

12 False Consciousness of Participation? Towards Ecological and Cosmological Participation for Critical Theory or “Serious Play”

In the last two chapters I have drawn upon two different perspectives of human communication in order to explore the empirical tracks of relational practices described in the thesis. In this chapter I take a slightly different attitude towards these practices in order to open my inquiry out into some alternative directions. Whilst I am drawing the thesis to a conclusion, the posture I take here could perhaps be labelled “speculative play” for it would connote the open-ended way in which I suggest this chapter be read. I continue to make use of the theoretical work of Bateson and Habermas, supplementing their ideas with other theoretical insights.

Whilst I have hinted at the connections on a number of occasions, I start the chapter by bringing together the pragmatics of communication from the Palo Alto group with Habermasian communicative action, initially framing this in terms of the relationships between NGOs and businesses. I then go on to point to the experiences of “self”, drawing upon Kenneth Gergen’s theoretical exploration of changing notions of identity in postmodern society and my own shifting understanding of “self”. In doing so I note that the Habermasian conceptualisation of the system and lifeworld is not able to make complete sense of my experiences. Despite attempts to pragmatise communicative action by critical theorists, the theoretical and political project of critical theory limits its conceptualisation of Mind to the human lifeworld. I suggest that we could perhaps include the more-than-human lifeworld in our understanding of democratic discourse, for Habermasian critical theory does not seem to give us enough “epistemological elbowroom” in our search for a participatory orientation and a relational praxis for sustainability. In so doing, we might avoid or transform some of the discourse in which sustainable development is seen as an opportunity for global management and control by the powerful and in which “participation”, in various embodiments, is reified into a purely methodological device that has no epistemological implications.

12.1 Looking at the system and lifeworld as a double-bind

In chapter 11 I sought to explore how the theory of system and lifeworld might help to make sense of the boundary crises experienced in everyday life in the modern welfare state. This was framed in terms of competing imperatives of communicative action towards symbolic

reproduction of the lifeworld and strategic action for material reproduction of the system. As I suggested in the introduction to section V my use of both Batesonian double-bind theory and Habermasian system and lifeworld theory is predicated upon taking different orientations towards the relational practice that I have been describing. In reading the last two chapters you may have noticed some overlapping motifs. This is more than coincidence; both have a central concern with communication and a specific orientation towards behavioural perspectives therein and both take multi-level perspectives of behaviour. In fact, we may see that Habermas' differentiation between communicative action and strategic action, in some ways, parallels one of the underlying axioms of the pragmatics of communication taken by Bateson and his colleagues - that between the content aspect of any message and a message's relationship-defining elements.

As I suggested in chapter 10, based upon the Theory of Logical Types, one is able to distinguish between messages that convey the content of any communication and messages that convey what *kind* of content that the communication should be taken as. The second type of message tells us about the relationship between the speakers. Following on from this conceptualisation, I suggest that the functional rationality of strategic action for system operation might be considered as relating to the content element of social life, whilst communicative action orients towards defining the *relationship* between Habermas' three nuclei of the lifeworld (culture, society and personality).

In chapter 10 I also suggested that the ability to meta-communicate and distinguish between types of message is the *conditio sine qua non* of successful communication. An underlying premise of the existence of a double-bind is the inability to differentiate between types of message, such that when one receives conflicting understanding between message and meta-message one is caught in an untenable situation from which escape is difficult. Kemmis has suggested that, in his work within educational systems, people often experience the competing "imperatives" of the system and the lifeworld (Kemmis, 1993, 2001). Individuals are suggested to encounter boundary crises of which they are not immediately aware and which result in a range of problems from withdrawal to anger. It seems that experiences such as these might be thought of as representing an inability to differentiate between two different message types – those messages of the system and those of the lifeworld – which suggests the kind of untenable communication tangles described in the theory of the double-bind.

With these reinterpretations in mind, one may look at some of the discussion of chapter 11 about NGO-business relationships in a different frame. As outlined in chapter 10, we are able

to discern a network of double-binds that Shell and Living Earth encounter in their collaboration: between Shell and society, between Shell-Living Earth and external parties, internally within all four organisations, and with respect to my relationship with them. By overlaying the theory of system and lifeworld with the double-bind we can reveal another knot in this situation of interacting tangles. Many latter generation NGOs and individual staff within are faced with two contradictory messages as a result of the competing rationalities of system and lifeworld. The first suggests that the organisations need to professionalise in order to maintain their legitimacy and value; that is to say that, if they are to be relevant to society, their attempts at systems catalysis and institutional change need to be done with greater efficiency so that the maximum benefit is gained. This system level communication orients action within the NGO towards the strategic engagement of powerful actors, of those parties who are having greatest influence upon system conditions.

We can see an example of the first injunction within the United Nations¹. Referring to the formal establishment of relationship between multinational companies and the United Nations through the “Global Compact”, George Kell, Senior Officer at the Executive Office of the Secretary-General at the UN, said

the issue of UN-Business relationship is loaded with myths. An essential point is, in any event, that the UN, right from its inception, has worked with business, labour and NGOs....More recently, we have tried to engage business, labour and civil society in a more strategic manner. The reason for that is simple: Become relevant and make a difference or wither away and hide behind empty slogans².

The UN has been severely criticised for both the Global Compact itself and the processes through which the agreement with multinational business was signed. For many it signals further delegitimation of the UN through the continued image- and agenda-tainting effects of “Bluewash”. Kell and the UN insist that the organisation must retain its relevance by communicating with these powerful actors.

As well as the message to “become relevant” by engaging the powerful, the UN and latter generation NGOs are given a second message which insists that, in order to remain in this place from which to foster change, the organisations must maintain an orientation towards

¹ Although not NGOs by definition, many of the ideas and concerns that have been discussed in the thesis also seem to have relevance for Inter-Governmental Organisations such as the UN, who are subject to similar perceptions of legitimacy, service to others and change as NGOs.

communicative action for mutual understanding and unforced consensus. This is mainly because it is their propensity (perceived and real) to reproduce lifeworld values relative to system values that ultimately seems to be the source of their legitimacy to act with such system catalytic pretensions. The result of these two messages is that NGOs such as Living Earth are increasingly “told” that in order to fulfil their “role” as systems catalysts they must look towards the rational purposive-ness of strategic action *and* that in order to be an “NGO” they must keep their distance from the influence and effects of money, power and strategic action.

Multinational business seems to receive a corollary message structure. In order to maintain their operations they must increasingly ensure that they are able to show that they are dealing with issues of human rights, environmental sustainability and participatory development in the context of their operations. Whilst there may be attempts to translate this into the language of the system, as a discourse of roles, functions and functionality (for example the social or environmental audit report), it also requires the development of legitimacy through an ability to communicate openly about their relationship with society. Outward facing individuals within businesses are required to show honesty, trust and sincerity in their interactions with society. The second message concerns the continued importance of strategic action for the business; here they are told that the underlying discourse of functional rationality is central to their project and cannot be undermined willy-nilly by weak professionalism or excessive openness. Individual managers are reminded of their ultimate responsibility towards the financial bottom line, shareholder value and maintaining investor confidence and, moreover, that their jobs and livelihoods depend on this background reference. Thus, the multinational business receives a paradoxical message structure. On the one hand it is told “in order to be a successful and viable multinational company you must face society with communicative action towards mutual understanding, which should not be in a purely functional vein”. At the same time it is also told “that in order to remain a profit making corporation you must maintain a professional and functional orientation towards society”.

Confronted with untenable positions like these businesses, such as Shell, seek to communicate about their relationship with society by developing the discourse of corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility and by forging relationships with “experts” in communicative action.³ These experts assist in the operational management of situations which require mutual

² Personal communication, July 2000

³ The recent (May 2001) international concern over the availability of anti-retroviral AIDS drugs in Southern countries, following the lawsuit filed by 39 pharmaceutical companies against the South African government for importing generic copies, seems to demonstrate the impossible injunctions that multinationals are faced with and the paradoxical communication that result from the collision between system and lifeworld values. In terms of corporate control, the

understanding and unforced consensus. For example, Living Earth (and the community development unit at Shell Nigeria) assisted Shell in developing an understanding of a different way of relating to the communities. In positioning their relationship with powerful actors, such as Shell, in terms of participatory engagement towards change, NGOs are able to deal with the untenable positions brought about through the contradictory messages that they receive from the system and lifeworld. The discourse they offer is one about leveraging institutional change through their (NGO's) overriding predisposition towards building communicative action. Their contact with the powerful other is often framed in terms of building corporate citizenship and corporate responsibility, in a way that correlates with business discourse. But even without such language, the stance taken tends towards the creation of solutions-oriented partnership, whose legitimacy is guaranteed by the final common denominator of NGO activity as "doing good". However, this orientation towards change feeds NGOs back into another double-bind about change and self-perpetuation; by accepting the need to work with powerful actors in order to create conditions for system change NGOs and the individuals within confront a message which suggests that, since they are part of the system itself, a push for system change would require the dissolution of their involvement, roles and ultimately their presence.

The links between the theory of communicative action, the search for legitimation, the double-bind theory and the challenges confronting business-NGO collaboration are given another burst of colour as one notices that most collaborative relationships between business and NGO contain elements of both analogic and digital messaging. For example, Living Earth offers Shell the "verbal" language of conducting participatory development with the community on the ground in Nigeria and "non-verbal", associative language of being in an open relationship with civil society represented by their organisational interaction. As I suggested in Chapter 10, analogic communication is regarded as being inherently ambiguous. It is clear that businesses have benefited to some extent from the ambiguousness of developing relationships with the NGOs, who have had the effect of acting as badges of legitimacy. However, as we saw with Shell-Living Earth collaboration, the ambiguousness of relationship

international right to the protection of patents (enshrined in the, now almost mythical, TRIPS agreement) is suggested to be central to the research and development project of multinationals. However, NGOs, such as Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa, have counter-claimed their "constitutional right" to healthcare. Faced with the sheer impossibility of denying that the drugs exist or that they cannot be made cheaper (viz. the generic copies made in India and Brazil), pharmaceutical spokespeople have resorted to a discussion centred upon the "lack of infrastructure" for drug delivery and their solution-oriented attempts to build "private-public partnerships". To listen to these spokespeople is to hear the business equivalent of a son freezing in front of mummy, as they attempt to avoid the fundamental meta-communication that society is sending when it asks for cheap drugs; no matter how much people in pharmaceutical companies and the organisations themselves profess to care about ill health, their existence is defined by the need to make money. And for once, maybe, the multinationals might have the upper hand; it is difficult, at the moment at least, to see Western consumers boycotting Prozac, Ritalin or whatever in solidarity towards people of the South (and this self concern, or what Habermas might call "lack of solidarity", is surely why the retort from the companies about the need maintain prices in order to invest in research and development is effective).

also creates the potential for labels of co-optation to be easily made when translated to digital communication. In the light of this last, I find the following comment by Bateson quite revealing in terms of the relationships between NGO, business and society:

“There are people - professional actors, confidence tricksters, and others - who are able to use kinesics [body language] and paralinguistic communication with a degree of voluntary control comparable to that voluntary control which we all think we have over the use of words. For these people who can lie with kinesics, the special usefulness of non-verbal communication is reduced. It is a little more difficult for them to be sincere and still more difficult for them to be believed to be sincere. They are caught in a process of diminishing returns such that, when distrusted, they try to improve their skill in stimulating paralinguistic and kinesic sincerity. But this is the very skill which led others to distrust them” (Bateson, 1972:418).

I shall return to these issues of organisational relationship towards the end of this chapter in section 12.6.

12.2 Self in transition

As I alluded to in a number of places in the research/practice learning history (chapter 8), a significant theme of my experience during the course of this inquiry has been the transition in my own sense of “self” and the important, associated understanding of my relationship to the world. Looking back to when I started my PhD I had become quite comfortable with the multiplicity of identity that postmodern life had opened up for me and I engaged in a range of relationships that allowed me to play out numerous, often incoherent or incommensurate, roles; however, I was also aware that there was something more, that the incoherence was not satisfying. At the end of my first year on the PhD, in August 1998, I read Kenneth Gergen’s (1991) exploration of identity in postmodern life in which he paints a picture of a changing concept of self. He describes a transition from the modernist who is searching for an “authentic self” through to a “strategic manipulation” of self. This self then moves on to a “pastiche personality” that recognises the merit of multiplicity and construction but then also confronts ensuing problems from the merger of the real and the contrived. Finally Gergen posits the emergence of a “relational self” who can mount a genuine challenge to the intelligibility of an autonomous self. This pattern seemed to resonate at a number of levels. I recognised at the same time, both in NGO-business relationships (which at the time I

conceived of as my core research focus) and more deeply within me, the “pastiche personality” and “social chameleon” that was “constantly borrowing bits from whatever sources [were] available and constructing them as useful or desirable in a given situation” (Gergen, 1991: 150). The notion of a relational-self seemed to be massively pregnant with possibility and meaning for the opportunities it seemed to offer for my growing sense of alienation at the lack of a single and constant authenticity in my multiplicity of personalities.

So an important part of my transition was a recognition of the potential pitfalls of the “separative self” (Gomes & Kanner, 1995)⁴ and the bright sound that an alternative made within me. I think that the ability to associate my own personal experience with the organisational phenomena through a societal perspective of the postmodern turn was also important. But whilst Gergen’s invitation to postmodern carnival seemed alluring, his exploration did not give me a sense of how to get there nor what would take place therein.

As I moved on in my inquiry, my reflective writing gave me an important space in which to explore relational and alternative ways of knowing. I became more conscious of locations in which I played out underlying themes of a modern, separative self and more aware of where various roots and origins my “in-authenticity” might be unearthed. As a result I refined my senses of how this might be changed. At the same time, voices from the action research field, in particular my supervisor Peter Reason, made it both legitimate and necessary to explore the relationship between the roles of academic/researcher that I was adopting and my changing sense of self, as informed by critiques of the modernist narrative. Initially, I sought to get such first-person inquiry “right”; as the quotes on sections 8.1.4 and 8.2.1 suggest to me now, my attachment to positivist constructions of objectivity and truth was, if not all pervading, certainly highly ubiquitous, distributed in the nooks and crannies of my acting and being and out of the reaches of normal, everyday awareness. Together, an inchoate sense and vision of alternative ways of being, my reflective and critical writing about my own research/practice, my relationship with Peter and my emerging attempts, at first, to be first open to and then, to actually try and integrate alternative ways of knowing into my practice, created a fluid structure for a simple dialectical interplay between reflection and action upon my world in order to transform it; for praxis as used by Freire (1993).

⁴ Gomes and Kanner adopt the term “separative self” from Catherine Keller. Gomes and Kanner contrast the term with the term “separate self”. In doing so they seek to highlight that it is an *attempt* to separate that can never actually succeed because of the fundamental interconnection in the world. It seems like a useful and important suggestion for reminding us that we are always already participating in and with the world.

As explored in chapter 4, such a critical, emancipatory and reflexive confluence is not a particular revelation in the action research tradition. Kemmis suggests that Habermas' more recent work alludes to a third feature of communicative action - *making communicative space* - that "brings people around shared topical concerns, problems and issues" with a shared orientation towards the other two aspects of communicative action - mutual understanding and consensus (Kemmis, 2001). This notion - the need to bring people together to constitute a communicative space in order to achieve mutual understanding - seems in many ways to be a cornerstone of action research, whether in the form of first-, second- or third-person research/practice. For example, the learning history works at creating this space for second-person research/practice. In my reflective writing and on-going inquiry into my practice I can see that I created a kind of communicative space for dialogue towards mutual understanding. It could be described as an internal dialogue between the multiplicity of selves and roles of a "pastiche personality" that has considerably increased the power within me to 'go on' (Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1984) in my experiencing of the postmodern conditions of saturation and plurality.

Whilst I have sensed the value of this internal and external democratic dialogue, my exploration has thus far omitted another important plane of experience on which I have tracked my practice. A couple of paragraphs above I made a rather nebulous reference to "alternative ways of knowing" and you may have wondered what kinds of alternative ways of knowing I was referring to. These are embodied, tacit and plural forms of active knowing, rather than purely cognitive and singular; in particular they concern an emergent "knowing in relationship", grounded in some vague and uncertain synaesthetic perception with the more-than-human world. My ongoing re-conceptualisation and re-experiencing of participation with the more-than-human world has and continues to be an important part of the change of "self" that I have discussed. It is this reframing and new understanding of participation which I feel has been quite significant in my ability to foster an inquiring attitude to the double-binding communication that I have received at various junctions in my research and to my experiences of the boundary crises between system and lifeworld.

In the next three sections (12.3 - 12.5) I elaborate upon this participation. This experience suggests to me that the concepts of the lifeworld and communicative action as used in Habermas emancipatory project may need to be widened or expanded in some ways. Whilst the notion and practices of democratic dialogue and the pragmatics of our communication are important for sustainability, they are currently largely restricted to participation with the human world and do not embrace our ongoing communion with the more-than-human world. In this

sense I suggest that our notion of democratic participation might need to move beyond a purely anthropocentric notion of dialogue, communication and perception if we are serious about environmental sustainability and social justice.

12.3 Pragmatising communicative action and critical theory

To explore this we should first go back to Habermas' theories of communicative action and system and lifeworld and look at to attempts to pragmatise some of the rather abstract notions of communicative rationality. In the theory of system and lifeworld Habermas seeks to make clear that society exists at both the system level and the lifeworld level. He adds that in the modern welfare-state the individual or group experiences the conflicting rationalities of system and lifeworld with increasing frequency. This forms part of his theory of communicative action oriented towards democratic discourse.

When I read Habermas' work on democratic dialogue I felt an immediate sense of distance from him; he came across as a disembodied writer of texts and I felt slightly estranged from his writing. Initially, I felt that my difficulty with getting to grips with this was mainly because of this disembodied style and the wide range of sociological theory that he brings into his exposition, with which I was mostly unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It came across as the theoretical grand narrative of modernist without any practical, local manifestations and I struggled to get to grips with the meaning of what he was suggesting.

Others have also confronted this difficulty. For example, Thomas McCarthy finds Habermas' normative concept of rational discourse in an ideal speech situation "too abstract, uncomplicated, decontextualised, in short, too idealised to function directly in research and development" and he seeks to read Habermas through a lens which focuses on communicative interaction in more ordinary settings as an attempt to scale down the notion of democratic discourse to a contextualised setting (1996: 160). Stephen Kemmis' work is based upon practical applications of the theory of system and lifeworld in education (Kemmis, 1995; 2001). As suggested, earlier in order to maintain the theoretical underpinnings and centrality to his project Habermas has required a mediating discourse between the two separate discourses of theory and practice. In this regard, there have been various attempts at pragmatising Habermas' communicative rationality. Through the aid of such attempts, which seemed to locate Habermas' work in more locally relevant ways, I was able to work through these challenges and explore the system and lifeworld constraints in business-NGO relationships.

McCarthy's work is, importantly, framed in terms of communication in everyday life. Nevertheless, it still does not seem to allow for the kind of relational practice with the more-than-human world that I have suggested was important in my experience. In order to make this point clear, I briefly explore McCarthy's exposition and then return to my own experience.

12.4 Communicative action in everyday life

McCarthy works with the "sociology of everyday life" in Harold Garfinkel's approach to the social action-social structure couplet. He elaborates upon six key ideas of the ethnomethodological approach - accountability, reflexivity, indexicality, the dialectic of the particular and the general, temporality and the orientation to mutual understanding - suggesting that the transcendence and idealisation of Habermas' communicative reason can be integrated with the indexicality and practicality emphasised by Garfinkel in such a way that

communicative rationality may be understood temporally (it is an ongoing accomplishment), pragmatically (that is never absolute but always only for all practical purposes), and contextually (in ever changing circumstances), without surrendering transcendence (it turns on validity claims that go beyond the particular contexts in which they are raised) or idealisation (and rests on pragmatic presuppositions that function as regulative ideas) (McCarthy, 1996: 168).

McCarthy positions his work of pragmatizing communicative rationality as an attempt to address a post-metaphysical question about the gap between the ideal and the real, with an invitation to critical participation. Through the application of Garfinkel's sociology of everyday life, he creates a way into this critical participation and reminds us that Habermas' universal validity claims "can never be anything more than an orientation to essentially open-ended discursive processes" (McCarthy, 1996: 171). Gustavsen adds to this by suggesting that the notion of democratic dialogue must be anchored in practices and experiences, rather than an effort to create theoretically founded meta-rules.⁵ And in a sense my exploration in chapter 11 of relational practices between NGOs and business was an attempt to make a similar contribution to this pragmatizing process. However, although I was able to do this and develop enough understanding to be able to write this discussion, there are intimations of a deeper, more significant challenge faced by critical theory in the context of a potential transition to sustainability and the presence of a participatory worldview. Despite the work of McCarthy to

⁵ Personal communication Bjorn Gustavsen, January 2001.

pragmatise communicative action with a sociology of everyday life, experience from my own relational practice still does not sit entirely comfortably with Habermas' theoretical construction of system and lifeworld nor with the mediating discourse for critical theory offered by Gustavsen and others in *Beyond Theory* (Gustavsen, 1996).

12.5 Towards understanding communicative action as an ecological and cosmological being

Above I suggested that I have experienced and continue to experience a transition in my understanding of "self". I have moved away from a purely separative-self towards a more relational understanding of my lifeworld. This is part of - the first stumbling footsteps in - a significant ontological transition that, at the moment, seems to be an always renewing understanding in my ways of relating to the "other", of being present in the world. However, importantly, this has not been a merely cognitive shift in the way that I have thought about my relating to a purely human world; beyond this, it concerns my embodied experience of "being in" the human and more-than-human world and universe.

Its difficult to recollect a specific moment when this shift began, if indeed there was any single moment. Perhaps it has always been lying there latently. The process is one in which I notice presence and activity in the non-human community around me; the trees and organisms no longer (dis)appear as so much background against which I go about my everyday life but are "encountered". In noticing and naming this as my encountering with some kind of presence, I begin to appreciate the creativity of a community of individuals in the more-than-human world. And this noticing increasingly takes the form of more active participation and engagement; a form of encounter in which I begin to "ask questions" of the "other" in terms of my own human framing and language at the same time as also trying to experience my "self" in terms of this animate landscape and language. Was the cackle of seagulls early this morning a rude noise or just a reminder that they were waiting for my participation on this new day? Is this blossoming jasmine plant suggesting to me that the time to bear the fruits of my inquiry is now here? (for this is its first flowering in the last two-and-a-half years). What role am I going to play in the emergence of universe today? How will I contribute to its drama? How will its story tell itself in me?

The lifeworld for me has come to include more of what I live, touch, breath, smell and hear in everyday existence, the ground that I walk upon and the air that I forget to see. In this sense my transition reflects what is a more primordial, carnal experience with both the human and

more-than-human world. It is the kind of unconscious process concerning relationship that feels trite, imprecise and incomplete in the way that I have sought to express it above in words.

12.5.1 Intersubjectivity and the universe

David Abram (1996) presents such a sensation of the lifeworld in his exploration of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Husserl's notion of intersubjectivity suggests that

“the field of experiences, while still a thoroughly subjective realm was...seen to be inhabited by multiple subjectivities; the phenomenal field was no longer the isolate haunt of the solitary ego, but a collective landscape, constituted by other experiencing subjects as well as by oneself.” (Abram, 1996:37).

This has some resonance with Habermas' position on intersubjectivity. However, Abram also suggests that, as part of his project to describe the “things themselves” and the world as it is experienced in its felt immediacy, Husserl developed the notion of the intersubjective world of life, the *Lebenswelt*. This development was in a more primary, corporeal dimension than a scientific, objective description of the experience. Such a view represents a unitary lifeworld that lies deeper beneath diverse cultural lifeworlds and arises from the centrality of the encompassing earth to our conceptions of space and time. These conceptions are developed from our experience of motion, rest, time and history as carnal beings present to a single earth.

For example, the contrast between our scientific language of the sun as we rotate around it and our embodied experience of a setting and rising sun evokes this carnal dimension, where we can understand that the “earth is the encompassing ‘ark of the world’, the common ‘root basis’ of all relative lifeworlds” (Abram, 1996:37). Similarly, Purser (Purser, 1997) has noted that the notion of a “globe” is abstraction since “except for astronauts most of us have never really seen or encountered a globe”. He adds that “the concern here is with how the image of the globe (which nobody can directly perceive) has displaced the environment of our immediate lifeworld” (Purser, 1997). Abram suggests that Merleau-Ponty radicalised Husserl's view, by rejecting the assumption of a self-subsistent, disembodied, transcendental ego, and recognising that “at the heart of even our most abstract cognitions (sic), [is] the sensuous and sentient life of the body itself” (Abram, 1996:37).

Abram describes how Merleau-Ponty destroys any hope that philosophy might provide a complete picture of reality by suggesting the body as the very subject of experience. He adds that at the same time Merleau-Ponty does open up the possibility of developing explanations of the world from our experienced situation *within it*, as opposed to from outside of the world. Abram goes onto show how our body exists in a flow of silent conversation with other presences. This is not a one sided flow of noticing by the perceiver of the perceived but a reciprocal and ongoing interchange, independent of verbal discourse between body and other entities. Such a view resonates with a deep ecological view of the self and ego as forwarded by ecopsychologists (Roszak, 1993; Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995) and the attempts to relocate the western psyche in the wider universe by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme (Berry, 1988; Swimme & Berry, 1992) as well as the original positions taken up by wisdom religions-traditions of Jainism and Buddhism. An underlying suggestion common to these positions is that “we are nature, we do not have nature” (Harper, 1995; Purser, 1997) ...we are the cosmos.

For me, one of the most evocative experiences of embodied presence with the more-than-human world for me came during the summer of 1999 when the south of England experienced a solar eclipse. In the week prior to the event I had listened to the scientific explanations of distance and trajectories of these various “masses” and, therefore, “knew” that the phenomenon could be reduced to the mechanics of physics. A group of us stood upon a hill here in Bath; we had bought watching glasses that would allow us to observe the eclipse. We looked skywards, noticing the Moon begin to pass in front of the Sun. But somehow, despite this knowledge about the phenomenon merely being a case of the moon’s trajectory taking it between the sun and the earth, I found my participation in this moment intensely mysterious. For somewhere within me, bodily, I experienced the situation as both untenable and beautiful; the Sun does not just disappear during the day - it rises and then falls - but, for some reason, it was deciding to hide itself from us for a moment in order to return and remind us of its life-giving centrality. As Abram suggests, “the perceiving body does not calculate logical probabilities; it gregariously participates in the activity of the world, lending its imagination to things in order to see them” (1996: 58).⁶

⁶ The kinds of relationship that I have sought to describe here will by their nature render my attempts at verbalising them through digital communication incomplete and unsatisfying. Bateson explains the difficulty of expressing such relationship far more lucidly than I could ever hope to: “It seems that the discourse of non-verbal communication is precisely concerned with matters of relationship-love, hate, respect, fear, dependency, etc. - between self and vis-à-vis or between self and environment and that the nature of human society is such that falsification of this discourse rapidly becomes pathogenic...it must follow that to translate kinesics or paralinguistic messages into words is likely to introduce gross falsification due not merely...to the distortions which arise whenever the products of one system of coding are dissected onto the premises of another, but especially to the fact that all such translation must give to the more or less unconscious and involuntary iconic message the appearance of conscious intent” (Bateson, 1972:418-419).

In beginning to relearn this fundamental connectedness and sensuous participation, I am also coming to realise that my discomfort with Habermas' disembodied authoring is not merely a stylistic problem, nor one that was fully dealt with by the pragmatising work of McCarthy. It seems to me that in silencing his own voice Habermas reveals an exclusive focus upon the human world. His ontology remains profoundly one of separation between the human-self and the more-than-human world. Hence, his conception of the lifeworld is one that seems to forget its living dimension and suggests that he seems unable to accommodate the kind of ontological shift that I have been experiencing.

Habermas' theories of system and lifeworld and communicative action, as well as McCarthy's attempts at pragmatising democratic dialogue, are based not only upon a preferential ordering of theory first and practice second but also upon a separation between self and the more-than-human lifeworld. Within the three nuclei, as defined by Habermas, we are forced to accept a dualism between the cognitive, rational mind-self and the over *anima mundi*, where the former is vastly superior over the latter. This trait is shared by other important emancipatory critical theorists - Paulo Freire's liberationist pedagogy seems no less predicated upon an ecologically separative view of the more-than-human world as disenchanted and lacking Mind.⁷ Giddens' structuration theory has similarly been criticised for repressing the sensuous quality of being (Shilling & Mellor, 1996) and is authored in an equally disembodied style as Habermas.

An important reason for my use of Habermas' work concerns its normative critique; whilst Habermas seeks to provide a theory of communicative action that is universal, it is very much framed within the material conditions of modernity, as his later works suggests (Habermas, 1987a). In this way, the normative orientation of Habermas' communicative rationality has proved to be an incredibly useful sense making device in my understandings of the challenges of systems catalysis involving powerful actors in the modern-welfare state and advanced capitalism. In contrast to the focus upon the oppressive qualities of the knowledge constitutive interests of the capitalist system and welfare-state, the normative critique of Bateson and colleagues is centred upon emancipation from the separative project of Enlightenment and its conceptualisation of the self-world relationship.

In this respect Bateson's distinction between conscious purpose and nature might help our understanding. At first, one might suggest that the definition of "technical/instrumental

⁷ While Freire critiques the banking concept of education for promoting a view that "a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others" (Freire, 1993: 56) a view of mind as present only in the human comes across in his differentiation between humans as conscious historical beings and animals as ahistorical.

reasoning” developed by Habermas and other critical theorists as discussed in section 11.3.1) offers a parallel to Bateson’s notion of “conscious purpose”. However, there is a clear and important distinction in terms of epistemology that seems to differentiate the two conceptualisations. In fact, it is not so much in terms of the overlap between technical/instrumental reasoning and conscious purpose that we should focus to understand this distinction, but upon the corollary notions of “critical/emancipatory reasoning” and “nature”.

Unlike Bateson, whose concept of Mind envelops the more-than-human and human lifeworld, “nature” for critical theorists, or what they label “emancipatory reasoning”, stops at the door of the human mind. This seems to apply whether manifested at the level of personality, society or culture for Habermas or oppressed and oppressors for Freire. Although some critical theorists, such as McCarthy do, implicitly recognise that it is the nature of mind not to be able to experience the whole of the mind in part of the mind, ultimately the transformational pivot, suggested by the democratic, open-ended discursive processes of Habermasian communicative action or Freirian dialogics, is placed in a human intellect that maintains a fundamental attempt at separation from the more-than-human world.

12.5.2 Post-Copernican double-bind

With such a separation, we in fact discover another double-bind that plagues both of these theories and, I would add also shrouds the various discourses of relational practice that I have been describing in this thesis. Richard Tarnas (1991) has described this as the post-Copernican double-bind. He suggests that the human relationship to the world is one of vital dependency and therefore it is critical that we understand the nature of the world accurately; this is the primary injunction of the bind which frames the world as the “parent”.

The secondary injunction arises from the incoherence between communication from our inner psychological and spiritual sense about our relation to the world and the scientific meta-communication that we receive about this relationship. Tarnas identifies this scientific meta-communication with a triumvirate of significant shifts in the evolution of the modern mind, starting from Copernican revolution. In recognising that the Earth was not the fixed centre of the universe and that the movement of the heavens could be explained in terms of the movement of the observer, Copernicus relativised the place of the human in the cosmos. Newly framed, the human mind deconstructed the naïve understanding and filled the space with the

“critical recognition that the apparent condition of the objective world was unconsciously determined by the condition of the subject, the consequent liberation from the ancient and medieval cosmic womb, the radical displacement of the human being to a relative and peripheral position in a vast and impersonal universe, the ensuing disenchantment of the natural world” (Tarnas, 1991: 417).

This radical displacement with respect to the cosmos was enhanced by Darwin who told us that we were equally insignificant in the context of the evolution on the planet.

The liberation from the universe and our resultant disenchantment from it following the Copernican revolution, was augmented when Descartes took the philosophical step that accorded with the new understanding of the self-world relationship. He posited that the autonomous modern self was fundamentally distinct and separate from an objective external world that it sought to understand. Descartes, subsequently supported by modern science, created a “schism between the personal and conscious human subject and the impersonal material universe”, whereby the world was understood as devoid of spiritual purpose and without intrinsic meaning (Tarnas, 1991).

Finally, Kant extended the ontological schism on to its epistemological consort by affirming that all human knowledge is interpretive, that all human knowledge is relative and un-rooted. The human mind cannot claim direct knowledge of the objective world because of the structuring effects of its own internal organisation. So instead the human knows the world-as-rendered-by-the-human-mind and not the world-in-itself. The Kantian dilemma has been drawn out by the postmodern discourses from the sociology of knowledge to the philosophy of science, and with respect to Nietzsche, Foucault, Wittgenstein, Kuhn and others. These have all told us that human knowledge is interpretive, meaning is rendered by the mind and “radical uncertainty prevails, for in the end what one knows and experiences is to an indeterminate extent a projection” (Tarnas, 1991: 419). The third injunction comes through this Kantian dilemma with the fact that, epistemologically, the human mind cannot achieve direct communication with the world. Finally, there is no possibility for the human being (“victim”) to leave the field of the bind. As a result

“we seem to receive two messages from our existential situation: on the one hand strive, give oneself to the quest for meaning and spiritual fulfilment; but on the other hand, know that the universe, of whose substance we are derived, is entirely

indifferent to that quest, soulless in character and nullifying in its effects. We are at once aroused and crushed. For inexplicably, absurdly, the cosmos is inhuman, yet we are not. The situation is profoundly unintelligible” (Tarnas, 1991: 420, italics mine).

Part of the message structure of this Post-Copernican double-bind has been revealed by postmodern language critiques of scientific objectivity, the realisation that the scientific meta-communication is only one form of practice (Toulmin, 1996) and that this form of meta-comment seems to require that we deny our own innate wisdom (Harman, 1996). However, whilst deconstructive postmodernism seeks to critique modernism’s epistemological grand narratives, it does not offer an alternative conceptualisation or “central myth” (Harman, 1996) that can include our embodied experience of the creative world and universe. As Spretnak suggests, the “nihilism implicit in deconstructive postmodernism is *simpatico* with the larger dynamics of disintegration and loss meaning in our time: the death of the planetary Grand Subject, the ruin of the majestic ecosphere that gives us life and is our greater body” which needs a “creative orientation of *attentive* and *respectful* engagement with the natural world, from our own body to the unfolding presence of the entire cosmos” (Spretnak, 1991: 261). Abram adds that, whilst deconstructionist thinkers seek to deny all philosophical foundations, Merleau-Ponty’s work suggests that

“underneath all those admittedly shaky foundations, there remains the actual ground that we stand on, the earthly rock and soil that we share with the other animals and plants....Unlike all the human-made foundations we construct upon its surface, the silent stony ground itself can never be grasped in a purely human act of comprehension. For it has, from the start, been constituted (or “constructed”) by many organic entities besides ourselves” (Abram, 1996).

From the deconstructive fallout, the synthesis that is emerging is one where “the human self is both highly autonomous and differentiated, yet re-embedded in a participatory relationship to a meaning laden universe” (Tarnas, 2000:11).

12.5.3 Democratic discourse in a more-than-human world

It seems that in critical theory, as explored by Habermas, the lifeworld and system exist within an entirely human universe and a disinterested cosmos. But if we are coming to remember that this is not true and if we re-accept that Mind is immanent in both the more-than-human and

the human world in their entirety then our understanding of democratic discourse may also need to include the more-than-human lifeworld. Ergo the concepts of lifeworld and system must also move out beyond the limits of the human psyche. Whilst remaining theoretically attached to only human limits, an analysis of the lifeworld-system boundary crises will not be able to transcend the self-world dualism engendered by the Enlightenment; locked into such a position it would remain wedded to a concept of *human power over* as a function of our fear of an uncaring and disenchanted universe. Within the pattern of such an argument it seems to me that the very notion of democracy may be grounded in the universe; whilst the modern consciousness has framed the universe as fundamentally uncaring because it does not differentiate between forms of consciousness it is, perhaps, the utter impartiality of the universe amongst all of its creations that has fostered “democracy” as a human interpretation of this impartiality. This ecological root is recognised in the Jain philosophy of *anekant* and in George Santayana’s statement “in nature, there is no foreground or background, no here, no moral cathedra, no centre so really central as to reduce all other things to mere margins and mere perspectives” (cited in Bowers, 1993)

Whilst we maintain a position that meaningful speech is only a human capacity, then we will deny our fundamental connection in the cosmos. In this way, I suggest that Habermas’ universal validity claims may need to be expanded to include communicative action with the locally experienced more-than-human lifeworld in order to deal with the underlying ontological shift suggested by a participatory worldview for sustainability. The shift I have experienced has requested a qualitative transformation in my understanding of the three nuclei of the lifeworld and the associated reproduction processes of communicative action. This shift has come about through a recognition of the inclusion of “self” as part of a universe discourse - my lifeworld in communicative action with the cosmos as they go about their mutual creative reproduction, destruction and mystery.

We could perhaps, then, add to the three structural nuclei - society, culture and personality - a fourth, the cosmos. This would refer to an ecological, embodied nucleus grounded in our phenomenal experience of the world and could go beyond a definition of lifeworld aspects of personality, culture and society that currently seem restricted by the notion of a “separative self”. The orientation of communicative action in the cosmos nucleus could be towards a symbolic reproduction of our fundamental co-participation with the unfolding universe. We may pragmatise communicative rationality not only in the context of everyday human life, but also in the context of the life of the ecology and cosmos, for example through symbolic practices of communion.

In doing so we would have the epistemological space to move beyond restricted concerns of the rational intellect and we might begin “to enter into that which we seek to know” (Tarnas, 2000). It would open up the possibility that the lifeworld reproduction processes are themselves in phase of ontological and epistemological transition.

The cosmos nucleus might also allow the “system”, as defined in anthropocentric terms, to be recognised as multiply constructed and nested within a larger self-organising whole “universe system” or “more-than-human system”. Thus, strategic action for material reproduction of the “system”, previously understood only as a human system, might be adjusted to include the roles that we take in action contributing towards the drama of the “more-than-human system.” We could also add to the validity claims of democratic discourse, for truth would also now include a way of being that strives to maintain a faithful and celebratory relationship to the sensuous earth and our participation as a species in a wider universe story (Swimme & Berry, 1992; Berry, 1988). It would recognise as Abram says “the complex interchange that we called “language” is rooted in the non-verbal exchange that is always already going on between our flesh and the flesh of the world”. It would also acknowledge that our “human language is informed not only by the structures of the human body and the human community, but by the evocative shapes and patterns of the more-than-human terrain” (1996: 90). Thus, democracy may be shifted to include discourse with the more-than-human lifeworld and away from a privileging of human communication.

12.6 Participation and sustainability

Coursing through the entire story of this thesis have been the concepts and practices concerning participation. In the previous section of this chapter (12.5) I have just described the possibility that sustainability may require a shift in the concept of democracy in order to encompass participation with the more-than-human lifeworld. Elsewhere, I have discussed the relationship between Living Earth and Shell in terms of their desire to work together for their organisational objectives. Both of these organisations also sought to engage with the communities in the Niger Delta in a participatory manner. Living Earth’s internal organisational structure was suggested to be a participatory one, while Shell was (and still is) seeking to adjust its relationships with specific “host” communities around the world and society in general towards more open, participative stance and tone.

Meanwhile, I attempted to conduct my inquiry with Shell and Living Earth in a participatory manner, in part through the use of a learning history. I would consider the relationship between myself and Peter Reason, my supervisor, as an example of participation that encompassed engagement in strong lifeworld interactions, whilst also working within system conditions⁸. And throughout my exposition of the thesis I have sought to relate to you, the reader, in a more open-ended way than traditional academic writing usually tends to. All of this might well be placed within the context of a range of discourses and practices emanating from the project for sustainability that have highlighted the importance of building partnerships and collaborative engagements, and from research practices that are seeking to highlight the importance of relationality in knowing. Finally, my initial framing of sustainability placed it alongside the emergence of a participatory worldview as a way of being and acting that recognises the deep interconnectivity within the world.

Yet, I have not *defined* participation anywhere. What does it mean to participate in transition towards sustainability? Are there varieties and dimensions that differentiate between both theories and practices of participation? Is it useful to think of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of participation?

At the end of 12.1 I quoted Bateson with reference to the ability of some people to “lie with kinesics”. I then suggested that we might draw some parallels between descriptions of such people and the activities of a range of businesses that are currently seeking to redefine their relationship with society. This movement between personal and organisation levels of attention has been another constant aspect of this inquiry. In the previous section (12.2) I discussed the transition that I have felt in my sense of self during these last few years and that the movement from a separative-self towards a fully relational-self required the acceptance of the more-than-human lifeworld as one of the important nodes for this relationality. Earlier, in chapter 3, I noted that attention to relationality in organisations has been increasing in both theory and practice and that one manifestation of this was the emergence of the NGO-business collaboration. Practitioners as well as postmodern organisation theorists have fostered a realisation that, in the same way that individually/personally we cannot separate our understandings of self from the people with whom we relate, organisations are defined, not only and simply by their internal structure and operations, but also by their relationships with other organisations and society.

⁸ My relationship with Peter has been significant for my ability to ‘go-on’ in my transition. In many ways the relationship between a student and supervisor is fraught with potential difficulties as the situation is one which repeatedly criss-crosses the boundaries between system and lifeworld. I have been fortunate to have, in my relationship with Peter, a way of

So we might ask the question “what contribution can the participation of a ‘relational organisation’ make in achieving sustainability?” Can we suggest that a transition, from organisations defined by modernist practices of artificial separation from society (the “separative organisation” where the state of society was of little or no concern), through forms of strategic manipulation and pastiche personality and then, finally, to a relational organisation? Can we suggest that such a transition offers a vision in our search for sustainability?

In this last section, then, rather than seeking to make conclusive definitions of participation, I would like to juxtapose a consideration of participation at two levels: participation when conceived at the inter-organisation/organisational level with participation considered at a personal level.

12.6.1 The relational organisation?

Recent practice might be considered to suggest that most organisations have moved away from behaviour that maintains separation from the rest of society and other organisations. Fordist type projects of creating a “separative-business” are no longer considered a possibility. For many businesses the importance of relationality has come, in part, as a function of operational concerns, where the “right” relationships enable certain actions (for example, in supply and distributor chains).

However, relationality has also been used as a source of symbolic representation, where the “right” relationships confer appropriate perceptions and attitudes. With the current phase of economic globalisation and increase in corporate power, multinational companies have sought to balance the perception of power by developing notions of responsibility in business practice, of corporate citizenship and responsibility that accord with various “new social movements” associated with sustainability (Phillips, 2000). However, confronted with the multiplicity of these different movements, businesses have tended to play a range of different roles in order to suit the various movements, as well as their sense of core identity in the form of profit making organisations. The initial results would seem to suggest that businesses have associated with aspects of these movements in order to *show* attachment to their ideals but have not really managed anything more substantial. Similarly, one might add that the associational revolution in NGOs (Fisher, 1997) suggests they have become attached to a discourse and practice of relationality.

This form of concern for relationality would seem to echo Gergen's sense that a formerly separative-self is forced into the strategic manipulation of a range of "self investments" that confer the appropriate identity but through which manipulation, eventually, the self eventually becomes "lost in the charade" (1991). Perhaps, some businesses and NGOs have begun to move beyond this strategic manipulation (as they seek relationships with a range of organisations and movements) towards forms of organisations that, recognising the "merit of multiplicity" and construction, develop "pastiche personalities", which become many things to many people (the stakeholder corporation). And perhaps, when these pastiche organisations realise that all the multiplicity merely collapses the difference between "image" and "the real", they may move on towards a way of being that challenges the intelligibility of an "autonomous organisation-self" and move forward into becoming "relational organisations", that cease to believe in themselves as independent of relationship. From here, it is may be just one small step towards realising an ecology of sustainable organisations or organisations contributing towards sustainability.

12.6.2 False consciousness versus joy of participation

Whilst such a picture offers an interesting vision, my sense is that a discourse of relational organisations and associated discourses of stakeholder engagement, NGO-business relationships, corporate citizenship and NGOs engaged in participatory development with communities, may also be hugely problematic, in the light of the very different qualities of participation at the personal compared to organisational level.

In this thesis I have sought to emphasise the importance of reflection and action - praxis - in transition towards sustainability. However, I now wonder whether by framing the notion of a *transition toward* sustainability there is a danger of highlighting one interpretation of this movement and obscuring another. The adoption of an alternative root metaphor or guiding myth for society requires that it contributes to sense making for all individuals. At the heart of this alternative metaphor is the need for an epistemological shift that challenges the dominant ways of knowing and the ways of understanding the relationship between self and world. These are deep changes and they seem to require considerable work; in this light the notion of a transition *towards* a way of being might be useful. However, in suggesting that we are engaged in a transition towards sustainability, it is possible that I have perpetuated a language in which the project of sustainability is defined by some end target towards which we must "drive" and "work" and the attainment of which point will signify the end, the final solution.

Like democracy, sustainability is not defined in terms of some end-place where, upon arrival, we can relax in the knowledge that we are sustainable; it is a way of being, thinking and acting in the world in which we are continually *becoming*. Whilst the notion of *working towards* sustainability is an important one, there is a danger of falling into a pattern in which such sustainability becomes defined in terms of the work required towards achieving it and the work towards achieving sustainability becomes defined in the narrow terms of methodology. Such a work-based, methodological project, then, shapes sustainability in terms of some global management project that seeks to discover the technical, expert-centred solution for our fragmented world.

As I have suggested, we can see such an orientation in the response by business towards the challenges of sustainability and the theoretical research output of the academic community with respect to organisations and sustainability. The isomorphism, in which theory and practice have constructed sustainability as a methodological puzzle to be solved by disembodied, objectifying hard-working experts, excludes the passionate side of this project - the play and joy of participation.

12.6.3 Methodologies of the powerful

The discourses of NGO-business relationship, corporate citizenship for sustainable development and a potential language of a relational organisation are increasingly imbuing organisations with “rights”, “responsibilities”, “sincerity” and so on. Recently, the formation of the Global Compact between the UN and multinational business “asks *companies* to undertake three commitments” and “seeks to weave universal *values* and principles into global *corporate behaviour*” (Ruggie, 2000, italics mine). The language is similar to much of the theory and practice used in the context of business-NGO relationships and business involvement with sustainability; it seems to imply that “organisations” themselves can do things to transform the world. It is a language that imbues the company or NGO with morality, ethic and sensibility and the ability to act upon these.

By constructing and (increasingly heeding) the language of corporate citizenship and organisational engagement for sustainability there is a possibility that we blur further the level of human agency. Such a discourse further legitimises the reification of organisations as entities that exist outside of human construction and individual action. Whilst we might consider organisations to have cultures, emotions and values, they exist, are forged and

maintained by the interaction between individuals. A fragmented consciousness, which has allowed and continues to perpetuate a lack of solidarity, a lack of awareness of our interdependence and inter-connection (not only with each other but also with the environment), is rooted/grounded within the individual being not within the amorphous mass that is a multinational company.

It seems that in locating participation within the prodigious abstraction of an organisation there is a greater tendency to forge the project of sustainability in the direction of a methodological accomplishment; the notion of participation is considered as something that is said and done once-and-for-all, as opposed to “ongoing-ly” accomplished. For example, with respect to NGO-business relationships, attempts to proffer objectified, across-the-board generalisations, about what organisations to engage and how develop organisational partnership, seem to obscure the need for reflection and the development of an in-the-moment awareness by individuals experiencing such relationship. As a result the individual within the organisation is excused of or excluded from the need to engage in the hard work and play of transforming fragmentary power relations and epistemologies into more socially just and environmental sustainable ways of being. Instead the work of participation is left to the “organisation”. Since an organisation cannot experience an epistemological transformation without transition of the individuals within, the result is an over-riding tendency for technical reasoning that takes a purely methodological orientation towards change.

In my inquiry I have sought to enact the latent qualities of participatory action research that define it as a way of becoming, as a way of shifting epistemology through the transformation of theories, practices and capacities for critical praxis. I have been forced to recognise that, even as a would-be systems catalyst, my own capacities require on-going reflexive transformation. However, in the same way that sustainability has been defined by elites as a methodological problem-solving project, there is a sense that some members of broad family of action research can and are adopting such entrenching, as opposed to transformative, patterns of theory and practice. I make this comment with specific reference to my experience with the learning history method.

Although my own first-person research/practice has advanced considerably while I have used the method, my experience of the learning history suggests that the ability to foster such inquiry amongst participants based upon the exclusive use of such a tool may be a difficulty. Whilst it was a useful intervention in my work with Shell and Living Earth, there is evidence that as a process it is tending towards becoming an institutionalised tool for powerful actors to

extract learning from situations, without developing the reflexive capacities of participants. When, in the light of my own attempts at enacting the methodology, I first reflected back upon the descriptions forwarded by learning history method pioneers, such as Roth and Kleiner (1995), it seemed to me that I had failed to fully follow the kind of practice that they describe. However, it now seems to me that the learning history itself may be problematic in the context of change for sustainability. This is so because it is presented as a complete pattern of activity, in which an historian or group of historians seek to enable an organisation and the individuals within to make sense of some event or project.

The learning history is suggested to have the potential to change frames within an organisation, through double-loop feedback, as well as strategy, through single-loop feedback. However, unlike co-operative inquiry, where cycles build upon each other through gradual, repeated and steadily, habit-creating patterns of interaction, action and reflection, the learning history seems to build more “nested” cycles between action and reflection that triangulate across a range of activities and interaction settings. Whilst the reflective interviews have been suggested to be valuable to research participants, the learning history does not focus upon building the capacity of the individual participants to engage in cycles of action and reflection through their own, unique first-person research/practices beyond the time of the inquiry. In this light, there are questions about how much and in what ways the learning history method can help to foster enduring and transformative first-person inquiry beyond the specific organisational context in which it is conducted and instead towards ongoing personal, non-work and societal learning.

As with any second-person research/practice challenges lie in avoiding devolution back into habitual, unilateral behaviour. My experience suggests that the pattern of interaction tends towards one in which the methodology is seen as a tool which powerful “historians” can use and that fails to empower local participation in developing knowledge and capacity for self-reflexive awareness and practice. In this way the learning history seems to be tending towards an institutional approach to inquiry that is replete with reified roles, functions and codes. The narrative device of the learning history seems to be a dialogical experiment that allows the powerful and the “other” to continue to engage in mimetic patterns of mutual oppression, “expert faith” (Gaventa, 1993) and fragmentation. This is as opposed to a form of second-person inquiry that becomes “increasingly mutual, loving, listening, disclosing and confronting” (Torbert, 2001).

It seems that a recourse to roles and methods in a learning history lets me - the individual sitting at my computer in my comfortable office - off the hook. “I” - in the embodiment as

person and not as a functional role taker - do not have to do the hard thinking, the re-evaluation and reconciliation between what I have done and still do in my inquiry to entrench a system that has allowed the injustice, disparity and destruction to be so great. I can maintain the objectified and fragmented voice of a role-taker and avoid having to inter-relate the action that I must do in all aspects of my life, at work and at play, in the office and home and within Gaia, that would make a transformation whole.

Similarly, if we enter an argument about a thesis that NGOs, since they are the “frontmen” of the “Lords of Poverty” (Fisher, 1997; Hancock, 1989), can never act legitimately to catalyse the emancipation of the powerless against an anti-thesis that NGOs, through their engagement can change the powerful and offer the disempowered and endangered (communities and ecology) a better position within our society, we may be facing towards the dilemma in the wrong way. The engagement between NGOs and business, the presence of Western development aid and the ubiquitous incursion of the system values of money and power are pragmatic realities.

Perhaps, a way to orient towards these realities is instead to find ways in which first-order developmental changes, in the way that organisations or institutions “act”, can be built up with the change directed towards the individual consciousness. Through such a dialectic of first-order and second order-changes, then maybe our organisations (business, NGOs, government) can begin to hold forth the kind of space for the work and play in communities of inquiry and practice capable for deeper epistemological change in society.

From the pragmatics of Batesonian communication theory and the existence of a post-Copernican double-bind, we can understand that schizophrenia is not in the individual member of the modern-welfare state, but in the relationships between self and other that collectively define the present world myth. Therefore while we still retain even the slightest whiff of a fragmented epistemology, all our relationships and communication will tend to exhibit schizophrenez. We are not seeking emancipation from the mother/world (for this is not possible). Instead we need to free ourselves from our attempts at separating ourselves from her by avoiding direct communication. If we propagate a fragmentary consciousness, through, for example, allowing a separation between institutions and companies from the individual lifeworlds of people that together create them, between social structures and personal morality through discourse of corporate participation and citizenship, then the opportunity for engaging in critical personal reflection and inquiry, as a task for both the powerful and disempowered, may well be sidelined, entirely missed or obscured behind a veil of discourse that shifts, chameleon-like, to suit the background context. We must, then, soak ourselves in languages

such that we can begin to reconnect and transform our lifeworld communication in the wider cosmos.

12.6.4 Quality of inquiry - quality of becoming

Bateson in his work with digital and analogic communication suggested that it is possible for the structure of an argument to communicate in a way that is concordant or discordant with the argument itself (1972). Having noted above that I have not “defined” participation anywhere in this thesis, I now retract that statement. I have sought to join the special olympics (never quite as grand nor commercial as the original games) being elaborated in an ever-growing corner of the epistemological playground, in which my inquiry has treated research as activism towards changing our ways of knowing. An important aspect of this transformation is the enactment of a participatory way of being. So because there is “nothing particularly participation-like about the word participation”, I hope that the structure of the argument in this thesis has manifested some of the qualities that such an ontology might demand of our attempts to know about the world and against which we might consider the value of this inquiry.

We might also pose similarly reflexive and postmodern questions (see Kvale, 1995; Lather, 1993, 1997, 1995; Bradbury, 2001; Reason, 1996) about my inquiry in terms of sustainability. The amount of research and “knowledge” produced in the name of sustainability over the last few years has been staggering. And this thesis is another addition to the reams of paper printed in the name of achieving ecological sustainability and social justice. Whilst it may seem overly tongue-in-cheek to do so, what happens when we ask a very simple question about the quality of this inquiry, viz.: “is this work worth the paper its has been printed on (and ink that has been printed with)?” In the context of our closed earth system, in what ways am I to consider the addition of my work to a library, already groaning under the weight of new publications and “knowledge”. In what ways can I understand the fact that I *had to* follow current “specifications” at the University of Bath and print this thesis on only one side of each sheet of paper? Could I suggest that looking through our kaleidoscope towards the vision-less vision of sustainability one way of assessing my inquiry, in terms of first-order changes, might reveal that if I had printed on both sides of each sheet then some understanding of the quality of my practice would have doubled? What could we suggest about the quality of inquiry, in terms of a second-order change, if I replied that I had engaged in a discourse about creating such change in practice? In the midst of this dialectical pattern of change, we might finally wonder whether this inquiry is “worthy of the term significant” (Bradbury & Reason, 2001) given that the Earth

is dying and given that, on this sunny morning in early summer, I hear some hills here in Bath calling for my participation?

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