

[Thisness: Coming to Our Senses \(Part 1 of 3\)](#)



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Wednesday, July 4, 2018 -- Cormac Russell

Curator's Note: *If citizen-led community building is an element of a reimagined democracy, as we have [suggested elsewhere](#), then we need pathways and practices for amplifying and accelerating that element. In the blog below, our friend and colleague Cormac Russell touches on some of these practices in a light and life-giving way.*

Try describing something you see in the place where you live without using a metaphor. Right now, I see a tree outside my window, with brown, red and green flecks on its bark. It's leaves are being moved by a gentle breeze and shadows are

casting across it at different points, changing very rapidly. Now I see the reflection of sunlight on one of the leaves of the tree, which has a dew drop that is yellow in one spot because of its refraction of the sun. On the limb of the branch above the one with the yellow-hued dew drop, I see a brown squirrel, moving swiftly downwards towards the base of the tree. Now it's on the ground. The ground on which it's moving is.....

Wow, it's really hard not to fall into a metaphor...

This exercise reveals my back garden to me in a way that reminds me of the truth of the poet David Wagoner words, in his poem *Lost*:

Practices that
call our
attention to the
“thisness” of life
are incredibly
valuable at a
personal and
also at a
collective level.

*‘Wherever you are is here,
And you must treat it
As a powerful stranger.’*

Some would describe the practice I've just engaged in as meditation, or its more secular description: mindfulness. Others might simply say it's being present to what is there. I don't think it matters what we call the practice. Personally I like the idea that across many different traditions we are consistently reminded that abundance

is revealed through radical appreciation of what is. I'm also personally very aware of how easy it is in the hustle and bustle of daily life to go for days without having such an experience. How easy it is to miss the "thisness" or "isness" of life.

Practices that call our attention to the "thisness" of life are incredibly valuable at a personal and also at a collective level. Such practices call us back to our senses and then outwards to the places we move through, and that move through us. They are therefore foundational to creating a culture of community.

Knowing this person, this tree, this animal, this laneway, this story, this field...is not the act of labeling it, nor rushing to find a metaphor to capture it. It's the act of being "sensible" in its presence and only using metaphors when the metaphor makes the experience even more sensational.

One of the ways we become senseless to the "thisness" of life is to label it: the stranger, the foreigner, the enemy etc. Judging destroys community; curious appreciative description enhances it. The other way to dislocate and dismember ourselves is by primarily focusing on that which is not there, and therefore not local or within the reach of our senses.

Choosing to start with a focus on that which is external, and beyond our own senses and our influence is to inadvertently render that which is proximate and in plain sight, invisible.

Read: [Thisness: Coming to Our Senses \(Part 2 of 3\)](#)