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Letters to teachers



Letters to teachers

Mr Williams

Miss Crozier

Mr Scullard

Mr Lee

Mr Ashman

and Stanley

Leave the hand that meets If you are afraid to be beautiful
you should look not only at yourself but also at other objects.
The three most highly recommended objects to look at are:
hair, fire and glove. The appearance of these objects, like your
reflection, can only be described on the most superficial level.

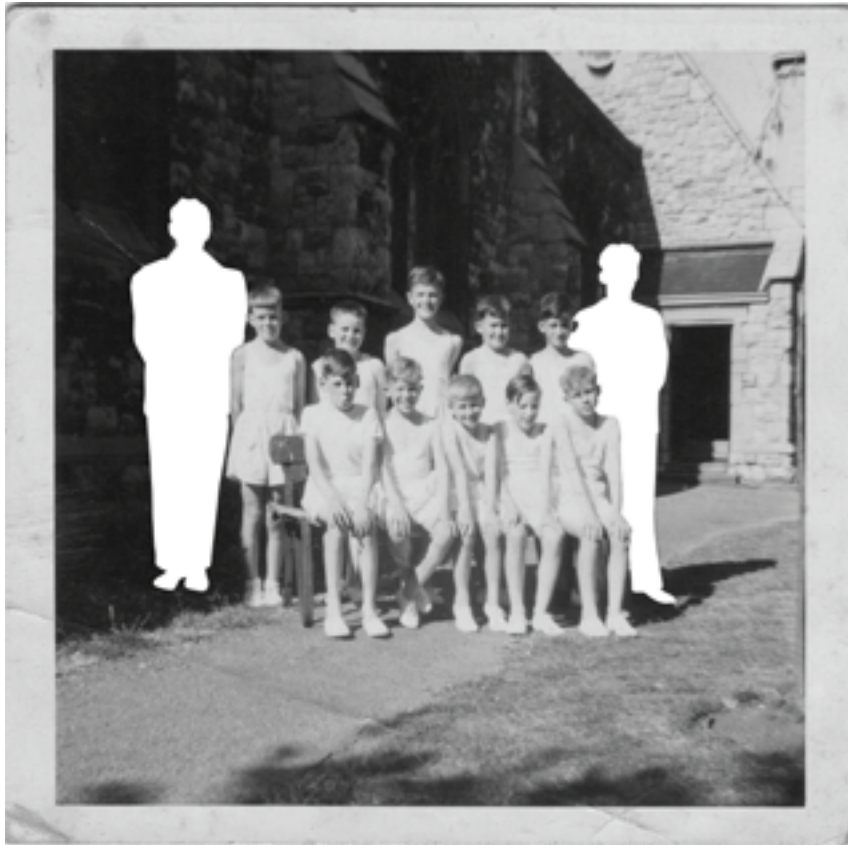
David Troostwyk

But this illusion is easily challenged. Windows become mirrors
in which strange shadows appear. The inside of a room is
projected onto a window, so we live in a world of shadows – or
should we say a disturbed reality? Smoke and clouds in the
sky may live on the wall opposite. Recently, a patient who had
suffered a traumatic experience at work became obsessed with
looking at a reproduction on a wall in my room. I doubted
whether he had a passionate interest in Giotto's 'Nativity'
(from the Scrovengi chapel in Padua). I had no reason to
think he was a Catholic. But when I asked him about the
constant anxious glances to this picture he said that he could see
in the glass the image of the factory in which the accident had
occurred.

Jane Graves

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Volume Two - Letter One - Mr Williams



Dear Mr Williams,

I am so very sorry that my memory tends to fold you both into one teacher. I know you both taught at Rathern Road School and remember some of the things you told us to this day. It seemed that you had journals and newspapers you made up some of your lessons from; not that I knew that then but surmise it now ... perhaps you were an early influence on my mind being so disparate.

There was 'Alcock and Brown crossing the Atlantic in 1919' ... 'the diagram of an insect (head, abdomen and thorax)' ... 'the moral tale of -A hundred runs I'll score for you if credit goes where credit's due-' ... the gist's of all I recall to this day. You steered us through the eleven plus with 'easy academia' but let us play alone through many lovely mornings ...

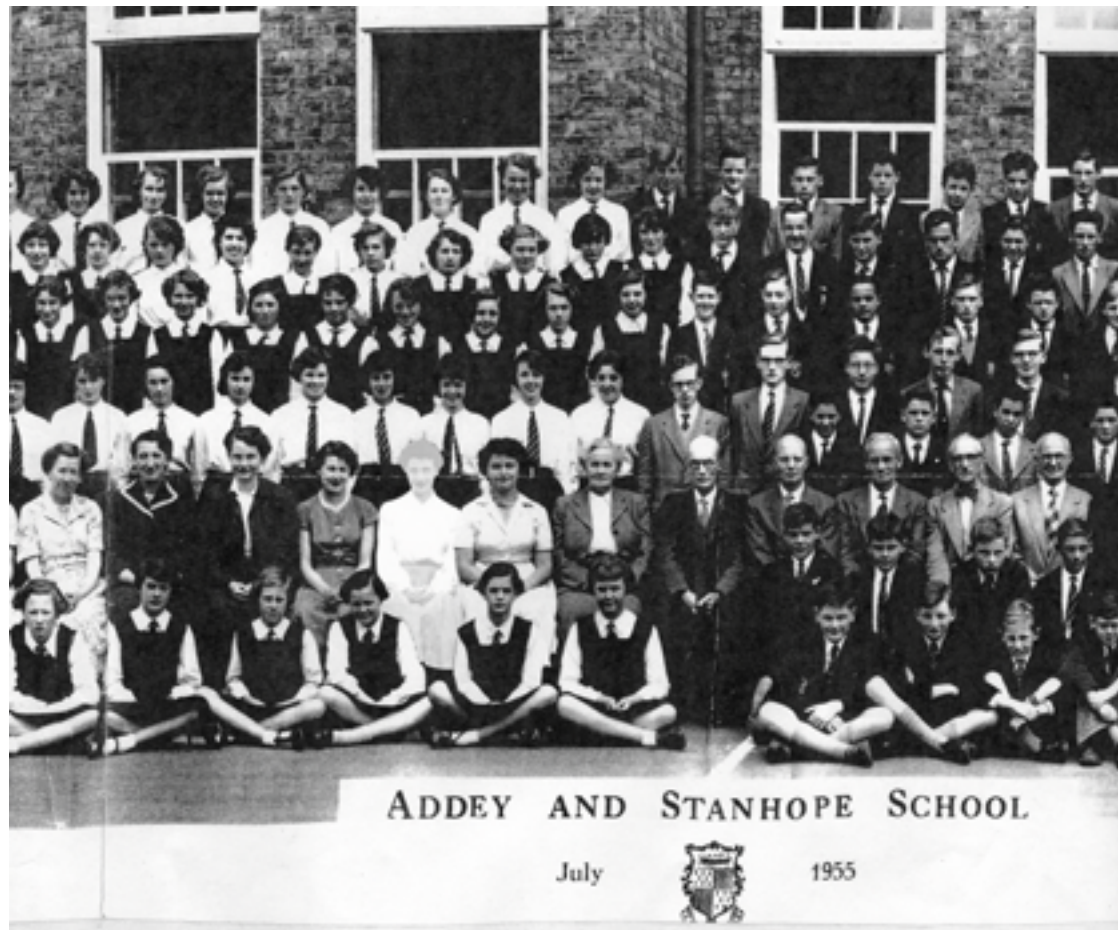
The part of our day spent making things was my favourite and though the materials mismatched our limit of skill our imaginations were evident ... we learned many things. I remember dreaming of being in my own 'hand made' rocket ship piloting beside Dan Dare.

I love 'my fragments' from you both; they help me set an agenda to this day.



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Volume Two - Letter Two - Miss Crozier



Dear Miss Crozier

Your biology classes are with me still ... the acid bath stomach, the little duct for bile, intestinal villi, numerous functions of the pancreas. You taught the pathways that flow through and with in us; even diverting once into the possible relation between the orange pip and appendicitis ... Steve Jones would have been proud of you.

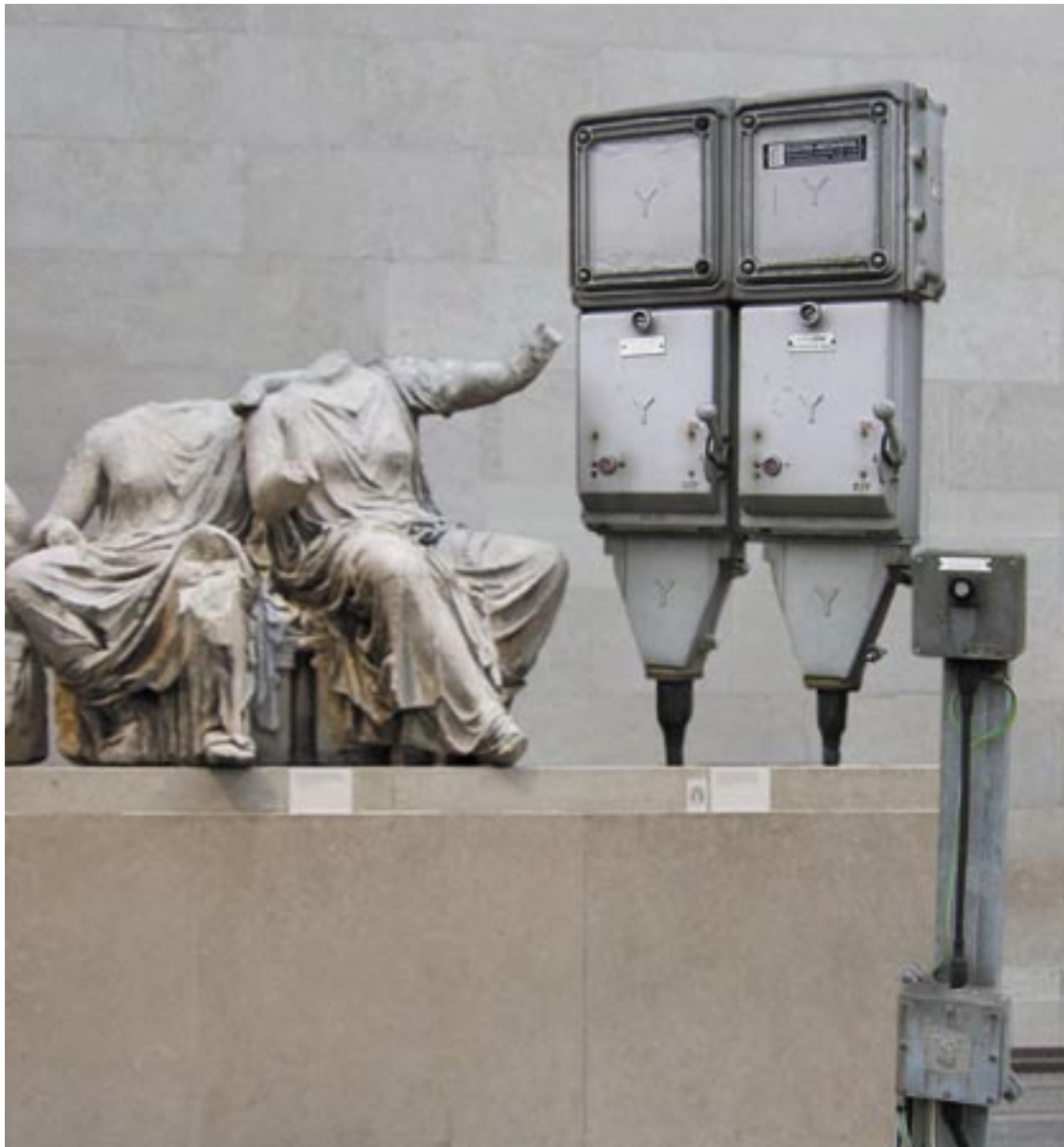
Thinking back evokes the memory of the room, one floor up in the 'new block' as we called it. The skeleton hanging from a hook by your blackboard, the walls lined with cupboards filled with I know not what. What is it we want from learning I wonder? ... to be able to recall the names and functions must be part of our beginning to wake up ... you certainly introduced names and functions for most of our bodies ... but something more, because of you, flowed round the room.

You arrived at the school a year after I had and from then on biology changed everything; science classes run by other teachers also blossomed ... was it all of my teachers that awoke something inside me. I must have been an odd child though because I was so disorganized; no that's not right ... I was not very good at dealing with the endless written mistakes I made and the way I just didn't know, well maybe, it's hard to remember muddles and Dyslectic Dada was in my future not yours ... so perhaps I was muddled after all. Sadly I began to truant and left school early for a job I grew to hate.

Randomness is more to do with what goes on than we pretend; I have encountered so many of us in wrong places but wondering that it matters got me no where ... back at school I didn't know that and anyway of all the teachers Addey and Stanhope offered, most of whom tried hard to instill something or other into us, you were my undoubted favourite; thank you for your quiet voice ... Oh, and by the way, how I loved the sandals you wore in the summer term.

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Volume Two - Letter Three - Mr Scullard



Dear Ken Scullard.

You were undoubtedly the very best electrical engineer I encountered during my apprenticeship. You taught me to work for and towards a high standard even in places where very few would look. The ducts of Dulwich Hospital were left not only safe but also immaculate in appearance.

It was the 'roof' though where looking out over London I perhaps saw a different future from that one that, endlessly cold, seemed to stretch ahead. There we were on the roof of the British Museum and you showed me the best 'parallel of conduits' you had ever seen, tucked away from sight above the Elgin Marbles in the Duveen Gallery. Here we installed the controls for a clean air system that would ensure the safety of the sculptures from the polluted air of London. We never discussed the quality difference between those conduits and the sculpture below because you refused to go down and have a look in where we had ensured the 'cleanest air'. "They'll never come up here to see what we've been up to, so I won't go and look at toffs' stuff" ... all part of the red flag ship you steered me on.

I have to thank you for making me join the communist party, your endless lectures on fairness and equality as well as making sure whatever the work, all must be managed to the very highest safety standards and look good too.

I still wonder what you saw when we followed "The Conduits' in the museum roof space. There were eleven or so that ran parallel through many twists and turns ... a high degree of skill was needed to keep order and 'a block', that's about a yard of four by two timber with a hole in it being the only tool that could be used to keep curves concentric. Conduit was inserted into this hole then bent/

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*Volume Two - Letter Three - Mr Scullard
Continued*

eased into shape, more difficult than it sounds. Currently most conduit is plastic and so harder to manipulate or tweak into appropriate position. Many new materials have shifted the skills away from the people who make installations. Filtered visual appearance changes the ways we experience the world; we need to try and recapture the spirit of making things you gave me Ken but I hold out little hope; sadly we seem unable to look much further than function ... I know I'm not supposed to moan or mind too much but I do.

Going back to the museum these days I see the wondrous roof over the courtyard round the old Library where Karl worked ... where in those days Ken they wouldn't have let you in ... the roof would not be so beautiful or even exist without modern technology but it needn't cause the loss of skill it has ... that's come about because we ignore many things written in the Library it protects.



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Volume Two - Letter Four - Mr Lee



Dear Dick Lee.

You sat with me and my palette for two whole days and painted as I watched. I remember those days more powerfully than the time I spent at your home in Barns where you lived in Beverly Road. You let me live in that home for perhaps five weeks while you were away in France ...in return I fed your cat and made a stack from tins in your top floor studio.

I remember that you, along with other teachers, showed us students how to look and examine the world around us ... I am still looking. I have a few paintings from those days spent in Meeting House Lane but not the one that you worked on; that is gone ... I do have the still life with apples that you and Mr. Pinsent helped me with even though you both said I needed to resolve the bottom right apple.

You were mindful of the way you talked with us and though some like myself were pretty naïve managed an equality. I would so love to have talked with you longer ...

What you gave us all was not just something to copy ... talented copyists abound ... you gave an opportunity to play with visual thinking.

I hope that it would be good for you to know that I still spend most of my time either thinking about or trying to find where art is. It certainly flows out from some works if you adjust yourself to the thoughts you need when looking. It seems to vary with some works; sometimes you see the art and another days looking brings nothing. I remember talking with you about how one good work could elevate others and how one bad one could devalue in the same way. This was such a good start, as well as the pleasure of just looking you gave the quest to find out more; learning to look never stops and is a joy of life if you take the time to begin.

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Volume Two - Volume Two - Letter Four - Mr Lee
Continued

I remember an arrow being shot in the 'Seven Samurai' film. The whole incident is needed rather than the stillness a painting requires ... and yet and yet ... I retain only the moment when the arrow is loosed. When learning to become a Zen Archer one must never 'lose the arrow' until one has learned to 'draw the bow'. See how well you introduced art ... as exciting to look now as the way you taught us way back then.

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Volume Two - Letter Five - Mr Ashman



Dear Linton Ashman,

After I left art school you gave me my first teaching job ... well actually you let me loose in the classroom during my last term as a student. I did two afternoons a week and Saturday morning classes with no experience of teaching juniors and you showed me a way of working with them that was efficient. I'm not entirely sure that I was ever cut out to work with them in that way but you certainly gave me the opportunity to build my own approach and a freedom I would not expect these days.

The interval of time you gave children was the first thing I noted ... an instruction then a reasonable average time before the next delivery. Some children lagged and some were well ahead ... I recently noticed that an American scheme to use computers to handle this problem is being muted for use in the UK ... it was being demonstrated for 'maths' ... umm, very rarely do you hear the difference between numeracy and maths.

When I'm working I refer to it as 'colouring in'; like Neil Young 'needing a maid', perhaps art class children may ask their teachers "When will I see you again" ... some manage well some are a bit bewildered but with the disciplined approach you used there was a subdued calm.

All through the time I taught children I remembered your 'authority' and eventually managed to get my own in quite a different way but you helped me hugely with my first nervous steps. I would have liked to talk with you more deeply about the nature of passing information around and putting others in the position to notice ... something like that. I think that I noticed more things from watching you than you would have admitted to me directly ... perhaps even noticed,

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Volume Two - Letter Six - Stanley



Dear Stanley Ablewhite,
I'm sure you would prefer to be remembered as a chemist rather than a teacher but the day you revitalized our little U3A group with a notion of the periodic table sits in my mind to this day.

You began with chemical valence ... went on to outer shell electrons and molecule bonds ... but it was the cards you had prepared and laid out for us that thrilled.

I have learned since those early days a few things about how scientists think and work. 'Popular Science' books and television programmes abound but sitting with people who do or have done science has been personally exciting. Many things in science have made me dream but the second law of thermo dynamics seems the one certain truth ... nothing gets hotter on its own, that's my favorite still.

I would have loved to show you the little film I made with my adopted daughter and her partner when I burned 'the table'... lots of people seem to like it and I hope you would too. The work would not exist with out you Stanley and in a private way owes its life to that wonderful moment when you laid 'the last card' took a long look, paused, and with reverent emotion declared "Isn't it beautiful"

