

CHAPTER 11

Reification Laboratory

A Reflection on Creativity, Communication, and Language

THIS LABORATORY INTERROGATES THE EXISTENCE OF ART. AS ARTISTS we occupy a special place in the cycles of progress. The act of reification is our real medium no matter what branch of art we have chosen. The Reification Laboratory represents the formulation of languages to communicate new ideas.

Just as I had articulated the Horizontal Laboratory with fallen paper cups, I simplified the concept of reification by drawing a big circle on a piece of paper. Contained in the center of the circle is all that we know as human beings. Outside the circle is all that we don't know. Artists and scientists must find their own process to enable them to escape the circle, reach into the unknown, discover something new, and then finally manage to bring the discovery back intact and communicate it to others. I had been functioning in this world as both artist and phenomenologist for a very long time. I felt, and still do feel, that without any college degrees or certificates, I had become a truly educated person.

I realized that the artist and the phenomenologist were united and that both were reifiers. Within every generation of artists, those who understand the core purpose of reification will make more effective and affecting art.



Unreified:

all that we do not know

In this practice students risk seeing if their findings can make viable performance, and get to see their friends make interesting art outside the normal framework. Because reification requires a witness, the group interaction and feedback is important.

I first encountered the concept underlying reification in 1968. I was in Estes Park, Colorado attending a teacher training course in Transcendental Meditation. Instead of leaving as a teacher, I left with a clear sense of the responsibility I was taking on in choosing to be an artist. It was soon after this experience that I began a new life in New York City as a member of the Natural History of the American Dancer. For the rest of my life I have studied, and have discovered practices and processes that allow me to bring ideas to life for others.

I was there with about 300 people who were all training to become teachers of Transcendental Meditation. Our lives revolved around "rounding" (20 minutes of meditation combined with a brief set of yoga postures). In the evening we listened to lectures by Maharishi. Maharishi was focused on investigating the connection of the sciences to TM.

There were about 30 artists at this course, and we asked to have a private meeting Maharishi. We gathered in the auditorium one afternoon. In his charming English he opened the meeting by saying: "So, you have some question for me?" One person immediately raised their hand, "Maharishi, can you help me? I do not know if I am

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GRAZING

"Grazing" begins with a small team of students who are sent out of the classroom to choose a piece of the urban environment nearby. They are instructed to study this limited area for 20 minutes. Their attention must be restricted to the smallest details: shadows, vibration of sounds, movement of hinges in doors, etc. At the end of that time, spent in total silence, they are instructed to bring back the information and perform their findings.

Could this be theater? The participants experience reifying on an unusual scale that is as communicative, performable and readable as lines in Shakespeare. They have brought some new performance into the studio.

an artist or not." Maharishi looked out at us and said, "Are there others with this question?" About seven people raised their hands. Then in a very sweet voice he said, "If you have this question, you should leave the room." We were all stunned, and in the silence they quietly left.

He explained: "The rest of you also do not need to be here. Artists have their own personal meditations. If you choose to be here at this course that is fine, but it is not absolutely necessary for you." He lifted both his hands and indicated his right hand. "This is the sannyasi, the monk. They forswear the householder life and retreat into a cave to seek enlightenment." Then he moved his gaze to his left hand and said: "This is the artist. They dive into life, swim in it, play and try to experience everything they can. The artist and the monk share the same goals in terms of evolutionary activities. They are both seeking enlightenment but their practices are very different. The artist experiences and goes through the very center of life. When he or she is ready they choose a medium to work in, and their job is to instill that medium with as much

consciousness as they can, and then to communicate this to their audiences. When their 'meditation' is done they present their work to raise the consciousness of the people. The more consciousness infused in the work, the longer it will remain important and interesting to the audience. Art with the highest levels of consciousness becomes what we know as classic."

Unfortunately, as influencing as this TM message was, my education was incomplete. I understood the mission of the artist but had no vocabulary with which to express this concept in writing or in a larger frame other than my own work. Years later, in 1986, having finished a great deal of work with the SSTEMS practices, I began my first attempts to write the Six Viewpoints down. After working for more than a year I realized that I was missing a concrete way to talk about this function of discovery and articulation that Maharishi described.

The frustration was overwhelming and caused me to begin to doubt myself and the entire theory. What was I doing? What were the Viewpoints? Was it all just hot air? It took many painful years before I finally ran into the information I lacked. When I made the discovery it turned out to be an explicit picture that succinctly explained what I had learned in that lecture long ago in Estes Park.

In the midst of my inner war with writing down the Viewpoints, I happened to be teaching at the School for New Dance Development in Amsterdam, in 1987. I attended a workshop, "The Relationship of Space to Human Thinking," organized by the artist Christina Svane, and led by a relatively obscure American high school teacher, thinker and writer, Robert Schwartz. I was amazed when he introduced the concept of reification. Without the unwitting intervention of Robert and Christie, this book would never have been written.

It turned out that there were two parts of me and they did not talk to each other very often and had no idea how they were related. One had searched for and found the Six Viewpoints. The other had a much looser way of functioning. She would just enter her studio and ask the question, what is on my mind, where should we start? This second person, the artist, was confused by the first person, the phenomenologist.

The phenomenologist understood that at some point she would be obliged to record

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REIFICATION

The Viewpoint performer should know this term. As a student studies the SSTEMS, they carry the concept of Reification within each practice. I am reifying Space by being able to witness it as I stand in Space. I am reifying Shape by being able to perceive Shape in my body. I am reifying Time by feeling it course through my nervous system. I am reifying Emotion by being present in the moment and allowing myself to be witnessed. I am reifying Movement by acknowledging that it is a living force that I respond to. I am reifying Story by acknowledging that Logic is indispensable to life.

As a teaching practice, I focus on the process of Reification that my students are going through. I comment on who can see her arm now! That he is fully functional in Space. That this group is very gifted in Time, etc. That this student is not experiencing Space. I try to make it clear that they are not learning fixed information; they are processing information and experiencing the chemistry of Reification.

this theory and practice, since finding this language was an integral part of the mission. The artist quailed at the prospect of fixed words on a page. She had a consuming fear that they might, in some unknown way, damage the creative process.

This gap of understanding between the artist and the phenomenologist kept inhibiting me in my attempt to write. I developed a tiny voice in the back of my mind that kept saying, "Don't write this down, it might hurt people, all these labels!" In addition to hurting someone I thought, "you might expose a terrible ignorance that is hidden somewhere in the Six Viewpoints and end up looking like an idiot." That first fear of damaging artists proved to be untrue but was impossible to dismiss until I found

Reification. The second fear of being exposed as ignorant proved to be absolutely true. There was a lack of understanding of my own relationship to the Viewpoints. The concept of Reification would solve that problem as well.

I took the fated workshop in Amsterdam. I absolutely had to go because it was related to Space, even though I resist learning new things (they keep changing my universe). The first part is a blur. At midpoints in the workshop we were being introduced to the concept of reification, and as an exercise were asked to spend a weekend without our concept of Space. We were told that Space was just a label and not the total definition of what exists as space. Robert pointed the way for us by stating that we think of space as empty but that this concept is absolutely false.

That weekend I alternated between euphoria and complete terror. In the end we all returned to class with a very good idea of what Robert was referring to when he instructed us in the principles of reification. As that class on Monday unfolded, my understanding of art, thinking, the Viewpoints, dancing, reading, walking into the unknown all began to appear as one whole cloth. It felt like a miracle.

With the introduction of the concept of Reification I was rescued from a great ignorance and given a much larger picture of my profession, how it functioned, and how everything fit together from the beginning of time. We label (reify) our findings, creating a vocabulary with which to communicate to others what we have experienced, and we keep our universes stable and connected through these agreed upon definitions. These languages contain our history and our future as we connect and use the languages we discover.

Many people—both artist and non-artist—do not like the idea of having to face this constant challenge. Reifying is not a safe, secure activity; it requires the willingness to take a risk and live in a constantly changing world. You never know when something will shift, like the L subway line going out of service at 8:30 Monday morning. Think of it: thousands of people must re-reify the way they are going to get to work. They are forced to be creative and problem solve. However, if we take the leap into the unknown and make it back with something new, we become pioneers!

Standing in Space

The Six Viewpoints Theory & Practice

Mary Overlie