

Resilience and Renewal Through Social Sculpture

- by Mark McAlister, for the Thornhill Group of the Anthroposophical Society
(attachment to the May 2014 network Update)

My dear friends, we are obliged to experience the importance of our task. We shall do this when we know that this school is endowed with a special task. We will really so shape our thoughts and make them concrete that we can have the consciousness: something special will be brought about with this school. We shall do this only if we look upon what will be done by the founding of this school not as something everyday, but as a festival act of cosmic ordering.

Rudolf Steiner spoke these words at the time of the founding of the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart. 50 years later, Alan Howard quoted them in an article in the newsletter of the Canadian Anthroposophical Society. He asked “all members everywhere to ponder with us what Rudolf Steiner himself meant by these words as...he founded the education which we are continuing today.”

Another 50 years have almost passed, and these words still find deep resonance in many of us. Although there are dreadful setbacks (e.g. the recent sale of our garden lands), we are very much alive and well – and kicking, one might say! In recent months there have been several small festival acts, and much more is in store.

Discovering social sculpture

In the 1960s (at the same time as the Toronto Waldorf School was being founded!), Joseph Beuys introduced Social Sculpture in Germany. The social sculptor is an artist who demonstrates how art can transform society. He challenges each of us to set aside our normal behaviours and to expose ourselves to radical new possibilities.

Today's art calls for an individual encounter from ego to ego, for conscious work to meet the artist's intentions and foremost for intense work on one's own habitual thought systems and so-called "normal" feelings. Losing the crutches of trained intellectual conclusions, as well as the comfortable wellness of one's familiar feelings, is surely an intense learning process, a threshold experience.

- Hans Joachim Mattke, *Art and Anthroposophy*, p19

Over the past several months, members of the Thornhill Group have been exploring this theme, through study, conversation, sculpture, painting and drama. How can we social artists contribute to a resilient and self-renewing community life? This article describes some of our glimmerings and small awakenings.

Shades of Influence

In September 2013, Warren Cohen (sculptor), Regine Kurek (painter), and Üte König (priest) invited the community to an inspiring event. The three artists stepped forward as individuals, leaving their institutional roles in the background. More than an art exhibit, it was a dynamic social experience which was accompanied by the influence of those who have died. The art encounters were very stimulating, and showed us how to invite positive change in our ways of working together.

Prepared by Mark McAlister, May 2014

Social Art and the Deep Self

Next on our journey, we spent 4 days with Deborah and Tom Ravetz. We learned so much from them – and from each other! (See separate document, *Digest of Participant Comments*, for more details.) Now, how shall we practice in our everyday life and work? This comment from a participant describes a small – and very difficult – step that we each need to take:

As long as we as individuals do not look at our own "hidden, ignored and denied" issues, we will not move forward as a community. If we stay stuck in our old ways and don't dare to jump, we will not change anything. Only if we make ourselves vulnerable will we make progress. To face our own vulnerability is incredibly difficult for us, it requires such courage and strong will and not everyone is able to do take the important first step. It was very interesting to see this even already during the workshop. Individuals who were able to muster up enough courage to overcome their own inhibitions seemed liberated afterwards. And yet, that is what we have to aim for if we want to become a true community: we have to come to a point where we can trust each other enough so that we can be vulnerable. Only from a place of vulnerability can we become truly human and recognize the Christ in the other and in ourselves. Only then can true community come about - how wonderfully enriching, nourishing and fulfilling that would be!

Our Mystery Drama

Next, we had Barbara Renold with us for 2 days in April. (Barbara is the Director of the Mystery Drama Project in Spring Valley NY.) Barbara's key message is that this is OUR Mystery Drama. We are challenged to set aside our comfortable feelings and enter into the unsettling dynamics of Steiner's characters. In the workshop, for instance, we learned how the simple statement, *O human being, know thou thyself*, unfolded (unraveled?) into 7 disjointed experiences. There is no ladder or fixed curriculum for spiritual development.

It is significant and helpful that we were able to go through these experiences together. We really need each others' insights and understanding.

In the new mysteries the whole earth becomes an altar. The hidden tragedies and triumphs of the pupils become external fact. Our friends and colleagues become for us, though we and they may know but little of it, the terrible and wonderful actors in the ceremony of our initiation.

- Adam Bittleston

What happens next?

The events described in this article are like stepping stones to a much larger event: *Metamorphosis - Summer Festival of Arts and Education* at the Rudolf Steiner Centre, 7-25 July. (Visit www.rsct.ca for details.) This Festival is a great opportunity for us to get immersed in (sometimes unfamiliar!) media and learn to swim. Hey, we're just getting started!