

## Assignment lesson 2

### Attentive Noticing

(from First Steps to Seeing by Emma Kidd)

#### Attentive Noticing - Short Study of a hand

##### 2. REDISCOVERING OUR OWN EXPERIENCE

explore this practice by first using it to rediscover a part of life that is immediately available to us, and often very much taken for granted, one of our hands.

Before you start this exercise try to consciously cultivate an open, curious, receptive attitude so that you can explore your hand from a fresh perspective. During the exercise, take your time and make a conscious effort to give your sensory experience your full attention. Try to explore the territory of your own hand like a pioneer, noticing and discovering things as if for the very first time.

Make sure to check-in periodically and notice where your attention is, observe whether it is focused on your hand or on your thoughts about your hand. If your mind starts to run away with itself consciously turn your attention back toward your sensory experience, and if your mind tries to tell you that you are bored, notice those thoughts (and any accompanying feelings of frustration) and then let them go. To keep your hand at the centre of your attention focus on the exact details that you can perceive with your senses and challenge yourself to continue searching for new details on your hand that you have not yet noticed.

If you would like to experiment with different ways of keeping your attention focused, one way could be to draw what you are seeing, allowing your pencil to record the experience of your eyes as they explore the surface of your hand. In this case, the aim is not to create a 'picture' but to help focus your attention on noticing exactly what you are seeing. In the insightful book *The Zen of Seeing* artist Frederick Franck called this exercise Seeing/Drawing. He writes that this type of drawing is, '...not self-indulgence, a "pleasant hobby", but a discipline of awareness of unwavering attention to a world which is fully alive.'<sup>14</sup>

Another way to focus your attention could be to write down

Another way to focus your attention is to write down descriptions of the particular details and qualities you notice on your hand as you progress through each stage of the exercise. Describing your experience as precisely as you can, helps to clarify, and provide a useful record of, your experience. Similarly to 'seeing/drawing', exact sensory description focuses on documenting the 'attentive noticing' that you are immersed in, and aims to describe details such as the slightly curved, horizontal lines that occur on the areas where the fingers bend, to help keep you engaged in a process of seeing

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## PART ONE: DEVELOPING A DYNAMIC WAY OF SEEING

ever further and deeper. Whether you are describing your sensory experience to help focus, or to accurately document, your process of attentive noticing, for the purpose of this exercise you do not need to include your subjective feelings or opinions about the practice, only note down the precise details that you are experiencing.

The exercise below comprises guidelines which aim to lead us into the process of exact sense perception, but they are not exact instructions as such. The overall aim is to get *into* the practice of precisely noticing what arises in your direct, sensory experience, so it is just as important to allow our own experience to lead the process. Read one guideline, find your own way into the practice, and then move on to the next guideline.

Lastly, whether you just look at and touch your hand, or whether you choose to also draw it, or to write down your observations, do not rush and do not worry about being 'right' or 'wrong', there are no fixed answers.

### EXERCISE: ATTENTIVE NOTICING – SHORT STUDY OF A HAND

1. Choose one of your hands to focus on. Wiggle your fingers on that hand, rotate your wrist and view the hand from arms length. Allow yourself to get a 'first impression' of your hand and notice whether anything about it instantly catches your attention.
2. Now, slow down your perception of the hand.

... your perception and use your senses to immerse yourself in experiencing your hand, bit by bit. Bring your hand up close to your face and use your eyes to slowly work your way across the different 'parts' of your hand, such as the surface of your skin, your fingers, fingernails, palm and the back of your hand. Use your eyes like fingertips to feel your way around the details of your hand, such as its contours, lines, grooves, undulations, patterns and textures.

3. After you have explored your whole hand, find a detail that particularly catches your attention, such as the star-shaped, minute creases on the back of one of your knuckles, and allow your full attention to dwell in this

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## 2. REDISCOVERING OUR OWN EXPERIENCE

one area. Try to notice the tiniest details that you can perceive with your eyes.

4. Move your eyes very slowly across this one spot and compare the different qualities that these details have. For instance, notice the rough surface texture of your skin in contrast to the smooth lines; compare the deep indentations and the raised protrusions; or notice the dullness of the creases in comparison to the slight shine of your skin.
5. Now use your other hand to touch and feel the hand that you are observing. For example, run your fingers over the skin on the back of your hand and gently press down to feel the lumps and bumps that lie beneath the skin; work your way up the sides of your fingers and feel the contrast between the fleshy surface and their hard centre; or turn your hand and trace the lines of your palm with your fingertips.

*Reflection:* Spend some time contemplating the details and qualities that you noticed on the surface of your hand. Did you notice anything that you think you had not noticed

before? Did anything you see, feel or experience surprise you?

Reflect also on the process of giving your full attention to your sensory experience. Did your mind wander or become frustrated? Was it challenging to keep searching for details? How did you have to change the way you would usually look at your hand in order to 'exactly' notice your sensory experience of it during this exercise?

This exercise could be expanded and applied to any part of life that we would like to experience, or to understand, in more depth. The part of life could be from nature, such as a piece of fruit, a tree, or an area of landscape such as river bed; or it could be man-made, such as a piece of music, a work of art, a building or a neighbourhood. The purpose of attentive noticing and exact sense perception is to disclose aspects of life, as precisely as possible. This involves paying attention to life as though the part of life we are attending to were describing itself. Instead

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## **Nature Drawing**

(From Thinking Like a Plant by Craig Holdredge)

### **Working with pencil**

Draw a white ball that is lying on a cloth (fig 2.3). The ball will be illuminated from one side, so that it throws a shadow on the cloth. The set up provides a wide spectrum of light and dark shades.

Draw in a way that you do not make outlines. Create the shades of light and dark. (fig 2.4)

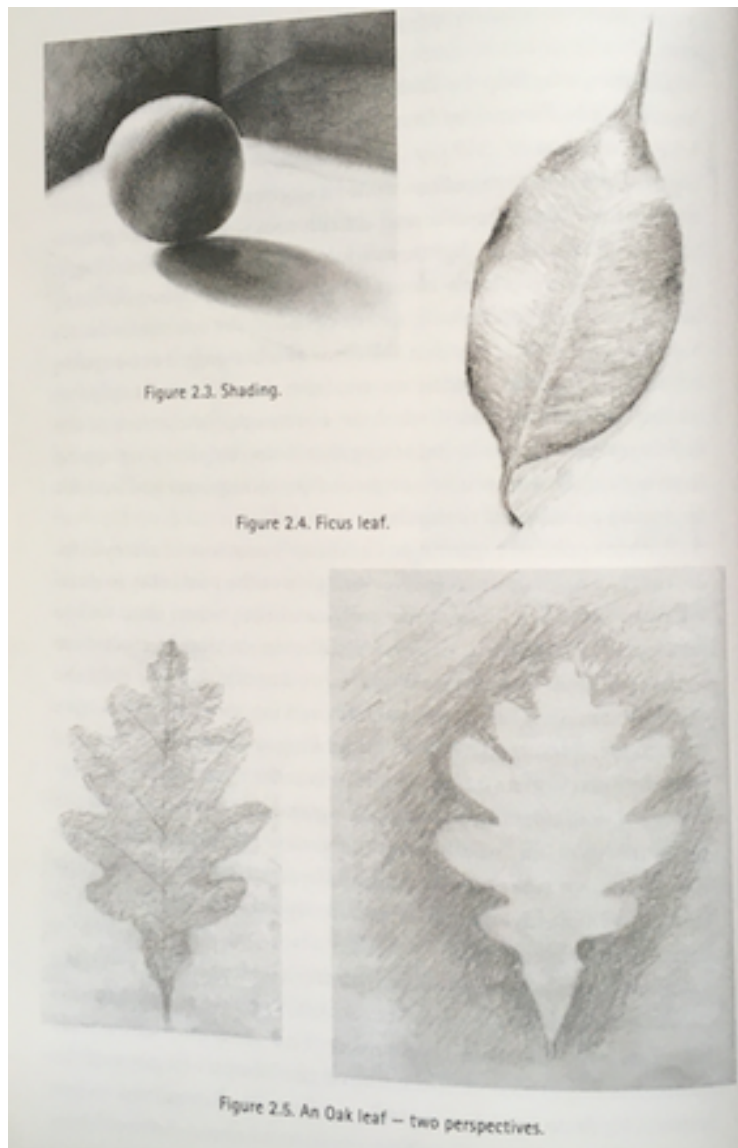
On the basis of this exercise, turn to an organic form, a simple leaf. (fig 2.4)

Again draw another plant, take a leaf, and sketch it first by filling out the form from the inside out (fig 2.5) No outlines, but shading from the centre and moving towards the edges. It's not so important that every detail is right.

Then do the exact opposite: you start by shading the outside -

the space around the leaf, and move in toward the leaf margin. In this way you draw the negative space around the leaf, and the leaf emerges as the “empty” space in the middle.

‘Through drawing, we are literally drawn out into the phenomena’ - Craig Holdredge



## Power of the Verb

Inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer's text 'The Grammar of Animacy'.

With these exercises, work upon your previous assignment, or herb study, or start a new piece of writing

### **Verbs**

Play with where you use nouns and consider alternatively describing them as verbs.

See how far you can go with using verbs to describe the plant or the situation in nature.

### **Make up new words.**

Taking the example of *Puhpowee* in Potawatomi language - 'the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight', consider how this word sounds like what it is describing. Consider new terms that could describe the plant or the place.

It can be just a sound, not a word.

### **Kennings**

Kennings is to put two words side by side that give a description. Rename something in this way.

This is a good addition to describing a herb's properties.

### **Examples**

Glechoma hederacea - Gently Expansive, Wound Dissolver

Iris - Elegant Geometry

'The sense of being immersed in a sentient world is preserved in the oral stories and songs of indigenous people' - David Abram, *Spell of the Senses*