Have fun, shit!

This title comes from a book chapter called "Witnessing subjects: a fool's help"[6].
I love it.

"Amusez-vous, merde![7]" says Gaulier[8] to his students. Having fun in this context is not a spectacle or escape, but rather the deadly game of living with loss, living despite failure, living even despite the humiliation of trying endlessly. It is this idea of "amusez-vous, merde" – live and love in the shit – which I understand as Boal's[9] approach to happiness: a tenacious, nonsentimental insistence on life within loss that is honest, ready to risk failure, and absolutely courageous. As witnesses, we inevitably fail. But how do we live? What are we like to have tea with?

It expresses what this thesis is about rather well.
Read it again and choose to put the rest of the writing to one side.
That could be enough.
Or, read on to see how this came to express for me what I have been working on.
This is what you'll get if you select the "read on" option.
Otherwise, thank you for getting this far… and have fun, shit.

If you've selected the "read-on" option…

…next you'll find the essence of what the different chapters of this thesis are about, and the ways in which they are linked to one another to form and infuse the whole story of the research. This is a story, set against the "big" backdrop of working in multiple ways for social and ecological justice (loosely termed "sustainability"), about how (particularly though inquiring and attentional practices informed by clowning) I have been succeeding and failing to make contact across all kinds of differences on four continents, about how I have both silenced myself and sought to re-find and improvise a generative agency for influencing for change, and about how I have worked with presentational knowing in service of both creating communicative spaces (Kemmis, 2001) and, more crucially, experiencing human (and more-than-human) contact within those spaces. Whilst I do not expect or want to find salvation in any one method (and am wary of any such claims), some ways of working, learning and seeing the world have become more figural in this inquiry journey than others. I do not intend to espouse the unique combination of inquiring pathways I have chosen as necessarily being right or appropriate for anyone else.

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[6] Julie Salverson, who teaches theatre and performs clown opera, wrote it (Salverson, 2006)
[7] "Have fun, shit!" or "For god's sake, enjoy yourselves!"
[8] Philippe Gaulier is a slightly frightening teacher in French improvisational clowning.
[9] Augusto Boal originated Forum Theatre – a participatory theatre for social change (Boal, 1979).

Research approach

Do you think you can dissect me with this blunt little tool?
Hannibal Lecter, in response to being given a questionnaire
The Silence of the Lambs (Harris, 1988)

The body, the senses, must conspire with the mind. Expression is the act of the whole man, that our speech may be vascular. The intellect is powerless to express thought without the aid of the heart and the liver and of every member.
Henry David Thoreau, Journal Entry, 2 September 2, 1851

[It is crucial] to cultivate as many modes of representation as possible or better, to cultivate the mode of representation that the phenomena themselves demand.
Goethe

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, I made a good living largely from conducting conventional market research. I used a combination of exploratory focus groups combined with telephone, postal and face-to-face questionnaires. These research approaches served me, my clients and my subcontractors well, until I began to realise two things: first, the qualities of the interaction around the research really mattered for how people went on to act in the world; and second, whilst the quantitative "factual" information I generated through questionnaires and the like was useful, it often served merely to affirm what my clients already knew. The upsides of conducting this kind of research alone were that it was relatively containable, predictable, lucrative and defendable. The downsides were that it didn't really engage me and that it seemed to almost completely miss the point of what I intuited was going on in clients' organisations – their fears, hopes, aspirations and the meaning they sought from their working lives.

Seeking to make my own work more purposeful from the late 1990s onwards (a process triggered by my father's death earlier that decade) meant that I needed to make my research correspondingly meaningful. This represented a shift in focus out from being an "expert" market researcher pleasing clients towards coming to know and act into a greater sense of purpose in my work. In one sense, that is what this thesis is all about – *the many ways in which I come to know a greater sense of purpose in my work*. Torbert calls this "*Visioning* – The attentional / spiritual territory of inquiry-towards-the-origin / purpose / mission / undifferentiated aesthetic continuum" (Torbert, 2001: 251). My experience of researching my visioning feels like taking steps in a dark wood, as if I were tracking an unknown and unknowable being which embodies a fuller version of my self. I can only glimpse that formless, nameless vision fleetingly through the trees – I can never capture it once and for all.

     Have fun, shit!

Architect Christopher Alexander evokes this kind of searching when he says: "There is a central quality which is the root criterion of life and spirit in a [woman], a town, a building, or a wilderness. This quality is objective and precise, but it cannot be named… The search which we make for this quality, in our own lives, is the central search of any person, and the crux of any individual person's story. It is the search for those moments and situations when we are most alive" (Alexander, 1979:19, 41).

Such a *search*, such *looking again and again*, such *re-search*, such *inquiry* can not be contained within the intellect alone as a kind of exercise, abstracted from context and contact with other people, places, phenomena. This research can not be approached under "laboratory conditions" devoid of emotions, mistakes, responses, mess and delight. My research invites my (and others') lived experience into the picture to live and breathe alongside my intellectual knowing. At some level it seems to me to be blindingly obvious common sense that, in "gathering knowledge from the heart of the world" (Buhner, 2004) with a fleeting sense of becoming more fully human, that the research processes themselves also need to be more fully human.

My intellect alone is not enough. It would be a fiction to pretend that this way of knowing on its own could come anywhere close to being able to represent the richness of my experience.

"When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the [person] who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built" (Scott, 1992: 25).

My research approach is based bottom up, giving emphasis to my experience and my practice in order to counterbalance (but not replace) the dominance of my intellect. I seek to pay attention to noticing my experience as it unfolds. My own experience of improvisation over more than a dozen clowning workshops has offered me experiences which, if they were easy to describe intellectually, would become less potent. As Isadora Duncan is so often quoted as saying: "If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it." The same feels relevant here – if I could explain my embodied knowing about relatedness, leadership and being in words, I wouldn't be learning about it through improvised clowning. In this thesis I use images, writing, some poetry and photography to evoke and represent my experience. The processes of creating those representations have in themselves been a source and development of my inquiry and deeper knowing. I combine this knowing-from-experience-in-my-body with the ideas and ways of understanding I have gleaned from others' theories. In this thesis, I blend all these ways that I come to know, drawing out meanings that are in-forming and resonant with this being human whilst remaining ever contingent on context.

"Research" implies to me a hunt for something obtainable, a beast that I might just recognise if I ever finally got it in my sights. In my thesis, there is no such beast waiting to be found. My tracking is more like "inquiry", a process without a final end point or destination. Inquiry is more of an attitude to be cultivated than a job to be done - something I seek to do "in the very midst of the real-time actions of [my] everyday [life]" (Torbert, 2001: 251). As such, I choose to use "inquiry" as a key term in my thesis. I combine this with my acting in the world to make an "action inquiry" and I link this to my own life experience in a kind of "living action inquiry" in the footsteps of Marshall (1989, 1999, 2001) and Torbert (1991, 2000, 2001, 2004). My time as a researcher for this thesis has invited and enabled me to enlarge my notion of what living action inquiry means to encompass disciplines of image making, representation through clowning, the practices of Goethean Science and evocative writing. As the thesis unfolds, you will encounter these ways of inquiring and coming to know the world and their influence on my working practices.

Inquiry streams

In the rest of this chapter, I offer background information for you to know something about my core inquiry streams and ideas. I will start with a rapid scoping of the terrain being explored, followed by a more detailed overview of each chapter to come. Following much reflection on how the thesis might look and discussions with my PhD supervision group[10], the terrain of this thesis emerged with the following basic features:

- **Two linked arenas for working:** ways to knowing for adults learning about acting for change for a more sustainable world (and something of the organisations I have worked with in the financially rich United Kingdom that create the spaces for this learning), and social marketing for enterprise development in financially poor countries. I have recognised these two areas of work as being those which are most tightly linked to my intentions and the wider implications of my work. These are the areas where I have encountered the greatest challenge, the strongest sense of not-knowing, the widest range of experiences and the most direct connections to global issues;

- **An encompassing medium:** which informs the work throughout – improvisation, the clown archetype, presentational knowing and taking an inquiring approach to life;

- **The ideas which tie these inquiry streams together:** power, earned and unearned privilege, play, arts-informed inquiry and ways to knowing, witnessing, transgression,

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[10] This is a group of between three and eight fellow PhD students (and Judi Marshall, our supervisor), who met regularly throughout the past five years to discuss, explore and move our inquiries forwards. In the latter years of our engagement, we also spent much time in our supervision sessions writing parts of our theses.

Link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/c_seeley.html   Have fun, shit!

humour and multi-layered (or "thick") emotions, making contact across irreducible difference, yearning and belonging, (critical) humility and hubris;

- **The research approach within which this work as a whole sits:** ranging from detailed accounts of my practices (where I pay attention to both internal and external phenomena in the present moment); to working and inquiring alongside others (where I am most aware of the give and take of power in service of acting for change for a more sustainable world); through to larger scale interventions (where I attempt to articulate the links I intuit between specific actions and micropractices and more complex systemic wholes). I comment on and explore my research approaches throughout the writing, paying particular attention to ways of knowing and representing that knowing which are "alternative" to "conventional" academic norms.

My research draws on contextually specific experiences illuminating an infinitely complex whole, which, in turn seeks to articulate itself through particular illustrations and examples, expressed through ideas, theories, practice accounts, visual imagery and experimental writing. My writing is not a set of disconnected and generalised abstractions claiming "the" truth, and, as such any conclusions I draw or truths I claim are a temporary coalescence which *has* been useful to me and *may* be useful to others. How could theory be otherwise? The qualities that I bring through this work come from making manifest a constellation of experiences and ideas, as a flock of birds might settle on a wire for a while before taking off again.

Expressions of Energy: an epistemology of presentational knowing

Next, you'll encounter a chapter I have rather grandly called "Expressions of Energy – an epistemology of presentational knowing". It started life as a book chapter which was released back into the wild when the proposed book was cancelled, leaving me more able to write more freely.

This section explores the epistemological considerations underlying the learning and inquiry elsewhere in this thesis and offers a foundation for the rest of the thesis as it unfolds. Here, you'll read about coming to know the world in many different ways, focusing on expressive, evocative, "presentational" forms of knowing (which, for me, have most recently included improvisational clowning[11], making visual images and writing-as-inquiry… and for others might include singing, dancing and playing music… and for you might include something else again).

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[11] From the Nose to Nose website: "The clown within… The clown's nose, the smallest mask in the world, is the mask that unmasks. Through the clown we can rediscover inner qualities of openness, spontaneity and play. The clown allows our imagination to soar, whilst keeping our feet firmly on the ground. Working with warm-ups, games and on the empty stage, we will find our inner clowns through improvisation, play and welcoming everything that emerges" (www.nosetonose.info).

This comes at a stage in my life (I'm 39 as I write this sentence) where I realise that applying more intellectual effort to intractable, complex world problems just isn't enough. I'd always been the smart girl, top of the class at school, but over the last six or seven years, in the face of climate change, growing poverty, fragmenting communities and fragmenting minds, I've needed to loosen my grip on that story to allow both a greater unknowing in me, and a greater attention (and return) to my non-intellectual knowing[12].

I tell this part of the story through an interleaved blend of my and others' ideas and, particularly, my experiences of improvisational clowning and creating and engaging with visual images.

Uncharted territory – inquiry and presentational knowing

This chapter moves on to an exploration of practical methodological considerations and possibilities of the marriage of living action inquiry with "alternative" ways of knowing through the kinds of presentational means which were explored in the previous chapter, "Expressions of Energy".

Here, I am interested in how inquiry and presentational knowing contribute together to coming to know and acting on that knowing in ways that are of both personal and political significance. What excites me about this work is that first, such "arts-informed" inquiry is relatively undeveloped in the spheres where I currently operate; second, it sits at a confluence of streams from many different realms; and third, it combines evocation, provocation, transgression, connections with other human and more-than-human worlds and, at best, accessible, holistic, life-enhancing ways of making sense of, digesting and responding to complex issues.

Peter Reason, the Director of the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) at the University of Bath writes: "first person research practice involves experimenting with new forms of expression and action in the world. One PhD dissertation I have seen includes a piece of embroidery at the beginning of each chapter… new possibilities may emerge—spontaneous, maybe countercultural action, or the disturbing inquiry of the Magician/Witch/Clown which roots into and overturns our basic assumptions. Second person research practice in the mode of [presentational knowing] is likely to draw explicitly on forms of art as inquiry—using visual arts, movement, psychodrama—to re-vision the world of the co-researchers. In more of a third person inquiry mode is the kind of 're-enchanted' art discussed by Suzie Gablik, art not in the modernist tradition as separated from the everyday, but art in context which invites us to look again, to stop taking for granted" (Reason, 2000).

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[12] And a gradual turn towards… a return to… and renewed acceptance of… an appropriate assertion of my intellectual agency (partially though this writing).

My intention is to start more comprehensively where statements like this leave off and explore how presentational knowing might develop into a more sophisticated, valued and integral part of the whole of inquiry.

I tell this part of the story drawing on a deliciously rich, eclectic mixture of ideas and practice (again, others' and mine) drawn from the worlds of the visual and performance arts, inquiry, multigenre writing and some rather naughty activism[13].

Trusting the Mapmaker – validity and presentational knowing, parts 1&2

These twin chapters explore the quality and validity considerations of the use of presentational knowing in inquiry. In my experience, inquirers tend to be congratulated for including presentational knowing at all in their work. Certainly, that describes the basics of my practice with the MSc participants I tutor. The last thing I am going to do is dive headlong into the kind of aesthetic critique of presentational knowing that is expected of me as an assessor for the International Society of Typographic Designers – the inquiring space for MSc participants' presentational knowing is often tentative and the links that these learners have with their expressive selves are fledgling. I respond to this relative lack of robustness by seeking to develop a greater sophistication about what makes quality in the marriage of presentational knowing and inquiry. I have drawn on work in the related field of art therapy for this chapter, as well as a handful of action inquirers (particularly in the field of education) who are also exploring this frontier.

Do You Want to Improve the World? – learning with the lowers

Paying particular attention to presentational knowing, this chapter examines my work as a thirtysomething white educated European woman "expert" contractor with international development agencies serving people from financially poor Southern countries - the "lowers" (Chambers, 1997). For people whose life conditions place them as lowers, this seems to me to mean finding ways of stepping up, not to replicate the destructive habits of uppers' life conditions, but in order to dismantle them and create different realities[14]. Over the six years I have been doing such work in Africa and Asia (mainly, but not exclusively, with the International Labour Organisation – the ILO), I have watched myself try, succeed and fail at making contact with people from other organisational, racial, ethnic, class, educational, gender and geographic contexts, cultures and backgrounds. As I have seen myself lurch from being over- to under-privileged, a silent witness to an outspoken "expert", I have sought to

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[13] More on that later when we meet "The Yes Men"...

[14] Perhaps, then, for both uppers and lowers, the process is one of stepping *to one side* or stepping *out*… or, defying the gravity of oppression and standing up with levity.

understand "the difference which makes the difference?" (Bateson, 2000: 459) in the many unexpected circumstances I have found myself. This work has sparked a very practical and down to earth interest in the micropractices (Foucault, 1977) of power and privilege. You'll see me getting it wrong… and right, against a shifting backdrop of the inherited and unfolding histories of colonialism, patriarchy and globalisation.

In addition, this chapter illustrates my ways of being, self-care and inquiry in these contexts. I also explore and critique the ways in which, over six years of working with the same ILO team, we have together moved towards more participatory, challenging, presentational and bottom-up processes for influencing change, using presentational knowing ranging from mass media TV and radio campaigns to Forum Theatre (Boal, 1979).

I illustrate, evoke and express this part of the story using autobiographical writing and drawing on a range of literature sources including post-development (and post-colonialism), ideas of witnessing, power, conscientisation (both from Freire (1996) and his friend Boal's Forum Theatre (1979)). I include feedback where it has been available to me and take a critical look at systemic large scale change and social marketing across these north/south/rich/poor differences.

A Pedagogy of the Privileged – learning with the uppers

Here, I choose to explore in more depth my work with adult learners from relatively privileged backgrounds - the "uppers" (Chambers, 1997), our ways to knowing and acting for change for a more sustainable world. For uppers like me, this involves developing ways of simultaneously stepping back *and* stepping up. This has primarily been through my role as one of a team of six Intake Tutors for the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice at the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice at the University of Bath.

There are so many paths that I could have chosen to be representative of my inquiring in this work. I have written thousands of words on my educational influence and facilitation work… and came to realise that my most unique contributions lay in the qualities of my attention to the participants and my use of presentational knowing with them.

In foregrounding these aspects of my work, I am choosing to keep at least another PhD's worth of inquiry into facilitating adult learning in group situations in the background. But I am reluctant to let it go all together. If the kinds of presentational knowing I am interested in are in service of making better contact with the other human and more-than-human worlds, and in turn, such better contact is in service of that "big" backdrop of working towards social and ecological justice, then I am

choosing to retain some examples from my educational practice which show me succeeding and failing to make such contact, whether I am using presentational knowing or not.

In addition, I am choosing to offer an extended illustration of my repeated and ongoing failure to make meaningful contact with a course leader from an (anonymised) educational establishment outside of the University of Bath context, and a look at what happens to my ability to make contact when the difference that is making a difference is gender.

I tell this part of the overall story using material drawn primarily from MSc participants' work, examples of and feedback on my educational practice (with the Bath MSc, and occasionally, elsewhere), plus a number of key influences on pedagogy, facilitation and "teaching" (Bache 2000, hooks 1994, Freire 1976, Palmer 1998, 2004). In addition, I pay special, but not exclusive attention to presentational knowing, both in terms of the content of my writing and (as elsewhere) in the forms that this chapter takes.

Serious Play – glimpses of that other field

Finally, I look through the lens of the part of my experiential and presentational knowing which, in many ways, has nourished my professional practice, inquiries and learning elsewhere, and yet has been largely hidden from the direct gaze of my clients, colleagues and students. In parallel to the professional work introduced above, I have been deeply involved in learning from a French tradition of improvised clowning (think "fooling" and "court jesters" if you are English and reading this with visions of big feet and buckets of water – that is not what I've been up to and, no, it is not for children's parties, either). This tradition and its way of learning are informed by a combination of the ideas of the French performer and teacher Jacques Lecoq (Murray, 2003) and the American originator of client-centred psychotherapy, Carl Rogers (1967).

Here, I build on my earlier clowning stories from the *Expressions of Energy* chapter to explore my attraction to and learning from this improvised performance work. I tentatively seek: first, to explicate the subtle ways in which this learning has influenced and shaped my existing educational and development agency practice (particularly in terms of stepping into the unknown, working with multi-layered emotions, humour and making contact); and second, to reflect on the potential of this work to address my "bigger" intentions and aspirations of working towards social and ecological justice and making contact with the more-than-human world.

Part of me has been reluctant to dive into the available literature which seeks to make sense of improvisational clowning, as I have wished the path of my learning to be experience first, from the inside out and very definitely non-intellectual. As I have gained more experience, my confidence to let my intellect start to have a peek at clowning (and its related implications) has grown. I bring these influences to this part of my story and structure this chapter in five *interrelated* sections:

- **Multi-layered, "thick" emotion**
  which includes...

- **Playfulness**
  which enables...

- **Contact across irreducible difference**
  which is accompanied by multi-layered, "thick" emotion and *is desired by...*

- The **obligated witness**
  who needs playfulness, critical humility, desires contact across irreducible difference, feels multi-layered, "thick" emotion and *acts with...*

- **Conviction**
  which arises through multi-layered, "thick" emotion.

In addition, since 2003, I have worked with my clowning teacher, Vivian Gladwell[15], to tentatively develop an inquiry stream exploring the connections between clowning and deep ecology. This ongoing work started with two days of conversation at Vivian's house in France, which were transcribed and followed by the first draft of an article. This, in turn, enabled us to have something to talk about with others, resulting in us finding a host organisation for an experimental and inquiring workshop, "Gaia's Playground" (held in May 2006).

For me, this clowning is largely an inner movement which has moments of grace enfolded in it, moments of awe and wonder when differences dissolve in a mutual recognition of shared humanity, of living and loving in the shit.

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[15] See www.nose-to-nose.info

Have fun, shit!

Interludes

Some chapters have interludes between them which explore multigenre forms of presentational knowing in freer ways, providing a safe haven to test and explore validity issues and arts-informed inquiry. The first interlude, "Achilles," expressed the traumatic events of October 2001 to around Easter 2002 when I broke my right Achilles tendon and was forced to stay (y)in, unable to stand on both legs and unable to pursue life with my usual vigour. The second interlude, "Glimpsing a Goethean Way of seeing" seeks to unfold the story and learning of my encounter with the methodologies of Goethean science – not writing *about* them, but (re)presenting the experience *from within* that way of encountering the world. The third interlude, "City Dump Slum" recounts the story of an experience I had in Brazil which, even now, I am not sure really happened. The fourth and final interlude, "Yearning" brings together images and writing relating to my responses on the occasions when gender is the difference that is making the difference.

Paths not taken

Throughout, I acknowledge the wealth of inquiry that has not and could not make it into this thesis. If the map is not the territory, then this thesis is not the PhD learning journey. I can not possibly do full justice to the breadth and depth of my learning since May 2001, when I first registered for this process.

We can not know the whole of this, or any life work. For this thesis to be meaningful, you as reader, and I as writer/inquirer/mapmaker, need to know that the ways in which I have intellectually and intuitively recognised which material, references, stories and examples to use are trustworthy. This has required much sitting back, allowing the parts which are most resonant of the whole to make themselves manifest and letting the sense making come. Here, my process has included: looking for repetition of themes over time; sensing which issues hold most sustained energy and interest for me; focusing on "nodal points" where there is a convergence of thoughts, ideas, writers referring to each other and asking similar questions; running with the issues which keep popping up in multiple different work contexts and holding open an awareness of and receptivity to events, meetings and conversations which may seem synchronous. The material and experiences I have chosen to let go have informed my "phenomenal field" (Rogers, 1959)… and as such are part of the "active absence" of the whole (Bortoft, 1996).

In his work on Goethean science, physicist and scientific philosopher Henri Bortoft uses the process of writing to illustrate the flux around sensing the whole and working with the parts. His words usefully explicate one key aspect of my bringing together the ideas, illustrations, references, quotations and examples for this thesis into a

coherent whole (and the flip-flop fear I have had of losing touch with the whole as I am working on a part at the same time as becoming overwhelmed by the wealth of parts I could chose while I am working on the whole). The trick, it seems to me, is to sense and invoke the whole whilst working on each part. Bortoft writes:

"The art of saying is in finding the 'right parts.' The success or failure of saying, and hence writing, turns upon the ability to recognise what is a part and what is not. But a part is a part only inasmuch as it serves to let the whole come forth, which is to let meaning emerge. A part is only a part according to the emergence of the whole which it serves; otherwise it is mere noise. At the same time, the whole does not dominate, for the whole cannot emerge without the parts. The hazard of emergence is such that the whole depends on the parts to be able to come forth, and the parts depend on the coming forth of the whole to be significant instead of superficial. The recognition of a part is only possible through the 'coming to presence' of the whole." (Bortoft, 1996: 11).

Let us for one moment consider changing the scale of what is suggested here by Bortoft (who was a student of the quantum physicist David Bohm):

- **First**, each part of this thesis, each word, sentence, paragraph, section serves and is informed by the emergence of the whole PhD submission;

- **Second**, the thesis, in turn, is one of the parts which make up my life, and in different ways, the lives of other people who have been associated with it. So the thesis is a part serving and informed by the emergence of my whole living (and so some extent, that of others, such as my PhD study group, as well);

- **Third**, I can then consider my living to be a part serving and informed by the emergence of some greater (Gaian) whole (Lovelock, 1982).

  Paraphrasing Bortoft's quote above (now this is a grand thought…), *the hazard of emergence is such that the Gaian whole depends on life to be able to come forth, and life (my living) depends on the coming forth of the Gaian whole, in order to be significant instead of superficial*.

  Perhaps, then, this work represents one person's desire for significance rather than superficiality, whilst remembering that (to redeem the previous thoughts from hubris), just like a broken hologram, in which "the whole is present in each fraction, but its presence diminishes as the fractioning proceeds" (Bortoft, 1996: 11), my life can only ever be a highly fractionated and thus diminished manifestation of the unknowable whole.

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As a sentence in this writing can only hint at the whole thesis, this life of mine can only have the most fleeting of glimpses of the wider socio-ecological wholes of which I am a part… and experiencing those glimpses in day to day life is an intention that informs this inquiry at its root.

After five years at this PhD work, I have become so saturated with its parts that the whole has precipitated out into presence – first in the still hidden confines of my imagination, day dreaming, on trains, at night - and then increasingly as a "perfect-in-the-head-narrative" which demands to be written and yet keeps slipping straight through my fingers. Henri Bortoft and the poet Ted Hughes are each familiar with this frustrating and exciting state as meaning starts to condense:

"We all know the familiar experience of having the sense that we understand something and then finding that it has slipped away when we try to say it." (Bortoft, 1996: 10)

and;

"I was plagued by the idea that I really had much better thoughts than I could ever get into words: I became very interested in those thoughts of mind I could never catch. Sometimes they were hardly what you could call a thought – they were a dim sort of feeling about something… I did not know that most people have the same trouble. What thoughts they have are fleeting thoughts – just a flash of it, then gone - or, though they know they know something, or have ideas about something, they just cannot dig those ideas up when they are wanted… There is [a] thinking process by which we break into that inner life… and if we do not somehow learn it, then our minds lie in use like fish in the pond of a man who cannot fish." (Hughes in Claxton, 2000: 46).

Time, then, for me to grasp hold of what otherwise may perpetually slip away and mark this ongoing inquiry by inviting the birds to settle on the wire for long enough for me to pull my writing together.