Chapter Eight

The Quiet of the Mind: Methods of Direct Observation

My predilection is to *see*, because only by seeing can a man of knowledge know.
—Don Juan as reported by Carlos Castaneda

First I must look, then I must learn.
—Theodore Roethke

In the face of ever-increasing forms of stimulation, have we lost our capacity to observe the world? Actually … have we ever learned it in the first place? Throughout this book, we have explored the benefits of heightened awareness as defined by photographer Minor White and other artists. This chapter addresses the potential for direct observation in the present moment, in the very midst of our lives, to better serve our aims and needs as well as those of others. Can we learn to read the explicit and implicit messages expressed by others in the form of minute facial expressions, non-verbal cues, tones of voice, posture and gestures, and more. And what can this information tell us? Can it make us better teachers, artists, doctors, lawyers—or better parents and friends? Can it make us more responsible citizens in a society and on a planet?

The highly-distracted doctor, the harriedly-overworked public school teacher, the preoccupied parent, or the bored, disinterested office worker and sales clerk; these are modern archetypes that we know all too well, that run counter to real seeing and genuine listening. The damage done by lack of attention, in the case of a doctor or a teacher or lawyer can be, in some

cases, irreparable. The ability to get what we want, and be successful and responsible in life—on a fundamental level—depends on our ability for directing a finely-tuned perception and on our capacity for visual thinking. Can we learn to read the text *and* the sub-text, the explicit as well as implicit messages that are expressed and manifested by all aspects of the world around us? Can we observe the myriad cues of information and interpret those messages through, not only the mind, but through the wisdom of the body and the intelligence of the feelings? Can we perceive energy and the emanations of those things and people that surround us, as well as acutely observe their manifestations?

As we have explored throughout the pages of this book, the modern educational system has taught our minds to think and reason, but not to see clearly or listen intently. The Dalai Lama claims that the true nature of the mind contains two defining features: "luminosity, or clarity, and knowing, or cognizance. … *Clarity* here refers to the ability of mental states to reveal or reflect. *Knowing,* by contrast, refers to mental states' faculty to perceive or apprehend what appears." In other words, we must perceive in order to know. And that perception and knowledge are interwoven and are necessary features of each other. One is contained within the other and not divorced from each other in favor of the rational, disinterested scientific mind.

Aldous Huxley writes: "In a world where education is predominantly verbal, highly educated people find it all but impossible to pay serious attention to anything but words and notions. … The non-verbal humanities, the arts of being directly aware of the given facts of our existence, are almost completely ignored.… Systemic reasoning is something we could not, as a species or as individuals, possibly do without. But neither, if we are to remain sane, can we possibly do without direct perception … of the inner and outer worlds into which we have been born."

This chapter is designed to offer tools for observation; a methodology that has been developed through proponents of direct perception in both the arts and the sciences. The study of perception, and how incoming impressions directly impact our mind and affect our very being, is currently being tested and examined by notable researchers. This research, in part, has been inspired by the work of the Dalai Lama in bringing the disciplines of science and Buddhism together through his innovative Mind-Life Institute.

In a landmark study undertaken—at the behest of the Dalai Lama—by Paul Ekman, retired Head of the Human Interaction Laboratory at UC San Francisco, it as been unequivocally demonstrated that the observational skills of long-term Buddhist meditators far surpass any other group of individuals. Ekman's project, known as the *Extraordinary Persons Project*, aims to verify on a scientific basis the mind's ability to read and interpret minute phenomena and to control the gap between impulse and action. One of Ekman's principal subjects was the French scientist-turned-Buddhist monk, Mathieu Ricard, aide and translator to the Dalai Lama and to the great Dzogchen master Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. Ricard is also an accomplished photographer, specializing in scenes of Tibet and moments of compassionate human interaction, and an author of several books including *The Monk and the Philosopher* and *The Quantum and the Lotus*. Through his writing and through his very being, Ricard has verified Ekman's claims that deep perception is within our grasp and that the neural pathways in the brain can be substantially altered through positive emotion and through meditation.

In *Shambhala Sun*, Barry Boyce reports: "Ekman's specialty, developed over years of painstaking study of minute movements of the face, is the Facial Action Coding System, a method of cataloging emotions based on minute changes in facial muscles, such as raising the inner eyebrows, tightening the eyelids, or lowering the corners of the mouth. How well someone can detect such microexpressions is regarded as an indication of empathy, as well as a skill that enables one to uncover deception and ill-intent. Consequently, Ekman has been vigorously sought out to help law enforcement and anti-terror agencies.

Ekman was curious to see whether meditators, who might be expected to be more attentive and conscientious, would do well at detecting lightning-fast changes in facial expressions. When presented with a videotape showing a fleeting series of facial expressions that one must correlate with an emotion, Ricard and other meditators *scored higher than any of the five thousand other people tested* (italics mine). As reported in *Destructive Emotions*, Ekman said, 'They do better than policemen, lawyers, psychiatrists, customs officials, judges—even Secret Service Agents,' the group that had previously held top honors."

It stands to reason that law enforcement and the Secret Service need to be highly trained in observational skills, so that they may recognize individuals of danger and ill intent. But what about the rest of us, with more mundane lives, where our perceptual skills do not constitute a

matter of life or death? How may we benefit? It seems to me that there are several major areas of life where our capacity for observation is critical and necessary, and where without it we could do harm to ourselves and others. And, where with greater perceptual awareness, we could be happier, healthier and more successful in our chosen endeavors—and live with greater compassion and empathy. In this chapter, we will focus on three broad regions where increasing our capacity for observation and deepening our perceptual skills can have a highly positive impact on our lives and of those around us: our forms of communication, our modes of expression, and the demands of our professions.

It's all in the Details: The Power of the Nuance

Every detail bespeaks the whole. Every nuance is the key to perceiving someone's character or state of being in the moment. Pay attention to subtle details, not only with your mind, but with your body and feelings as well. In his marvelous and insightful chapter on Observation in the book, *Acting: the First Six Lessons*, author Richard Boleslavsky claims that "The gift of observation must be cultivated in every part of your body, not only in your sight, and memory." The change of rhythm or intonation in another's voice, the lightning-fast shift in facial expressions, and the subtlety of minute gestures cannot be hidden from careful observation, and can reveal much important information. Listen and look with your body and your feelings to discover these changes of nuance and what they may mean.

The important feature of this form of observation—of paying attention to details—is found on our ability to not draw immediate conclusions. In fact, do not draw conclusions or make judgments at all, a difficult task to learn to be sure. Conclusions come later, as a result or by-product of careful observation. Take a moment—any moment will do— and observe everything that is going on. In a moment of human interaction, clear your mind, sit or stand in a relaxed manner, and just simply look. Allow very detail of the moment to impress itself upon you: the way someone stands or sits or moves, their gross and subtle postures and gestures, their facial expressions and shifts of expression, the relationship between their facial expressions and words and/or intonations. Take note of the way they dress, the way they hold themselves—and how their bearing changes with the interaction. Pay careful attention to the negative space, the

space between objects and people. Observe these phenomena from within your own body/ How does your own body feel when you observe the posture or gesture of another? Can you empathize with the facial expression, the tone of voice, or the gesture? Do you know the state of another that you observe within yourself?

Think of yourself as a sensitive recording device, able to receive all the impressions of the unfolding scene in front of you. Your attention can be divided: half goes out to the scene itself, a portion remains within yourself, taking note of the experience and observing your own response to it. One of the most important features of direct observation is to learn to trust your own perception and instincts. To trust what you see. However, the danger here, and what we must learn to distrust is our immediate interpretation and snap judgment. Instinct, intuition, and feeling must be distinguishable from judgment and interpretation. We cannot avoid judgment; we are human. However, we can—it is possible—hold our interpretation in abeyance; we can agree to wait before we draw conclusions until all of the facts are in—or at least a good deal more factual information than we can receive at first glance. We must watch the scene and we must watch ourselves concurrently, and especially take note of what arises in oneself that may represent a bias, assumption, or highly personal emotional reaction that may cloud our clear observation and diminish our ability to impartially register all the details of what is front of us.

One of my fellow faculty members, Tamara Moats, former Curator of Education at the Henry Art Gallery of the University of Washington, teaches a course to first and second year medical students employing the viewing of works of art to assist in the development of their diagnostic skills. The course, titled *Visual Thinking: How to Observe in Depth*, is based, according to the *Seattle Times*, "on a trademarked concept called Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). It trains students to observe objectively and critically, filtering out bias and assumptions that can cloud their perception."

In that class, students were asked to observe and carefully examine a large-scale photograph by Richard Misrach, from his series *On the Beach*, that was made at Sans Souci beach in Honolulu of sunbathers taken from a hotel room that literally hovers over the beach. Kyung Song reports in *the Seattle Times*: "Moats said the students scrutinized the image in detail — from the way the footprints in the sand grow denser as they edge closer to the water to what the wide personal spaces between sunbathers say about American society."

In another example, iconoclast doctor Gregory House, in the television show *House*, examines a patient who complains about tingliness in his arms and hands, loss of sensation, and fears that these symptoms may be the precursor to a heart attack. While other doctors are preparing to administer a battery of tests to evaluate his heart and blood flow, Doctor House walks casually into the room and, after a moment's careful glance, states something to this effect: "You may want to loosen your watch band; it is too tight and constricting the flow of blood to your hands."

Whether viewing a person, an object, a work of art, or a moment of human interaction, you may want to take note of several features—inspired by tools learned in viewing works of art—that represent potentially important details:

- The broad shapes and forms; the overall postures, gestures, or markedly clear facial expressions

- The subtle or minute rhythms, the brushstrokes or surface texture; or the subtle bodily tensions, minute facial expressions, and non-verbal signals or cues.

- The colors, tonalities and textures; the light. How does the light interact with the subject, or subjects?

- The positive and negative space; How does an interaction take place in space, and what of the spaces between the primary subject(s).

- The emotional tone. How does the subject feel? What feelings are evoked by the subject and its inherent details

- The age of the object; How does it or do they "wear" their character?

- The signs and signifiers; the cultural references and societal accordance or lack thereof.

- The symbolic and/or metaphoric content; the intellectual associations

- The "elegance"—or harmony—or disharmonies that may be present.

Remember, at this stage, the primary purpose is mere careful observation, taking note of all details and simply recording them in your mind, as well as within your body and feelings. Do not yet attempt to interpret the object or interaction. Try to keep the mind still and focused on the task at hand. Take in, record, and be receptive. Be thorough and attentive. Do not let anything, even the smallest detail, escape your attention. It is not yet time to form conclusions or make assumptions. This stage is fact-finding. Try to become blank slate; take note of your own responses and reactions, but merely treat them as part of the overall picture and not a defining factor . . . not yet.

Staying Open

The greatest difficulty most people have with this form of observation lies within our inherent subjectivity and the need to form conclusions or make assumptions based on associations and past experiences. The reactions and biases that we bring to looking are unavoidable, yet we must try to hold them temporarily in abeyance. Stay open to observing the moment and all that it contains. We are taught from an early age to take a stand, have an opinion, and to form a conclusion—and we often do so, mostly unconsciously, well before all the necessary and relevant facts are received by our mind and senses. The aim here is to accept our responses, observe them merely as part of the overall landscape, and not to identify with them immediately. The key to successful observation lies within our capacity to observe ourselves concurrent with a thorough recognition of the outer scene. The inner and outer worlds must both be within our field of vision. We have an emotional reaction . . . and we see that. We have a growing opinion . . . and we see that. We form an immediate assumption . . . and we see that. But we do not allow these inner attitudes to prevent an ongoing—moment to moment—recording of impressions.

This is meant to be an active exploration. Can we remain in a state of questioning, rather than answering? Can we treat the subject of our attention as a question, and suspend the inevitable judgments that we make, or at least begin to observe the outer manifestation and our judgment simultaneously? Can we allow the scene to unfold within our field of observation in

spite of our judgment and remain open to what we see? There are many questions here, and few immediate answers.

Time and again, individuals, often students in my case, over time, prove my immediate judgments to be wrong, ill-founded, hasty and incomplete. Can we remain open while a more complete picture begins to form? What clouds our observation is many things: what we want to see, our predisposed attitudes, and often our cultural or social biases that are rarely called into question. We must admit the truth; that the subject of our observations has its own integrity, its own character, and its own energy manifestations regardless of our opinions and attitudes. Can we simply give respect to what we see, and notice—yet not believe in—our reactions and assumptions? Can we move beyond our inherent subjectivity to see—and respect—what is in front of us? As art teachers, we are trained to look beyond our likes and dislikes and to not place too much weight on them; otherwise they become a burden to a true observation and genuine response.

We need to strive to take a democratic view of the unfolding scene. When I say democratic, I mean the principles upon which American democracy was founded: an absolute respect and tolerance for differences, an unflagging openness to myriad forms of expression and thought, and a self-disciplined sense of inquiry into the causes and manifestations of what is in front of us—to assume innocence until guilt is proven. We, as a people and as a society, have, in my estimation, lost a good measure of this disciplined openness. We divide ourselves—and alienate—without any remorse whatsoever, casting ourselves into categories as red states or blue states, liberals or conservatives, or Christian and others. As I have noted earlier in the book, we believe strongly in our own opinions, rarely scrutinize them, and often lose the healthy sense of questioning and investigation that formed the opinions in the first place. Genuine observation has the capacity to open us, once again, to an active investigation and exploration of the outer world, and has the power to engender respect and tolerance of all healthy manifestations and forms of thought and expression that constitute the world in which we live.

The exercise that helps here is a simple one. Try to be quiet; view the mind as a still, reflecting pool observing everything, favoring nothing. Krishnamurti uses the phrase, “choiceless awareness,” which is like the sun, illuminating all things under its glance, giving equal priority to all. I have found that it helps greatly to strive to observe without words, without verbal concepts

interfering with our observations. Don Juan gives Carlos Castaneda the exercise of "stopping the internal dialogue." And reminds Carlos that most of our so-called seeing is the naming and categorizing of things in our field of vision. Try, for a few minutes—to see without words; you will find it nearly impossible. But, what is possible and highly fruitful is to not place much weight on the words generated by the mind, merely take note of them and hold them in a sort of abeyance, in a place that is not uppermost in your mind or attention. Become a witness. You are a camera; a silent witness to what is, allowing both the impressions of the outer world and inner world to register themselves on the sensitive field of your body, mind, and feelings. This form of observation then becomes a kind of food, a form of psychic nourishment. The pupil who is taught by the elder statesman of the theater in Boleslavsky's book reports that exercising this form of silent observation has made her life "rich and wonderful." She claims: "… In three months' time I became as rich in experiences as Croesus is in gold. … Everything registers … somewhere in my brain… I'm ten times as alert as I was."

Instinct, Intuition, and Feeling

In this form of silent awareness, one attribute of seeing may emerge that gives depth to one's observations. It could be called a state of "no-mind," where one sees and knows from a different place than the ordinary mind. We may begin to sense and feel certain characteristics about the subject or understand something of its inherent nature through the language of instinct, feeling, or intuition. One of the distinguishing features of the emergence of these more subtle ways of knowing is that we are more anchored in the present moment, aware of our own inner world of sensation and feeling, while we are observing the subject. And we often find things that *we were not looking for*. In a certain sense, we allow the subject to act on us, registering the energy of its impressions within our own energy field.

As we have discussed earlier in this book, the body and the feelings represent important ways of knowing. The sensitivity of the human body knows rhythm and proportion, can distinguish texture, movement, tone and color on both a literal and metaphoric level.

Boleslavsky states simply: " To exist is to have rhythm." Its elements in life and art are, "tone, movement, form, word, action—color." Everything and everyone has a distinctive rhythm—and it changes from moment to moment. The rhythm of someone's movements, their

tone of voice, their gestures both broad and subtle can reveal much information, especially if we listen and look from within the body, sensing the cadence, the "tone," the sound of a movement or gesture. Some move with care and grace, others with abandon and a certain wildness, yet others with discipline and tight control. Some actions are smooth and relaxed; others are full of tension and discord. Can we take in these various rhythms, allowing them to be experienced by the knowing of our own bodies through our senses.

As an experiment, try looking at Leonardo da Vinci's famous work, *The Last Supper*. Boleslavsky claims that twenty-six different and distinct movement of hands are depicted in the painting, "twenty three visible and three invisible. If you knew all the positions by heart and could freely change from one to the other, building up their significance with each change, you would achieve a rhythm of that particular masterpiece." And it is true; the hands are highly expressive and lend an element of meaning to the painting through a sense of rhythm and the corresponding emotional elements associated with each movement or gesture. Boleslavsky then explains: "… the business of acquiring (or perceiving) a sense of rhythm is a matter of giving himself up freely and entirely to any rhythm he happens to encounter in life. In other words, not to be immune to the rhythms which surround him.

… Look into space and listen with your inner ear. … Don't miss anything in it. Listen to the waves of the sea. Absorb their sweeping changes of time, with your body, brain and soul. … Go through the same experience with woods, fields, rivers, sky above—then turn to the city and swing your spirit to its sound… And above all, don't forget your fellow men. Be sensitive to every change in the manifestation of their existence."

Our emotional nature is surprisingly simple and yet quite sensitive. Something feels either good or bad, it has a positive or negative "taste." We like it or we dislike it. Yet we also "feel" many characteristics about the subject of our attention that are unavailable to the mind; they are too subtle and fleeting to be captured by thought. Can we "feel" the meaning behind someone's words? Is their emotional tone consistent with the message of the words? Do their facial expressions or intonations belie another, different layer of meaning? Often, this is true. Even in nature, this kind of "feeling into" the subject brings many dimensions of meaning to the scene that are not otherwise available. For example, I have often had the experience in front of great beauty—an ocean, or an island, or a wooded scene—that underneath the superficial

satisfaction of pleasure something was wrong, very wrong. The earth felt wounded, polluted, suffering—or, in some cases even dying. Is this imagination, or a fabrication of my mind? I have often wondered . . . and deeply questioned this often-apparent gap between the outer manifestation of something and the way that it "feels" to my internal body of experience.

Finally, what of intuition, of an inner knowing that simply asserts itself into one's consciousness. While we must learn to distinguish between genuine intuition and mere wishful thinking or imaginary scenarios, nevertheless the voice of intuition, when it does genuinely emerge, can be trusted. And it often follows on the heels of our efforts towards observation. By doing the work, through opening our minds and senses and hearts to the unfolding scene, we invite these moments of knowing that we know as intuition. It is an integrative moment that seems to offer, in a single gesture, a kind of knowledge that is a flash of insight or an elegant, unexpected summation of the very nature of what we are seeing. This voice is often subtle and quiet, and does not make its appearance until we quiet the noisy mind and engage the wisdom of the body and the senses. When talking once with a well-known photographer, he pointed to his belly, in the region of his solar plexus, and exclaimed, "intuition comes from *here*."

While a moment of intuition mirrors the state of "no-mind," it is a function of the whole person and does not arise in a vacuum. Intuition makes is appearance generally when we are clear and when we are *engaged*. A rigorous, active exploration of thought or observation of a particular subject of our interest creates fertile conditions for spontaneous insight. Further, it generally appears within a field of knowledge; we intuit in areas that we already have an interest and a background of material to build on. For example, I am not likely to have intuitive revelations about Quantum Physics or Economics; they are not fields that I have any background in or knowledge about. The mind's rigor, the clarity of the emotional nature, and an awareness of one's own body; these are the conditions that create a ground for intuitive insight. We must, I believe, learn within ourselves the difference in "taste" between a genuine insight and a mere snap judgment. For me, there is a qualitatively very different feeling between these two contradictory, yet superficially allied state: an immediate, snap judgment and a moment of insightful revelation. For me, one of the distinguishing factors is how anchored I am within my body. When I am more present, within myself, a quality of listening appears that seems to be a

fertile ground for insight. When I am observing a person, or scene, I diligently give it my full, rigorous attention, and listen . . . and wait.

By staying within, maintaining a portion of our attention on our own inner world, we may find that while observing an outer scene, something emerges: a still, small voice, a subtle feeling, a "blink" of insight that rings true, that offers a substantial way of knowing that simply appears. I cannot state if more precisely than this: it simply appears. If you wish for a further discussion on the role of intuition in observation, the popular book, *Blink*, by Malcolm Gladwell treats this subject with much more depth than I could hope to offer here.

Active Empathy

With objects, works of art, or even with people, we can employ a form of looking that is highly penetrative and potent; it is known as active empathy. And it provides much information about the subject, well beyond the mere observations of the mind. In this form of looking, we literally strive to place our attention within the object of our glance, and experience its postures, gestures, tones within the field of our own bodies and feelings. A cautionary note here is that this exercise is highly sensitive. It should, at least at first, be tried with life affirming impressions only, avoiding violence or sickness or negative manifestations of any kind. You are literally internalizing the energy of another person, or scene, allowing it to penetrate more deeply within you.

Think of yourself as a tuning fork; all impressions of the outer world resonate within you and actually mirror some part of yourself. Take a portion of your attention, and literally place it within the object of your interest. What does that posture feel like from the inside out? What does it feel like to be wearing those pants, or shoes, or a hat such as this? What does that intonation of voice tell you as it resonates within your own body? Maya Angelou, prior to teaching a class, any class, was known to write on the blackboard: "I am a human being; nothing human can be alien to me." We share much of the same DNA with all of life's manifestations. Everything that exists in the outer world also exists within us. If we allow life to penetrate our boundaries, a similar energy within us can be evoked. We can know what this posture feels like, this gesture, this expression—and we can know in reliable ways, using the internal sensations of our own body as a sounding board.

This sounds like a mystical conundrum, but, I assure you, it is not. It is a highly reliable means towards a way of knowing that is unavailable by other means. The following passage, from the Introduction to my book, *The Widening Stream: the Seven Stages of Stages of Creativity* is the best description of active empathy that I have articulated: "Attention is the key. I can sometimes sense the character, or thoughts of another person by loosely resting my gaze on them, and staying within my own body, which provides insights and empathetic realizations.

I have consciously experimented with this phenomena in order to understand it. Probably the most vivid impressions came on a number of occasions while riding the subway in Manhattan. I discovered that by empathetically looking at individuals on the train, it was possible to place my attention inside their body, so to speak; to feel and sense their posture and weight with my own body, and understand what that posture feels like, from the inside out. From feeling the weight and shape of their posture, other realizations about what they may be experiencing in that moment presented themselves. This division of attention, where we maintain a measure of our awareness within ourselves while simultaneously directing some toward and into the object of our perception, stimulated many key experiences for me. It was a remarkable discovery. My understanding was no longer limited to looking at things on the outside only—the inner world is within the capabilities of our seeing."

In my job as the Chair of an Art Department, I often need to decide, for example, how to advise a student when they express an interest or need in dropping out of school or taking a break of a semester or two. While the decision is clearly their own, my words often carry some weight with those that are wavering in their choice. After speaking with them, I attempt to "enter" their circumstances, "feel" their concerns, and empathetically "become" their conditions—for a moment. This activity helps me to know how I may advise them. When I bring this form of active empathy to another, often something in me just knows—in a moment of insight—what actions to implement or what advice to bring.

Try it with a tree, or a river or a natural object. Become the tree; become the river. Feel their energies flowing within yourself. You may find an intimate connection to the rhythms of the natural world that is enlivening and deeply nourishing. Your attention enters into an energetic feedback loop with the object of your looking, which is a method that is active rather

than passive. You become a part of the landscape and it becomes a part of you. You are interrelated parts of a whole, which is life.

This active attention differs markedly from passive entertainment, where we are merely acted upon and our interest is "captured," and even held hostage by compelling outer impressions. The powerful draw of media—television, movies, the internet—can occupy, or we might say, steal our attention for hours at a time, without a moment's questioning on our part. Professor Jacob Needleman in his book, *Why Can't We be Good*, recounts an exercise where he consciously switched-off the television during the concluding moments of a courtroom drama of *Law & Order*. He writes: "I was not surprised by the sweet silence that immediately ensued, and I savored it to the full. Nor was I surprised that by the fact that I was no longer interested in the outcome of the drama—which just a moment before had held me spellbound. What surprised me and profoundly interested me was something else; it was a completely new impression of my attention returning to me from outside of myself. What I saw, what I felt with great clarity, was the, so to say, *my-own-ness* of my attention. It was *mine*. It was *myself*. It was like a substance, a current of conscious substance that was my self returning to me and once again inhabiting me, my body, sitting there in the chair. … And along with this unique sensation, or feeling, there was the sharp sense of astonishment tinged with remorse and certain kind of fear that I had so complacently allowed my *self-ness* to go so far away from me—*without my care*…

In the past I had often heard the idea stated: 'I am my attention,' But it was now more than a respected idea. It was a lived certainty."

Afterimage and Recall

In college art classes, we occasionally employ a marvelous children's game—to train the capacity for observation, to expand one's experience, and deepen the interpretation of works of art. The rules are simple. You first look at a photograph, a painting, or an outer scene for a predetermined period of time, say two or three minutes. Then you turn your attention away from the object, and you recall—everything that you can. You savor, explore and turn-over the afterimage, the remembered scene in your mind's eye, attending to the numerous details that you remember. You revisualize the scene. And you will be surprised just how much you remember, often many more details than you consciously paid attention to when the object was within your

physical view. And you will perhaps be surprised which details emerge in your mind's eye as those which occupy a place of importance or prominence. And these important details may not be those to which the conscious mind has assigned much meaning.

The mind has depth and dimension. It sees and registers many details that may not be within our field of conscious awareness. If we accept contemporary psychology's assertion that the mind is likened to an iceberg, then it follows that only ten percent or so lies above the surface. The remainder of the mind represents what we call the unconscious or the subconscious. And it contains approximately 90% of the contents of our mind. Many psychologist's believe that the task of the individual, the mind's work if you will, is to make the unconscious conscious, to bring more of the subconscious material into the light of day, into consciousness.

Through our conditioning and our educational systems, we learn to rely predominantly on the surface, rational brain—a tragedy in many ways. The rational mind is simply not equipped for the dominance that we confer on it. Its dominant function is reason, and its principal currency is the superficial weaving together of the multiple associations and often-predisposed assumptions we have toward the object of our attention. If a detail of something we are looking at does not fit within our known associations or categories, we tend to ignore it consciously and it is relegated to the unconscious. I know this is highly simplistic, but there does remain some truth to the fact that our reasoning minds do not integrate well those impressions that run counter to its world-view, to its attitudes, or to its past associations. I am merely making the point here that our surface minds are not equipped to make full sense of observations of the world or of other people. We need to rely on the depth mind, including and activating its wisdom in the service of our observations and in the interpretation of incoming impressions.

Try taking a predetermined amount of time, say five to ten minutes, after looking at something intently—and give yourself the task of total recall, or attempt as comprehensive a recall of the original scene as you are able. During this recall, recreate the picture in your mind of the outer scene or event, and scan the mental image thoroughly, without favoring anything or analyzing what you remember. Try to recall as many details as possible: the way someone dresses and holds themselves, the colors, smells, sounds, the changing facial expressions, intonations, the choice of words and phrases, the bodily gestures and spaces between. Also, do not forget to include yourself. How were you in the moment? What, at the time, impressed you? What were

you feeling? How did your feelings move in response to the subject? What did you consciously notice? After a time of this total recall of the scene and your own responses, you will find certain attributes, like cream, rising to the top of your awareness. You may find that through the distillation of the observation in your mind's eye, an integration and prioritization may naturally occur. Where, through your thorough and rigorous work of recall, the most salient and telling impressions will emerge that lend meaning to the scene. And often, these crucial details were not the ones that you were consciously aware of during the initial looking. In other words, you have narrowed the gap between your conscious, reasoning mind and the reservoir of the unconscious, that, like a sponge, records many details in its recesses.

Don't forget to include the intangibles in your state of recall. What did the moment or scene feel like, what did it taste like to your senses, and what moved you?

The creative process works in its own time, has its own integrity. It does not always follow a linear progression. Once you have internalized an impression of an outer scene, moments of recall may take place spontaneously when you least expect it. The material that has been registered by the unconscious will spring to the surface, when it is ready, like a rose in bloom and offer moments of understanding. The mind digests its impressions in its own time, in its own mysterious fashion. Welcome these moments. Let it be, and draw what material you can from these unexpected gifts.

What Does it All Mean?

How do we draw conclusions, render a judgment fairly, make intelligible sense out of the moment of observation? The danger here is obvious, and relates to snap judgments or knee-jerk reactions that arise before all the facts are in evidence. Today's new age community has taken the word *judgment* and rendered it impotent as if it has no value, and is a mere negative manifestation of our assumptions and biases. However, I believe that the word judgment is closely related to the activity of evaluation, where we assign values to that which we observe. But, genuine evaluation extends well beyond our likes and dislikes, beyond our predisposed assumptions and attitudes, and beyond the activity of the rational mind. It is found in our capacity for contemplation, turning something over and over in the mind, until a creative

moment of understanding occurs, and we graciously recognize that *here* is the insight we are seeking, *here* is a state of integrated knowing that is the result of our previous work.

The work of observation—as we have seen—consists in noticing details, taking note of obvious and subtle, explicit and implicit cues, as well as the full engagement of our attention, the employment of the depth mind, as well as the knowing of the body, and the highly sensitized intelligence of our feeling nature. These are the myriad means that we use to gather the facts, collect the evidence, so to speak. Without any of these methods, our work is not thorough, incomplete, and stands on a faulty foundation. But now comes a new demand, a new activity: the need to make sense of our observations, to assign meaning, and at times when necessary, to formulate a plan of action or render an informed judgment of some kind.

We need to contemplate, that is to allow all of the impressions we have received during direct observation and during the recall stage to act upon us and distill themselves within us. Contemplation differs from mere rational thought in that it is not linear, and it is an activity of gestation and digestion, an active process where we attend with the mind, and turn something over and over again, allowing it to follow its own meandering stream. Yet, we focus our mind on the subject at hand, and only allow for productive and related tangents. Contemplation contains both freedom and discipline; the freedom to allow the mind to range freely, and the discipline to stay focused on the question of the moment. When the associative mind relates all manner of memories to the subject under scrutiny, we both allow for those associations and yet filter them carefully. Some may have great import, others will be highly subjective and distracting. The task is to know the difference. Contemplation is a form of seeking, a kind of prayer to define the right and proper meaning. We seek beyond our rational brain, employing the material we have gleaned through our feelings, our bodies, our unconscious and our intuition about the subject of our interest. I have often taken questions, and placed them within the contemplative factory of my mind, and days, weeks, or even months later, insights arise unexpectedly and in the moment, often when I was no longer looking for an answer. The mind relaxes, and in that relaxation, a different form of thinking may occur, one with greater depth and dimension that brings new understandings in its wake.

In my job, I often need to review admissions portfolios and determine whether a given applicant has the talent and creativity to successfully study art—with the goal of becoming a

visual artist. And what is more, I need to look at and evaluate the portfolio while the young person is seated across from me, and while they are nervously expecting some kind of immediate response to their work. Generally, I ask for one concession from the young student—that I be allowed to view the entire portfolio in complete silence, to review all the pieces before I say anything. While unfortunately this serves to dramatically increase their nervous anxiety, it gives me one important opportunity: the chance to internalize their portfolio in silence and carefully observe my own reactions and responses. And it allows me the room to contemplate their work, to allow intuitive insights to emerge and to distill my responses quickly into the evaluation I am expected to provide. When I can stay open—and when I do begin to speak about their work—I often find words forming themselves in my mind and mouth that were unknown to me before the moment of speaking, that grow directly from my response but from a deeper part of the mind. It is uncanny. The words flow, and they are often equally surprising to me and to the young student. And something in me just knows whether or not this person is a good candidate for our rigorous and demanding program. But this happens only when I can stay open and look carefully, contemplate quietly, and feel/sense their work.

And of course there are times when I cannot make a decision, where I do not trust my responses, or I suspect that my own biases interfere. Or, when I instinctively like or dislike the individual and feel that my opinions are unduly colored. It is here when I seek the wisdom of other faculty members in my department.

Other people can be highly important at this stage. Sharing impressions and insights, comparing notes on one's observations can help deepen and enrich our own experience. We are to some extent governed by our subjectivity, both informed by and limited by our own body of experience. The incorporation of other points of view, the negotiation of meaning between individuals with different attitudes and life experiences can help us stay open, and help keep the question of meaning alive, without attempting to answer an observation too soon, prematurely. For me, it is highly interesting to witness the paradox of just how differently other people see certain details, emphasizing some and downplaying others, and yet how similarly we perceive the core or the essence of the scene. Truth lies in both our differences and our compatibilities. And a whole picture emerges often only through the incorporation of multiple points of view—and "testing" our observations against those of others.

Cultivating our gift of observation has many benefits. On an obvious level, we can recognize ill-intent and conditions of danger. We can be attuned to our surroundings and learn to respond accordingly, making the necessary adjustments to ensure the well being of ourselves and those within our care. Our lives can be smoother, safer, and more comfortable. We can navigate our professional lives and our interpersonal contacts with greater grace, ease and elegance. And we can learn to assist others more effectively, reading the subtle image of their motivations, actions, and their character.

We can we more awake and aware to the myriad manifestations of the world around us. Life can pass through us, deeply informing our character and nourishing our very being. We can even say that careful observation—of our surroundings, of others, of ourselves—is a form of food that our psyches cannot do without. We can become more a part of life, of this moment and all that it contains. Life will not glance off our impenetrable shells, and we can see and appreciate the energies behind surface manifestations. We will be immeasurably enriched and we can become more responsible as citizens—and as parents, teachers, lovers, or friends. Television, movies, and even the internet cannot place us directly into the flow of life, fully experiencing its many gifts. We need to take care with electronic media, acknowledging its many benefits, but ultimately recognizing that it cannot take the place of direct perception in the present moment. I ask my students frequently, how many of you spend at least an hour a day with impressions that are electronically mediated, in front of a TV, a computer monitor, or a movie screen? Every hand in the room is raised. Then, I beg the question: How many of you spend at least an hour a day, just looking, just observing life itself? Often, not a single hand is raised.

The world contains a breathtaking amount of knowledge: in science, mathematics, the arts, the humanities. And it contains a growing body of knowledge about human evolution, both individually and as a society. And most of this knowledge was derived from careful observation, from the contributions of many people, that took place over generations, over thousands of years. Present generations build upon the discoveries of their antecedents, and add to this evolving sum of knowledge that lends meaning to our worlds and to our lives.

Something is needed from us, in each moment . . . do we know what it is?

Do we have the courage to see what is?