

Foreword

An old friend from Berkeley, Stephen Blum, used to quip, ‘Nature isn’t organized the way universities are!’ Legal scholar Patricia Williams echoed his point in a deceptively simple way when she observed, ‘It is a fact of great analytic importance that life is complicated’. But in Sydney, Australia’s largest housing estate, Dominic Grenot put this even more poignantly and practically as he described his day-to-day observations as he worked with residents speaking 80 languages, ‘There’s always more going on’.

Our educations typically help us in one field to the neglect of others. We presume a lot and often probe far less – various literatures on social learning notwithstanding. And so our typical ways of ‘planning’ and ‘community development’ back us into the future; we try to learn from yesterday, as we ought to, but we stay close to our disciplinary trainings. We can count on the fingers of one hand the urban planners who dare to put ‘environment’ and ‘ethics’ and ‘spirituality’ and ‘love’ in one paragraph, much less one sentence. But we can count on Wendy Sarkissian and her colleagues to do it regularly, persistently, thoughtfully, sensitively and practically – not theoretically, not for the sake of publication but for the sake of improving our lives.

We can count on Wendy and her colleagues to break the rules when they hold us captive, when the rules of our narrow perspectives hide our interdependence, our connections, from us in ways that make us more vulnerable, more alienated, more isolated, less understanding, less respectful, less able to recognize one another and our shared possibilities.

Wendy and her colleagues challenge the idea that first comes knowledge, then comes action – for how can we begin to learn, to listen, to inquire, to wonder, to imagine if we’re not already rooted in a place, in a history, in a web of social and political relationships and interactions? Wendy and her colleagues help us to recognize our connections, our interdependence, in far more intricate and intimate ways than most traditional (ecological or

'systems') views do and so they don't shirk from speaking of 'love' and care and respect and survival when they see all that and more at stake in the ways we treat our places, our planet and one another.

In person and in print, Wendy works by gentle indirection. She knows that we will learn more if we're less able to predict where she's going: if we'll listen more, we'll wonder more, we'll imagine more, we'll hide less, we'll be surprised more, we'll discover more. Lucky us to join her on her journeys, to have her journeys into the world of future possibilities become our journeys too, to have her keen senses of complexity and creativity help us sense too what really matters, help us to see more clearly both the limits of yesterday's education and the real opportunities of what we might do together today and tomorrow.

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