Serious Play
glimpses of that other field

… observation […inquiry…] proceeds from one thing to the next and then actually becomes creative itself. The decisive thing, then, is not just what is in front of you, but whether or not you can make the connection that exists between one thing and the other. To this extent that this is possible, observation becomes insight
Joseph Beuys, 23 April 1979 (in Beuys and Harlan, 2004: 62)

In this chapter I pick an essentially linear path through a richly populated set of interrelated, distinctly non-linear influences, resonances and learnings around the themes of the bittersweet, joyful, life affirming poignancy of experiencing the clown archetype (both at work and play), of attempting to act in ways that are more generative than destructive and of the ups and downs of making and missing contact across difference. How does each theme in-form and deepen my experience of the other? How do my visceral responses to experiencing the clown archetype offer me insight into my wider yearnings, intentions and purposes? My aspiration is to bring the whole lot together and work at the intersections where presentational meets other ways of knowing, where art and intellect compare notes, where irreducible difference makes contact, where the clown meets the scholar and where uppers and lowers cross paths in their shared humanity. When I look back at my inquiring journey as a whole, I see myself holding an intention to find and create contexts where contact across a sense of shared humanity and connection with the more-than-human world might arise, and I see myself dwelling in those contexts most often through presentational knowing and play.

The experiences underlying this part of my inquiry have been non-linear both in terms of chronology (with my learning going back and forwards in time through new realisations, synthesis and understandings) and in terms of written expression. The essentially linear form of text doesn't seem to match with this multifaceted inquiry. Returning to that idea of curating my own work, I see my inquiry more like a room to be encountered as a whole with images and ideas displayed on walls and tables and cabinets.

My desire here is to build a rich and relevant picture, and my fear is twofold: first, not making the interconnections that I feel sufficiently explicit to be grasped by others; and second, killing the spirit of the inquiry by telling what the connections are in a lumpen, leaden way. I want this chapter to engage in a way that is "impossibly double, simultaneously the stake and the shifting sands" (Diamond, in Salverson, 2006: 149). French philosopher, Luce Irigaray says that: "it is not, therefore, a question of uttering a truth valid once and for all but of trying to make a gesture,

faithful to the reality of yesterday and that of today, that indicates a path toward more continuity, less tearing apart, more interiority, concentration, harmony - in me, between me and the living universe, between me and other(s)" (Irigaray, 2002: 22).

I have identified five themes to work with, which I believe appear in one form or another across the full range of my working and learning: working with the lowers; working with the uppers, and especially clearly in the stripped down, laid bare world of the clown on the stage. The process of identifying and naming these themes has been a long slow coalescence of: attempting to articulate the similarities and common attributes I felt across the different fields of my work and life (but couldn't quite name); following research trails around others' literature (and where their references lead me) to see if what I was trying to put my finger on had already been articulated (or, for all I knew, was a whole, well documented branch of some obscure discipline) and of reading back and forth across my own writings and memories of the last five years (looking for repeating patterns and questions that just won't go away). In addition, I carried a concern that any themes which I drew out would enable me to say what I wanted to say without force fitting material under headings such that the material came to serve the neatness of the headings rather than the headings serving and illuminating the material. Each of the five interrelated themes now has a name to work with, which I am showing here (no particular order)[204]:

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

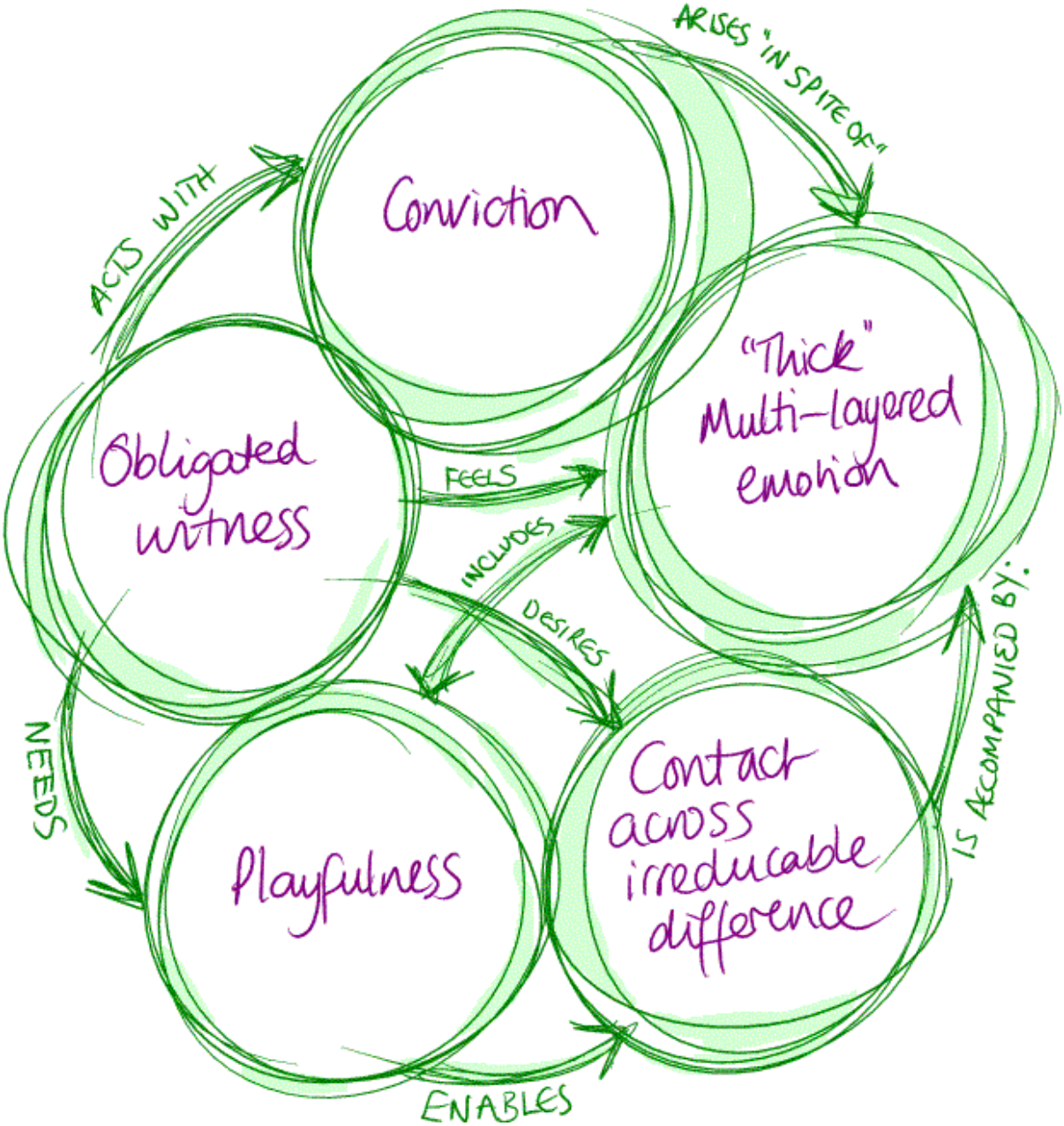
- **Playfulness**
  which enables…

- **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.

[204] *A small rant from a self- and socially repressed, politically sparky voice:* as it turns out, some of these interrelated themes appear under the academic heading of "ethics in feminist philosophy". If I foreground this wording, then it seems to me that, combined with my advocacy for a stronger, more integrated presentational knowing in the field of action inquiry (with all its subjectivities…), then I place my self triply in marginal space. And yet, what I am writing about seems common sense to me and I am reluctant to see myself perching on the edge of mainstream acceptability. What else are we going to do in the face of social and ecological destruction? Continue destroying all around us in individualistic, melancholic, theoretical, miserable, disconnected ways? *Rant finished.*



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Multi-layered, "thick" emotion

What would happiness be that was not measured
by the immeasurable grief at what is?
Adorno, (in Salverson, 2006: 146)

Clowning is an invitation not to ignore the bad stuff, but to find,
even in that, lightness…
Gladwell (in conversation, 10 March 2006)

In August 2004, I went on my fifth clowning course, this time at Ringsfield Hall, a brick Victorian farmhouse used as a Christian Ecology centre in East Anglia. The week, run by clowning teacher Vivian Gladwell and theatre director Robert McNeer, was called "The Clown and Shakespeare". I was particularly attracted to this week because the Shakespeare play we'd be working with was "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Vivian had mentioned that we'd inevitably be bumping into issues of our relationship with nature and ecology as the course progressed.

I was excited by the prospect. Here was a chance for me to bring together clowning's heightened experiences of improvisation, presence and response with my bittersweet

feelings of loss and celebration around the "anima mundi" of deep ecology[205]. I experience both in fleeting, often poignant moments. For me, experiencing the clown archetype is a congruent way of expressing what I feel when I sniff the sweet first and then finally the cloying last of the honeysuckle blossoms at the far end of the village on my dog walks. The clown's exaggerated emotional response helps me recognise and express my own feelings from behind the "safety" of the red nose mask. It's OK for the clown to be exhilarated and devastated all at once at the sight of a flower. During "The Clown and Shakespeare", I felt I could experiment directly with the connection I intuited between the clown's and the deep ecologist's responses to the world and see how that connection felt in practice.

The event led to a stream of shared inquiry, including taped recorded discussions between Vivian and me (at his house in the Pyrenees during October 2004) about the links we intuited between the clown archetype and the attitude of deep ecology, making the transcriptions of these discussions into a jointly produced piece of writing (during 2005), and finally taking our learning and thoughts into a wider arena of inquiry by convening an experimental weekend workshop, *Gaia's Playground*, which was held in May 2006 at Hawkwood College, Gloucestershire, with nine participants. During the workshop, we invited participants to hold and evolve their own inquiry questions under the umbrella of "what is the relationship between the clown and the ecologist?"[206]

Over the two days, we cycled through a series of clowning exercises punctuated with conversations about how participants intuited the relevance of clown for connecting more meaningfully with the more than human world. Like Gaulier's call to "live and love in the shit," (mentioned in the earlier chapter, *Have fun, shit*) during our discussions, Vivian said:

"What makes clowns so funny is how they carry this contrasting inner optimism and faith despite living with tragedy. Clowning shows us a way of overcoming what is tragic in our lives, not through denial but through living very intensively through it. Clowns live in tragedy without being destroyed by it. It's the stuff of children's cartoon where characters get mangled, trampled on and cut into pieces only to be healthy and running the next second. Roadrunner, Tom and Jerry, they are calling us to believe in eternal rebirth" (Gladwell, 2004, in discussion).

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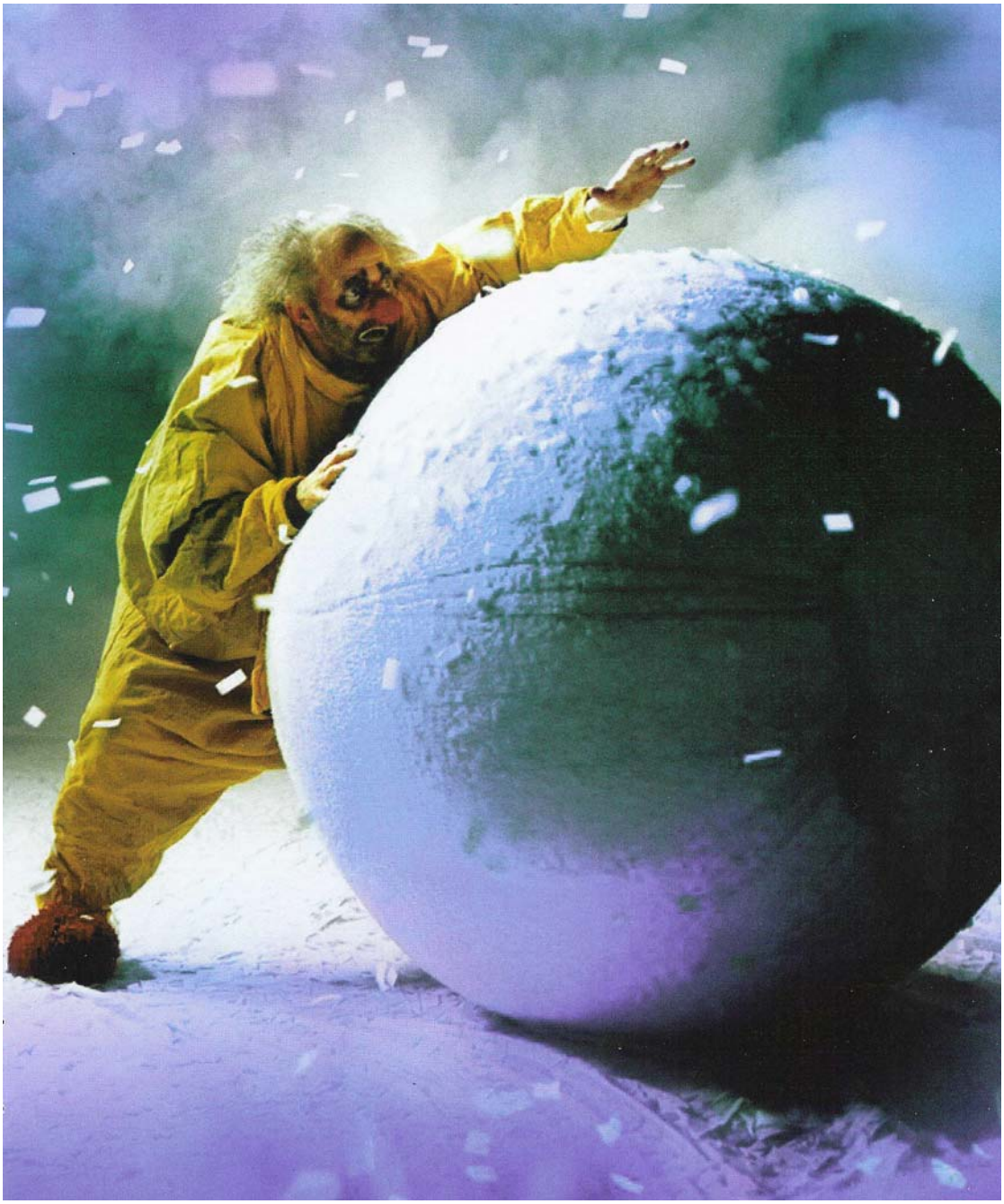
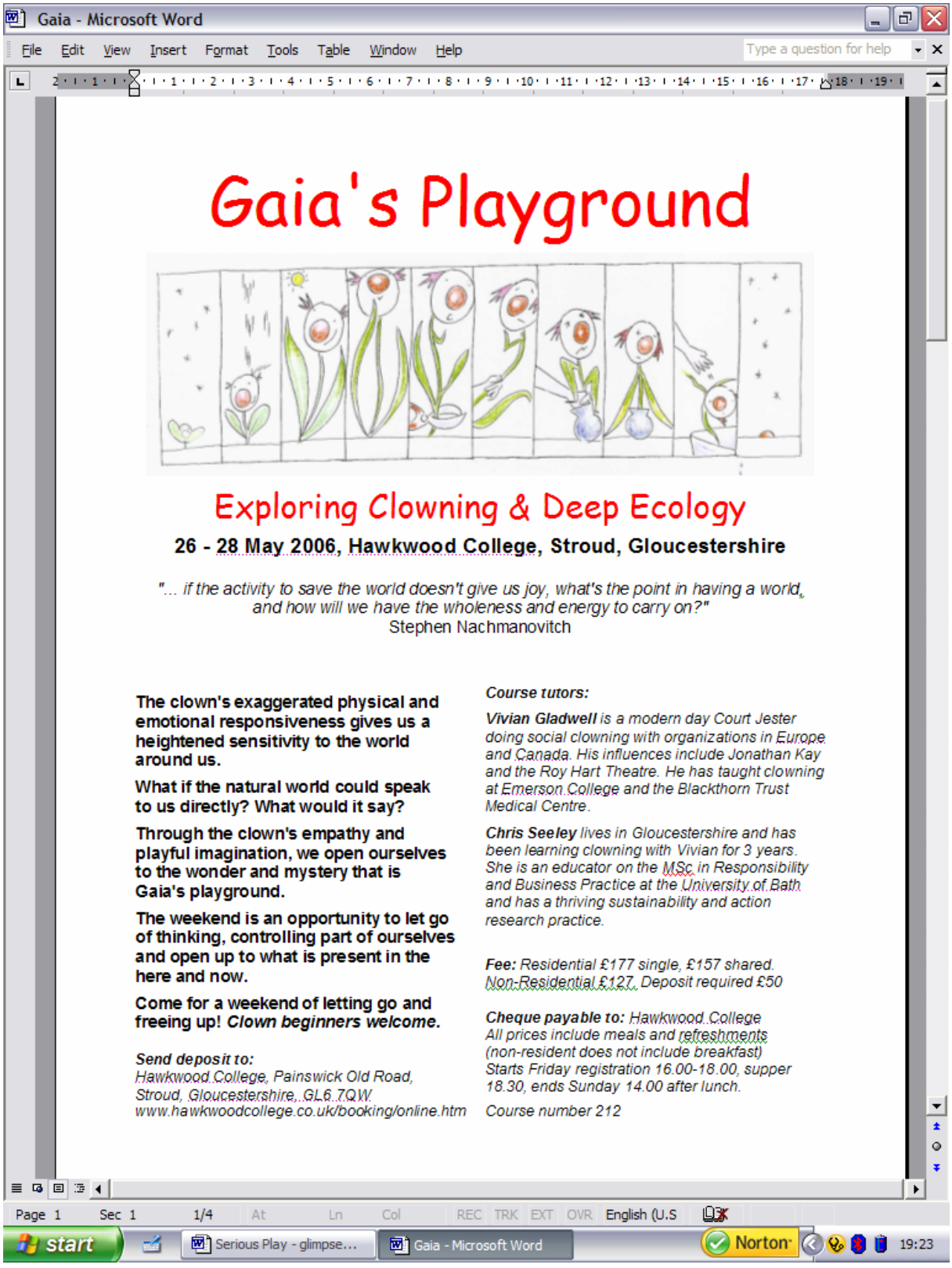
[205] "Deep ecology is a recent branch of ecological philosophy ("ecosophy") that considers the human species as an integral part of its environment (Naess, 1990). It places more value on other species, ecosystems and processes in nature than is allowed by established environmental and green movements, and therefore leads to a new system of environmental ethics. Deep ecology describes itself as 'deep' because it is concerned with fundamental philosophical questions about the role of human life as one part of the ecosphere, rather than with a narrow view of ecology as a branch of biological science, and aims to avoid merely utilitarian environmentalism based on the well-being of humans alone" (slightly adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/deep_ecology).

[206] "Clown" derives from the Anglo-Saxon "clod" (as in a clod of earth). A clod was a lowly, down-to-earth person, like a lump from the soil.





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To repeat: "Clowning shows us a way of overcoming what is tragic in our lives, not through denial but through living very intensively through it". During the *Gaia's Playground* workshop, several participants voiced similar double-edged experiences:

"*There's not a good future, in the distance, it's not there, if [Lovelock's] right, but I hope to god he's not. But whatever, life goes on; evolution will take its course. Clowning, I think, could add into the pathos of that. That's it, that's what it is, the great joys, sorrows, consumption, new birth. But life goes on. And the clown gets into the sadness of it, and it's a mystery and it's real. And that's what clown is to me, in some ways make believe, but entering into it feels like real. Most of us here, it seems to me, have shown something of our real selves through clowning"* (committed ecologist after his first experience of clowning, May 2006).

"there was a lot of lightness... The one image that strikes me, that is wonderful, is how we laugh, we can laugh at guilt… we've talked about [feeling guilty], and there it is on stage, in a big way, the embodied way. And the embodied way is when we're squashed on the floor and we're having a great time and yet it speaks profoundly about how we destroy ourselves also in that process. And how, it's basically, I fundamentally trust that our responsiveness to what is happening outside is the only way forward. I think that clowning teaches us this over-the-top responsiveness. It just goes over-the-top, that's the joyfulness that comes out of taking it to the extreme" (Gladwell, May 2006).

The Norwegian philosopher and deep ecologist, Arne Naess makes a similar point "According to Spinoza, the power of an individual is infinitely small compared with that of the entire universe, so we must not expect to save the whole world. The main point… is that of activeness. By interacting with extreme misery, one gains cheerfulness. And this interaction need not be direct. Most of us can do more in indirect ways by using our privileged position in rich societies" (Naess, 1995: 251).

In my interview for a place as a participant on the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice at the University of Bath six years previously in the Autumn of 1998, I tried to express this bittersweet feeling: "Since my father's death, I've had this feeling that its amazing that anything is alive and just as I am looking at, say, at a new flower, I can also see its inevitable dying. I don't know what do when I get this feeling".

During the MSc course, two of our guest speakers, Nick Mayhew and Richard Layzell, were performers. Both, in their own ways pointed out the absurdity and destructiveness of industrialised living, and both celebrated the inquisitive, creative aspect of humanity. Richard Layzell simply read out business letters, letting them drop to the floor as he finished each formal, unreal missive. He spoke about spending some grant money on a suit and briefcase so he could do chalk pavement drawings in the City of London whilst looking like a businessman. He wrote about the madness of

being invited into a Directors' Dining Room – that such a place could still exist. He was acting as a court jester, saying the unsayable, pointing out that the Emperor had no clothes on. This touched me, churning my belly and filling my eyes with tears of… what? Not sadness or laughter, but somehow yearning and recognition. Here, someone was making manifest, expressing what I felt – life, death, artifice and reality tumbling around together. "Everything I do is real" said Richard. "It is all true." But, at that stage, I didn't explicitly make the connection back between this human absurdity and the fleeting life and death of a flower.

By the end of my time as a student on the MSc in 2001, this bittersweet question hadn't gone away (it still hasn't), and although I didn't express it directly in my written work at that stage, I did include a passage transcribed from an interview with the British playwright Dennis Potter (just before his death) (Potter, 1994). He was appreciating the blossom outside of is window at home in the Forest of Dean, not too far from where I live. I remember his appreciation of the "blossomiest blossom" he'd ever seen[207].

During a clowning improvisation at the Gaia's Playground workshop, one clown on the stage encountered a vase of tiny white flowers. After the event, Vivian and I spent some time making sense of the double-edged qualities of what had been a difficult and sometimes upsetting improvisation. Vivian said: *"another paradox is how the woman treated the snowball flowers: she protects them, loves them, holds them in her arms and yet she does not notice how she is destroying the flowers as she strokes them. It is another kind of violence, one of loving too much"*. Even (and, perhaps, especially) the blossomiest blossom will pass.

In "The Timeless Way of Building", architect Christopher Alexander says: "So finally the fact is, that to come to this, to make a thing which has the character of nature, and to be true to all the forces in it, to remove yourself, to let it be, without interference from your image-making self – all this requires that we become aware that all of it is transitory; that all of it is going to pass. Of course, nature itself is also always transitory. The trees, the river, the humming insects – they are all short-lived; they will all pass. Yet we never feel sad in the presence of these things. No matter how transitory they are, they make us feel happy, joyful. But when we make to own attempt to create nature in the world around us, and succeed, we cannot escape the fact that we are going to die. This quality, when it is reached in human beings, is always sad; it makes us sad; and we can even say that any place where a man tries to make the quality, and be like nature, cannot be true, unless we can feel the slight presence of this haunting sadness there, because we know at the same time we enjoy it, that it is going to pass." (Alexander, 1979: 154)

[207] "I see it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomiest blossom that there ever could be, and I can see it. Things are both more trivial than they ever were, and more important than they ever were, and the difference between the trivial and the important doesn't seem to matter. But the nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous" (Potter 1994)

It was only during June 2006 that I stumbled on a way to name this bittersweet feeling and, through others' propositional knowing, gain a greater sense of acceptance with this pervading sense of *happysad*[208] appreciative ambiguity. Italian conflict negotiator, Maríanella Sclavi has explored Gregory Bateson's thinking on the role of humour, and I came across her work through that path. She calls that bittersweet quality multi-layered, or "thick" emotion.

Sclavi adapted the "thick" idea from anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who in turn borrowed it from Gilbert Ryle, the originator of the term "thick description" (Ryle, 1968). Ryle wrote a "thick description is a many layered sandwich, of which only the bottom slice is catered for by that the thinnest description… this thinnest description requires a thickening, often a multiple thickening" (Ryle, 1968). Sclavi takes the idea from descriptions to emotions, and writing about the practice of a facilitator, Barbara, she says: "when Barbara manages the tension and the conflict with [the client], she is at the same time annoyed and curious, stern and disposable, hard and sweet, self-assured and worried. The strong emotions trample us, the thick ones make us freer. In other words: it's not a matter of choosing between involvement and detachment, but to practice them together, at the same time… That's why humour, irony, self-parody, benevolent satire (benevolent in the tones, since in the contents it can and needs to be fierce!) are so important, because they are the typical dynamics of involvement and detachment." (Sclavi, 2002: 6).

Apart from in strongly held spaces such as the clowning stage (where over the top responses are *de rigueur*), when I am experiencing multi-layered emotions, I am more likely to hold them in private tension than freely express what is happening. Becoming unexpectedly moved by the Anselm Kiefer painting at the Guggenheim in Bilbao is one example of this, where I stood with my throat constricted, tears almost there, a smile on my face and my teary eye contact avoiding anyone's gaze. It is as if one of the layers of emotion holds the other one in check and, frustratingly neither gets expressed fully, yet both are perceptible: one through my words and the other through my gestures. At a clown workshop on 14 May 2006, the group I was a part of explored similar issues when reviewing an improvisation during which one person on the stage became a tyrannical bacterium forcefully infecting the other clown… and

[208] In *Finnegan's Wake*, James Joyce put together the word *laughtears*. I haven't read Finnegan's Wake (that seemed like a tall order in order to give permission to use the reference here), but came across the word in performance artist Matthew Goulish's "39 Microlectures in proximity of performance". Goulish says that during treatment for cancer: "I noticed one day that when I should have laughed I laughed and cried at the same time. I could not distinguish the difference. I realized that the tears had begun to return, but in the form of what James Joyce called laughtears… It is so embarrassing to live! I felt abandoned by everything. A great sorrow fell upon my soul. I walked across the fields without salvation. I pulled a branch from some unknown bush, broke it, and brought it to my upper lip. I understood immediately that all people are innocent. We walk thousands of years. We call the sky 'sky' and the sea 'sea.' All things will change one day, and we too with them" (Goulish, 2000: 71-72). *If I could footnote a footnote, I'd now comment on noticing how the two footnotes above both concern life threatening or terminal illness, but footnoting a footnote is too far down Gergen's "virtual vertigo" of self-reflexivity, mentioned in Uncharted Territory, so I shan't… apart from repeating an aside Margaret Colquhoun whispered to me during the Goethean Science week: "this is a training for death."*

the audience: "just as you enjoy being in the role of a dictator, your enjoyment will be obvious, you can see it in your eyes. You're being two things at once" (Gladwell, 2006, in conversation).

In the ocean-side apartment in Sri Lanka, envy, desire and seduction arose in me at the same time as judgement, aversion, inverted snobbery, shame and mischief[209]. Sitting with Arurit and his daughter in his front-room-brass-casting-workshop in Moradabad, I am at once seeing through the appreciative eyes of a would-be National Geographic photographer, the reminiscing eyes of the once-a-daughter-poking-about-in-her-own-Dad's-garage, the controlling eyes of an ILO consultant with a tight deadline and the ever confused eyes of the inquirer trying to make a bit of sense out of the whole experience.

Sclavi frames "thick" emotions as being a desirable and needed attribute for the "…the joyous transformation of frames… passing from one frame to another with lightness and a sense of the complexity" (Sclavi, 2002: 3). Her work was picked up by American participatory planner, John Forester, who is also interested in ambiguity and "thick" emotions (Forester, 2003). He is particularly concerned with the use of humour (more of this in the forthcoming section on "playfulness"), saying "the politics of humour is multi-layered, incorporating multiple perspectives all at once," and referring to the work of a community planning consultant, Norma Jean McLean, who comments: "when I can say with a sense of humour that I don't take myself so seriously, it conveys that things are possible – that possibility comes through a whole band of human interaction. It comes through the pain, it comes through the laughter, it comes through our tears. It comes through grieving together, it comes through eating together. It comes through dancing. Through that whole band of human interaction we find solution, we find possibility. We find soul-mates, we find teachers" (Forester, 2003, 17-18).

It is with the MSc groups at the University of Bath (and with some other second person inquiry work) that I have been most able to share the experience of "thick" emotions with others. This often happens in the smaller "learning groups" of around four learners and me as their tutor, who meet as more intense communities of learning than the group as a whole. Here, in this more intimate space, like Matthew Goulish, we do experience sometimes *laughtears* together at the desperate absurdity of the fix we've got ourselves into as a species. I have sat with groups – all in tears for their

[209] Apparently, in Arabic, many words and their antonyms are one and the same word, for example: "mawla" means master and slave; "wala" means to follow and to lead and "fitna" means love, infatuation, passionate desire, but also means civil war and illusion. I wonder about the extent to which inquiry questions are language specific. If I was a native Arabic-speaker, perhaps the multi-layered ambiguity that interests me here wouldn't hold the same fascination (see: http://arabicgems.wordpress.com/2006/04/21/antonyms-in-arabic-are-a-strange-phenomenon/). Stephen Nachmanovitch says (of his conversations with his teacher and friend, Gregory Bateson):
"To express non-dualistic thoughts in English and related languages is very difficult. To express non-dualistic thoughts, or basic matters of preverbal learning, in the language of almost any academic discipline is just about impossible" (Nachmanovitch, 1981: 7).

own griefs – and one of the group members looks at me, still crying, and smiles, or laughs, carries on for a bit, then calms, might say something serious, might cry a little more, will laugh, and we'll carry on[210].

Meeting Buddhist and deep ecologist, Joanna Macy, was a joy and an inspiration in this respect. I remember a group session during the summer of 2005 when we were about to enter a ritual space that would enable us to speak with "future beings" about our actions, and what life is like now[211]. One of the participants put his hand up as Joanna was introducing the ritual:
"Yes?" she said.
"This exercise... I think it might make me cry," the participant said.
"Yes" she said, "people cry when they do this. Get on with it."

Complexity theorist, Doug Griffin writes about "living in the moment of paradox," (Griffin, 2002: 9) meaning living with this *and* that – crying *and* getting on with it, seduction *and* aversion, involvement *and* detachment - *at the same time*[212], saying that "the key phrase is at the same time" (Griffin, 2002: 12).

Artist Anselm Kiefer has spent years dealing with the tragedy of the Holocaust and then environmental destruction in this work, which can be disturbing and bleak. At the same time, when interviewed, he is jovial and humorous, as if one channel of communication enables one emotion or response to be expressed, whilst a different channel – potentially at the same time – allows another[213]: "He typically operates at simultaneous extremes of epic and lyric, grand and humble, transcendent image and crude material, high-holy-day prophecy and workaday artisanship. A subtle, devilish

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[210] I also sometimes receive feedback from MSc participants which seems to point to a multi-layered quality to my tutoring work, for example (from February 2006): "I've enjoyed… your energy, laughter but also your wisdom and balance", "your smile, creativity, clowning, vitality, questioning and reframing have given so much", "so many questions, so much challenge" and "you've been wise and jolly in equal measure". How do I include this kind of material without it veering uncomfortably towards hubris? Is it possible to make a positive claim without it morphing immediately into a victory narrative? Notice I have tucked it away in a footnote in a moment of "virtual vertigo".
[211] See: "Deep Time: Reconnecting with Past and Future Generations", Chapter 7 of "Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World" (Macy, 1998).
[212] Griffin makes the distinction between the positions of "either/or", "both/and" and "at the same time", offering the following examples: "The rationalist position of 'either…or' is that of the detached observer on the bank looking at the stream as a whole separate from himself and the banks… The second viewpoint, that of 'both…and', is that of a person steering a canoe on the stream. This person is constantly facing the problems that rocks present and resolving the dilemmas of constantly adjusting to retain the balance required to keep the canoe afloat and in the stream between the two banks… The third perspective, which is analogous to the sense of 'at the same time', is that of being in the stream, caught up in the generation of forward movement, with no fixed point from which to settle into the certainty of 'being a stream'" (Griffin, 2002: 13).
[213] Jungian psychoanalysts, Amy and Arnold Mindell have explored the idea of different sensory channels through which we operate, including both the basics, such as "visualization, audition, proprioception and kinesthesis" as well as "composite" channels such as "relationship" and the "world channel" (Arnold Mindell, 1985). Amy Mindell has written particularly about the "world channel" (Amy Mindell, 1996), saying that this is a "special sensitivity to the atmosphere around us… Until now, this kind of awareness has been left to shamans, mystics, spiritual teachers and saints, and perhaps those performers and artists who sense and work with the surrounding environment. By focusing on the world channel as it arises inside of us, we become modern shamans and artists who express the field in which we are living at any given moment… what does this atmosphere seem to want particularly from you?"

humor results. Kiefer rarely gets credit for being funny, which he usually is. He seems to me dead serious only in intimate dynamics of touch and tone, stuff and color. Viewed from inches away, his work can just about break your heart" (Schjeldahl 1998).

I worked with one MSc learner who for some months ping-ponged between the poles of working in a bank and being a musician. What did the world want from him? What did he want for his life? Should he escape from the rat race of the bank to live in a commune playing music, or should he stay and continue to develop the bank's understandings and practices of sustainability issues? Should he be both a banker and a musician, making sure that he left work on time to allow enough space in his life for music? As Griffin suggests in the distinction between *either* banker *or* musician, *both* banker *and* then musician or the third perspective of banker and musician *at the same time*, this MSc participant eventually came to the point where he could see that he did not want or need to be a banker during working hours and then, in serial manner, a musician only during the evenings and weekends. He gradually reframed his situation towards being a musician playing at being a banker and a banker playing at being a musician at the same time[214].

Educationalist Parker Palmer writes about "standing in the tragic gap" – maybe a rather dramatic phrase - but an idea which I think has relevance here. Palmer says: "we must learn to hold the tension between the reality of the moment and the possibility that something better might emerge… Of course, finding a third way beyond our current dilemma may be possible in theory, but it often seems unlikely in life… the pressures of ego, time, and the bottom line make it unlikely that we will find it… We live in a tragic gap – a gap between the way things are and the way we know they might be. It is a gap that never has been and never will be closed. If we want to live non-violent lives, we must learn to stand in the tragic gap, faithfully holding the tension between reality and possibility in hopes of being opened to a third way" (Palmer, 2004: 175). I believe Palmer's "tragic gap" is the place where Sclavi's multi-layered emotions coexist[215]. He goes on to say "I harbour no illusions about how hard it is to live in that gap. Though we may try to keep our grip on both reality and hope, we often find the tension too hard to hold – so we let go of one pole and collapse into the other. Sometimes we resign ourselves to things as they are and sink into cynical disengagement. Sometimes we cling to escapist fantasies and float above the fray" (Palmer, 2004: 175).

The next section, *Playfulness*, is an invitation back into that fray, a creative space of potential and possibility, unknown outcomes and close contact.

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[214] Although it was easier for him to see what the musician-mind could bring to the banker than the banker-mind could bring to the musician… ☺

[215] I also believe that the "tragic gap" is a site of possibility, potential and play… more of that coming up from Donald Winnicott's work in the next section on *Playfulness*.

Playfulness

"... the environmentalist sometimes succumbs to a joyless life that belies his concern for a better environment. This cult of dissatisfaction is apt to add to the already fairly advanced joylessness we find among socially responsible, successful people, and to undermine one of the chief presuppositions of the ecological movement: that joy is related to the environment, and to nature"
Arne Naess (1995: 250)

"...playfulness is the product of [the] shared ability to appreciate the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important – an appreciation which becomes possible only when one's aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description..."
Richard Rorty (1989: 39-40)

"...in playing, and perhaps only in playing, the child or adult is free to be creative... playing and cultural experience can be given a location if one uses the concept of the potential space between [the self and the other]"
Donald Winnicott (1971: 53)

"The otters may have belonged to a dying world, but God how they played!"
Stephen Nachmanovitch (1999: 25)

This section was originally going to use humour as its key term, not playfulness[216]. At some stage in the process , I realised that humour can still be seen as an individualistic, even heroic pursuit, and could easily be confused with images of professional stand-up comedians, wise cracks in pubs, loud mouths and shaggy dog tales. As community planner John Forester says: "having a sense of humor, as I wish to explore it here, has nothing to do with canned, pre-packaged, all purpose jokes, and everything to do with creative, improvised responses in the heat and flow of work" (Forrester, 2003: 2).

Being playful means to improvise. Being playful means not knowing the punch line. Being playful means to engage with the unknown. Being playful means to respond, to pay attention to the other, to offer and to invite (like the clown). Being playful can also mean to subvert, transgress and transcend[217] (like the court jester[218]), to question existing power structures and to show that the Emperor is wearing no clothes.

A former MSc participant and now colleague emailed me what she'd noticed about my practice as I moved from being one of her tutors to one of her colleagues: *"I have seen you in 'challenging mode… and, whilst thrilled by the challenge, I think I wondered what lay behind it… at [the project] meeting I saw your very well-formed inputs pitched just right between not accepting nicey nicey (playful sometimes: 'I see we are going clockwise in a circle, Peter,' and other times using strong real language) while still being really constructive…"* (feedback received by email on 27 March 2006). Here, I see the multiple nature of "thick emotion" revealing itself in a playful way. I remember that meeting – I was excited and irritated at the same time by the way it was going, by the way power was being used to privilege certain (male, theorising) voices and wanted to stand up for the relational approach taken by me and my (female) colleague (… and, I was really interested in the theories being put forwards as well…).

When I use play or humour, it is rooted in a desire to and an intention of deepening contact and opening up conversational space (rather than skimming off or deflecting issues), as a way of bridging across the gaps between people. Such behaviour is predicated on trust, which I build on as much with body language, eye contact and tone of voice as with the words I use. One of my co-facilitating colleagues sees it like this (feedback dated 10 July, 2006):

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[216] When I write about playing and playfulness, I am thinking of transgressive, imaginative, creative, improvised, child-like play, not the type of agonistic play associated with sports and competitive masculinity.

[217] *Subvert*: undermine, challenge, threaten, sabotage, weaken, destabilise.
Transcend: rise above, go beyond, exceed, do above, surpass.
Transgress: misbehave, disobey, go astray, contravene, break the rules.

[218] The court jester figure, whilst related to the innocent naïveté of the clown ("the clown shows us our awkward human condition and encourages us to laugh at ourselves"), "takes on the social and political behaviour specific to the current age… Jesters are wits and critics. They expose the establishment's lies and make light of the contemporary social scene… he gets away with dangerous revelations by making them funny" (Nisker, 2001: 32-35).

"I see you as playful rather than humorous (not to say you are not humorous). I imagine that this is very linked to your clowning work. I always look to you to do some of the ice breaking, introductory bits. I think you do this very well - why? Not sure. You seem quite creative in how you introduce things, what you say. I don't see this as being humorous as I say - I think you are just up for being quite open and flexible around your style of presenting / talking and that that seems humorous because most of us are so set in our ways of how to do / say things. I imagine that with the clowning there is a 'yes, and' approach rather than a 'yes, but' or a 'no'. Again I relate this to an openness to deal with situations on their own terms, without too much baggage about how they should be. This is just my take... As I say I see it as playfulness, and an openness - maybe that has the same effect?

I think that there is also a confidence that allows you to be playful in this way. Your confidence in the process as a whole which perhaps allows you to relax a little more than me in the session by session, moment by moment interactions. You seem to have a trust that the whole process will work well, that it has history and lineage, and that allows you to relax. I notice that I have this less (mainly I put this down simply to less experience than you) and as a result I think I worry more about most elements of the course. And I notice that the worrying stops me being more playful. When we did our learning buddies last time and went for love rather than fear, I relaxed and found myself more playful. I don't think one can play when one is afraid."

I notice that anxiety restricts my ability to be playful, and, in part, my anxiety is heightened when my intellect takes over with constrictions about uppers, lowers power, agency, communion – the theories behind the practices I am enacting in my work, especially with the International Labour Organisation.

Where did play go, for example, in that Sri Lankan apartment? As much as I might have wanted it, in that context play wasn't going to happen (particularly as I wanted it to, and certainly not with the emotional mix I was holding). There was no "potential space" for play, just private transgression.

In a chapter fittingly titled "Winnicott the Clown", psychologist Donald Winnicott also asks: "what takes place between the subject and the object when there is no potential space?" and suggests that: "the potential space[219]… between individual and society or the world, depends on experience which leads to trust. It can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living." (Clancier and Kalmanovitch, 1987: 71-72). It seems to me that there is a reciprocity, an invitation and an acceptance, or even (through the raising of an eyebrow, for example), a mutual invitation to play.

[219] I associate this with bell hooks' places "of radical openness and possibility," Fine's "working the hyphen" and Alexander's "quality without a name" mentioned previously

In the discussions on the clown and deep ecology with Vivian in the Pyrenees, I commented: "now I find myself looking for opportunities, the glint in the eyes of whoever I am with to journey outside of what is considered to be conventionally acceptable, to play with something else, looking for those opportunities which can be the tiniest movement of an eye-brow or a smile at the right moment which then reveals something else."

And Vivian responded: "the twinkle in the eye you are talking about is the invitation to go on a journey. It says 'Let's dream together'. You have this in clowning but not just to dream because you could also make a mistake by just dreaming. The twinkle in the eye says 'Let's have fun' and in clowning that needs to be grounded. We are not just crazy, there is coherence in our madness and we are having fun together. And there is fun in imagining 'What if … the world was like this?' in clowning as well as in research… It is exciting and playful. There is something intrinsically generative about playfulness and I believe we need more of it if we are not going to keep on destroying things around us. Those opportunities for play need to be looked out for all the time. Our relationship with the world becomes tragic when we no longer have the space to play. That says something profoundly spiritual about who we are. Even though we are totally grounded in this world we are free in spirit. Clowning demands this of you in an intense and short burst, whereas life demands it of you but in a less forceful way most of the time" (Gladwell, 2004, in conversation).

Sclavi also acknowledges the importance of non-verbal cues for play: "It is through bodily play cues that the play frame is constructed. The words 'Let us play' not accompanied by pertinent bodily, non-verbal play cues are confusing, they are not capable to set up the play frame. These body messages can be translated in words such as: 'Be a part of this unreal relationship'. 'Be a part of this unreal dance', or: 'Co-operate with this unreal dance'" (Sclavi, 2002: 4).

Winnicott says: "psychotherapy is done in the overlap of the two play areas, that of the patient and that of the therapist" (Clancier and Kalmanovitch, 1987: 54). I would like to suggest that: "development work is done in the overlap of multiple play areas, those of the lowers and that of the uppers"[220]. In Sri Lanka, on that occasion, I wasn't able to exercise a wilful choice to play, even if I came desiring a playful attitude (I could say that, in stealing the shell, I played alone).

María Lugones puts forward a set of ideas about "Playfulness, 'World' Travelling, and Loving Perception" (Lugones, 1990). She defines playfulness as an openness to surprise and creativity, an attitude towards one's activities. She says: "Playfulness is, in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding

[220] "The clown occupies the liberated space between the oppressor and the oppressed" (Gladwell: notes taken during clowning session, 22 August 2004).

ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight. So, positively, the playful attitude involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction and reconstruction of the 'worlds' we inhabit playfully. Negatively, playfulness is characterized by uncertainty, lack of self-importance, absence of rules or not taking rules as sacred, a not worrying about competence and a lack of abandonment to a particular construction of oneself, others and one's relation to them" (Lugones, 1990: 177).

In critiquing Lugones' work, feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver says that "Lugones's discussion of playfulness implies an unacknowledged power hierarchy that undermines the political usefulness of her notion of playful world travelling… Lugones says that she was motivated by her own experience of seeing herself and being seen by others as being playful in some worlds but not in others. In the white/Anglo world, she says she is constructed as unplayful. Because she is marginalized in that world, she says it is difficult to play" (Oliver, 2001: 52).

Is this what was happening to me in Sri Lanka? Is it more difficult for the (self-) ascribed lower to engage in play? What was the relationship between the part of me that made me enough of an upper to be there in the first place and the part of me that saw myself as a lower? In that situation, feeling like a bit of an upper and a bit of a lower at the same time didn't cancel out to leave me feeling like a peer.

Are the play cards dealt only by uppers (or peers)? In which case, is offering an invitation to play always potentially imperialist? Lugones says that yes, this is an issue: "a playful attitude is a privilege of those who are constructed dominant in any given world" (Lugones, in Oliver, 2001: 53). Oliver questions the whole idea of a playful attitude as being (amongst other things) a site of change… "as if changing one's attitude could be enough"… and suggests that a playful attitude can unwittingly affirm, rather than transform, existing formal power structures (especially if the play space is both opened and closed by those with privilege). I both agree and disagree: clearly play is not enough on its own… but it is *something*, and that something can be desirable if it is in the service of deepening communication and understanding, and sitting with "thick" emotions in the face of difficulty, complexity and tragedy.

Social constructionist, Kenneth Gergen takes a more critical view, saying: "An atmosphere of ironic drollery thus pervades the postmodern consciousness, but many find this a difficult resting place. In particular, to unleash a culture of jesters and dandies seems both delimited and demeaning[221]. It is delimited because it dramatically reduces the range of human activities in which one can satisfyingly participate. If all serious projects are reduced to satire, and one can only play, generate nonsense, or turn rituals into riots, then to be 'serious' is self-deluding. All attempts at authenticity or earnest ends become empty – merely postures to be punctuated by

[221] During an argument, G. says: "we're not bloody clowning now, Chris". Which, of course, I find funny.

sophisticated self-consciousness. Yet, if there is nothing left to us but satire, we many be escaping one rut merely to tumble headlong into another, even if a merry one." (Gergen, 1991: 193-194).

Sclavi says that a "*lack* of humor is the sign and style of resignation, whereas humorism is a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for change" (Sclavi, 2002: 4, *postface*). Play seems to me to be a step towards something else, opening up a tiny fissure of possibility for trust and peer-to-peer respect across difference, the mutual recognition of, or even loosening up of the pre-prescribed, stereotypical roles of upper and lower.

Winnicott says that (like the clown, in my experience): "[in play] no longer are we either introvert or extrovert. We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation[222], and in an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that it external to individuals" (Winnicott, 1971: 64)[223].

Perhaps, once we are in there - once we have entered the potential space of play - then upper / lower definitions can melt away, even for a moment. But getting in to the potential space can be thwarted by context, and not just personal attitudes (which may also be contextually and socially influenced[224]) towards playfulness. It seems to me that the reciprocal game that mutually indicates whether or not potential space is open is subtle (and, potentially culturally specific, although I am not sure, given that so many other differences abound in such situations[225]). In clowning, a glance, that quizzical movement of an eyebrow, that glint in the eye and that smallest smile can say "let's play"[226].

[222] Winnicott also says: "To some extent objectivity is a relative term because what is objectively perceived is by definition to some extent subjectively conceived of." (Winnicott, 1971: 66)
[223] This connects with taking an inquiring attitude to life (and using presentational knowing as an aide to play and experimentation in doing so). In their 2006 paper on "challenging conventions on writing action research theses", Australian action researchers Fisher and Phelps "in the true spirit of action research… encourage a 'meta-reflection' on the form of presentation as well as the substance of the research itself. Above all, strive to be simultaneously playful and rigorously reflective" (Fisher and Phelps, 2006: 160).
[224] Working with the group of ex-pat engineers who had one female colleague with them, I noticed the extent to which the men assumed that making images on paper was somehow "her thing".
[225] If I were an anthropologist, then perhaps this is the field where I'd do my field work in a see-through tent like Bateson and Mead (Bateson, 1958).
[226] Or, if that doesn't work, striding up to your fellow clown and loudly saying to their face "I want to play with you" might have the desired effect…

I remember going out dancing in Ghana. On the first occasion, I went to a late night nightclub in the heart of the capital, Accra. Inside the dark building aging ex-pat European men danced with lithe Ghanaian prostitutes. I couldn't stand seeing the exploitation of these girls and muscled in to dance with the young women myself, mutually exchanging glances, smiles and laughs in the direction of the men[227].

On the second occasion, a week later – the evening before I broke my Achilles, as it turns out – I had gone to an outdoor hotel dance floor right by the rolling rocky Atlantic shore. A live band was playing, it was groovy, it was fun and the salt air enveloped Ghanaians, English, Dutch, more Ghanaians. Without wishing to romanticise or de-politicise the event, which wasn't put on for tourists, I'd say that we were, for a while, just a bunch of people enjoying ourselves. Everyone was dancing with everyone, there was a lot of laughter, it wasn't costing anyone a penny and there was neither need nor benefit in some post-colonial deconstruction. That it was my last pre-Achilles dance became of greater significance than anything else.

On both occasions I had entered a play space with my dance partners as peers. The lower / upper divisions seemed subsumed[228].

[227] Who, undoubtedly, they sold their services to later, anyway.
[228] Writing this makes me realise afresh just how much I would like to develop clowning practices in some of these countries. In Ghana, for instance, the most popular large scale mass entertainment is the Tuesday night comedy club in Accra, which attracts thousands of people to see the local fool-like comedians satirise national politicians and TV stars. Clown-like figures appear, as far as I am aware, in cultures across humanity, ranging from the First

I don't play any musical instruments, but lived with a jazz musician for ten years. Now, when we discuss his experience of jazz improvisation, and I talk with him about my clowning experience, I think I have experienced a taste of what playing together in the musical sense means. Violin player and former student of Gregory Bateson, Stephen Nachmanovitch says that "the beauty of playing is meeting in the One. It is astonishing how often it happens that two musicians meet for the first time, coming perhaps from very different backgrounds and traditions, and before they have exchanged two words they begin improvising music together that demonstrates wholeness, structure, and clear communication. I play with my partner; we listen to each other; we mirror each other; we connect with what we hear. He doesn't know where I'm going, I don't know where he's going, yet we anticipate, sense, lead, and follow each other. There is no agreed-on structure or measure, because we've started something. We open each other's minds like an infinite series of Chinese boxes. A mysterious kind of information flows back and forth, quicker than any signal we might give by sight or sound. The work comes from neither one artist nor the other, even through our own idiosyncrasies and styles, the symptoms of our original natures, still exert their natural pull. Nor does the work come from a compromise or halfway point (averages are always boring!), but from a third place that isn't necessarily like what either one of us would do individually" (Nachmanovich, 1990: 94).
How do I evidence something as subtle, spontaneous and fleeting as my use of playfulness with the learners I am working with? Can I find *the* perfect direct example, the part which clearly shows the whole? (Probably not). Can I piece together enough different voices and viewpoints that all point in the same direction? (Maybe, but can I do it well enough?). What stances or viewpoints to I have access to?

- My own assertions (the idea of assertion is feeling painfully inadequate already – "I am playful, honest");
- Asked-for feedback from the learners I work with (better, but could be so easily leading);
- Unsolicited feedback from the learners I work with (getting better);
- Transcripts of times when the group I have been a part of have had a good laugh when we have been working issues (better still)[229].

The difficult thing for me to do is provide direct transcribed evidence of my use of playfulness in learning situations for the following reasons (they feel like excuses):

- The kind of use of play I want to show is spontaneous – the tape isn't always running, ready to capture the moment, just in case;

Nations' *contraries* to West Africa's *Ananse the spider man* to the characters of the Italian *commedia del'arte* to China's *A Chou*, the Brother Clown (for more, see Otto, 2001).

[229] Perhaps best of all would be to have been able to write this thesis in such a humorous way that it is obvious and I do not need to add more layers of "show and tell" on top. Well, that's clearly not going to happen, is it?

- This humour is fleeting, coming and going in the conversational flux. This means I don't remember the detailed give and take of the words, even if I recall the laughter;
- I am unable to see my own gestures and expressions, all I can perceive is people's responses to me ("quick, get the camera out, I'm about to do something that might amuse someone"… er, no);
- This play (and multi-layered emotions) often surfaces in the forum of the learning groups, which are smaller and more intimate than the whole group setting. Again, this is not a forum which tends to be recorded.

Quoting Canadian community planning consultant, Norma Jean McLean, John Forrester writes "Humor provides safety… This work is too hard without humor. Without humor we have no salvation… Humor is such a connector" (Forester, 2003: 10). Forester goes on to address "the subtle connections between humor and hope, to the ways that a sense of humor can encourage not just recognition but a sense of community, not just a momentary release but a sense of capacity, not just safety, but a sense of possibility too… Hope… can be held hostage to a seriousness and heaviness that substitutes earnestness and even commiseration for the encouragement of action and change"" (Forester, 2003: 12-14).

Play spaces, with my niece (left) and delightful Italian clown, Daniella (right)

Here is a small example of playfulness from my own practice. In this transcript (dating from 25 March 2004), I am about to start a short seminar on my second person inquiry practice. The group I have entered is running late:

Host: We had a brief discussion about timings, and we thought we wanted to make space for some discussion about our own facilitation practice over the last day and a half… and we wondered if there'd be a way of sort of merging that into the end of your session?
Chris: Well, I'm sure…
Host: …because we thought this is quite central to a lot of what you're going to be talking about…
Chris: Yeah, I'm sure there is, there's got to be overlap, hasn't there… (says she, rewriting all her questions…)…
(Group laughs)

This is a tiny example, but what am I doing here, what atmosphere am I creating as I enter the room and am asked to change my plans before I've even started?

- When I say "says she" at the end, and am publicly referring to myself, I am standing outside of myself as a witness to the situation – I am commenting back on my inner state (the clown does this all the time);
- I am modelling flexibility and responsiveness in my facilitation practice – the content as well as form of the workshop (and by demonstrating this flexibility, I am working to release some of the tension that might have built around the group running late);
- I am consciously de-powering myself (as the invited "expert") by showing that I am, at some level, thrown by the request and am willing to collaborate with that which is present rather then rigidly bring pre-planned proclamations.

In June 2006, I facilitated a workshop session on leadership maturity and life stages[230] for the MSc group I was working with. The session was recorded and reading through a transcript of the session, I looked for moments when people laughed, the moments that seemed playful (which may have been market by laugher, playful ambiguity or light-hearted challenge). Here, I want to show how playful behaviour helps the group stay in difficult territory concerning life changes and responses to issues of social justice and ecological degradation, in ways that mirror the greater flexibility and adaptability suggested by the developmental phases that were the content of the session. Forester suggests that "humor allows "people to go into deep water without being so scared" (Forester, 2003: 9) and Sclavi says that playing means showing "that they are being able to practise the dynamics and the displacements that come with the passing from one frame to another with lightness and a sense of the complexity".

[230] Drawing on the "Leadership Development Framework" (Rooke and Torbert, 2005) and anthroposophy-influenced ideas about life stages (Burkhard, 1997, Lievegood, 1997).

For example, here, at the beginning of what will be a theoretically based talk, I simultaneously value the theories and put them in their place:

Chris: Then the other part of what we are doing today is looking if you like, from the bottom up, at lived experience. How has my life been? What are the stages of my own development? My biography? My life narrative. So there is a whole bunch of theories human development, human narrative, none of which are true, but they might be useful…
(Group laughs)
Chris: Then there is your unique and wonderful lived experience, which is entirely true to you, and may have patterns. So these theories are trying to look at patterns, some of which may be helpful at different stages.

Similarly, in this second example, I stretch out the categories in the theoretical model I was using, again, in order to keep the theory in its place of potentially-useful-thing-that-someone-made-up[231]:

Chris: I made up another one that I haven't slipped into the system yet, called Zombie… (Group laughs)
Chris: Zombie is about the influence you have after you are actually dead…
(Group laughs lots)
Participant: Like Jesus (Group laughs more)
Chris: You know, you don't necessarily want to be able to access all of these things…
(Group still laughing)
Chris: If you are hanging around in alchemist territory as your dominant way of seeing the world it is quite likely that you will get shot, or targeted or something you know. It is not necessarily something desirable, operating at all of these stages.

In these examples, I am allowing two realities to coexist (Sclavi calls this "bisociation"): this is and this is not stuff to be taken seriously; this is and this is not the stuff of human evolution; this is a map and not the territory. I am exposing the Emperor's new clothes whilst also describing their fine cloth.

Qualitative scientist, Brian Goodwin[232], seems to have become more playful even over the few years during which I have known him. Now in his seventies, and following serious illness, his joy for living shone out to me on a visit to Schumacher College where he is a Visiting Professor. I wrote out the story of what happened later that same day:

[231] And, in order to prevent participants from either feeling the need to judge themselves inappropriately, or strive for some imagined glorious state of being.
[232] I asked Brian's permission to use this, which he gave with characteristic generosity of spirit: "Thanks for that lovely little bit about your response to the Schumacher scene, which has so much of you in it and YOUR love of life. I'm just back from a soul-changing time in Assisi and places nearby in Italy, which is why this response is slow. It's also the quality of Italy, slowing down in the body and dancing with the soul, so emails take their place in the queue. Do use the piece you've written as it is" (email correspondence dated 23 July 2006).

Schumacher College, Sunday 26 September 2004, 9pm

Here I am at Schumacher again and with my memories of great revelations, happy and sad weird times here (like when the man of independent means was waiting outside of my room and the time I had a huge zit on my chin and drove all the way to Salisbury from here for an evening of unrequited love and the time I cried with gratitude at the sandwiches and the time when I enthused with the bookbinding woman in her studio at midnight). This time, for the first time, these memories are quieter echoes in the corners and pathways of the space and I am feeling that my time here is my own as well as that of the students I will be working with here.

I remember, belatedly, just on my arrival and not 6 months ago or 9 months ago, that here is all about structure and freedom… and how hard I find it to introduce structure into my own life without the support of environments like this. Brian Goodwin walked into the tea area tonight with this hands tucked into the pockets of his black jeans. His face, already relaxed, lit up when he saw first Peter and Judi and then me. "I'll make you dinner! There's plenty in the cold store".

And his clown-like spirit shone out from the moment I saw him.
"How's your year been, Peter?"
"Awful"
"But it's better now, isn't that great?"

What is it about Brian that makes me think clown every time? He looks perpetually surprised and delighted by whatever's going on around him.

"Well, how about that?" he says.

He lightens, or lights up situations:
"It's been so awful, I've got more wrinkles, Brian," Peter tells him.
"So you have, and they're big. But they're not deep. This awfulness in your soul isn't deep".

He delights in the mundane:
"Hey, these are stewed apples. They're scrumped apples. Organic. I love them with biscuits on top. Instant crumble."
"Can you still scrump apples, Brian? Does it still happen?"
"Sure, you can scrump anything. Not just apples. Plums. There's plum trees here."

"Maturana. You saw Maturana? He's a gnome isn't he? Great energy. 76. But what he says is still Darwinian. The living system doesn't just respond to its environment, whether you call it evolutionary drift or adaptation. Maturana doesn't take into account how the living system calls forth its environment and how it creates its own form. It has its own morphology and is also affected by its environment. We're all different and we're all the same. Henri Bortoft was here last week. He really lives this stuff, seeing both the archetypal form and the unique form at once."

This reminds me of the biographical storytelling at Emerson, seeing myself in the unique other. The all-human story, my face reflected in the glass as I look through the window at another person. We're all different and we're all the same. I'm different,

and I'm the same. Like my trips to Schumacher, all different and all the same within that constant binding structure of work, learning, food, walks, discussions, sleep. Time moves more slowly for me inside this structure. I feel held and supported in its frame in a way I seems almost incapable of calling forth myself. Here I can be alongside others without changing what I do in order to accommodate (my perceptions of) their needs or getting swayed, drawn like the tide by their presence. Here, now, I feel more adequate, good enough. The structure around me supports me in realising, calling forth my own morphology whilst being less affected by those around me, and maybe more by what is collectively around me. I find I can be more choiceful about what energies I open myself to, lapping up Brian's energy and presence and allowing more difficult memories to slip quietly away.

Deep ecologist, Arne Naess says that "continuous joy" should be a "condition for living. Whatever is done without joy is of no avail," and asks "Should the world's misery and the approaching ecocatastrophe make one sad?... My point is that there is no good reason to feel sad about all this… such regret is a sign of immaturity: the immaturity of unconquered passiveness and lack of integration" (Naess, 1995: 251). Forester supports this view, adding in the need for respect and recognising the multilayered emotional qualities of humour. He says: "taking enjoyment is not seen as disrespect, and unmitigated seriousness is not mistaken for respect… Humor, we begin to see, is both a laughing matter and a deeply serious one… a responsive sense of humor can be both respectful and en-lightening all at once" (Forester, 2003: 9)

As Kelly Oliver pointed out when critiquing María Lugones' work, this is not to say that playfulness alone is enough to solve our human problems and restore our planetary home. American writer and designer, Kurt Vonnegut playfully points this out: "everything is going to become unimaginably worse, and never get better again. If I lied to you about that, you would sense that I lied to you, and that would be another cause for gloom" (Vonnegut, 1970).

I am not writing about an unknowing, deflecting or avoiding playfulness here[233]. Arne Naess says that we need to develop "a kind of norm concerning the high priority for developing the *capacity* for joy" (Naess, 1995: 256), and suggests that "the environmental crisis may turn out to be of immense value to the further expansion of the human consciousness" (Naess, 1995: 258). Naess claims that joy is intrinsically linked to development: "joy is instriniscally linked to… an increase in power and virtue, an increase in freedom and rationality, an increase of activeness, an increase in the degree to which we are the cause of our own actions[234]…" (Naess, 1995: 254)

[233] Although I do accuse myself internally of being shallow, a light weight. Arne Naess says that if someone were to live a joyful life in all circumstances (which I don't): "the sad truth is, I think, that he or she would be classified as shallow, cynical, disrespectful, irreligious, or mocking…" (Naess, 1995: 250). On the other hand, Oscar Wilde said "seriousness is the only refuge of the shallow".
[234] Words which mirror my intentions for my ILO work.

In 18 May 2006, I went to see James Lovelock, the originator of Gaia theory, give a talk in Bristol. In amongst the doom and gloom questions about destruction, climate change and nuclear power, I took the opportunity to ask him what benefits to humanity he saw coming from the challenges held in the future. The person I was sitting next to said to me that he twinkled when he heard my question. "I'm an optimist, even though you might not think so," he said, "I see the looming crisis as a kind of genetic bottleneck for humanity. It's an evolutionary opportunity".

Finally for this section, I return to Kenneth Gergen's Saturated Self (Gergen, 1991: 193): "All our attempts to do good works, to achieve, to improve, and to be responsible can be punctured with wit. The postmodern invitation is thus to carry the clown on one's shoulders – to always be ready to step out of 'serious character' and locate its pretensions, to parody or ape oneself… Culture seems a carnival with a never-ending array of sideshows…."

Contact across irreducible difference

For changes and evolutions to happen in ways that are more fair and equitable, sensitive and transparent, meaningful and lasting, I need to get alongside others (whether that be in the other human or the more than human worlds) sufficiently well, or with sufficient empathy, to make good enough decisions about my own courses of action and non-action. Playfulness is one way of enabling contact with others, across differences which are fundamental: I will never know, for example, what it is to be a man, or a person from a heritage of post-colonial exploitation, or a person coming from generations of family who have experienced insidious racism. On a more extreme basis, I can not know what it is to experience living as a dog, a bear, a tree or a mountain. In this section I consider both contact across human to other human (*intraspecies*) difference and human to more than human (*interspecies*) difference.

Contact across irreducible *human* difference

French philosopher, Luce Irigaray says that the *other* is "irreducible to oneself" (Irigaray, 1996, 2000, 2002a, 2002b 2004) – that we can never know the other completely, and to do so, or aspire to do so would be an act of appropriation which would repeat and reinforce degenerative power structures between ourselves as a species and our species and our planetary home. Irigaray says that the other needs to remain a mystery, that: "Human mystery must be safeguarded and cultivated thanks to a poetic way of dwelling. And the same goes for the preservation of the mystery of the other, whose attraction lives on if this other continues to surprise without being reduced to some familiar evaluation at our disposal" (Irigaray 2002: 152).

Playfulness is a potential or transitional space or field where those who are irreducibly different can meet. The play space becomes a site of relationship, for which all parties are responsible: "Even the relation is a kind of receptacle to be cared for by each one, a place where that which will allow a feast to come is remembered and retained. This space is not solely internal to each one but it does not correspond to a simply external thing, and which only one ought to fashion. This – ultimate? – undertaking of humanity is far more complex and far more subtle" (Irigaray, 2002: 139).

Irigaray suggests that the cultivation of, movement towards and dwelling in such "third" spaces (such as Winnicott's perception of a "potential space") is "horizontally transcendent" across boundaries (Irigaray, 2002: 140), rather than vertically transcendent, reaching greater heights and plumbing greater depths in our psyches. Dwelling in the horizontally transcendent, she says is: "a space where the bridge between past, present, and future is elaborated, as well as the passages between the other and oneself… The difficulty in this creative faithfulness is that no external measure can assess the validity or value of what is built. At least no standard exists which could be applied from the outside in order to judge the task. It is to a more

interior undertaking that the human is invited to here, to a work of becoming that can be evaluated according to the blossoming of the Being of the self, of the other, of the world where they dwell." (Irigaray, 2002: 146-7)). This work, she says, "implies respecting the other and respecting oneself while assuring bridges between two irreducible worlds" (Irigaray, 2002: 114).

Within my ILO work, in avoiding hubris, exerting inappropriate power and unearned privilege, I can lose sight of my self-respect – and, particularly at first, wanted to disappear myself, make myself invisible. This seems amazing, in retrospect, thinking that there was a possibility that I cold be invisible when in reality I stuck out like a sore thumb as (often) the only white person around. Conversely, my experience is that invisibility comes generatively at those moments when eye contact moves out and away from me in group learning situations such as the MSc at Bath. In such contexts, I achieve some healthy degree of invisibility whilst retaining my self-respect.

David Brandon says of such mutually respectful knowing: "The knowing is not a knowledge about, but a direct awareness of, life direct communication, direct awakening. This awakening is seeing people as they really are. It means seeing them with the eyes of love and without the continuous carping and criticism which is so much a part of my experiencing of others. Often I can hardly hear what another says because of the internal noise that goes on in the judging of them. (Brandon, 1978: 19).

My capacities for other- and self-respect seem to be contextually dependent…

	Low self respect	*High self respect*
High respect for other	*Initial ILO "missions" where I wanted to be invisible*	*Clowning workshops* *MSc tutoring work* *Encounter with 's wife*
Low respect for other	*Meeting at Sri Lankan apartment*	*Encounters with Basil*

Getting into the top right hand box, where respect for both self and other is high implies two sets of responses: a response to uppers which calls for a generosity which steps aside from, rather than is complicit with, unearned, contextual privilege; and a response to lowers which calls for recognition and witnessing of, rather than humouring or control of those with contextual under-privilege. Notice that my ILO work is more likely to fall into the low self-respect boxes. I wonder whether this is connected to the fundamental tension between wanting to invite people to participate and play as peers and the strong feelings of responsibility I have towards meeting my project objectives (in ways which at the same time do not interfere too much with the work itself). The subtle, hovering agenda of imposing the project objectives is in opposition to the idea of a true invitation to participate.

At the start of the ILO work, this didn't seem to matter so much as the choice of TV and radio advertising ensure at least passive participation. As the work moved gradually towards more participative forms such as applied theatre approaches, the idea of the true invitation came to the fore (as well as an increase in my client's anxiety that with invitation comes a greater risk that people will decline the risk: "Can you send me some proof that Forum Theatre works?" he asked eighteen months after the project first started to be planned.

In March 2006, I took part in a workshop exploring the connections between conflict negotiation and the clown[235]*. On the last day of the course, Michael Jacobs, the facilitator for the conflict part of the programme, introduced a topic for research: "Can we research the qualities of present-ness and the qualities of inviting the other person to be present with me in the conversation? How can I extend an invitation to the other to be present with me? How do I make that invitation open and warm? Can we find ways to invite, to make it safe enough for the other person to engage in the conversation?... When you extend an invitation, there isn't the assumption that the other person will say yes. But you can invite in a way that makes it more likely that they'll say yes*[236] *– and they have the right to say no. Why would the other want to have this conversation?" (Jacobs, 12 March 2006, personal communication).*

As I write this quotation out, I can feel the tension rising in me. In my ILO work where, arguably, the need to make respectful contact across difference has its greatest political significance, everyone knows that the ILO agenda is present, and that it may be at odds with what people really want. For example, people in Moradabad said that the number one thing they wanted is a continuous electricity supply – which wasn't my ILO agenda. On another occasion, a group of men asked me if I could arrange a trip to metalwork trade shows in Birmingham – which I had no skills, resources or contacts to be able to do. I say no when I would rather have the flexibility to say yes, let's work with that. Clown mentality says *yes* to invitation. Salverson says: "the destabilised position of the clown offers a place to consider relationships across difference – relationships of attention without resolution, of respect without capture – that allow for peaceful engagements" (Salverson, 2006: 155).

The fundamental imposition, rather than true invitation, of the ILO work echoes Irigaray's call not to appropriate the other. The work does, at some level, want (and *need* for its continued funding) to capture. Irigaray proposes a (slightly clunky) syntax appropriate to intersubectivity and the kind of peer to peer contact implicated by true invitation rather than imposition and appropriation: "I do not subjugate you or consume you. I respect you (as irreducible). I hail you: in you I hail. I praise you: in you I praise. I give you thanks: to you I give thanks for… I bless you, for… I speak to

[235] "Playing with Fire," 10-12 March 2006, Emerson College, Forest Row, United Kingdom.
[236] This, I think, is the core of my ILO projects as they have evolved. My working assumption is that if the intervention we are inviting people to take part in is entertaining, enjoyable, easy to get to and the kind of event and timing that makes it possible to take the kids along, then people are more likely to say yes.

you, not just about something; rather I speak **to** you. I tell you, not so much this or that but rather I tell **to** you… The 'to' is the site of non-reduction of the person to the object. I love you, I desire you, I take you, I seduce you, I order you, I instruct you, and so on, always risk annihilating the alterity of the other, of transforming him/her into my property, my object, of reducing him/her to what is mine, into mine meaning what is already a part of my field of existential or material properties" (Irigaray, 1996: 109-110).

Returning to the ILO work, this means practicing an attitude and protecting the space of "I invite to you", and acknowledging more fully that the answer may well be no. Even through photography I am appropriating. These days, if I want to photograph anyone at all, I ask permission, tell them why I want to take the picture and how it might be used, and show the images to the person on the screen of the digital camera.

I speak to you, not just about something;
rather I speak ***to*** *you about running your own business*

I tell you, not so much this or that but rather I tell ***to*** *you why I am here*

I give you thanks:
to you I give thanks for telling me about storytelling when you were young

Contact across irreducible *more-than-human* difference

If contact – *intraspecies* – between humans is tricky (it does have the added complication of human intellect and consciousness, after all), then the kinds of *interspecies* contact we will eventually need to re-establish on a large scale if we are ever to get to know a restorative (or at the very least more generative than destructive) place on our planet offers at least as much of a challenge. The attitudes and practices of Goethean science are a step in the direction of getting to know the more than human world from the inside out, in an embodied we-are-part-of-this kind of way, but how else might we identify with and recognise and express the differences between us and other species in non-romanticising ways that are imbued with respectful humility? Contact with the more than human world is particularly mediated and revealed through human presentational knowing[237], which may be more or less esoteric, as we shall see. As you might imagine, clowning addresses this issue, playing with the traits of more-than-human beings.

I'll return to that and wanted to start with some (extended) writing from the ecological poet, Gary Snyder, who says that we are "barely beginning to be able to know" the more than human other. His words evoke the territory of cultivating those "thick" emotional responses. Snyder says: "the 'art of the wild' is to see art in the process of the context of nature – nature *as* process rather than product or commodity – because 'wild' is a name for the way that phenomena continually actualize themselves. Seeing this also serves to acknowledge the autonomy and integrity of the non-human part of the world, an 'Other' that we are barely beginning to be able to know. In disclosing, discovering, the wild world with our kind of writing, we may find ourselves breaking into unfamiliar territories that do not seem anything like what was called 'nature writing' in the past. The work of the art of the wild can well be irreverent, inharmonious, ugly, frazzled, unpredictable, simple, and clear – or virtually inaccessible. Who will write of the odd barbed, hooked, bent, splayed, and crooked penises of nonhuman male creatures? Of sexism among spiders? Someone will yet come to write with the eye of an insect, write from the undersea world, and in other ways that step outside the human… Life in the wild is not just eating berries in the sunlight. I like to imagine a 'depth ecology' that would go to the dark side of nature – the ball of crunched bones in a scat, the feathers in the snow, the tales of insatiable appetite. Wild systems are in one elevated sense above criticism[238], but they can also be seen as irrational, moldy, cruel, parasitic… there is a world of nature of the decay side, a world of beings which do rot and decay in the shade. Human beings have made much of purity, and are repelled by blood, pollution, putrefaction. The other side of the 'sacred' is the sight of your beloved in the underworld, dripping with maggots… Shame, grief, embarrassment, and fear are the anaerobic fuels of the dark imagination" (Snyder, 1999: 260-261).

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[237] Although I have come across elephant gamelan and paintings by cats…

[238] My footnote: Geogory Bateson reminds us that "god is not mocked" (ref: Angels Fear).

I want to stretch out my understanding from the points that Snyder makes, first by introducing some ideas about animism and totemism from Gregory Bateson to frame this section. Then, I move on to accounts from my own experience of animism in clowning. Third, I include an account of an intervention I witnessed relating to a cedar tree during the Goethean science workshop I attended. Fourth, I offer writing from deep ecologist and magician David Abram, about a shaman-like encounter with a bison and finally, an art crtitc's account of a (to me) barely comprehensible[239] performance given by Joseph Beuys in 1966 with a dead hare, which questions whether he is a shaman or a showman.

Gregory Bateson conducted his research with human and more than human behaviours alike. He distinguishes two aspects to the ways we form connections with the more than human world, "totemism" and "animism".

Bateson says: "man in society took clues from the natural world around him and applied those clues in a sort of metaphoric way to the society in which he lived. That is, he identified or empathized with the natural world around him and took that empathy as a guide for his own social organization and his own theories of his own psychology. This is what is called 'totemism.'

In a way, it was all nonsense, but it made more sense than most of what we do today, because the natural world around us really has this general systemic structure and therefore is an appropriate source of metaphor to enable man to understand himself in his social organization.

The next step, seemingly, was to reverse the process and to take clues from himself and apply these to the natural world around him. This was 'animism,' extending the notion of personality or mind to mountains, rivers, forests, and such things. This was still not a bad idea in many ways. But the next step was to separate the notion of mind from the natural world, and you get the notion of gods.

But when you separate mind from the structure in which it is immanent, such as human relationship, the human society, or the ecosystem, you thereby embark, I believe, on fundamental error, which in the end will surely hurt you …. These circuits and balances of nature can only too easily get out of kilter when certain basic errors of our thought become reinforced by thousands of cultural details" (Bateson, 2000: 492-3).

My experience has been that clowning can serve to build our human capacities to identify with the strange other (without making much distinction between what is officially alive and what isn't… to a clown everything has the potential to be

[239] In this particular section, I don't think it is right to discount that which I do not understand… surely that is the very nature of making contact with irreducible difference (in this case, both Beuys and the hare).

animate). If animism imbues the "more-than-human" with living sentience, inevitably through an anthropocentric lens (this other is like me), then totemism suffuses a "more-than-human" being with sentient traits I can learn from, aspire to and develop a special rapport with (I am like this other). The clown plays loosely, reciprocally and light-heartedly with these transformations.

For example, in clowning I have become an enthusiastic pizza cutter, a happy river fish, a snail reaching nirvana, a stuck dog and a hungry haggis. I have brought to life stuffed toys, plastic clothes pegs and sieves. I have seen others as an annoyed oven-ready turkey, a scary pan scourer, a relentless mosquito, the voice of a stone and an eager hat stand.

During my exploratory discussions with Vivian Gladwell on the connections we sense between clown and deep ecology, he asked me if I knew any deep ecologists who exhibited clown-like behaviours. I said: "I think Stephan Harding from Schumacher College carries that sense of play within him when he talks about deep ecology and the anima mundi[240]. You can sense the world come alive when he talks, for example, about the nature spirits of the trees and the moon. I feel that with clowning I also get to connect in a very direct and experiential way to what Stephan is describing, for example by making a chair or a flower talk. If I am to live by the story that the world is alive, then clowning gives me the opportunity to play with it being alive. Stephan

[240] In Stephan's book, "Animate Earth," he says: "…'animate' is both an adjective and a verb. The adjective tells us that the earth is animate – *alive*; the verb urges is to find ways of speaking and acting that allow is to consciously re-animate the Earth so that we bring her back to life as a sensitive and sentient Being" (Harding, 2006: 39).

also does this by anthropomorphising[241] the world around him. He talks about the innate desire of rocks to give of themselves, to give up their elements. He is reanimating the world back to life. When the world becomes alive to us we are less likely to destroy it. Deep ecology is living as if the world is alive, as if we are not superior or in control and (as Aldo Leopold suggests), as if we are just a plain member of the earth community. It means living with compassion, deepening relationships and looking at the sacredness of life. There is a deep sense of belonging to a sentient world and a nourishing human community" (personal communication, October 2004).

In one of his marathon discussions, German artist Joseph Beuys spoke about the spiritual background of ecological beings becoming accessible to our experience. "Yes", he said, "accessible to experience, to the extent that one really pursues things: for instance, if one enters right into, lives into, what this stone must experience or feel as it sits here in the wall, how it formed and from what it arose, and what function it has now taken on… there is a general need for people to learn and practise in this way" (Beuys/Harlan, 2004: 22).

On the last day of a clowning workshop in August 2004, the participants were invited to do a solo improvised response to the week's work together and took it in turns to enter the blank canvas of the stage to see what emerged. On 8 April 2005, I wrote up what happened for me:

There's something to choosing when to take your go with this. It's a learning edge in itself. Going first brings with it risk and discovery, go last when its all been done, and the tension beforehand could be unbearable, go straight after someone with lots of experience and risk feeling inadequate… think about any of this too much and the whole think collapses into the dominance of the intellect and the spontaneity could get lost.

On this occasion, about half way through, I stand up and move to the changing area to the left of the audience. I slip through the curtained glass door into the long thin room that runs down the side of the hall. Inside, jumble sale clothes, hats, bags and props are laid out on tables. I am drawn to a skirt, one I haven't work before, a flamboyant hair clip covered in flowers and two chiffon scarves, one blue and one yellow. I use the scarves to tie my hair up on the top of my head like a pineapple and clip the flowers to the knot. I shake my head a little, knowing that, if the whole ensemble fell down during my turn on stage, then this would have to become part of

[241] My current thought is that we as a species will anthropomorphise the more-than-human world to some extent. This seems inevitable that this will be the case as we have no choice but to filter our contactful experiences through the sense perceptions of a human. Goethe saw this as a good thing, one that we carry the species-wide responsibility to do well, as sophisticated organs of perception of the planet. I asked Margaret Colquhoun about this issue of making anthropomorphic analogies – she said she was deliberately vague about what might be "real" and what might be "metaphorical" comparisons. Stephan himself rather pragmatically said that he didn't mind at all what we did as long as it brought us into better contact with the more than human world, and that any finer distinctions were too far away from the stage of connection we are currently able to reach as a species.

my improvisation – I wouldn't be able to pretend it hadn't happened as an actor might. Preparing myself distracts me as my nerves build and I hear the applause signalling the end of the previous person's turn. I look in the mirror to check my hair and pull my nose up from where it was hanging round my neck on its thin white elastic. Looking in the mirror, the set of my mouth changes as the nose goes on, and I breathe out through my mouth. A sigh, really.

I stand behind the white painted wall waiting for my turn.

Tin-a-ling-a-ling.
Pavlov's dog summoned to start.

I hear my breath loud and shaky in my red nose. My heart skitters around in my chest.

"Here we go then". Vivian says from beyond the wall.

I walk around the corner out onto the stage and look wide eyed at the audience. They look back at me, just standing there, looking at them. My mouth falls open a little and I let a breath escape. The out-breath is a mini-rest on stage, Robert had said. Don't think about what Robert said, I think. Don't think, I think.

"Don't do anything. Just let us look at you, you're beautiful as you are", says Vivian.

I look around me and see familiar props, rearranged while I was getting dressed. The wooden paint-splattered stepladder, the bright feather duster, the plastic flower, the bentwood chair and the white frisbee.

I do nothing. I look at the audience some more and bring my awareness to my breathing. I look again at the stepladder and pick up the duster. I show the duster to the audience. Their faces look as expectant as I feel. Together we are waiting for something to happen. Something always happens.

I look at the floor. It is made of parquet blocks. I look up again at the audience and down at the floor. I point at the floor, look up and say "I'm made of wood. And you're treading on me". I look down again, listening to the floor. Next to me the bentwood chair calls out – "I'm made of wood, too". I look to the chair, surprised. People laugh. "So am I" says the ladder. I look to the ladder. The plastic flowers are laying down on a rung about half way up. I look at the flowers and look at the audience and then back, picking up the flowers and stroking their plastic petals. "We're made of plastic" they say, unhappily. I look back up at the audience, sad now and back down at the flowers. We hold our breath and I look back up, hopefully, smiling now… "but plastic's made from oil… and…oil… well, oil comes from, wood!". We breathe out, laughing, relieved, its OK, everything's OK again. People clap, I'm relieved and

happy – it has taken me a week of clowning to let my mind go and receive what's around me, to simply acknowledge what is. These moments are what it's all for.

Taken out of context, these moments might seem silly, trite or simplistic. And yet here was an improvised visual metaphor, created in the moment, from a mind that's not the intellect, in response to something unexpected. It's always unexpected. And, to my mind, such a moment encapsulates tragedy and hope. In discussion with a writing buddy in April 2005, we wondered how such moments can be represented without them being diminished like a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy… a listened to, read out, written down, memory of an expression of an experience… "Perhaps," my buddy said "we can only bear the truths of this when it is mediated through a plastic flower, or a soft toy penguin".

I'd told her the story of the penguin, a similar moment during an earlier clowning course in February 2004, when I'd picked up a soft toy penguin just before going on stage…

I look down at the penguin, which is lying in a child's suitcase, and the penguin looks back at me. I pick it up and tuck it under my arm so the audience would be able to see it. I want to show them my penguin.

Donna, a Canadian woman with long dark hair flits around me as I step onto the stage area. She is my invisible guardian angel for this scene, whose job it is to ensure that I come to no harm. Donna lightly grooms me with her feather duster. I'm wearing a hot tweed jacket and a flat hat. My heart beats fast. The penguin stands on my hand at my side. I make contact with the audience, look at the penguin and look back at them. I smile. Look at my penguin, isn't he great?

In this new world, I feel proud of the penguin and waddle forward doing a penguin walk. People laugh. Donna watches as I come closer to the blue rope that signifies the edge of the stage. I carry on close to the edge. Donna's guardian angel character starts to panic and steps forward gesturing for me to stop – she puts her hands up and looks at me, but I can't see her, she's invisible. I'm in danger of leaving the stage. I look at the blue rope – yes, this is close to the edge. I hold my breath a little. Donna has a problem – I'm in danger. She flits down and pushes the rope out further, creating a bigger stage for me and the penguin, and I breathe out, relieved, shuffling to the new edge that appears miraculously before me.

Carefully, I remove the penguin from under my arm and place him on the floor in front of me. He sits between my legs like a chick penguin. I bend down again and hold the penguin's sides with my hands. Donna crouches down close to the action. I look up at the audience and with a flourish, move backwards to allow the penguin to stand alone. The penguin stands – a triumph of evolution! The audience clap.

Then, ever so slowly, the penguin, keels over to one side. The penguin falls – a tragic disaster. There's a sharp intake of breath in the room. What will happen? I look up in shock and despair. Donna fusses at my feet and rights the penguin. I look down, and he's upright again. All is well.

What's happening in these moments? I am allowing something to emerge that's not premeditated, that comes from a non-intellectual place, involves a wide identification with the more than human world, it is certainly animistic and acting as if the world is alive, it is playful and yet these moments speak unexpected truths which others, in the audience, witness and recognise.

This clowning experience I understand because I was part of it. Now I want to push my understanding wider, out of the familiar, playful world of the clown and back to that week of Goethean Science. One of the participants was a marine biologist, and, as far as she knew, the first person to start experimenting with what a Goethean approach might bring to understanding and knowing the marine environment. Here, at the workshop though, she had to work with terrestrial plants and chose a magnificent cedar tree to research. I listened with interest as her story of identifying with and thoroughly responding to the tree unfolded, and wrote these notes (30 April 2006):

Helen, the marine biologist, stood in the centre of the room. Other participants stood around the edges, making a rough circle, within which she delineated the four directions. In the south, she presented a maceration of cedar; in the west, a carbonisation; in the east, a cold infusion and in the north, a hot infusion of cedar. She passed cedar sprigs round for us to crush and smell. The cedar smelled sharp, strong, toilet-y. The scent lingered on my fingers after I'd passed it on. She showed paintings of the tree she'd made at different times of the day. First, in her performance space, she laid down the paintings of the sun's journey relative to the tree, with the sunrise painting in the east, full sun in the south and evening sun in the west. Then she showed her painting of her night time journey, placing it in the north and saying she had taken some of the tree to bed with her, tucking it under the pillow as she slept. She'd dreamt of death. Only then, four days in to the workshop, she researched the tree both in terms of folklore and scientific information. The cedar had been used to care for, and preserve the dead. In Egypt it accompanied bodies in their tombs. Finally, she spoke a poem, accompanied by eurthythmy gestures about the cedar as the armour, shroud and protector of the dead.

Notice the multiple ways of expression Helen used, and that the expressions themselves (such as preparing the infusions) kept her close to the cedar itself. Notice, too, how she made use of different subtleties of knowing at different times of the day – what did the tree tell her now, and now, and now? And notice how she suspended her intellectual knowing for days before allowing this potentially dominating part of

the mix of knowing in. What she came to know was thoroughly grounded in her experience, and her simultaneous experience of presentation as she immersed herself in knowing. I found Helen's intervention compelling, rigorous, interesting and understandable.

Now, moving on to something which I don't have any personal experience of, but nonetheless still makes sense to me. When deep ecologist and magician, David Abram received a research grant to study the links between folk medicine, traditional magic and the animate natural world, he went to Indonesia to spend time with local magicians. He says: "the shaman or sorcerer is the exemplary voyager in the intermediate realm between the human and more-than-human worlds, the primary strategist and negotiator in any dealing with the Others… [she is] involved in monitoring and maintaining the relations *between* the human village and the animate landscape" (Abram, 1996: 7). While he was there, he started to pay more attention to the natural world, and, after many days alone, he says that the qualities of his perception of and reception my the more-than-human world began to change. One day, he says: "I stepped out from a clutch of trees and found myself looking into the face of one of the rare and beautiful bison that exist only on that island. Our eyes locked. When it snorted, I snorted back; when it shifted it shoulders, I shifted my stance; when I tossed my head, it tossed *its* head in reply. I found myself caught in a nonverbal conversation with the Other, a gestural duet with which my conscious awareness had very little to do. It was as if my body in its actions was suddenly being motivated by a wisdom older than my thinking mind, as though it was held and moved by a logos, deeper than words, spoken by the Other's body, the trees, and the stony ground on which we stood" (Abram, 1996: 21)[242,243].

Abram says that shamanism is: "the ability to readily slip out of the perceptual boundaries that demarcate his or her particular culture – boundaries reinforced by social customs, taboos, and most importantly, the common speech or language – in order to make contact with, and learn from, the other powers in the land," but he warns: "in the 'developed world' today… many persons in search of spiritual understanding are enrolling in workshops concerned with 'shamanic' methods of personal discovery and revelation… 'Shamanism has thus come to connote an alternative form of therapy; the emphasis, among these new practitioners of popular shamanism, is on personal insight and curing. These are noble aims, to be sure, yet they are secondary to, and derivative from, the primary role of the indigenous shaman, a role that cannot be fulfilled without long and sustained exposure to wild nature, its patterns and vicissitudes. Mimicking the indigenous shaman's curative methods

[242] The weekend before writing this section, I bumped into ecological storyteller, Malcolm Green. He told me that he's just been on an Apache tracking course, and taken from it the notion of walking in nature with "an open heart, a soft foot and wide awareness".
[243] David Rothenberg, a musician and translator of some of deep ecologist Arne Naess' work also writes of similar encounters, for example when he was playing clarinet to a bird, which joined in: "I was shocked to find a bird really paying attention to me, jamming along with the clarinet in an engaged, attentive way – laughter or music of the first degree" (Rothenberg, 2005: 270).

without his intimate knowledge of the wider natural community can not, if I am correct, do anything more than trade certain symptoms for others, or shift the locus of dis-ease from place to place within the human community" (Abram, 1996: 9, 21).

Compare Abram's understanding with what artist Joseph Beuys has to say on the subject: "So when I appear as a kind of shamanistic figure, or allude to it, I do it to stress my belief in other priorities and the need to come up with a completely different plan for working with substances. For instance, in places like universities, where everyone speaks so rationally, it is necessary for a kind of enchanter to appear" (Beuys, 1979: 3).

Art critic Donald Kuspit says that the purpose of Beuys' shamanism was to restore art "to the primordial power of healing it once had…" and that "shamanistic art can trigger a creative, empathic intrapsychic process, but the audience must see it through. The work's creation is the model for the healing of the self, just as its wholeness is a model for the self's integrity. As many have said, the modern work is fragmentary; but it is also a mythical whole – an entity unto itself – in its audience's eyes[244]" (Kuspit, 1993: 91-92). Kuspit draws on Winnicott's notion of the "potential space" to help make sense of Beuys' work: "Donald Winnicott's sense of creativity as occurring in transitional or potential space, and as such existing to deny that one's separateness is irreversible and absolute, is [an] answer. It is of special relevance to Beuys. His shamanistic performances, of which his objects are the symbol-residues, were attempts to create a transitional space that would function as a facilitating environment in which a sense of what Winnicott called the True Self[245] could be recovered. The problem, of course, is that Beuys' critics saw his performances as a sign of False Self – the showman. They could not understand that Beuys was attempting something unusual: to use the False Self[246] in the service of the True Self" (Kuspit, 1995: 35).

It seems to me, then, that Beuys' actions might be considered to be "popular" healing shamanism, rather than "primary, indigenous" shamanism, according to Abram's experiential understanding. I am suspicious – to what extent was the work personally therapeutic, narcissistic, or of wider social and deeper ecological influence and significance? "Should" this work have been more overtly political? Or was it anyway?

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[244] In 2005, I went to see a pair of performances by the avant-garde group of performance artist-dancers, "Goat Island". The work, which I found very strange indeed, dealt with issues of torture and time. My experience of the paired event, which perhaps might as close as I have come to Beuys' actions in its form, was that it was fragmentary, and my role as a witness-audience to the performances became making or intuiting my own whole from the parts.

[245] "The true self comes from the aliveness of the body tissues and the working of body functions, including the heart's action and breathing. It is closely linked with the idea of the primacy process, and is, at the beginning, essentially not reactive to external stimuli, but primary" (Winnicott, 1960).

[246] "In the cases on which my work is based there has been what I call a true self hidden, protected by a false self. This false self is no doubt an aspect of the true self. It hides and protects it, and it reacts to the adaptation failures and develops a pattern corresponding to the pattern of environmental failure. In this way the true self is not involved in the reacting, and so preserves a continuity of being. However, this hidden true self suffers an impoverishment that derives from lack of experience" (Winnicott, 1955-56).

I can see that it might be easy for me to get inappropriately judgemental here (no contact across difference)... I am soothed by Stephen Nachmanovitch's words about his friend and teacher, Gregory Bateson: "Confronted with the crisis of mind and nature in our day, many people believe we must jump to some sort of political action. Gregory, for most of his life, was cynical about politics of any sort, and felt that even the best-intentioned and best-informed such action must inevitably backfire" (Nachmanovitch, 1981: 20).

Finally, just to push this a bit farther, and certainly tip over the edge of my understanding… I am including a description of a 1966 performance in Copenhagen of Beuys' action *Eurasia-Siberia Symphony* which (albeit second hand, out of place and out of time) raises ambivalent responses in me, from *"bullshit"* to *"great, this is* ***it****"* (Andersen, in Kuspit, 1995: 41). Kuspit also says of such actions that Beuys was too caught up in his own tragedy: "He should have been more of a clown than he was" (Kuspit, 1993: 99).

Beuys manoeuvred, along a line drawn on the floor, a dead hare whose legs and ears were extended by long, thin, black wooden stilts. These touched the floor when Beuys put the hare on his shoulders. He walked from the wall to a blackboard, where he put the hare down. On the way back, three things happened. He scattered white powder between the hare's legs, stuck a thermometer in its mouth, and blew into a tube. Then he turned to the blackboard with its bisected cross, making the hare prick up its ears as he suspended his foot, which had an iron plate tied to it, above a similar plate on the floor. Now and then he stamped his feet down hard on this plate.

Obligated witness

"On the path to his or her truth and freedom, the seeker after Truth finds solace in the act of witnessing… the word witness and its derivatives – in Arabic and persian, shâhed, shadîd, shahâdat, particularly in their sûfi connotation – mean 'to observe', 'to witness, 'to bear testimony', 'to be present at or in', 'to reflect the beauty or truth', but also 'to become a martyr'…"
Rahmena (1997: 400)

In the legal world, a witness has two obligations: to see or perceive an event or circumstance and to tell or testify to what they have seen. So much of the work with the MSc learners at the University of Bath has at some level been concerned with the unsustainable inequities which characterise a world dominated by a reductionist, consumerist mindset that I felt I drawn to go and see for myself – to bear witness to – severe under privilege. In this sense, I felt obliged *to* witness, if I was to stand any chance of having a right to explore and discuss these issues of gross inequity back in the comfort of the "uppers" at Bath.

But is that enough? What a stereotypical "upper" move that could be… pop over to poor countries, smile at the poor people, take a peek at their lives, make a few notes and come back on the next plane thinking I now have the right to speak from a better understanding.

Language professor, Kimberly Nance says that we must go further: "witnessing an injustice is no guarantee of action to prevent it happening again. Witnesses can and often so remain bystanders" (Nance, 2006: 11-12). She says that we must not become empathic "co-victims" and leave it at that, we must become "obligated" witnesses with a responsibility to act[247] (Nance, 2006: 13).

She describes a "conventional empathy" as "an immediate emotional reaction". The ordinary everyday contact I have with, for example, the Ghanaian prostitutes, or taking my driver out for lunch and eating together seems like conventional empathy, where, as Nance says, I realise how much I myself and the person I am with are alike[248]. Conventional empathy operates on the basis of the commonalities of this being human, and I have no wish to undermine or devalue this kind of empathy, which takes time, care, mutual attention and a paradoxical intending-but-not-trying to

[247] When I use the word "act" in this context, I am including in the meaning conscious, informed choices to not act as actions in themselves. Act, then includes both action and non-action. What it does not include is paralysis, avoidance, running away and so on…

[248] I miss out on opportunities for conventional empathy when it comes to the many women I meet on my travels who are mothers, having no desire to reproduce myself. Sometimes I talk about my niece and nephew, who I rarely see, and sometimes I talk about my neighbours' daughters, who I have seen grow up. At best, I think I gain some kind of unspoken sympathy that either I haven't been able to bag a husband, or that I am sadly barren. I avoid speaking about my dog, for whom I have cared for over a decade, especially in countries like Viet Nam, where dog is on the menu. I do use my two chickens as a way of finding similarity (although they're extremely ancient and haven't laid an egg in years), and that I live in a small village. Does this work, or is it patronising? Both, probably.

enable it to happen. I have found it easiest to build conventional empathy when eating, drinking, dancing or sharing common intellectual interests (such as market research techniques in Ghana) with people. I work to build these spaces both with my ILO work and with my MSc work (where I encourage groups to prepare meals for each other, for example). Nance's work suggests that the problem with conventional empathy alone is that witnesses feeling such empathy do little more than become overly-identified with what feels similar and familiar at the expense of acting for political change about the differences that make the material difference to people's life chances.

Marianella Sclavi says the "simplifications that cause one to ignore the possibility of another's differences create a crisis in the dynamics of establishing open communication and common ground" and "[conventional] empathy may not be enough in seeking to understand the experience of the other" (Sclavi, 2005: 2-4). Similarly, Julie Salverson suggests that there are "tendencies in both pedagogy and aesthetics to reduce the other to the explainable," and yet, we "can never know… the Other; I can only respond, attend, and remain willing to hear beyond my own conceptions" (Salverson, 2006: 147-149).

Drawing on the early work of Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, Nance introduces a second type of empathy – a "constructed" empathy, which she says "is hard ethical and imaginative work. It is not only a matter of discovery of pre-existing points in common, or even seeking the closest analogies in one's experiential inventory, but rather attempting the impossible: seeing the world from the other's place… [this] appears at first to violate a precept of respect for difference… Rather, [Bakhtin's formulation] acknowledges the impossibility but at the same time insists on the necessity of the attempt" (Nance, 2006: 12-13). It seems to me that constructed empathy invites compassion – a word that's easily bandied about, but, like constructed empathy (perhaps they're the same), impossibly necessary to attempt. Social worker, David Brandon says that "Compassion is the process of deep contact with the primordial source of love. It is the direct communication from the innermost recesses of one's existence… The highest level of compassion is without any purpose or intent. It seeks neither the good of others nor its own good. It lies in being good not 'doing good'. There is simply living without design or conscious reflection. It embodies the fostering of love" (Brandon, 1978: 49-50).

Buddhist Chogyam Trungpa links compassion with joy: "Compassion has nothing to do with achievement at all. It is spacious and very generous. When a person develops real compassion, he is uncertain whether he is being generous to others or to himself because compassion is environmental generosity, without direction, without 'for me' and without 'for them'. It is filled with joy, spontaneously existing joy, constant joy in the sense of trust, in the sense that joy contains tremendous wealth, richness" (Chogyam Trungpa, 1973: 99).

I find compassion one of those words which (a bit like the phrase "I am passionate about") keeps popping up in what seems to me to be a rather shallow, unrooted way. I don't know if I have ever really experienced compassion. When I interrogate myself from the inside out, I don't think I really know what the word signifies. Does this reveal me to be a thoughtless meany? Being compassionate feels like such a grand claim... or perhaps my superficial life circumstances have been too undramatically soft and comfortable for it to arise.

Nance says that it is the differences that obligate witnesses to act, not the similarities. The witness, then, perceives both similarity (identifying with) and difference (alterity[249]). If perceived *at the same time*, I suggest that this double vision of identifying with and seeing difference gives rise to "thick" emotion, for example, my encounter with Suhail's wife in Moradabad, where (for some mysterious reason) we identified strongly with each other as women at the same time as perceiving the huge differences in our lives[250].

Making the attempt "to see and know what the other feels" reminds me of my experience of Goethean science, where the first four stages of the process, *exact sense perceiving, exact sensorial imagination, seeing in beholding* and *becoming one with*[251] invite engaged, obligated witness-researchers to do just as Bakhtin says and endeavour to see the world from the other's place. "Knowledge, for Goethe," says Jeremy Naydler, "is not arrived at by imposing ideas on experiences, but by deepening experiences to the point at which their innate idea-content is made manifest" (Naydler, 1996: 89). The disciplines and mindset of Goethean science could be of use here, including at its next stages, *catching ideas* and *growing the idea into matter*, which require the researcher-witness "to return to one's own place from which action is possible" – which is what Nance calls (after Bakhtin), the "exotopic moment" (Nance, 2006: 13).

Exotopy is a term coined by Bakhtin to denote this return to your own place. Sclavi says that "exotopy *requires a double displacement: you displace yourself in order to be able to displace the [other]…* We must be prepared to feel 'awkward', to recognize that we find absurd or thoroughly ridiculous and nonsense what the other person is saying and/or doing. Displacement becomes a necessary step to establish the mutual recognition, respect and learning required for the joint and creative solution to a

[249] *Alterity* derives from the Latin *alteritae*, meaning the state of being other or different, diversity, otherness. Its English derivatives are alternate, alternative, alternation, and alter ego. The term *alterite* is more common in French, and has the antonym *identite* (Johnson and Smith, 1990: xviii).
[250] I have no idea why or how that particular encounter was so strong, cutting through the whole ideas of similarities and differences. If as Rumi says, there is another field, then that is where we met. I still wonder now about how I might use the privileges I have to serve women in Suhail's wife's context – without trying to reduce them to me. I didn't have a translator with me, but I would have loved to sit with her and really ask "what do you want?", "what do you need?", "How can I be of use?". I don't even know her name.
[251] See the interlude *Glimpsing a Goethean Way of Seeing*.

problem. The arrogance of the know-it-all is replaced by an acceptance of vulnerability, together with the pleasure that comes from being someone who learns and grows, who changes with others instead of opposing them" (Sclavi, 2005: 4-5).

She says that exotopy is particularly needed in more complex frames of reference: "When we move within a 'simple system' (shared frames of reference, the same assumed premises), the most appropriate habit of thought is that of classical logic – analytical and linear reasoning *plus* empathy. But when the system is 'complex' (characterised by communication between different frames of reference), one needs a different habit of thought, one guided by thick active listening (exotopy), which considers the observer as an integral part of what is being observed, both circularly and self-reflectively" (Sclavi, 2005).

In response to Sclavi's comments, I suggest that the field of the MSc is a simpler system (in which I and others can flourish and learn in an environment which develops fuelled by lots of conventional empathy) than the more complex field of the ILO-type work, where conventional or constructed empathy, if achieved at all, is insufficient for transformative change to happen.

Irigaray says: "From the moment that I am not you, every instant allows me to return to myself. You are the one who helps me remain in myself, to stay in myself, to contain or keep me in myself, to remain present and not paralyzed by the past or in flight towards the future. Your irreducible alterity gives me the present, presence: the possibility of being in myself" (Irigaray, 2002: 37). She continues: "It is not by overcoming distances that the human will find proximity to self, to the other nor even to the world. It is rather the capacity to stay in oneself, to exist in one's autonomy, distinct from what surrounds one. It is also in the ability to proceed from oneself while recognising the part of the other in this provenance. The appropriate name for such a participation of the other in the provenance of self is perhaps engendering[252]" (Irigaray, 2002: 127-128). And again: "Two gestures appear necessary: to reground singular identity and to reground community constitution" (Irigaray, 2002: 3).

I think one of my learning edges is that point of regrounding my singular identity – of coming back to myself. For some reason, I am far more aware that the return to myself seems to be structured according to someone else's, or an enforced time schedule… so my sense is that I rarely get to experience the turn back in according to my own needs and time schedules, as opposed to someone else's. An example of this is the transient nature of the MSc work, where, at the end of the workshop, the group parts whether we are ready for it or not.

[252] *en·gen·der* (ĕn-jĕn′dər): *v.* en·gen·dered, en·gen·der·ing, en·gen·ders. *v.tr.* 1. To bring into existence; give rise to: "Every cloud engenders not a storm" Shakespeare. 2. To procreate; propagate. *v.intr.* To come into existence; originate.

The same issues arise in clowning: "Clowning invites you to step back, but it shouldn't be at the expense of having gone inwards. The danger with clowning is that you step back without having gone inwards first and connecting" (Gladwell, 24 August 2004, personal communication).

I understand from the concept of exotopy the necessity of stepping back, of proceeding from oneself and of returning back to myself in order for (non-)action to emerge. I understand exotopic movements to be the moments and half days I had to ask for (for example in Viet Nam) in order to sense-make on my own, those times which, when left to their own devices, my ILO clients somehow didn't seem to think were necessary (for example, on the 25 meetings in 5 days trip to India). I understand the feeling of saturation that came early in 2006 after five years of PhD research to be the call for exotopy – to return to my own place to act into the compiling and writing.

I can find the exotopic moment, if it is imposed on me, difficult and sometimes painful. Sometimes I am not ready to return to myself when the stages of conventional and constructed empathy feel unfinished. So much of my work seems to be predicated on rapidly and sensitively building contact, it's no wonder that through the clowning, my developmental support has also been strong in this area. Yet, little has prepared me (or I have not prepared myself well) for the exotopic moments of coming back to myself – this took years to develop during the heat of the ILO weeks of work. I am now better at being quieter after the MSc workshops, for example, and letting the experience fade gradually.

Nance says that constructed empathy "is essential grounding for the exotopic moment" (Nance, 2006: 13). I am not sure that the current configuration of my ILO work allows sufficient time to receive in ways that might engender constructed empathy, except now and again, seemingly by accident. The repeating rhythm of the MSc and my second person inquiry work does allow such deepening, the constant call to the clown to receive, receive, receive on stage invites empathy of all sorts, as did the intensity of my Goethean science week. But still, the shock of the transience of these more deeply empathetic places disturbs me, as I show in this piece of writing (from right in the feeling, which of course has now passed) the morning after one of the MSc groups I had worked with finished (written 5 July 2006):

It is now the morning after MSc8's graduation ceremony and party afterwards. I stayed in Bath overnight and, driving home today my head was filled with flash memories of familiar faces and snippets of remembered discussions, expressions, laughter and embraces from the night before. I remember people's eyes the most. And then, it's over. All gone. The transience of this work, after two years of building loving attention, fills me with sadness. This is such an abrupt severance from enthusiastic chatter, inquiry, paying attention to one another, and I feel it as a tension inside me like a storm that doesn't break. The feeling of loss sits in my chest, a still

nugget. The loss holds its breath and doesn't want to let go. I see those faces again in my mind and return to the empty quiet of my house. Alone again. The familiarity of home helps a little. Maybe it was all just a dream, I can tell myself here. The loving atmosphere of the party is just a memory now, as if I'd read it in a book. It's OK.

If the transience of this work was all partings and no building of community I couldn't stand it. This two year cycle is a hot hard tempering ground of love and loss, love and loss. The loss hits me harder as I become more open to the love part of it. I am flexed and stretched by the intensity of the emotions, but I find no good means to express my grief. We do the endings well, but what about afterwards? In my home life, I seem manifestly unable to build the kind of communality and reciprocity I experience with these groups. The contrast is sharp and it hurts. I realise that I do this work for those feelings of love and connection. Returning to my home ground is the harder part of the equation, but I can't experience one without the other. Another layered emotion…

With both the MSc (over a two year cycle) and the ILO work (over typically 2 week cycles) the transience and brevity of the encounters prevent me from appropriating the other: "the subject is structured not by mastering or dominating but by accepting that the subject is not the whole, that the subject represents only one part of reality and of truth, that the other is forever a **not I, nor me, nor mine**, and not a: **not yet, not yet mine** to integrate into me or into us" (Irigaray, 2002: 127)[253].

The forms of the work force me to step back in an exotopic gesture, often just at the point where the deepest empathy has been achieved. I slip into the meetings and the development of empathy with the warm feeling of having a worthwhile task ahead. My move away again feels like a wrench, irrationally with nothing on the other side. But of course there is something on the other side, the end of one MSc heralds the nourishment and development of a new group, the travel home from a piece of ILO work invites and enables new explorations elsewhere. It is the exotopic return to my self that can feel like a black hole. At the end of one MSc workshop, one of the participants became tearful at how he'd missed his family, and I momentarily became envious of the thought of having that pull to home as a presence, a place of belonging rather than representing an absence of the intense contact that work offers me.

Irigaray says: "We want to have the entire world in our head, sometimes the entire world in our heart. We do not see that this gesture transforms the life of the world into something finished, dead, because the world thus loses its own life, a life always foreign to us, exterior to us, other than us. Thus if we precisely grasped all that is the springtime, we would without doubt lose the wondrous contemplation in the face of

[253] I've been on the receiving end of this twice that I have known of, in rather clumsy, blunt ways. Both encounters were with men, lovers, 20 years apart in time and nearly 40 years apart in age. One said: "I don't want you, but I don't want anyone else to have you either," and the other speculated "do I have her yet?" Although I cannot imagine using such words, even privately to myself, I cringingly recognise the grabby devouring grasp of these phrases in my more insecure moments, like a collector pinning a butterfly down.

the mystery of springtime growth, we would lose the life, the vitality, in which this universal renewal has us participate without us being able to know or control where the joy, the force, the desire that animate us come from." (Irigaray, 2002: 121-122).

Salverson questions "is there a relationship between happiness, suffering, and the capacity to bear witness, to be present to both the losses and capabilities of others?" and asks "what the notion of a courageous happiness might being to the ethics of witnessing a tragic world?" (Salverson, 2006: 146).

Like the clown, the witness is obliged to receive and to (not) act but be thoroughly engaged: "the challenge to respond with integrity – honestly, with one's entire being – is a challenge to witness" (Salverson, 2006: 147). She continues: "the idea of the clown I am drawing on is not the stereotypical circus clown, but one characterised by truthfulness and a willingness to engage in the face of failure. This clown begins with nothing, is in fact ridiculous but is innocent of this fact, innocent of the impossibility of hope. To be ridiculous is normal, ridicule and loss is part of life, flopping, messing up, is inevitable. 'In the face of this, let us begin,' says this clown. This clown always needs a playmate, someone to begin with. This idea of needing to be engaged, having to engage, suggests a new approach to witnessing… French artists Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier teach that the clown refuses consolation, including the consolation of forgetting. In their approach to teaching and performing clown there are a number of key elements: a world from which there is no escape; an audience, implicated and present; clowns on the stage, constantly seeking to love and be loved, and above all offering their naked selves." Finally, Salverson asks: "What potential could be offered by a fool's help, a foolish witness?... In being foolish witnesses, we allow ourselves to fail while remaining always alert, ready, and willing to try" (Salverson, 2006: 153).

In her book "Witnessing: Beyond Recognition", Kelly Oliver concludes that "relations with others do not have to be hostile alien encounters. Instead, they can be loving adventures, the advent of something new. Difference does not have to be threatening; it can be exciting, the source of the meaning of life" (Oliver, 2001: 224). She calls for us to witness "the process of witnessing itself [such that we can] begin to reconstruct our relationships by imagining ourselves together" (Oliver, 2001: 223)[254],

Majid Rahnema comes to a comparable conclusion in his understanding through a post-development lens. He says: "For half a century [development's] 'target populations' suffered the intrusion in their lives of an army of development teachers and experts, including well-intentioned field workers and activists, who spoke with big words – from conscientization to learning from and loving with the people. Often they had studied Marx, Gramsci, Friere and the latest research about empowerment and participation. However, their lives (and often careers) seldom allowed them to enter the intimate world of their 'target populations'. They were good at giving people

[254] My experience is that the clown is her own witness, publicly witnessing herself witnessing others…

passionate lectures about their rights, their entitlements, the class struggle and land reform. Yet few asked themselves about the deeper motivations prompting them to do what they were doing. Often they knew neither the people they were working with, nor themselves. And they were so busy achieving what *they* thought they had to do *for* the people, that they could not learn enough *from* them about how to actually 'care' for them, as they would for their closest relatives and friends whom they knew and loved." (Rahnema, 1997: 392).

Oliver suggests that imagination includes the idea of "the possibility and necessity of love beyond domination," identifying "love as the first and primary form of recognition for subject formation, which becomes the foundation for later social and political forms of recognition." She writes of "the necessity of love in order to form the self-confidence needed to operate as an agent," calling for a "loving eye" (Frye 1983, Oliver 2001, Warren 2001).

Drawing on Frye's earlier work, Karen Warren says: "The loving eye is a contrary of the arrogant eye. The loving eye knows the independence of the other. It is the eye of a seer who knows that nature is indifferent. It is the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult some thing other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination. One must look at the thing. One must look and listen and check and question. The loving eye is one that pays a certain sort of attention. This attention can require a discipline but not a self-denial. The discipline is one of self-knowledge, knowledge of the scope and boundary of the self... In particular, it is a matter of being able to tell one's own interests from those of others and of knowing where one's self leaves off and another begins.... The loving eye does not make the object of perception into something edible, does not try to assimilate it, does not reduce it to the size of the seer's desire, fear and imagination, and hence does not have to simplify. It knows the complexity of the other as something which will forever present new things to be known" (Warren, 1996)[255].

The clowning workshops and learning I take part in are fundamentally informed by psychologist Carl Rogers' idea of "unconditional positive regard", which I correlate with the loving eye. Using the client-therapist terminology of his own field of work, Rogers says "to the extent that the therapist finds [herself] experiencing a warm acceptance of each aspect of the client's experience as being part of that client, [she] is experiencing unconditional positive regard… It means a 'prizing' of the person" (Rogers, 1989: 225). What I like about Rogers' definition is the footnote he attaches to it, which offers a critical humility seemingly absent in Warren, Frye and Oliver's[256] work: "The phrase 'unconditional positive regard' may be an unfortunate one, since it sounds like an absolute, an all-or-nothing dispositional concept. It is probably evident from the description that completely unconditional positive regard would never exist

[255] Warren, Karen 1996 Ecological Feminist Philosophies, Indiana Univ. Pr., Bloomington 137 ISBN 0253210291
[256] Wimmin, huh?

except in theory. From a clinical and experiential point of view I believe the most accurate statement is that the effective therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client during many moments of [her] contact with him, yet from time to time [she] only experiences a conditional positive regard – and perhaps at times a negative regard, though this is not likely in effective therapy. It is in this sense that unconditional regard exists as a matter of degree in any relationship" (Rogers, 1989: 225)[257].

As I find myself inexorably drawn (again) to the ideas of the "loving eye" (as I have been in my writing during 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006) and, through my clowning work, "unconditional positive regard", I can't help but also think what a terribly floppy, non-specific, obvious, vital, desirable, flimsy and fundamental conclusion it is to draw… I still couldn't offer instructions or advice to others on achieving this state which I only glimpse myself and yet, it forms the lifeblood of my work[258]... the participants in inquiry groups, the woman in Moradabad, that meeting with Brian Goodwin, the learners on the MSc…

[257] I have taken the liberty of changing the gender in Rogers' quotations to suit me. Wimmin, huh?
[258] Unsolicited feedback from another participant on the Goethean science workshop (April 2006):
I watched you from across the room.
I could see the clown in you.
You're paying attention without looking, like you are amused.
It's in the eyes. I can see it in your eyes.
There's love and interest, paying attention.

Conviction

This section is informed by my clowning experiences, which have gradually leaked out into other areas of my work[259]. I have gathered a collection of comments and insights I have noted and transcribed from my teachers, myself and my fellow learners in response to clowning workshops over the last two and a half years (between February 2004 and August 2006), many of which I think could be referring to the experience of living life with an inquiring attitude. This collection of insights reflects my embodied experience of coming on to the stage again and again with no idea what might happen (and the conviction to stay with whatever does happen). I have clustered my experiences into four moods of committed (non-)action: **receiving**, **leading**, **enabling** and **following**. This is bottom-up learning feels grounded and precious as it comes from my body outwards. The interplay of these four moods makes for committed, serious play, and the invitation of clowning is to dwell in and move between these moods[260] with whole hearted conviction.

- **Receiving** – coming onto the stage, suspending any action and spending time taking on board and getting to know (connaître) what is present, what is happening there. This is the power of the witness who receives.

  Go slower, receive before responding.
  Stay simple, take your time, trust the emptiness.

  There's a need to receive, but in a naïve way.
  Take time to receive what you encounter.
  Don't act on what's going on around you too quickly.
  Take your time. Stay with it.
  Stay with the phenomena in order to receive what it is,
  using the senses to find out and not the intellect.
  Observe the thing in itself, until the inner gesture begins to rise in us.
  Live with it until it comes alive.
  I receive, I pour myself into the chalice of the world

  We come in so full of ideas of what we think we know
  that we can't see what's in front of us.
  Receiving means coming in empty of ideas,
  so that we can see what's in front of us.

[259] For example, the felt experience of walking onto the empty clown stage feels the same as walking into a new situation with the ILO through simply not knowing what might happen next.
[260] This moving between moods could be considered to be a kind of procedure. I build a picture through this way of knowing *and* that way of knowing. Through receiving *and* leading *and* enabling *and* following. These are practices or procedures for trying to connect. Clinchy (in Goldberger et al, 1996: 205-47) points out the need for such procedures, in which she calls "connected knowing". She says: "True connected knowing is neither easy nor natural… [connected knowing is] a rigorous, deliberate, and demanding *procedure*, a way of knowing that requires *work*" (Goldberger et al, 1996: 209).

- **Leading** – putting forward and staying with a clear idea or initiative, an *invitation* to play for others to follow. This is the power to take action, with well prepared spontaneity, not pre-planned rigidity.

  We have a responsibility to listen to ourselves,
  and if we have an insight,
  we have a responsibility to share it with others.

  Risk acting before thinking.
  This space demands that you commit yourself before thinking.

  There's something very satisfying about just one idea going through.
  When you find a vein of gold, you follow that vein until the gold runs out,
  you don't go off and look for another vein straight away.
  Its not about having more and more ideas,
  it's about finding one thing and following it.

  Act, and through the acting you will know.
  When you connect with something,
  then you touch it and through acting,
  then you begin to know.

  Don't delay the action.
  If you don't commit yourself, nothing happens.
  You can do anything.
  Don't withhold the action.

  Do it do it do it do it.
  Go on, go on, over the top.

  When you act from intention only, then you're cut off at the roots
  and there's not space for anything creative to come up.

  When you want to do something, do it,
  but only half the time and sometimes, that's not easy.
  Waiting for your turn is doing something.

  The part of you that has more energy doesn't have to be a tyrant.

  Receive any small movement forward with gratitude,
  and don't lament all that is still left to come.

  As soon as you show your authority, you lose it.

- **Enabling** – supporting others in their initiatives through holding the space and paying appreciative attention to what they are doing. This enabling power encourages and emboldens others.

  How do we support the action when we're not part of the action?
  How are we present and supportive?

  This is a lesson in democracy.
  We become strong, not because we are strong,
  but because other people make us strong.
  It's a very generous act.

  Donner le jeu - giving the game
  Enabling the other to flourish.
  It's not about what I do,
  it's about what I enable others to do.

  When something is happening, the thing to learn is to do less,
  so that you give everyone the chance to see what's happening.
  You don't have to do anything at that moment.

  Understand the difference between:
  "doing nothing," and doing "doing nothing".
  The fact that you think you have to do something
  is doing something.
  We have to tame this sense of doing nothing.

  You have to trust that that's enough.
  You have to trust that what we do is enough.
  That doing nothing is enough.

  Step back and still hold a right / responsibility for acting.

- **Following** – mirroring someone else's initiative to amplify what they are doing, mimicking their actions in service of their initiatives. This power of following generously, of solidarity, invites and amplifies voices which might otherwise be silenced or unheard.

  Be totally at the service of another
  to make their wishes come to life.
  Be at the service of what is in front of you.

  Amplify others' initiatives.
  There is an aesthetic quality about resonance, amplification.

  When they were acting both together, they were formidable.
  Acting from a base of communion has a more solid, broader foundation.

  Allow the relationship to develop.
  If you manage to keep it simple,
  then you can allow the relationship to develop.

It seems to me that developing the conviction to (not) act side steps the seemingly intractable problem of at one level knowing that everything is relative and on the other wanting to act for (what? which?) change[261]. This hung state can so easily engender what Salverson names as a "kind of politically correct paralysis" (Salverson, 2006: 147). She says that, through concerns and worries such as "I could not presume" or "How could I know?" or "How could I have anticipated?", ""we are confronted with the I, but am I more paralyzed than prepared for difficult engagement" (Salverson, 2006: 150) and goes on to say something which resonates strongly with me: "the other side of rushing to fix it, is to be too afraid to rush at all. It is a curious irony if we find ourselves weaving a web of distance in the name of contact and engagement" (Salverson, 2006: 151). The clown would say, go on, risk it, see what happens.

Conviction is more of a matter of sticking with a chosen course of (non-)action, of seeing it through, whilst being willing to discard that pathway if feedback says that there are too many negative unintended and unforeseeable consequences. "Clowning invites us to enter into the play – knowing it is play – with full conviction. It's not a problem of [making an] image, it's a problem of conviction" (Gladwell, 14 May 2006, personal communication). Without conviction, I am unwittingly paralysed, withdrawn, unavailable and out of touch.

[261] This is an issue that many learners on the MSc programme encounter. When recalling discussions with Gregory Bateson, Stephen Nachmanovitch writes "truth is multifaceted, but it is not just anything" (Nachmanovitch, 1981: 24).

Julie Salverson says: "central to Jacques LeCoq's[262] teaching about clown – and, perhaps, Boal's teaching as well – is the willingness to offer ourselves, something he called having *quelque chose à dire* (something to say). If we do not bring who we are, including our skills and our vulnerabilities, to the encounter with others, then we are not truly available" (Salverson, 2006: 154-155).

I have learned about developing conviction primarily through the inner experience of clowning, and what I have learned in this part of my life applies elsewhere. For some years, I have been wondering how I might name this type of learning, which, although learned through one specific type of experience, is *directly* relevant to other fields.

- Is the conviction of the clown stepping up to take a lead a *metaphor*[263] for the me that steps up to run an impromptu workshop in Sri Lanka?
- Is the conviction of the clown to enable others to perform on stage *analogous*[264] to the me that holds the space for MSc participants to questions guest speakers, and present their own stories and inquiries?
- Is the conviction of the clown to simply receive what's going on around her *homologous*[265] to the me that takes on board the sights, sounds, smells and heat of the brass casting district of Moradabad?

During the clown and deep ecology discussions with Vivian in 2004, we concluded that this learning is *resonant*[266] across different fields. Lakoff and Johnson might say it is experientially metaphoric: "we understand experience metaphorically when we use a gestalt from one domain of experience to structure experience in another domain" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The word "analogy" doesn't feel strong enough. And, technically, the link is not homologous – it does not derive from a common ancestry - but, I would suggest the link is *homoplastic*[267] – it is evolving towards a convergent future. *Homoplasy* is an ungainly word, but my experience is that my own professional practice and my clowning practice are on a convergent evolutionary path. Humanity needs a place of joy, a place for self-irony, a place for wide awareness of context, a place for innocence and naïveté, the ability to laugh at ourselves as we stumble around in the degraded future of our own making…

Clowning is a celebration of all the things we are desperately trying not to be in life[268]

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[262] LeCoq was a French performance artist and teacher whose work informs the ways that clowning has been taught to me.
[263] *Metaphor:* a figure of speech by which a thing is spoken of as being that which it only resembles.
[264] *Analogy*: is the comparison of two pairs which have the same relationship (eg: hot is to cold as fire is to ice).
[265] *Homology*: a similarity of structure and function due not to common ancestry but to a common "archetype" or basic plan on which all forms were based (a biological term).
[266] *Resonant:* Strongly reminiscent; evocative.
[267] *Homoplasy*: Correspondence between parts or organs arising from evolutionary convergence (another biological term).
[268] This must have been said by Vivian at some point during every one of the clown workshops I've been at…

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing…

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field - I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
Doesn't make any sense.

Rumi[269]

[269] The Sufi pattern above is called Ḥāl/Waqt. It expresses a spiritual state (ḥāl) as being both complementary to the moment of encounter (waqt) and the opposite of stability (tamkīn). The spiritual state evokes the impact of an encounter with a moment of time.

The comic spirit masquerades in all things we say and do. We are each a clown and do not need to put on a white face.
James Hillman

For the present, the comedy of existence has not yet "become conscious" of itself. For the present, we still live in an age of tragedy, the age of moralities and religions.
Friedrich Nietzsche

Comedy is ultimately more enchanting than tragedy, even for those disenchanted by themselves because of their own tragedy.
Donald Kuspit (1993: 99)

Writing this whole chapter has been a bit of a dream – but one where my feet are still planted in experience. I have worked hard not to let my intellect overstretch where my experience has taken me – even if that experience was only a glimpse of meeting in "that other field" Rumi wrote about. In spite of, and perhaps because of this extended inquiry within the PhD framework I see better how far I am from living my own aspirations on a day to day basis. I am a long way off knowing or expressing from my heart instead of my intellect. I am a long way off being in tune with my planetary home. I am a long way off being able to witness the kinds of difficulties we have got ourselves into as a species through the eyes of the clown. I'm a long way off being playful unless the context really invites it. I may even be less able to access these states of being now than I was before the whole PhD started and my intellect got so thoroughly nourished.

At the same time, I see better what my aspirations and possibilities are. Through the clowning and through my (partial and small) reconnection with presentational knowing, I know better in my body that building the capacity for improvisation and play does have a place and is not necessarily a sign of ill-preparedness or shallow deflection. I know better in my body that bittersweet "thick" emotions are a desirable sign of dwelling in potential space. I know better in my body that there is also tension in that potential space to be lived with. I know better in my body that knowing others, knowing the more than human world - that knowing anything (in the connaître sense) - takes time to receive. I know better in my body that play, clown, presentational knowing and inquiry can be worthwhile strategies for living. I know better in my body that if I am to continue to integrate these different strands of experience in ways that are resonant (and *homoplastic*), that I need conviction and resolve. I know better in my body that there's sacredness in the muck and the dirt and the mistakes and the accidents and the detail and the perseverance. I know better in my body that neither hoping for a good outcome, nor despairing that a bad one will happen is much use.

Joanna Macy says don't be dependent on hope: "Hope is really just a feeling. It comes and goes. Don't be dependent on it because with hope rises hopelessness… if we shed

hope then the hopelessness goes too. We can be there, be present to this great adventure"[270]. Development practitioner, Allan Kaplan says that at best we work with neither despair or hope, but with a sense of "alive engagement, a renewal of conscious intent… We are here to understand, to rekindle a living awareness. So that we can live in our response" (Kaplan, 2005: 330-331)[271].

Yet, we *are* in jeopardy as a species, and we're dragging others down along with us. Jeopardy means: the risk of loss or injury; peril or danger - but its etymology reveals something else: *Middle English juperti, from Old French jeu parti, even game, uncertainty : jeu, game (from Latin iocus, joke, game) + parti, past participle of partir, to divide (from Latin partīre, from pars, part-, part*. We've become divided from the game. What we do and how we are is partly a bit of a joke.

Nature writer, Richard Mabey says: *"Evolution itself proceeds as an unscrupulous, opportunistic comedy, the object of which appears to be the proliferation and preservation of as many life forms as possible. Successful participants in it are those who live and reproduce even when times are hard and dangerous, not those who are best able to destroy enemies or competitors. Its ground rules for participants, including people, are those that also govern literary comedy; organisms must adapt themselves to their circumstances in every possible way, must studiously avoid all-or-nothing choices, must seek alternatives to death, must accept and revel in maximum diversity, must accommodate themselves to the accidental limitations of birth and environment, and must prefer cooperation to competition, yet compete successfully when necessary… Comedy is a strategy for living that contains ecological wisdom, and it may be one of our best guides as we try to retain a place for ourselves among other animals that live according to the comic way.*

The ultimate expression of the comic way is play, an almost universal phenomenon among more complex animals (and which includes what humans call art), and one which, in its exuberant purposelessness, seems close to the heart of the whole business of life. Play is the opposite of Management by Objectives, the current creed which screens out spontaneity, imagination and surprise as parts of the creative process" (Mabey, from Nature Cure: 200).

The glimpses I have that bring me closer to the whole messy business of life - through clowning, through contact with privileged MSc learners, through moments with people in underprivileged parts of the world who lead very different lives from my own– are the spaces that hold the potential for change, spaces like those where "a

[270] Transcribed from talks given by Joanna Macy on 6 May 2005 in Gloucestershire and 9 May 2005 in Oxford.
[271] Elsewhere, I have seen this state of being beyond hope and beyond despair variously expressed as "non-speculative equanimity" (Vidyamala, 2003: 64) and "wow/fuck" (MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice participants in a cooperative inquiry making sense of deep ecology experiences, 2006).

shared carpet of breath is woven between the clown and the audience"[272]. But I can't strive for those spaces. Like in the clowning paradox "*You can transgress any of the rules, as long as you're funny. And one of the rules is you mustn't try and be funny"* there's a game to be played with the nothingness of not trying: "…beyond the 'nothing' we must stand in, the seeming emptiness of how little we offer, there is also the 'something' we bring in our efforts to listen, to teach, to engage, and to change things. It is frightening, there is a nakedness in this kind of clownish contact" (Salverson, 2006: 155).

Perhaps, then, we are continually stepping up to the stage, with the clown's nakedness, without preconceptions to impose and with no idea what might happen next. *We can be creative, play, clown at any point because we don't know what's going to happen next… What we do in the present moment is create the possibility of the future.*

[272] Quotation from storyteller Ashley Ramsden at Emerson College, Forest Row, during my first clown workshop in August 2002.