190 capacity—even when we find ourselves in a
191 different nexus in time and space at the very
192 moment we try to do this? With and through this
193 activity, I invite participants to dwell for some
194

195 time in their own imagination, to explore what
196 kind of sensorial experiences they can retrieve
197 from memory or conjure up spontaneously while
198 making this effort. At this moment in time, I often
199 narrate the story of the Bourequat brothers in
200 prison camp “Hell,” as a compelling example of
201 how rich our imaginative capacity can be.
202

203 Then it is time to move to action. I give each
204 participant a small square of cutup white card-
205 board (size 12 by 12 cm), and I ask them to make
206 on it a rough pencil drawing of the main lines on
207 the palm of one of their hands. To create the
208 drawing, they should use their unschooled non-
209 writing hand (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). My reason for
210 encouraging them to use the “wrong” hand is to
211



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

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

278 When these initial stages of the workshop
 279 have been completed, I ask the participants to
 280 return the card with hand lines to the person who
 281 initially drew them. The idea is that each partici-
 282 pant now individually makes a short walk in the
 283 local area, taking their drawing along, in search
 284 of a physical location that would, in some way,
 285 "resonate" with the lines that they drew on their
 286 card at the start of the workshop. They should
 287 look for some kind of reverberations, a resem-
 288 blance in patterns, in what they encounter. This
 289 could, for example, be in the shapes one finds in
 290 the bark of a tree or in the structures in scratches
 291 on the surface of a rock. Patterns could even be
 292 found in the lines of jet aircraft exhaust plumes in
 293 the sky. Once such resonance is found at a certain
 294 location in the terrain, they should remain there
 295 for a while. This specific place will be their loca-
 296 tion for what comes next.² While they are at this

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.

297 spot, I invite them to write a *haiku*-like poem³ on
 298 the back side of their card. In these three lines,
 299 they should ideally try to respond in words to the
 300 "gift" they've received of one of the other partici-
 301 pants trying to articulate how it was to be in a
 302 landscape they imagined on the basis of the forms
 303 suggested by the drawing of one's own hand
 304 lines. And then, when a participant has finished
 305 compiling a haiku, he or she then goes back to the
 306 large circle of where the whole group once again
 307 reassembles. When everybody has returned, the
 308 poems are recited by their authors, two times in a
 309 row. (But only if the participant concerned would
 310 be inclined to do so, there is no pressure, see
 311 Figs. 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6) If time allows, we have a
 312 final concluding conversation on how this activ-
 313 ity possibly made sense (or perhaps *didn't* make
 314 sense) in the context of seeking ways of connect-
 315 ing to the natural world or developing novel
 316 forms of sustainable education. When taking up
 317 such themes, there is no obvious connection to
 318 the constituent elements of the workshop itself,
 319 but it is precisely this circumstance of *non-*
 320 *association* that afford the triggering of an unex-
 321 pected, often animated and therefore likely more
 322 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

328
 As part of co-teaching the course *Children and*
Nature: Rediscovering a Sense of Wonder at
 331 Schumacher College (an international college for
 332 ecological studies in the United Kingdom) in the
 333 summer of 2010, I facilitated *lines of the hand* on
 334 the lawn, near to an enormous horse chestnut
 335

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)

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

344
 345 We were struck by how many of us saw water in
 346 landscapes and also by how evocative the experience
 347 could be. Everyone talked about sounds, and what
 348 they could see and feel. As for myself, I saw an
 349 expansive delta from far above, kind of like a map,
 350 going out into the sea. And enormous creatures
 351 would be hiding in the water. Huge flocks of
 352 birds. From above they are tiny, with a flush of
 353 colour. One of us saw an oak tree, at a very specific

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

373 After this first report, I initiated a dialogue by
 374 asking open questions on what has just been
 375 shared, such as whether people in this group also
 376 talked about things that they *tasted*. “No, taste
 377 didn’t come up; it was sounds: the calling of animals,
 378 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.

379 informed. "No." "Any smells?" "Yes," Sarah
 380 replied, "one talked about the smell of the mud,
 381 and the smell of the water."

382 I then attempted to take the conversation to
 383 another level: "Was there a difference between
 384 people that saw themselves as being *in* the land-
 385 scape, and those who were looking at it from
 386 above, or saw it like a map hanging on a wall?"
 387 "Yes, there were differences," Sarah reported.
 388 "There were two of us who were very much look-
 389 ing down from above and there were three where
 390 there was definitely a sense of being *in* the
 391 landscape."

392 Later, the other reporters, on their turn,
 393 recounted what was said in their respective sub-
 394 groups and I had a short conversation with them
 395 as well.⁵

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

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

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

412 *The flower's breast opens.*
 413 *The insect enters,*
 414 *moved by the unknowable.*

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

418 *A crooked branch across the threshold.*
 419 *Dreams come in through the woody arch of bark.*
 420 *Find deer, smell of musk,*
 421 *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)

469 **Lines of the Hand in Virtual Space**

470 In May 2020, I facilitated a session of *lines of*
471 *the hand* completely online, and about 70 interna-
472 tional students in the course “Environmental
473 Education for Sustainable Living” at
474 Wageningen University & Research center par-
475 participated in it. Because of the COVID-19 pan-
476 demic, students as well as teachers were in
477 (self-imposed) quarantine at their homes, and
478 the only way to conduct the workshop was to
479 carry it out in virtual space. Because of this cir-
480 cumstance, the cards with drawn hand lines could

481 not be exchanged physically, so these (see 481
482 Figs. 3.7, 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10) were swapped by 482
483 email between the students who were divided in 483
484 14 subgroups. The subsequent breakout sessions 484
485 in these small groups were also performed 485
486 online. Clearly, doing *lines of the hand* in isol- 486
487 ation and via screen generated its own challenges. 487
488 In the chat box that was open during the session, 488
489 student Rebecka mentioned: “At the moment I 489
490 felt peaceful and happy. But now I’m sad 490
491 because I want to be there in that landscape of 491
492 my memories (my home).” And student Karis 492
493 commented:

494	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.	With time I came to realize that, You represent my world.	541
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502	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 <i>stronger</i> 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 <i>lines of the hand</i> was but one part):		
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516	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)	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 <i>enabled</i> 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, <i>within</i> the confines of these limitations?	549
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531	Here is a sample of the kind of haikus that the students created ⁶ :	Lines of the Hand and Sustainable Education	561
532			562
533	<i>water traveling from high to low, birds are flying to wherever they go I love being here, living in solitude and slow</i>		
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535			
536	<i>A field full of flowers Flowing down the grass so green The sound of music</i>	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 <i>lines of the hand</i> meaningful in the context of developing new approaches in sustainable education is that it challenges participants. It encourages them to yield to <i>not</i> -knowing, to working in a Beuysian sense with what is <i>not</i> yet there.	563
537			564
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539	<i>When I was little, I thought you represented the initials of my name.</i>		
540			

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

584 of education for sustainable development? Or
585 does art have an autonomous status, at odds with
586 any form of instrumentalization of it, even when
587 it is enlisted in efforts to reach ends that are seen
588 by most people as *intrinsically* beneficial, such as
589 reaching a more sustainable society? The adage
590 *l'art pour l'art* ("art for art's sake") seems fixed
591 in stone. As Suzi Gablik (1984/1997) recalls, it
592 was composer Arnold Schönberg who went so far
593 as to declare that *nothing* done for a purpose
594 could be art. Elsewhere, she describes how she
595 was trained to view art as a specialized pursuit,
596 devoid of practical or social goals. One could not
597 tinker with what was taken to be a kind of "theo-
598 logical law," namely, that art was "inherent pur-
599 poselessness" and "value-free" (Gablik, 2000,
600 p. 39). Gablik believes a change is welcome in
601 the paradigm from which art operates. She is
602 interested in how making art can include more
603 than just the concerned artists themselves and in
604 what ways art can actually *build* community. As
605 she sees it, art can speak to the power of connect-
606 edness and, in a "connective aesthetics," establish
607 bonds. It is this view on artmaking that to me
608 finds expression also in *lines of the hand*.

609 The common view is that sustainable develop-
610 ment rests on three pillars, namely, an interplay
611 of ecological, social, and economic development
612 that does not impede development options of
613 future generations. Sacha Kagan (2010) has a dif-
614 ferent, more comprehensive idea of what sustain-
615 ability entails, arguing that this triptych is overall
616 too static and reductionist and has little regards
617 for an *aesthetics* of sustainability. He advocates
618 for a new holistic way of looking at sustainability
619 which includes the dimension of cultural sustain-
620 ability, and in his view this will require finding
621 ways to handle its complexity. In "cultures of
622 sustainability" (Kagan, 2010), education and art
623 evidently are key elements. It has been argued
624 that education is not like a "black box," external
625 as it were to our efforts to reach a more sustain-
626 able society. Rather, education itself is very much
627 at the *heart* of this endeavor. For this reason,
628 Stephen Sterling suggested that we move from
629 "education for sustainable development" to "sus-
630 tainable education" (Sterling, 2003). In a world
631 that grows more and more complex and is

632 wrought with entangled wicked problems, we
633 may urgently need a different kind of education. 634
634 A way of learning in which it can be seen as a
635 quality, for example, to be able to withstand—
636 even if for just a little while—the pressure to
637 make a quick "either-or" decision. Here the
638 famous statement, attributed to Einstein,⁷ applies:
639 "Problems cannot be solved with the same mind-
640 set that created them." In short, what is asked is to
641 be able to face, and to not be put down by, really
642 rather overwhelming challenges often of a rather
643 paradoxical nature.

644 In *lines of the hand*, participants are, as it
645 were, "put on the wrong foot" (Van Boeckel,
646 2013, p. 219, 378) by and through the surprises
647 that the unfolding of the workshop has in store
648 for them and none of these are communicated on
649 beforehand. There is, in effect, a series of hurdles
650 that participants need to cross which may go
651 against or contradict their expectations. When
652 they—in all likelihood—would expect that they
653 will be asked continue to work with their *own*
654 drawing of their palm lines, they are asked to
655 hand the sketch to someone else. Subsequently
656 they are confronted with the nonsensically sound-
657 ing invitation to picture themselves as being in a
658 landscape that is to be imagined on the basis of a
659 few crude pencil lines. Later they, again
660 unexpectedly, receive their own card back from
661 another participant and the next request is to go
662 and make a walk into the natural terrain at or near
663 to where the group finds itself and to look for
664 lines or markings that seem to resonate in some
665 way with their drawn hand lines. Finally, they are
666 prompted to read the haiku they have put together
667 out loud in front of the rest of the group. The only
668 way to do all this is to surrender oneself fully to
669 the workshop's process: to trust it and to not act
670 on the basis of what one *assumes* to be the most
671 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."

672 In a letter that he wrote to his brothers in 1817,
 673 romantic poet John Keats (1899) first expressed
 674 his idea of “negative capability.” Asking himself
 675 what quality went to form a “Man of
 676 Achievement”—such as Shakespeare—he came
 677 upon the view that such a man is, first and fore-
 678 most, “capable of being in uncertainties,
 679 Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching
 680 after fact and reason” (Keats, 1899, p. 277).
 681 Basically it is the ability to accept that not every-
 682 thing can be resolved. Keats had a high regard for
 683 receptive intuition, for which the intellectual self
 684 could be standing in its way. Negative capability
 685 can be understood as an ability to contemplate
 686 the world without the desire to try to reconcile
 687 contradictory aspects: embracing uncertainty and
 688 ambiguity and being willing to live with mystery.
 689 What this requires is being able to remain in a
 690 state of restlessness without at every instance
 691 impatiently looking for additional or newer infor-
 692 mation. This is what is demanded of participants
 693 when they join in—or perhaps more aptly put,
 694 *surrender* themselves to—a *lines of the hand*
 695 workshop. In contrast to this is the generally pre-
 696 vailing practice in group workshops that partici-
 697 pants are informed on forehand on what the
 698 learning outcomes, the “deliverables,” will be.
 699 And usually they often will anticipate that at the
 700 end a neat “take-home message” will follow.
 701 None of this, however, is going to happen in *lines*
 702 of the hand.

703 Next to Keats, others have also argued that
 704 there is a certain quality in maintaining a toler-
 705 ance for doubt. In the words of Os Guinness,
 706 author of *In Two Minds*, “To believe is to be ‘in
 707 one mind’ about accepting something as true; to
 708 disbelieve is to be ‘in one mind’ about rejecting
 709 it. To doubt is to waver between the two, to
 710 believe and doubt at once, and so be ‘in two
 711 minds’” (Guinness, 1970, p. 25).⁸ And Rebecca
 712 Solnit, in her *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, sees
 713 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
 714 present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and
 715 mystery. ... It is the job of artists to open doors and
 716 invite in ... the unknown, the unfamiliar ... To
 717 calculate on the unforeseen is perhaps exactly the
 718 paradoxical operation that life most requires of us
 719 (Solnit, 2005, pp. 5–6).
 720

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

The negative capability that is asked of the
 756 participants in *lines of the hand* is to go along
 757 with the “absurdist” suggestion that the few lines
 758 on the square piece of paper actually *represent* a
 759 landscape in which one can situate oneself. If
 760

762 they would approach this solely in a rational
763 way—from a one-sided leaning on what Gregory
764 Bateson called “self-conscious purposiveness”⁹—
765 many of them would probably immediately cast
766 it aside as a children’s game of make-believe.
767 Crossing this threshold and participating *never-
768 theless* then means also to surrender oneself to a
769 process without having any notion of where it
770 will go. And it is this quality, I would hold, that
771 may be of great value in the “postnormal times”
772 (Sardar, 2010)¹⁰ we have entered, bringing about
773 both extreme and increasingly frequent states of
774 flux, anxiety, and other manifestations of what
775 has been termed the “ecological emergency”
776 (Mickey, 2016). Sustainability concerns are most
777 often described as “wicked problems”, write
778 Lotz-Sisitka et al. (2015, p. 73), “characterized
779 by high levels of complexity, ambiguity, contro-
780 versy and uncertainty and uncertainty both with
781 respect to what is going on and with respect to
782 what needs to be done.”

783 However, it is not a given that one will be able
784 to jump over the mental hurdles that pop up
785 through one’s participation in the unfolding artful
786 workshop. Some years ago, I took part in a gath-
787 ering on STEAM education¹¹ with various stake-
788 holders inside of modern library building. About
789 40 people partook in the session of *lines of the
790 hand* that I facilitated. When it came to the point
791 where I invited the participants to imagine them-
792 selves being in the landscape of someone else’s
793 hand lines, a woman stood up and said “I just

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

Memory and a Sense of Place

798

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

822 One could, however, argue that, strictly speak-
823 ing, *lines of the hand* is not based on prompting
824 the participants’ imaginative capacity, but that it
825 is, essentially, a *visualization* exercise. In
826 *Webster’s Dictionary* the verb “to visualize” is
827 defined as “the act or power of forming mentally
828 visual images of objects not present to the eye.”
829 And indeed, most of the renderings by partici-
830 pants of their imagined experiences in a land-
831 scape summoned by meditating on the drawn
832 lines on the cards tend to be overtly ocularcentric.
833 Julian Pas reminds us that there is a small but
834 important difference here between visualization
835 and imagination. For the object of imagination,
836 he maintains, is “something not only absent, *but*
837 *never wholly seen before*” (Pas, 1995, p. 175,
838

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 Vea 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 multisensorial 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.”

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

990 A basic epistemological assumption for offering
 991 the workshop is that participation in it allows
 992 participants to explore how rich the power of
 993 imagination potentially can be and how easy (but
 994 at times also, how hard) it is to imagine and/or
 995 retrieve memories of past sensorial experience.
 996 *Lines of the hand* brings along the additional
 997 challenge of formulating these storied memories
 998 in words to others. To many people, doing all this
 999 may feel childish or ridiculous. Nevertheless
 1000 most participants tend to commit to the process
 1001 as they go along with it, but for this to happen it
 1002 seems essential that they feel that their experi-
 1003 ence is contained and held in a safe group envi-
 1004 ronment. It is a space of a (respectfully) shared
 1005 intimacy: another person talks about the land-
 1006 scape “identified” in the drawing that you made
 1007 of your hand lines, expressing what he or she
 1008 possibly heard, felt, smelled, and touched being
 1009 there. Making a personal poem in response to
 1010 this, at a location where one finds resonating ele-
 1011 ments in the environment, only deepens the ex-
 1012 perience further. Ideally, it is my hope that it allows
 1013 for increased understanding of what Gregory
 1014 Bateson (1972) meant with being sensitive to
 1015 “the pattern that connects” the elements of the
 1016 world: the relationships between the lines of our
 1017 hands, the morphology of our hands, and the
 1018 forms and expressions that we find in the natural
 1019 world around us.

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Uncorrected Proof

Author Queries

Chapter No.: 3 0005266849

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.	