

Bates College and Maine, 1977-2006

In this essay, I talk about teaching at Bates College and our life together in Maine.

In July 1977 Anne and I were married and a week later drove to Maine in my old Ford. Our high rise apartment gave way to a Cape Cod house on the edge of woods. We could walk or cross-country ski forest trails fifty feet from our door. Maine was everything and more than I had expected, a wonderful place to live, once you got used to the climate and the sense of rural poverty. I had always craved contact with nature, and found Chicago difficult for that reason, but now nature was everywhere, just outside the city limits, or sending a moose walking down our street. The college was small, 2000 students, and lacked the research cachet of Chicago (though it was half a century older). I noticed, when I attended academic events, that the name of the college on my tag made me less visible. I found this difficult at first, but getting to know the students and becoming involved in college affairs soon made me aware of the benefits of life at an elite “little ivy” liberal arts college.

Bates provided intellectual stimulation with intense conversations among faculty members in the philosophy department and intellectual friends in physics, psychology, English, and the arts and music. There was plenty to talk about. Finding intellectual stimulation outside the college was more difficult in our relatively small city, but Boston was only three hours away and for research I could from time to time purchase memberships in the Harvard library.

I had less pressure than at Chicago and more time to write because there were no graduate students, though I had less daily stimulation from people working in closely allied areas. On balance I became more productive and found my directions more easily. Teaching at an elite liberal arts college was close to an academic ideal, provided one kept active professionally.

And I did. While at Bates I finished my first book, then a second book of essays on language and architecture, then a set of essays on hypertext theory and practice, an edited book on Hegel, and the bulk of my book on place and suburbia, which I finished after we had moved to Oregon. Along with these books I published scores of articles and gave dozens of talks in many locations around the country and the world. In five years at Chicago I had produced three articles and thirteen talks at conferences, whereas in 29 years at Bates I wrote four books, edited another, and published two or three articles a year, plus dozens of talks. I also began writing about new areas that enriched my thinking, architecture and hypertext.

I found the undergraduates at Bates better than many of my students at Fordham, with the best students equal to the best anywhere, though on average not as intellectually adventuresome as the students at Chicago. On the other hand they seemed to live more balanced lives than the more tormented students at Chicago. Over time I came to realize the pluses and minuses of student life at a small liberal arts college. The key was for the students to develop close relationships with other intellectually alive students and with one or more faculty, and this often happened, especially in the sciences and arts.

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Our philosophy majors were a mixed group, talented and studious, intellectually curious, and often quite different from the average Bates student. I liked working with them. We had senior theses for all students, and more elaborate honors theses. This gave students a chance to pursue interests more deeply than a single course could do. Sometimes that worked out extremely well; at other times it was more of a chore.

I am proud that among those of my students I happened to hear from in later years; most pursued creative and significant work, some in academia but most in other important endeavors. Several students from Fordham, Chicago, and Bates went on to good careers in philosophy, even though those years of narrowing job prospects were not the time to urge many students to attend philosophy graduate school.

At Bates I worked closely with the Dean of the Faculty, Carl Straub, who was helping to build a first-class faculty. His imaginative leadership really improved the college's intellectual quality, as did the energy and ideals of the president at the time I was hired, Hedley Reynolds. When Carl retired as Dean and returned to the religion department, he continued as a very successful teacher, I was part of the search committee which made an exhaustive, careful, well-structured, and ultimately quite bad choice for his replacement. In the process I got to know better the then president, Donald Harward, and worked with him on various planning committees. His stress on community involvement left an important imprint on the College.

I taught three or four courses a year, more than 40 different courses over my time at Bates. Also I developed spring short term courses on philosophy, architecture, and hyper-writing. I helped develop, administer, and teach a spring term trip to Japan in 1985, and the Bates Fall Programs in Japan in 1987, 1989, and 1994. I served on and chaired many different committees during my time at Bates.

I was the head of the Humanities Division for some years, chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion for many years, and at various times chair of of the Library Committee, Long Range Planning Committee, Ad Hoc Committee on Extracurricular Life, Computing Service Committee, Information Services Advisory Committee, Task Force on Strategic Planning for Technology, Information Services Advisory Committee. I was a member at various times of the Personnel Committee, Educational Policy Committee, Academic Computing Service Committee, Ad Hoc Committee on Computers and the Liberal Arts, Graduate Study Committee, Ad Hoc Committee on Tenure Rules, Planning Group for New Residential Construction, Committee on Teaching Awards, Vision 2005 Planning Committee, Interdepartmental Hiring Committees in Education, Art History, and for the Dean of the Faculty, Architectural Advisory Committees for a new student residence, a new academic building, and the renovation of Coram Library, President's Advisory Committee, Electronic Security and Access Committee, Campus Master Plan Committee. Probably the most interesting were the committees overseeing computing at the college, the library committee, and the long-range planning opportunities. The computing committees supervised good upgrades to the campus system, and the library was moving into the digital world ahead of many small colleges.

Bates was open to interdisciplinary experiments and during my time there began successful interdisciplinary majors and programs. I taught a course with a physicist on the exploration of space, and joined him in showing astronomical events through telescopes. I taught in a group

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course with people from three or four departments, and I used guest speakers in courses on the philosophy of art, sometimes connecting them by telephone in those pre-Zoom days.

Philosophy of Art was a province I had never much explored. An unexpected combination of circumstances led me to fill in the course one year, which I and my students so enjoyed that I repeated and developed that course from then on. It allowed me great freedom for new teaching and testing techniques, and was the first course in which I used slides and PowerPoint.

When I arrived at Bates the philosophy department was housed in offices mixed in with foreign languages and mathematics. After some years we had a chance to move the department to a converted residential house across the street from the campus. We made the move and acquired a lounge for our students and better offices for all of us; I'm proud that I and my colleagues insisted that the the order in which faculty chose a room from those available was decided by lottery rather than by seniority.

Most of the changes to my map of philosophy during my time at Bates came from outside meetings and conferences. Premier among these was the Collegium in Perugia. I attended the full session in 1978 and visited briefly in several other years. Lively discussion with stimulating colleagues, held in a working 14th century Franciscan monastery with Etruscan remains to explore and Assisi gleaming in the distance. I met whole groups of younger scholars and heard Reiner Schurmann give the lectures which would become his book on philosophical anarchism; I came to know Hans-Georg Gadamer and other highly placed Heidegger and Husserl scholars; I visited exciting locales and danced in the streets in celebration of Italian victories in the World Cup. I improved my Italian. As a bonus, the talk I gave there became a published article which furnished the outline for my first book.

At that time the Heidegger movement was being overtaken by deconstruction and a split began to appear between French and German trained Americans. I was already turned off by much of the Heideggerian piety and found the deconstructive moves refreshing, but soon they assumed a sectarian quality of their own. I had to come to grips with Derrida, Foucault and later Deleuze. I did enough for my own satisfaction, but I was assured by one of their faithful students that I had utterly failed to understand the teachings of her master. Ironically there are certain approaches I learned from Derrida which I find continually useful, while he himself has almost disappeared from the philosophical horizon since his death somewhat as did Bergson. who had had a vast following which melted away. In both cases there are still treasures to be explored.

Discussions at these continental get-togethers was more relaxed and less competitive than at the typical analytic meeting. I also attended some of summer sessions on Greek philosophy led by Marjorie Greene at Colorado College. They too had this cheerful camaraderie without competition. But while it's fashionable to diss analytic philosophy for its macho competitive atmosphere, that atmosphere also encourages precision and makes it harder to get away with the vague general pronouncements which plague many continental discussions.

Another addition to the geology of my philosophical world at Bates was not so much a new terrane but an old Atlantis arising from the seabed. John Dewey and pragmatism muscled their way back into my thinking. Richard Rorty once remarked to me that if he kept proclaiming that there was a Dewey Renaissance maybe one might actually occur. Rorty took Sellars towards a greater pragmatism by abandoning the picture theory of meaning. Rorty finally moved out of philosophy entirely into comparative literature because he came to see most analytic philosophy as pointless and some of the softer features of continental thought as adaptable toward the poetic and imaginative expansion of our moral sensibilities he hoped to bring about. Rorty was good friends with one of my colleagues at Bates and lectured there several times. When I was teaching in Japan I managed to persuade my Japanese university to invite Rorty to lecture there, his first trip to the country. He enjoyed the trip despite several upsets, though frustrated as a birdwatcher without the proper book to claim the many new birds he saw in Japan. My own conversations with him were always interesting but I was not as bold as I should have been, tending to ask him what he thought rather than express ideas of my own and confront his. This was too often true of my talks with Ricoeur as well; I learned a lot but could have grown more.

Architecture

It was at Bates that my long-standing enthusiasm for architecture became a philosophical interest. It turned out to be another way to approach my big questions about the traditional versus the modern. I had always read about architecture, subscribed from time to time to architectural periodicals, and done architectural tourism. In the mid 1980s I began to write about architecture. A committee overseeing the construction of a new dormitory, introduced me to William Rawn and his Boston architecture firm, where I had a chance to observe a working architectural firm and increase my practical awareness of architectural planning and the decisions it involves. I began publishing articles about architecture, architecture criticism, philosophical analyses of architecture. I wrote a number of entries for encyclopedias on these issues. I discovered that Hegel had very interesting but often criticized views about architecture. They were not satisfactory as they stood but opened interesting doors to new ways of thinking about buildings and cities.

A reader of my first book in manuscript suggested including a final chapter on the then newly popular term "postmodern." Writing that chapter put me in touch with postmodern architecture. Then I wrote a second book, a collection of essays about postmodernism, half of which were specially directed at philosophical problems around architecture and modernity. After I retired I finished a third book, on city and suburban place-making.

I incorporated architecture into my philosophy of art courses, and I taught several short-term units where the students were challenged to take up a real-life architectural/urban design problem and then report on their creative solutions to some agency that I had contacted, such as the Auburn City Council or a local architectural firm. The students had to produce drawings and models and plans; they enjoyed the work and asked me years later if anything had come of their

plans for one renovation of a school building that we had worked hard to survey and suggest for re-use. Unfortunately I had to tell them that city had no funds for the project, and recently had demolished the building.

Computing

When I took a beginning programming class one summer, using the Basic language, I thought it would be helpful to create a system for my students where one person could post a thought and others could reply and comment on what was said. The system kept the comments and presented them in the order of relevance. I was very proud of my 1200 line program, but soon realized that what I had done was to reinvent not the wheel but the public bulletin board system which existed, in those pre-network days, on UNIX computers and now much advanced on Reddit and social media.

For a time Bates relied on connections to mainframes at Dartmouth College from dumb terminals available on campus. I pushed for a future with personal computers. To write my first book I rented a standalone word-processing machine the size of a small refrigerator. It had specialized keys for word processing operations, a green screen and made a lot of noise. I enjoyed it, and began working on the manuscript of my first book using it. Then the time came for me to spend a year in Japan, so I returned the clacking word processing machine to the company and left the country.

Upon my return from Japan I bought my first computer. It was an Epson machine that included a suite of programs for word, number, image processing and communication that was better than what was then available elsewhere. The machine had two floppy drives and no hard drive. You put the system disk in one drive and a data disk in the other. Looking back from today when files can be huge and storage is unlimited it seems antique. But at the time it felt like a liberation. I started a user group for people with the Epson machine. We met monthly in a church in Portland, helping each other advance. I wrote dozens of tech articles for the monthly newsletter we mailed all over the state, most memorably to Noel Paul Stookey (of Peter Paul and Mary), in Blue Hill.

The user group had a lot to explain, because the Epson machine, though very well built, was seriously underpowered for the software it was trying to run (it had an eight bit processor). Eventually I gave up on the Epson's special software suite and found more efficient word processing programs to run under the CP/M system. It was on this machine that I finished my first book.

Meanwhile the industry moved on to sixteen bit processors. By 1990 Bates finally committed to personal computers, urging faculty to adopt MSDOS machines. I abandoned the Epson with regrets and relief.

As computers came into general use I became involved with the committees that oversaw their development at the college. We made decisions about equipment and training and helped to

spread personal computers among the faculty, and later established the network for the campus. It was exciting being in on this revolution.

Computers changed my writing; I had for years been typing my own manuscripts, composing them directly on the typewriter rather than on yellow pads. Now the whole process of editing and revising and assembling resources became much easier. I've gone through many generations of word processing software and research tools, and enjoy exploring the possibilities for new modes of working and writing.

In 1992 Anne and I were making our first visit to the Pacific Northwest. We drove south on I-5 from Portland, stopped for lunch in Eugene, drove west to the Oregon coast at Florence and then up the coast to Seattle by way of the Olympic Peninsula. It was a voyage of discovery in an area that we had no idea would become our future home. When we stopped for lunch in Eugene, we visited a bookstore and while Anne looked around I picked up the *New York Times* book review for that week, and found Robert Coover's article "The End of Books." He described his class on hypertext fiction. Cover had already written postmodern prose that deliberately violated the canons of narrative; now he was using computers to experiment with breaking and multiplying the narrative line. I wondered whether you could use such programs to break or multiply the argumentative line in philosophy.

When we returned I sought out hypertext software; as the only usable program was on the Macintosh I bought a new computer, and began to experiment. This opened a new field of investigation. I wrote a hypertext book, a collection of essays with an elaborate theory about argument and multi-linear text plus various examples that I constructed to show different ways in which hypertext could assist philosophy. The work was published on a floppy disk by the company that sold the software and spoke of itself as "purveyors of fine hypertext since 1977."

My work became influential for a time in the growing field of hypertext studies. I began attending conferences and giving papers about hypertext, about digital scholarship and different ways to produce it, about the effects of the web on culture and learning, and related topics. This was quite satisfying, but it had no effect on the philosophy establishment, which is conservative about its modes of professional communication, and barely into blogging.

The hypertext community conferences were wide-open and creative in a way I never found in philosophy. We felt we were doing something totally new, beginning a revolution. The community had its own tension between the techies and the more literary people but this was mostly a fruitful interchange. It was inspiring to go to conference where people were brimming over with enthusiasm and new ideas. We embraced lofty ideals which we watched being betrayed as the growing World Wide Web enforced a mode of hypertext linking which we considered impoverished and missing essential features. But it was this impoverished hypertext linking, not needing a central link server, which made it possible for the web to spread. Then eventually two more changes: the young pioneers grew into teachers with their own grad students, and the

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growth of the web flooded the field with data to be analyzed, and pushed creative new systems to the margins.

By the year 2000 I was thinking about how areas of space get transformed into human places. With the principles I had discovered I wrote both a book and a large web hypertext about that, offering ways to make suburban living more humane. Reflecting on my writing process I composed an essay for the Association of Computing Machinery's 2004 Hypertext Conference. I analyzed the different affordances and pressures created by writing about the same subject matter in two different media. The essay received the Douglas Englebart Prize prize for that year's best research paper. I was privileged to receive the plaque and a thousand dollar award from Englebart himself, one of the true visionaries of using computers to augment human intelligence. When that conference ended I hurried to Texas to see my father, who was terminally ill with cancer. Back when I was finishing high school my parents had offered to finance me up to a PhD in any field I chose. I went to the Jesuits instead and then a PhD, though not in the sciences my high school self would likely have studied. I knew my winning an award from a scientific association would be especially pleasing to my engineer father, and it was. He died a week later.

This move into hypertext turned out to offer yet another approach to my concerns about the modern versus the traditional, in this case modern versus traditional modes of writing, presentation, and scholarship.

I offered a course on hypertext writing several times. This was in the early days of the web, and I taught HTML to the students so that they could create simple websites. This is the only course I ever taught out of which a student was able to get a job right after graduation.

So, when asked what I studied, I would say it was the modern versus the traditional, in philosophy, writing, and architecture. My list of published articles includes all three.

I taught several short-term units at Bates College where the students were challenged to take up a real-life architectural/urban design problem and then report on their creative solutions to some agency that I had contacted such as the Auburn City Council or a local architectural firm. The students had to produce drawings and models and plans; they enjoyed the work and asked me after many years if anything had come of their plans for the renovation of a school building that we had worked hard to model and re-use. Unfortunately I had to tell them that city had no funds for the project, and recently the city demolished the building.

Looking back on my time at Bates, Carl Straub, the dean who hired me and with whom I had worked closely, and who was famous for composing elegant introductions to candidates for honorary degrees at graduation, sent us a greeting.

Greetings to David Kolb on His 75th Birthday

Dear David,

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Surely you deserve a greeting from the place where you dwelled for 25 of your 75 years. If it were feasible, there would be a chorus of appreciative voices recounting your many gifts to Bates College and to Maine. [Given whom I am thinking of, I would not want a chorus line! Just a chorus, albeit with some voices more melodious than others.] In any case, I am delighted - and honored - to have the solo role. It is difficult acknowledging that Anne and you left us more than a decade ago. Just as I remember meeting you in your Chicago apartment on the eve of your coming to the College, I remember countless moments during your life and work in Bates. So I want to praise you, if only briefly,

You gave all of us at least three gifts. First, you gave us your great learning, carried quietly and shared generously. It would be enough for any person to just take seriously Greek culture and philosophy. But you take seriously the history of western culture and of its philosophical reflections. There have been few colleagues who approach your breadth of learning and your agility to share it with such openness and clarity.

Second, you gave us - almost nonstop - clues about the character of academic collegiality and the consequent happiness that can come from exploring fresh interstices in the human story, the story which haunts us all. You were not only mentor for dogged inquisitiveness and for new ways of seeing things; you showed us how to listen to one another.

Third, in almost all you did, you reminded us that the intellectual life, as well as its close companion the moral life, deserve - and need - institutions. Your service to the College and to its Faculty was a gift of ceaseless efforts to think and act institutionally, to be a source for reconciliation, and for patience and understanding when impatience and provinciality otherwise prevailed. Your vision of the academy trumped those seeing only fragments of self-interest. Your own graciousness calmed many a tempest.

You were always important to us. So from across the continent [where winter lingers]:
Happy Birthday, and best wishes to Anne and to you.

Carl

His praise for me is overblown but the ideals he expresses seems to me worth emphasizing in a time when liberal arts education is under pressure to reduce itself to vocational training.

Maine Life

During a recent return trip to Maine I saw a list of what *Down East* magazine claimed were "the 60 most beautiful places in Maine," and I was happy to note that Anne and I had visited 57 of them. Even before moving to Maine I had spent a week on a Maine island owned by a friend of my father, where I was joined by a long time Jesuit friend. We rowed out to the island, set up the stove, and spent the days roaming the small island, watching the sea and stars, cooking lobsters bought off the fishing boats, swimming in the cold water. It was a glorious time.

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In Maine our house in Auburn was small, 1100 sq.ft. When we added a ground floor bedroom it became more adequate. We debated whether we needed more space, but instead we built a second house an hour away at Heald Pond. The pond house was a wonderful contribution to our lives but it kept us in the confined house in Auburn. Looking back we find that we have hundreds of pictures of the pond house and relatively few of the Auburn house, except for its back garden.

With a colleague from Bates I hiked a dozen or so mountains in western Maine; we were usually alone on the trails, which led through berry patches and fragrant woods to rocky heights with expansive views. Expanded life. I like the feeling of being in a clearly defined but wide space such as a mountain valley. It was an important achievement in my self understanding when I realized that I did not always want to be at the top of a hill or mountain but rather somewhat lower, within the space it opens.

We resided in for our first year in a college house a block from the campus. After that we moved to that house by the woods, three miles from campus. Anne commuted for some years fifty miles to the state capitol where she directed a continuing education TV system that linked hospital and university branches all over the state. Later, after we returned from a year in Japan, she became the director of the citywide Lewiston Adult Education system, managing programs for local businesses and groups of residents with many different educational needs.

We were looking for land. After some investigation we decided not to purchase land along the coast for a vacation home. It was either too expensive or too far away. Some of my colleagues did so, however been very happy with their choices. We started looking in Western Maine amid the mountains and lakes. After trips to various areas, I had some time off and went to a cabin on the shore of a lake an hour from our house. While there I looked into some real estate and found a plot of land on a nearby smaller pond that intrigued me. Anne came and we liked the land and purchased it. In 1989 we completed building a house.

This house sat on 2 acres of land with 450 feet of frontage on the mile-long Heald Pond. (The pond was named after an early settler; the division between ponds and lakes is not very clear in New England: I know of a pond nine miles long and a lake less than a mile across.) Our pond was only partially developed; the opposite side was completely unbuilt and eventually purchased to be a nature preserve. So the place retained a wild look, and on our side of the pond there were only 17 houses stretched over more than a mile of shoreline. It was quiet, looking out of the pond and the hill on the other side. We shared the land with twenty-one different kinds of wildflowers, our own wild cranberry bog, and a fox, the occasional moose, many birds, marauding beavers, muskrats, squirrels and chipmunks. A large black dog lived across the road and became a special friend. We made good connections with a few of our neighbors but didn't feel much connection with others. The town, Lovell, was composed of old Yankee Mainers plus summer people. We didn't fit either category, since although we lived in Maine we could never be truly native, and yet we visited at all times of year, unlike the summer people. We provided employment for house watchers, repair people, snowplowing, and the local hardware store.

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The pond house became our refuge since we were both working hard. Although we envisioned it as a place to go and stay all summer, that never happened because we both worked during the summer in different ways. The hour-long drive was pleasant enough but not good to take every day when Anne had to be into work. So we tended to use the house mostly on long weekends or for an occasional week, and to stay with relatives and friends who were visiting.

It was a place to relax and be with ourselves and with nature, and we did just that. I carved a network of paths around the property and in the woods. Anne planted gardens on three sides. We had a canoe to explore the lake and its streams. We had many gatherings at the pond, usually just 4 to 6 people, plus a few large parties, although we found it difficult to persuade people to drive the hour from Lewiston/Auburn.

After we moved to Oregon we kept the pond house and visited there several times a year, especially while my mother was living in Massachusetts and getting progressively weaker. After her death we continued at the house of the pond for another few years but we sold it in the summer of 2013. This was both sadness and a release. Although we have been tempted by other locations, we have no intention of becoming dual owners again.