

Foreword¹

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What identity politics has broken apart – shared experience, the common good – meditative inquiry mends. What post-structuralism split – discourse from embodied lived experience – meditative inquiry stitches together. Meditative inquiry replaces the postmodern postulation of the post-human by reiterating our species' aspirations for heightened consciousness,² and in doing so it affirms our embeddedness in the biosphere, our emplacement in the cosmos. “Meditative inquiry”, Ashwani Kumar explains, “is the art of understanding oneself and one’s relationship to people and the world,” adding that it honours “our existential quest as human beings from time immemorial to ask fundamental questions about the meaning, origin, and purpose of life.”³ How, the reader might ask, inadvertently inscribing instrumental rationality. Kumar appears to anticipate that question, sidestepping instrumentalism by redirecting the query to our embodied experience – what is revealed to us every day – as “each one of us discovers our own truths through living life wakefully, meditatively, and creatively as we interact with people, knowledge, and the world within and around us.” Ashwani emphasizes that “seeking understanding through meditative inquiry is not, and does not have, a particular technique or systematic method that one can follow or practice to achieve preformulated outcomes.” Indeed: “Meditative inquiry is an emergent process of learning and discovery that unfolds organically when one lives attentively.” Everyday life and our embodied experience of it become the site of one’s spiritual and intellectual practice, one’s ongoing meditative inquiry.

We learn that “meditative inquiry can take many forms,” one of which is the “personal,” as “meditative inquiry promotes existential investigation into the deeper layers of one’s own thoughts, feelings, and actions that are never isolated from the people and world around us.” In this sense, meditative inquiry and the method of *currere*⁴ are conceptual cousins. As Kumar makes clear, self-understanding is necessarily “*social and relational*,” and so meditative inquiry’s emphasis on the personal prompts us “to understand ourselves in relation to each other ethically and compassionately,” encouraging efforts to live “peacefully and respectfully together.” Within this panoramic vision, Ashwani Kumar seeks answers to “epistemological questions from non-

Eurocentric perspectives and thereby challenge[s] colonial and capitalistic control on the nature of knowledge and processes of understanding,” quite conscious that “colonial and capitalist forces [have] undermined and marginalized non-Eurocentric ways of being and knowing.”

While acknowledging that “meditative inquiry also provides opportunities for exploring and engaging with arts and aesthetics,” Kumar focuses on one medium – music. Music as meditative inquiry “offers a deeply spiritual and existential engagement with music where music and meditation merge together in the creative flow of life.” Kumar’s spiritual and existential engagement with music reminds me of Aoki’s invocation of jazz as a metaphoric way of understanding improvisation,⁵ what one does in that space in-between the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived. There – on that bridge that is not a bridge⁶ - creativity can occur. Such subjective “space of non-coincidence”⁷ with “what is”⁸ – that Aokian “bridge” that affords suspension between here and there – Kumar construes as “dialogical meditative inquiry,” that is “listening holistically and learning from” not only music and others’ voices but also, significantly, from “silence.” In silence one can “let the questions be and not suppress them, [as then] deep responses emerge from within on their own.”

Dialogue is, then, with oneself as well as with others. “In my life,” Kumar confides, “dialogue has opened the door for learning and understanding – it has been a creative and spiritual force that has transformed me deeply”, explaining that: “Dialogue has taught me to listen and to observe – it has helped me to appreciate silence and space, and it has allowed me to become more patient and caring.” He concludes that “dialogue is my way of life, my way of being.” One form that “way of being” takes is engagement “with/from a variety of perspectives”, exploring “the connections that exist between my work and other perspectives including Indigenous worldviews, Afrocentricity, autobiography, social justice pedagogies, and the mindfulness movement, among others.” Through the meditative dialogue that animates mind – and structures this collection – Kumar “deepen[ed] [his] relationship with students and colleagues and learn[ed] more about their worldviews and perspectives.”

In positioning meditative inquiry alongside “Indigenous, autobiographical, and critical responses” to “neoliberal” curriculum reforms, Kumar points to its political potential, its capacity “to challenge the negative and deleterious influences of

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colonialism” and “ideological control . . . in diverse international contexts.” Meditative inquiry can be, then, a political project, as well as a personal, ethical, and aesthetic one. He emphasizes the point that it “goes beyond engaging in certain activities and exercises,” and that meditative inquiry is

an exploration within oneself and of how one is connected to life relationally, ecologically, economically, politically, and culturally. It is this existential and social exploration – inside and outside the classroom and in one’s own self and in one’s social interactions – that forms the core of a meditative inquiry approach to teaching, learning, researching, creating, and living.

Meditative inquiry as “existential and social exploration” forefronts the infinity of human experience – the spiritual-intellectual-emotional adventure inquiry can be when it is meditatively inflected.

Because meditative inquiry stimulates subjective and social reconstruction, it can contribute to the creation of “a culture of peace, compassion, and wholeness to promote peaceful co-existence on earth.” Each of these ideals is emphasized in meditative inquiry. So is that last term – earth – as “meditative inquiry support[s] our efforts to connect with nature and protect our fragile ecosystem.” Earth as ecosystem is a concept extended as it is affirmed by the First Peoples; it is made explicit in the land acknowledgement that opens many meetings across Canada. “When we acknowledge that University of British Columbia is located on the ‘unceded, ancestral territory of the Musqueam people,’” Sam Rocha writes, “the reality of ‘unceded, ancestral territory’ can be understood in more than one way,” first as “a political statement of non-surrender,” but also “as a spiritual statement of non-surrender.”⁹ He explains:

We are not gathered on soulless, inanimate ground; there is no modern scientific sovereignty over the metaphysical reality of this place. Unceded, ancestral territory, in this sense of spiritual resistance, is another way to say that the land is always-already sacred and it will never be surrendered to a worldview where nothing is sacred. The demand is not for tolerance or respect; sacred land demands *reverence*.¹⁰

While working from Western and specifically Catholic traditions, Rocha shares with Kumar this sense of the spiritual significance of the land, the earth, a significance that accents wayfinding,¹¹ including finding our ways toward reconciliation. If

differently, each scholar embeds specificity in spiritual universality, positioning each of us on a spiritual quest to find our ways, including to reconciliation. Like Rocha, Kumar does not walk alone: his wife, Nayha Acharya, “helped [him] see how a book like this fits well with [his] desire and disposition for dialogical engagements.” That “desire and disposition for dialogical engagements” animated and structured this collection, as you will discern. From the intimacy of marriage to the intimacy – solidarity – of different peoples wedded together spiritually, Kumar welcomes us: “May our meditative inquiries transform ourselves, our relationships, and the world!” Turn the page and walk through the door Ashwani Kumar – and the contributors to this volume – have opened for you.

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¹ Foreword to *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research*, edited by Ashwani Kumar. Routledge, 2022.

² Pinar 1974.

³ All quoted passage from this text.

⁴ Pinar 1975.

⁵ Aoki 1990/2005.

⁶ Aoki 1981/2005.

⁷ Subjective non-coincidence means not becoming fused with (or “attached” in Buddhist traditions) to what surrounds you, what is inside you.

⁸ Pinar 2019, 102.

⁹ 2020, 144.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Chambers 2008.