
Letter to the Editor: A response to the Spring 2022 issue

Dear Nancy and colleagues,

I am writing in regard to last season's *Gateways* (Spring 2022). While I knew that my article questioning the Michaelmas festival would be printed alongside another article that discussed the festival from a seemingly contradictory point of view, I was taken by surprise when I saw the article. It was written by Janene Ping, a colleague whom I respect and have had the honor and pleasure of working alongside for a few years, despite our living across the country from each other. Besides being puppetry colleagues

and working together on the west coast (and online) puppetry festival, we each have family near to where the other lives (I went to college with her nephew over two decades ago, in fact), and we share a birthday! All this to say, when I saw that my article was printed in contrast with hers, I was taken aback.

How grateful I was a few days later to receive an email from Janene expressing the dismay I also felt. Along with Nancy, we discussed the vulnerability we each experienced in publicly offering an experience of

friction to the wider movement. In particular, Janene and I both love and deeply value the art of puppetry, the intended topic of her article. We experience and practice it as a healing art and an opportunity to bring stories, pictures, gestures, colors, music and moods that bring the audience a sense of the (supposed) other and our interrelatedness one with the other. We work through questions of appropriation and appreciation (as discussed by Joaquin Muñoz at the 2022 conference), research authenticity, and actively work with intent and impact through this work. So for us, having puppetry standing within this friction—this needed and supportive if uncomfortable friction—was unfortunate and disconnected from our commitment to this work and the opportunities for collaboration and healing it offers.

After a few months had gone by, Janene and I finally found the time to sit down together and talk at length. We asked how we wanted to handle this friction amongst our work, amongst our colleagues. We asked how we could create the space to disagree and discuss the experience and thoughts of the other. In larger culture, the ability to speak seemingly opposing points of view without judgment or defensiveness is becoming rare. We are surrounded by a sense that we need to take sides and disagree vehemently with those who hold different views from our own (not to negate cases in which silence is violence). This apparent spectrum of ideology is in actuality, like all either/or/binary constructs, a circle in which we all reside and can meet each other. In my experience, discovering that a spectrum is actually a circle opens me up to understanding that both can hold truth and we can honor the complexity of what it is to be human.

Growing into middle age at this moment when the potential for transformation is ripe, I am cognizant of standing in the present moment through embodiment and presence, while carrying the multiplicity of truths of the past and a vision for a loving and healing future for all, including the land.

After talking with Janene, I found myself relating these thoughts to our conversation. Our movement is multigenerational. Just as the children teach us so much, so do our young teachers. They are holding the future in their hands, and I stand to support them in bringing about needed transformation. I simultaneously remember that many of our elders worked hard through the 60s and 70s, working towards cultural transformation that created space for this next stage of

liberation that is upon us. How can we hold and honor the wisdom of our elders and all the good work that has happened (and continues on) while also holding the flame of a transformed future? I am grateful to be standing at this crossroads of not yet being an elder, but also not of this rising generation of activist educators. I resolve to stand in the present, as a conduit for both our elders and our youth, holding the truths of the past and the inspiration and hope of together building a loving, equitable, and sustainable future.

I write this letter out of respect for the work of *Gateways* in allowing space for conflicting points of view that can lead to discourse that brings us together in our similarities and differences, and makes way for something new to emerge.

With thanks,

—Aimee de Ney

Post Script:

Aimee sent her letter to me on the eve of a new school year's beginning. Crickets were singing to the stars overhead...and as I watched the crescent moon hover on the horizon just after sunset, I felt grateful for the thoughts shared. We are hovering too, resting just for a moment on the horizon between past and future—as is the truth about every moment of presence.

The word friction has been used often in referring to the diversity of points of view. That is interesting, but really, for me the unfolding of new ways of teaching is welcome, as long as we are authentic and carefully in tune with the children we guide, seeking discernment as we balance between form and freedom. It is a wonderful thing that as far as we go, there is still more to discover.

Blessings on all the children of this beautiful earth and to each and every devoted teacher who seeks the truth in the times we live in.

—Janene Ping

*After teaching in Waldorf schools in Washington State since 2001, **Aimee de Ney** founded Bird Song Children's Garden in Olympia, WA in 2012. Aimee is a doctoral student at Antioch University in the Multicultural and Antiracist education specialization, researching pedagogy that prioritizes fostering love and healing for the Land, the Other, and the Self.*