

01.06.2011 - Beauty

Enjoyed reading the transcript and was quite sorry to miss the first meeting of the new year. Good to see everyone again (if only in text)!

I've been holding the question of beauty in mind a little bit through December, and found myself tending toward the notion that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." By this, I don't mean that beauty is purely subjective or culturally/biologically defined (although it is certainly those things too) but that my ability to perceive beauty seems to be very dependent on my own state of mind, in particular, my sense of presence. On a lousy day, I barely register the beauty of a sunset, whereas on a good day, even the potholes look pretty good to me, they hold a surprising amount of interest. Maybe it comes from a willingness to hold to basic values rather than obsess on anxieties.

When a sense of presence is more "operational" in me, I notice it (and sometimes its lack) in other people and my surroundings too. Just enjoying the interaction in the Target supermarket checkout line between a dad and his two sons -- one is newly back from college and the younger is teasing him "you're just a vegetarian -- you're not a vegan, you're not a tree hugger, you're just a vegetarian!" That sweet sense of togetherness (and awkwardness) they enjoyed turned the whole experience into something great. (The older son later pulls out a two dollar bill and says "How much do you think this is worth? Probably at least 184 cents after taxes!" which I found especially delightful after having dreamed about two dollar bills earlier that morning.)

I found it interesting that the issue of familiarity and comfort came up a lot in the discussions -- I wonder if familiarity is a bit of a requirement or an aid partly because presence arises more easily when we're feeling comfortable and easy? Maybe we also want to be able to find meaning in a situation or art work -- if the language is too different, it's hard to sense the energy or intention that runs through it.

Mits and I watched "Exit through the Gift Shop" over the holidays -- a movie about a kind of art-making that is definitely not about serving comfort levels. And yet beauty can be found here too -- beauty in the complex of cross-cutting cultural iconography, beauty in the energy and craft of some of these street artists. The surface theme is comeuppance or antagonism, it seems, but it feels like there's also a beauty or aliveness in truth that cuts through the surface.