

Expressions of Energy

an epistemology of presentational knowing

I was 6 years old when I drew this camping picture in 1972 (see left). I neither knew nor didn't know how to draw – I just made marks, straight from experience to expression. Before I could write, I expressed and responded to my world first through drawing and scribbles, wavy bits and line-y bits of bright wax crayon on newsprint that smelled like powder. There's nothing out of the ordinary in this – kids draw first, write later. And if I wasn't drawing, I might have been dancing round the living room, making up plays or imagining strange worlds with my sister.

Then, something happened, as I suppose it does with many people: “You're too bright to do art, Christine. You ought to consider chemistry and physics. Why don't you be an accountant – you're good at maths,” and eventually my own question asked as a young person growing up under the influence of United Kingdom's Thatcher era, “How will I ever make a living doing ‘art’?” Scribbles, lines and making things that surprised me gradually gave way via four years of graphic design at art school, a short spell in corporate design, and then marketing consultancy, planned research, proposals, reports and statistics that I predicted and controlled.

20 years pass, and I am facilitating a group of mid-career managers. We sit in a circle and they have their eyes shut. Some of them peek and fidget. “Remember a time when you were completely engrossed in what you were making...”, I say, and lead them through a short visualisation. Many of the stories we discuss afterwards are of childhood memories, of a time before anyone had thought to say “I can't draw,” or knew that scribbling wasn't a valuable way to spend your time.

Potter, painter and poet, MC Richards worked in the latter years of her life with groups of people with special needs. In a film of her work “The Fire Within” (Kane, 2003) we see MC with a resident at the community of which they are both a part (see next page). She says “When Andy Margoles begins he has the paper there, he has crayons, he sits down and begins. He picks something up and he goes [*MC waves her arm about erratically over an imaginary surface*] and there's that thrust, there's that energy and the look on his face also sometimes shows an expression of energy... It has something to do with immediacy, with intuition, with a sort of transparent connection between oneself and what one does. I like the way Andy does that. I like the way he suddenly moves out to the paper and does something because I can feel it in my own body when I paint. I take the brush and suddenly I'm scrubbing the paper. Why? Why am I doing that? I'm not doing it because of any visual effect. I'm doing it because there's something about that motion that is calling me”.



You may not find yourself scribbling with wild abandon too often and you may not consider yourself an artist, but, as Goethean scientist, Margaret Colquhoun suggests: “the arrangement of furniture in our living room, the daily choice of our garment, our handwriting or even just the scribbles which we make on a notepad while telephoning are *outer expressions of inner qualities*” (Colquhoun, 1996: 20). There’s nothing out of the ordinary in presentational knowing. As you read this chapter, let go of any “it’s not of value” or “I can’t do arty-things”-type thoughts that creep in. It is and you do, all the time.

A doodle at the edge

Me? I say make a sacrifice to the
doodle; pick some flowers, speak a
poem, feed the tiny muse.
Draw, paint, sing or dance, and you'll
bring the gods back into the board
room; the laughing, smiling, weeping
gods of the night-time and the wild

William Ayot

Many ways of knowing

This chapter is concerned with the ways in which we come to know our world through the processes of presenting, expressing and making manifest those *inner qualities* of our experience in the world. It offers an epistemological foundation for the chapters to come, and by introducing presentational knowing here, towards the beginning of the thesis, it is my intention to build some common ground of understanding with you. Throughout this chapter, you will notice movements in and out of italic text. These different voicings show the parallel interplay between ideas and theories and a kind of personal commenting on the implications of those ideas and theories. I start in the latter realm:

How do I do presentational knowing in this chapter, and not have it swallowed up by abstracted propositions and theories about it? How can this chapter be both a good enough fit with the conventions of academic writing at the same time as being a living example of presentational knowing? In what ways might this writing reflect the very issues it is seeking to illuminate, and how can I show my awareness of these issues as I write? How might I allow my presentational knowing to take messy, stuttering forms, if it needs to? Will I resist the temptation to strive for a glossy “performance” of smoothly flowing text? Or will this presentation of my knowing only pass muster if I perform in the “right” way? I will sit firmly in my own experiences of ways I know, whilst urging you to get to know, explore and articulate your own brand of knowing.

We come to know the world holistically in many different ways, but only some of them are recognised as valuable in modernist society¹⁶. The myth of utility-maximising, rational homo economicus strongly informs the wealthy, Western, patriarchal culture into which I was born. On the surface of things, people tend to get rewarded more highly for working in their heads with ideas, concepts, money and numbers than they do for the kinds of knowing that enable an oncology nurse to turn a patient over in a gentle dance, an artist to create a form that provokes a greater understanding of the world’s complexities, or an educator to ignite enthusiasm through her gestures for learning in the students she works with. Presentational form is routinely both devalued as a way of knowing and, paradoxically, revered by being placed in an exclusive and excluding container marked “Art” with a capital “A”. Art therapist, Pat Allen, uses the terms “image making” and “imaging” (Allen, 1995) to dissolve such exclusivity and make the whole affair more “ordinary”.

Philosopher Suzanne Langer saw how such fundamentally different ways of knowing were needed to come to know more holistically when she wrote: “there are presentational/aesthetic forms of representation and discursive/propositional forms,

¹⁶ Since making this comment on the perceived value of presentational knowing, I heard that this writing, originally destined for a chapter in a book on presentational knowing to be published by Sage, suddenly became redundant as Sage rejected the book, saying there wouldn’t be sufficient sales of a publication on this particular subject.

which are fundamentally different. For example, presentational forms represent wholes, while discursive forms represent parts; presentational forms represent tacit knowledge, while discursive forms represent explicit knowledge” (Langer, 1942, in Taylor 2004: 73).

To provide more of a vocabulary for what I mean here, I will briefly introduce a piece of theory about ways of knowing which helps me legitimise and value the broad range of ways in which we humans come to know what we know.

John Heron proposes there is an “extended epistemology” of four interwoven ways of¹⁷ knowing (Heron 1992, 1999) which reach beyond the confines of conventional intellectual positivism to embrace the pre-verbal, manifest and tacit knowings we might associate with artists, crafts people and our own guts and hearts and bodies. In some spheres, intellectualism is highly valorised and associated with the masculine metaphor or linear, self-contained, potentially rigid and controlling stability, whilst “other” ways of knowing are either dismissed (or repressed) as non-masculine or associated with the metaphorically feminine qualities of a more embodied and sensible (potentially smothering) fleshiness (see Irigaray, 2004: 97-102). Taken separately, there is clearly much scope for degenerative power relationships between these two metaphoric approaches to knowing and expressing what we know. I am interested in the potential for creative intercourse in the spaces between the two (see Walsh, 2006).

I fell into the category of repressing my own non-intellectual ways of knowing as I came out of childhood and succumbed to conventional ideas about what’s required to make a living. This PhD journey and thesis have provided the supporting framework I have needed to start addressing that repression (through bringing back more ways of knowing into everyday life) in the pursuit of my own and others’ fuller humanity.

Heron writes about these four ways of/to knowing both as a cycle (Heron, 1992: 174), in which each successive way of knowing builds on previous iterations of all different ways of knowing, and as an “up-hierarchy, with the ones higher in this list being grounded in those that are lower” (Heron, 1999: 3). Heron says:

“Experiential knowing – imaging and feeling the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing – is the ground of presentational knowing.

Presentational knowing – an intuitive grasp of the significance of patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical and verbal art-forms – is the ground of propositional knowing. And propositional knowing – expressed in statements that

¹⁷ In Guy Claxton’s “The Intuitive Practitioner”, educational theorist Michael Eraut suggests that ways to knowing might be more useful than ways of knowing. He says: “if intuition [and I would substitute ‘creating presentational form’] is a process, could it not be better described as a ‘way to knowing’” (Eraut, in Claxton, 2000: 256). I appreciate the more active, less static implications of this suggestion.

something is the case – is the ground of *practical knowing* – knowing how to exercise a skill” (Heron 1999: 122, *my emphasis*).

In this chapter, I will place a magnifying glass on the second of Heron’s four-fold ways to knowing – presentational knowing. I will extend its focus wide to include the transitions in and out of presentational knowing, coming up from experiential and then onwards towards propositional knowing (for viewing presentational knowing as if it were an isolated phenomenon would surely signal acquiescence to the domination of abstracted propositional knowing).

Heron and Reason offer this more detailed definition of presentational knowing: “presentational knowing emerges from and is grounded on experiential knowing. It is evident in an intuitive grasp of the significance of our resonance with and imaging of our world, as this grasp is symbolized in graphic, plastic, musical, vocal and verbal art-forms. It clothes our experiential knowing of the world in the metaphors of aesthetic creation, in expressive spatiotemporal forms of imagery. These forms symbolize both our felt attunement with the world and the primary meaning embedded in our enactment of its appearing” (Heron and Reason, 1997).

The full category of presentational knowing was a late addition to Heron’s theory, encompassing intuition and reflection, imagination and conceptual thinking (Heron, 1992: 158). It was only through experiencing the value of coming to know the world in this way that he came to believe that presentational knowing “was valuable in its own right, not only as a bridge between experiential grounding and propositional knowing” (Heron, 1992: 175). Presentational knowing, then, is the least mediated (most immediate) way of knowing following direct experience. Heron goes on to say “If we agree that presentational symbolism is indeed a mode of knowing, then we can no longer conveniently distance ourselves from its use by delegating it to the artistic community. We need to bring it right back into the mainstream knowledge quest” (Heron, 1992: 176).

Heron says that: “... a person creates a pattern of perceptual elements – in movement, sound, colour, shape, line – to symbolise some deeper pattern that interconnects perceptual imagery of this world or other worlds. On this account of knowledge, art is a mode of knowledge... Presentational knowledge includes not only music and all the plastic arts, but dance, movement and mime. It also embraces all forms of myth, fable, allegory, story and drama, all of which require the use of language, and all of which involve the telling of a story... There is one overall point about presentational knowledge which is important for our understanding of the world. It reveals the underlying pattern of things...” (Heron, 1992: 165-168).

Over the past three years I have been exploring around the edges of and into presentational knowing through the forms of improvisational court jester-style

clowning and storytelling, plus numerous presentational knowing, writing, poetry and visual art-based workshops which I have attended, co-facilitated or facilitated alone. In addition, I have worked wherever I can to validate presentation knowing as a part of my practice as an educator. This has represented my second extended trip into presentational knowing, following four years at art school in my late teens and early 20s. This time, my foray into presentational forms is in response to increasing complexity in my working life and a sense of “hitting the buffers” of what my intellect alone can “work out”.

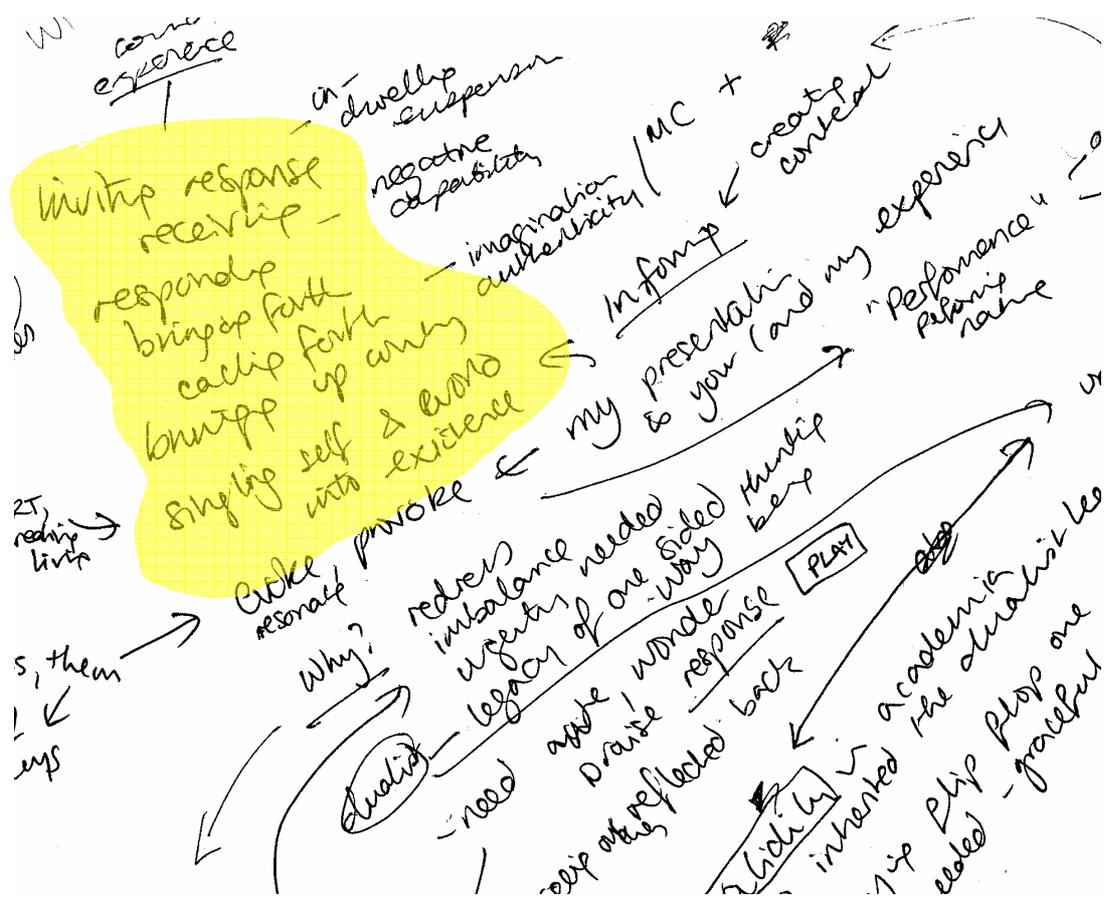
A friend once asked me whether I found that my intellect “got in the way”. Lately it seems to me that it can cloud out other knowings with its certainty, which serves me well only in some situations. This writing does not claim to be the epistemology to presentational knowing, it can only be an epistemology, based on my experiences of and ideas about presentational knowing and the ways in which I construe meaning from those experiences. In a (deliberately ironic) process of “poking about in George Kelly’s backyard”, I wish to borrow from that philosopher the notion that “we must begin abstracting our own principles instead of ‘poking about in the neighbours’ backyards for methodological windfalls’” (Kelly, in Kenny, 1984) – and add to it that reading others’ ideas and expressions of their experience are also a part of my experience. My encounters with their presentational and propositional knowing become part of my grounding experiential knowing.

Through a process of gathering books, films, music, images and memories, of sleeping on it, of walking and talking and of looking back over previous pieces of my writing (methodological windfalls in my own backyard), I asked myself what I see when I look through that magnifying glass at this concept which Heron named presentational knowing. After a week of this process of active mulling...

(which my intellectual, modernist-self swiftly devalued by calling it procrastination)

... I woke up early with an intuition about a pattern of co-arising themes (highlighted) and roughly noted them, bleary eyed (no glasses, face close to the page) before my first cup of tea.

The notes shown overleaf, directly scanned from that early morning scribbling demonstrate both how I will often have ideas upon waking (and for years have used a short nap as a way of reinvigorating my creative self) and how unintelligible those ideas can look later on...



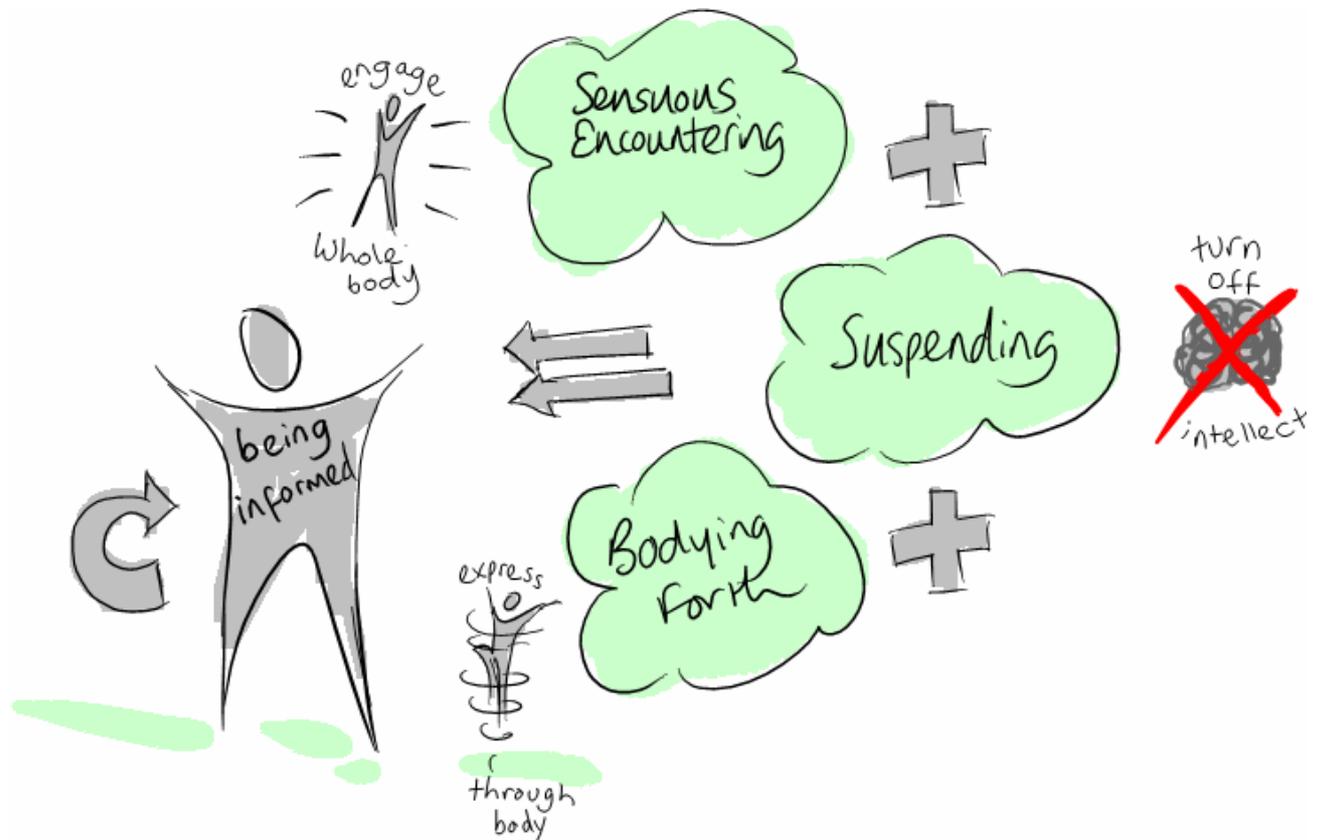
The themes (initially noted in the jumble above as *experience, inviting response, in-dwelling, suspension, bringing forth, calling forth, singing self and world into existence*), named something for me both in terms of my experiences (of drawing, painting, of performing as a storyteller and clown and of writing) and in terms of the most resonant of my and others' ideas and thoughts I'd encountered.

At the expense of the glossy performance and smoothly flowing text I mentioned earlier, I am interrupting again to say just how important the thoughts and writings of artists, crafts people and commentators on the art world have been to me. These are people who have chosen to spend their lives exploring the world primarily through presentational knowing in ways which are more sharply attuned than the relatively blunt and generalised musings in mainstream management-style texts¹⁸. I have enjoyed sensing where these multidisciplinary texts overlap and now have the sense of being a curator, spanning different worlds to assemble and juxtapose these works and experiences to make a fresh expressive whole.

I notice that these themes came to me as co-arising phenomena, and yet my first impulse was to put them into a linear list, which I am now complementing with a picture showing the essence of my thoughts. Three elements, sensuous encountering (engaging the whole body) plus suspending (turning off the intellect) plus bodying

¹⁸ Although I am inspired by more radical action research based texts exploring issues such as arts-informed inquiry and emotions in first person inquiry, for example.

forth (expressing through the medium of the body) combine to suggest a state of being both formed and in-formed through presentational knowing.



I go on to list the themes – 1,2,3,4 - in keeping with the conventional basic linearity of written text and to reinforce the idea that I might know what I am talking about here (aha, I am borrowing the over valued legitimacy of propositional knowing and using it for my own ends). I don't suppose for one moment that the encounters behind these named themes occur neatly, in numeric order. Most of the time, they don't feel like they're happening at all. Or they are happening all at once, blurred into and informed by one another. These themes represent a glimpsed dream of a more whole existence which I best experience in contexts such as workshops and performances outside of the day-to-day realities of keeping up with the emails and taking the rubbish out. My spontaneity and expressive responses paradoxically seem to need a strong container from which to flourish¹⁹.

¹⁹ A few days after the four themes arrive in my consciousness I started to pursue a seam of reading, and then direct learning on Goethean science which, much to both my delight and dismay, reflected a version of my own thoughts back at me (what, I wasn't the first?). Here is Margaret Colquhoun's interpretation of the process of Goethe's "delicate empiricism":

- 1) Exact sense perception – detailed observations of the facts we can perceive through all our senses while suspending all forms of personal judgement and evaluation;
 - 2) Exact sensorial fantasy – the stage where we imaginatively perceive the form of the phenomenon as an expression of its own transformation, moving through its history to its present and into its future;
 - 3) Seeing is beholding – the stage where we “allow the thing to express itself through the observer”;
 - 4) Being one with the object – the stage where we “conceptualise to serve the thing.”
- (from Colquhoun and Brook, in Wahl, 2005: 62-65). This is clearly overlapping territory with the explorations of this chapter (as is Otto Scharmer's “Theory U” (Senge et al, 2004), also influenced by Goethean philosophy).

Now, in a linear format, I will explore each of these four areas in turn, remembering that each state builds on and offers something to each of the others.

1. **Sensuous encountering:** using all my ways of sensing to directly experience the world with a whole-body sense of curiosity and appreciation for the glorious mundane²⁰;
2. **Suspending:** hanging fire with fresh²¹ rounds of clever intellectual retorts in order to become more deeply acquainted with the responses to experience of my more-than-brainy body to the more-than-human world;
3. **Bodying-forth:** inviting imaginative impulses to express themselves through the medium of my body without my intellect throwing a spanner in the works and crushing those responses with misplaced rationality or premature editing and critique;
4. **Being in-formed:** becoming a being whose living and actions form and are informed by the rich experiences, surprises, provocations and evocations of presentational knowing, both as a perceiver and as a creator.

In the next four sections of the chapter, I expand what I mean by each of these themes. I draw on my own experiences (particularly my recent explorations into clowning) as well as a rich diversity of ideas and creative actions of thinkers and artists who work in at the deep end of presentational knowing, taking it seriously as *a*, or (for some at the opposite end of modernism's trust in propositional knowing) *the* way to knowing the world: "...art may be superior to philosophy as a mode of metaphysical investigation, since only through materials and individuals can the truth be grasped; thus philosophers, yoked to words and concepts, are incapable of addressing the 'real'" (Belgrad, 1998: 103). This represents another extreme, of course, just as lopsided as over-valuing of the supposed "facts" of propositional knowing.

Rather than pitting the presentational against the propositional, I am more thrilled by the healthy, dynamic interplay of all of these ways to knowing. Gregory Bateson says: "there are bridges between one sort of thought (intellectual) and the other (emotional), and it seems to me that the artists and poets are specifically concerned with these bridges. It is not that art is the expression of the unconscious, but rather that it is

What I particularly liked about Goethe's ideas, but will not pursue here in the spirit of having to draw a line somewhere, is his imperative to think morphologically, as form and potential unfold over time (an awareness of which is also imperative in haiku, which I use in my educational practice). See the interlude "Glimpsing a Goethean Way of Seeing" to discover more.

²⁰ **Glorious:** magnificent, wonderful, splendid, intensely delightful. **Mundane:** commonplace, everyday, of this world. **Glorious mundane:** that which is intensely delightful of this world, the wonderful everyday stuff of life. Similarly, Arthur Frank calls for the recognition of a "mundane charisma" (Frank, 200X, *exact date unknown*, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~frank/tride.html>).

²¹ I am inevitably carrying into the encounter all my intellectual knowing, hypotheses, memories and personal constructs of how the world works. And good thing, too, lest I be run over by the next bus whilst I sensuously appreciate the glorious qualities of its rapidly advancing redness.

concerned with the relation between the levels of mental process... Artistic skill is the combining of many levels of mind –unconscious, conscious and external- to make a statement of their combination” (Bateson, 2000: 470).

In his paper on “Goethean Science as a Way of Knowing”, Daniel Wahl similarly notes: “We need to learn to consciously shift between epistemologies and be aware of their conceptual implications and limitations, acknowledging the perceptual blind spots of each particular epistemology. The Goethean epistemology... does not negate the validity of reductionist science, it merely challenges its position as the exclusive source of reliable knowledge about the world and offers a way to overcome the limitations of the dualistic subject-object-separation epistemology” (Wahl, 2005: 67).

Wahl goes on to make the link between the need for multiple epistemologies and the development of greater sustainability when he says: “We are in a process of a fundamental shift in society’s guiding paradigm, as our motivation for achieving knowledge changes from an aim to increase our ability to predict, control and manipulate natural processes to an aim to increase our ability to make the complex dynamics and relationships in nature more intelligible in order to participate appropriately in the health and wholeness sustaining processes of Nature... The fabric of life is unravelling with humanity as a conscious witness but also a cause of the disintegration. We are desperately in need of what Goethe called ‘knowledge utterly in tune with the nature of things’” (Wahl, 2005: 74-75).

It seems to me that, in the light of the current ecological and social climate, there is an urgent need for spontaneous and considered aesthetic responses to our world – and that, through presentational knowing we each have the capability of nurturing and creatively shaping our part of that response.

“We live in times that demand a work of art; a skilled, imaginative, and psychologically sophisticated response, and an ecological worldview.” (Sewall, 2000: 253).

Sensuous encountering

August 21st is my birthday. On this day in 2004, I was in the middle of “The Clown and Shakespeare” workshop, and I was about to have a birthday treat. Three times each day, we walked down the lanes past heaving damson trees from the big house to the village hall for our clowning sessions. This day, my clowning teacher, Vivian Gladwell, invited us to go outside again as soon as we arrived. “Just walk around for ten minutes or so and allow something to speak to you. It might be a stone or a flower or a feather or a leaf, but just walk around and allow it to make itself known. Then bring it back and find yourself a partner”.

I stepped over a stream to a damp, scrubby field and thought about deep ecologist Stephan Harding’s words at Schumacher College telling me that “grass pasture is a desert”. I saw a white feather with fluff at its base and my mind kicked in trying to decide if it might be a suitable choice. I left the feather and moved on, waiting for my mind to calm and allow something else to emerge. Vivian rang his brass bell to call us back. The sound tinkled across the field and I looked down, seeing a pale flower with some spiky leaves. I picked the stem with a muttered apology to the plant and carried it back to the village hall in the palm of my hand.

*Inside, through a similar process (of allowing someone to make themselves known), I found Paul, an experienced clown and artist who’d earlier embodied the essence of a wolf in the moonlight in a way that was spellbinding. On seeing the full moon since, I can hear Paul’s mad words from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* “and the wolf behooooowls the moooon”. I feel a little intimidated by and in awe of Paul’s skills.*

“What you need to do”, Vivian said, “is to interact with, to play with what you brought in from outside. What your partner needs to do is to respond as if they were the voice of the plant or to stone or the stick.”

One person took their flower to the window to wave at its relatives as it wilted and died. Another sat by a recalcitrant stone who complained of being ignored by humans when they came by, once every six million years or so (“hey, you. Human, You don’t even see me, do you? I’m over here”).

My plant stem enjoyed moving through the air (“weeeeeeee”), but was frightened of being dropped or hurt (“ouch, be careful with me”).

Later, Vivian says he doesn’t do this work often because, in context, it can become almost unbearably poignant as we become aware of how much we destroy just through everyday living.

(Written during a writing retreat in Powys, Wales on 8 April 2005).

I would like to stress the importance of messy, rich direct experience where we are a part of our complex, creative planet as *the* grounding for all our other ways to knowing (whether we like it or not). Part of the way I do this is to bring together (or curate) others' ideas as well as my own. I blend my own direct experience with others' ideas and, where possible, others' reporting on their experience²².

Without experiencing and acknowledging an earthy, sensuous rootedness in the world around me, I run the risk of perpetuating the disconnected, objectifying intellectualisation that keeps me apart from the wider world. Paradoxically, the process of writing this thesis has kept me apart in this way, cocooned with my computer and the ever-present books. I surround myself with flowers at the writing table and fill the birdfeeders for company now my dear dog has died and I am no longer being taken for walks by him.

Philosopher and ecologist David Abram says that: “Our spontaneous experience of the world, charged with subjective, emotional, intuitive content, remains the vital and dark ground of all our objectivity” (Abram, 1997: 34)

Another philosopher, John Dewey suggests that we might have choices about the ways in which we receive our experiences in the world. He says that such direct experience can be aesthetic and relates it to the ways in which we appreciate tasty food: “It is Gusto, taste; and, as with cooking, overt skilful action is on the side of the cook who prepares, while taste is on the side of the consumer” (Dewey, 1958: 47). What, then, if we were to ground our experience of the world in a gastronomic stance of gratitude, enjoyment, savouring and restraint? What represses our gratitude? Convention? Despair? Complacency?

If our dominant modernist, throw-away society mitigates against such appreciation, then, as Dewey says, “There is work to be done on the part of the percipient as there is on the part of the artist. The one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention to perform this work will not see or hear. His ‘appreciation’ will be a mixture of scraps of learning with conformity to norms of conventional admiration and with a confused, even if genuine, emotional excitation” (Dewey, 1958: 54).

Theologian Matthew Fox similarly warns against the slothful attitude of *acedia*, an anaesthetised, unresponsive state: “It is a kind of ennui, depression, cynicism, sadness, boredom, listlessness, couch-potato-itis, being passive, apathy, psychic exhaustion, having no energy” (Fox, 1999: 168). This is no recipe for the foundations of fertile presentational knowing.

²² For example, I learn from others' experience through taking part in (and taking notes at) extensive feedback sessions during our improvisational clowning workshops and performances. Such feedback essentially invite personal reflection on the process of improvisation, with simple, positively framed questions such as “How was it for you?”, “Which bit did you like best?”, “How did you feel when...?”.

Conversely, the artist MC Richards was described by one of her friends²³ as a siren in a cave corrupting intellectual writers “with their big philosophies” (Matthew Fox and Rudolph Steiner were given as examples), “with her sensuousness, with her need to make ideas erotic” (in Kane, 2003). When Richards says “taking a skin off a ripe peach is like undressing a lover” (in Kane, 2003), she is embracing the world with Dewey’s gastronomic *gusto*.

Architect Christopher Alexander tells a story of what it is to relish such experience: “I was with a friend in Denmark. We were having strawberries for tea, and I noticed that she sliced the strawberries very very fine, almost like paper. Of course, it took longer than usual, and I asked her why she did it. When you eat a strawberry, she said, the taste of it comes from the open surfaces you touch. The more surfaces there are, the more it tastes. The finer I slice the strawberries, the more surfaces there are... [My Danish friend’s] whole life was like that. It is so ordinary, that it is hard to explain what is so deep about it. Animal almost, nothing superfluous, each thing that is done, done totally” (Alexander, 1979, 548)



In November
the strawberry hangs on a thread of sleep
In May
it lies in my hand like an erotic dream

(Richards, 1997: 155)

Receiving experience in these ways isn’t confined to relishing the good things in life like peaches and strawberries. Ecopsychologist Laura Sewall says that “to be fully present in any moment...[we need] ‘sacred attention’. In essence, this means to ‘pay respects to’ all that is, to both the painful and the glorious aspects of our lives” (Sewall, 2000: 231).

Participatory artist and art historian, Suzi Gablik calls such an erotic way of experiencing “Living the Magical Life” (Gablik, 2002), relating it to a “sacred feminine force” which “asks us to accept the world as a magical place” (Gablik, 2002: 14), with an attention informed by gratitude, curiosity, awe and respect.

²³ “MC is kind of like a siren, in the Homeric sense of the word. Here are these guys. Here’s Rudolph Steiner. Here’s Matthew Fox. With their huge philosophies and all their books. That’s a ship and its out there on the sea, and its going. You know. And MC’s over in this cave corrupting them with her sensuousness with her need to make ideas erotic. So that it isn’t just an intellectual structure.”
Julia Connor, Poet and friend of MC Richards, (in Kane, 2003).

Sewall identifies two aspects of attending to our experiences. She says that we both pay attention as an internal gesture, and have our attention caught by external factors: “Attention”, she says, “is classified as both ‘endogenous,’ internally generated, and ‘exogenous’, that which arises by virtue of the dynamic, demanding world of innumerable things buzzing, ticking, changing, and jumping into view... Exogenous attention is what happens when something out there solicits and seizes our senses... Endogenous attention, on the other hand, refers to the way in which we are primed to see whatever resonates with our own cortical landscape – what we expect, assume, or desire... a kind of loyalty to our personal history, to the tracks laid down in an otherwise chaotic mess of neurons.” (Sewall, 2000: 101-103)

We can choose how we pay attention to the world (through the qualities of our reflection) and we can choose how we respond when we allow our attention to be caught by something out there (through a child-like receptivity of being spoken to by the “thing”). Both choices offer the opportunity to enrich the ground of our experience. But what of the qualities of those experiences? How are we to be responsible for the kinds of experiences with which we populate our living? What choices can we make about the contexts that will in-form us, about what we pay attention to, and about what experiences we immerse ourselves in? Sewall warns that “Without awareness of the body’s response to each place and moment, our experience is little more than a ‘view from nowhere’... With our senses cut off from a deep engagement with the colors and sounds of a dense and vibrant life-world, we become increasingly disembodied” (Sewall, 2000: 85-90).

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is more prescriptive when he suggests that the choices we make (where we can make those choices) about our day-to-day experiences pattern our minds in different ways. For example, he claims that “To fill free time with activities that require concentration, that increase skills, that lead to the development of the self, is not the same as killing time by watching television or taking recreational drugs... the former leads to growth, while the latter merely serves to keep the mind from unravelling” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 171).

Which is not to say that a bit of activity to stop things unravelling isn’t useful now and again, but not all the time, please.

The choices we can make (and our responses to those that we can’t) build a foundation for our responses to the world. With an impoverished, anaesthetised experience of living, we are left with a disembodied ‘view from nowhere’ and not much of a foundation for any meaningful expression. But with a sensuous, erotic, curious, playful and emotional engagement with experience, we have a rich compost to work with as such foundational experience begins to quicken into response.

Suspending

Poised at the edge of the realm of experiential knowing where our senses and imagination meet, we run the risk of the intellect prematurely rushing in with a show of certainty, planning and a quick answer to dispel the anxiety of dwelling in complexity and unknowing.

Using Heron's theory, such a rushed response represents a jump from experiential knowing straight to propositional knowing, whilst bypassing presentational knowing altogether. This over-valuing of propositional knowing comes at the expense of potentially subtler, richer and more complex presentational knowing. Goethe wrote: "throughout the history of scientific investigation, we find observers leaping too quickly from phenomenon to theory, hence they fall short of the mark and become theoretical" (in Naydler, 1996: 85). Clowning teacher Vivian Gladwell says "when you have an over-intellectualisation, then what matters is absent from the room" (in conversation, 15 January 2006). Our challenge here is to develop and allow a fuller capability to sit in the face of complexity without striving to intellectually "solve the problem" – suspending isn't about cleverness. Gregory Bateson says that "the whole of the mind cannot be reported from part of the mind" (Bateson, 2000: 438). Suspending invites more of my (body)mind to "report in".

In MC Richard's language, suspending is the "and" part of a rhythm she likens to breathing: "To bring the universe into personal wholeness, to breathe in, to drink deep, to receive, to understand, to yield, to *read*, life. AND to spend wholeness in the act, to breathe out, to give, to mean, to say to *write*, to *create* life" (Richards, 1964: 65-66).

When the group I work with are improvising clowning, Vivian asks us to become aware of "suspending", that is allowing the next responsive impulse to emerge – from the whole body and not as a premeditated idea had in advance of taking action²⁴. Suspension means staying open to what the imagination brings up.

In one improvisation game, the clown standing to my right plays with an imaginary object or substance, vocalising sounds to bring the squishy, bouncy, stretchy, huge or tiny object to life. I feel slightly nervous as my turn approaches. My intellect takes over for a moment: will I be "good enough"? I let the thought go (or suppress it). I know from experience at this that hidden self-doubt doesn't help. I watch and listen to what he is doing, and gradually join in. I copy his movement and in unison we enact being devoured by an object which has become huge in his imagination. I carry on playing and the clown to my right gradually stops. His imaginary object has been

²⁴ In improvised clowning, premeditated reactions – "coming in with an idea" – show a mile off. The clown becomes drained of emotion, and so do the audience, who cease to respond. Laughter stops. Poignancy and resonance ceases. A shared carpet of breath unravels. It all gets a bit too clever for its own good.

passed on to me and I am “infected” by its presence. I continue – this is the moment of suspension – until I receive (from where?), a surprising and unpremeditated imaginative impulse. I am drawn to stepping outside of the huge object and folding it up, crushing it underfoot until it is a long flat... thing... that I pick up. The clown on my left watches me, copies me and takes over. And so it goes on.

Suspending can be an embodied, rhythmic movement from which improvisation can emerge. Goethean practitioner, Heather Thoma describes this movement: “Rather than deciding where to move through my thinking mind, I am patient and waiting to discover how the intelligence of my body wants to reveal itself in motion” (Thoma, 2003: 17). Similarly, somatic researcher, Tiffany von Emmel says that: “with somatics, knowledge is constituted or performed through the concrete lived actions of the body as they engage the moment’s environment. The lived experience of the body is not just a processor for rational thought” (von Emmel, 2003).

It was in this spirit that the poet John Keats coined the phrase “negative capability” in a letter written to his brothers: “I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats, 1817: written Sunday 21 December).

Many writers have commented on the idea of negative capability. For example, MC Richards calls it “[enjoying] our doubts as symptoms in the process of knowledge” (Richards, 1964: 115). Heron says that Keats “meant the empathic attunement to be out there eating seed with the sparrow” (Heron, 1992: 174). Bamford says it is “a most gentle, intimate emptiness” (Bamford, 2005: 14). In the “His Dark Materials” trilogy, novelist Philip Pullman’s character Mary Malone describes negative capability as a state of mind where: “You have to be confident and relaxed at the same time” (Pullman, 1998: 92). Pullman’s heroine Lyra recognizes it as “trembling on the brink of understanding” (Pullman, 1998: 97).

I understand suspending to be a process of allowing non-intellectual space for both fundamental, wise, right, essential knowing to distil from complexity *and, at the same time* for fundamental, wise, right, pluralised²⁵ knowing to multiply from complexity (where that complexity includes my current intellectual constructs).

Suspending can allow a process of discerning what is unnecessary and carving it away to (maybe, eventually) reveal what the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi named “the essence of things” (Giménez and Gale, 2004). It is a simplicity born of a “complexity drawn taught and synthesised” (Dalwood and Ireson, 2005) which has been a recurring theme in “art” for millennia:

²⁵ I draw this term from my experience with Augusto Boal’s “Image Theatre”, a part of his “Theatre of the Oppressed” (Boal, 1979). Image Theatre invites multiple interpretations of human bodies sculpted into different representations of feelings, ideas and relationships to proliferate without collapsing meaning down to one “right” answer or meaning.



The Essence of Things - Brancusi – Prometheus, 1911



Cycladean head, Crete, c.2000 BCE

Equally, suspending can allow the proliferation of meaning. In clowning, one of the “objectives” is to hold open a premature intellectual interpretation of an event, object or relationship until it is actually experienced. For example, one of the very first exercises “new” clowns experiment with is called “Scene One”. In scene one, the clown simply steps onto the stage with nothing in mind, no ideas at all. The clown makes eye contact with the audience – still with a blank and receptive state – and approaches a blanket left on the floor in the middle of the stage. The challenge is to respond to the blanket – to interpret its meaning – in the moment. And then leave the stage, acknowledging the audience on the way out. Through this simplest of improvisational forms, I have seen the blanket transformed into tents, shrouds, babies, monsters, ghosts, animals, security blankets, nun’s habits and so on and so on. Through “Scene One” we see what is at the core of this type of improvisational clowning – embodying an innocent naïveté as if the world was encountered anew in each moment. Clowning invites the practice and lived experience that Zen Buddhists might call “beginner’s mind”²⁶.

Through suspending the intellect, and dwelling in uncertainty in this way, we open ourselves to receive inspiration. This is a gesture of allowing an impulse (or impulses) to enter. MC Richards says that “imagination is something that comes to us before it comes out of us” (in Kane, 2003). It is an effort of “holding back of our own activity – a form of receptive attentiveness that offers the phenomenon a chance to express its own gesture” (Brook, 1998: 56). Such holding back requires discipline. Dewey says that: “adequate yielding of the self is possible only through a controlled activity that may well be intense” (Dewey, 1980: 53).

Such receptivity, in clowning, often results in the clown “becoming” the phenomenon. We have a specific improvisation which invites the first of three clowns to make an entrance on the stage and spontaneously embody (temporarily turn into) something – a haggis, a fridge freezer, a hat stand, a bowl of ice cream, a radiator, a pan scourer... whatever comes up. The second clown comes on and affirms their “identity” (“Phew! It’s getting hot in here” says the second clown. “Would you like me to turn myself down a bit?” says the first, twiddling with her own imaginary radiator controls”). The third comes in, still improvising, and then “names” the situation, for example “Did somebody call a plumber?” Laura Sewall calls this shape shifting a “‘sympathetic’ perceptual mode... a form of perception that fully recognizes the value of ‘the thing seen’... The thing seen displays a quality or way of being – the stillness of a mountain, the rootedness of a ponderosa pine – and suggests the possibility of ‘turning into’ something other than oneself... to try on the attributes of another, of whatever is displayed or modelled for us in the visible world” (Sewall, 2000: 29-30). She goes on to say that “This form of psychology is not an analytical process; temporarily turning into arises from direct experience, from looking and listening... ‘turning into’ requires... a particular generous form of projection. This form of

²⁶ “Shoshin” in Japanese.

projection is described as ‘divining the inner life of everything’”, or granting a unique individuality to the ‘thing seen’” (Sewall, 2000: 30). Similarly, Goethean scientist Isis Brook says “[we] allow the thing to express itself through the observer... what is expressed is the being of the phenomenon, something of its essential²⁷ nature” (Brook, 1998: 56). This ability to “turn into” is central to clowning²⁸ and, I would suggest, a useful capacity for developing a participatory worldview where the “other” is recognised as part of a network of interconnected and interdependent phenomena.

Suspending implies *letting* our spontaneous, empathic, intuitive responses come forward, rather than striving to *make* it happen through some effort of will. Bateson points out the limitations of the intellect (or conscious purpose) working in isolation when he says: “Wisdom I take to be the knowledge of the larger interactive system – that system which, if disturbed, is likely to generate exponential curves of change... [Consciousness] is organized in terms of purpose. It is a short-cut device to enable you to get quickly at what you want; not to act with maximum wisdom in order to live, but to follow the shortest logical or casual path to get what you next want, which may be dinner; it may be a Beethoven sonata; it may be sex. Above all, it may be money or power.” (Bateson, 2000: 439-440).

Through suspending we are allowing our primary thought processes to flourish, thinking in images – imagining - before reducing those thoughts to linguistic or other languages. Action researcher, Hanne Heen questions the imperative for such a reduction at all, when she says: “I believe that in many cases it would be more fruitful to get away from the words and the reflections, and just let the experiences be... It seems that the ‘real thing’, the feeling itself with the embodiedness, disappears with the analytical language” (Heen, 2005, 264)²⁹.

As an invitation to temporarily enter into a generative communion, suspending sits at the core of improvisation, imagination and intuition. In clowning, it particularly means attending to the complexity of our emotional responses³⁰. The clown’s

²⁷ I discuss and problematise the issue of anthropomorphic projection raised by the human expression of *something* (possibly) essential of the “other” later in this thesis, in the section “Contact across irreducible *more-than-human* difference, in the chapter titled: *Serious play – glimpses of that other field*.

²⁸ ... and poetry: “In The Red Booklet, written by his disciple Tohō (1657-1730), Bashō is quoted as saying, “the mind’s movements merge with the object. . . . [which] is taken in its nature, without obstruction. . . . Learn of the pine from the pine, learn of the bamboo from the bamboo.” Tohō explained this notion of “learning” as follows: “In other words, one must become detached from the self. . . . To learn means to enter into the object and feel the subtlety that is revealed there.” As a result, “the color of the mind becomes the object” and one “can identify with the feelings of the things in nature. . . .” (Ijichi et al, 547-48).”

²⁹ Whilst I agree with her warning against jumping straight from experience into analytical proposition, it seems to me that Heen’s words are bypassing the potential of presentational knowing to enhance and come to know embodied feeling more fully.

³⁰ In my experience, clowning has demanded that I become better practiced and more open to paying multiple attentions at the same time to, for example, my emotions, my inner state, the props on stage, other clowns around me on the stage, the audience, what is happening around the audience. The clown is forever drawing wider and wider boundaries around what is included and relevant. This fits with and exercises action inquiry’s imperative for multiple arcs of attention and, to my delight, was expressed well by Heen (2005) in her description of learning Gestalt practice: “One aim was to develop the ability to maintain a double or triple perspective in an ongoing situation:

emotional responses are exaggerated, but first, the emotional charge to be amplified needs to be gathered, like a wisp of sheep's wool caught on branches. "When the impro is full of emotional charge, the clowns don't really need to do anything" (Gladwell, 2006, in conversation).



At some point in many improvisations, the anxiety of standing before people on stage with no plan and nothing to do gets the better of me. And I try and mask that anxiety. My intellect comes blundering in and all play is lost. But the good news is that once lost, play can be picked up again, it is not lost forever. The ebb and flow of improvised clowning performances tell me that.

Gestalt thinker, Paul Goodman says: "Emotion, considered as the organism's direct evaluative experience of the organism/environment field, is not mediated by thoughts and verbal judgements, but is immediate. As such, it is a crucial regulator for action, for it... furnishes the basis of awareness of what is important.' Emotional responses grounded in awareness could inspire actions that the introjected intellect would otherwise disallow. Recovering emotion as a basis for judgement³¹ would thus ultimately be both personally therapeutic and, in the context of corporate liberalism, socially revolutionary." (Goodman, in Belgrad, 1998: 152-3).

a) to be aware of what happened in the interaction;

b) to be aware of how that affected me;

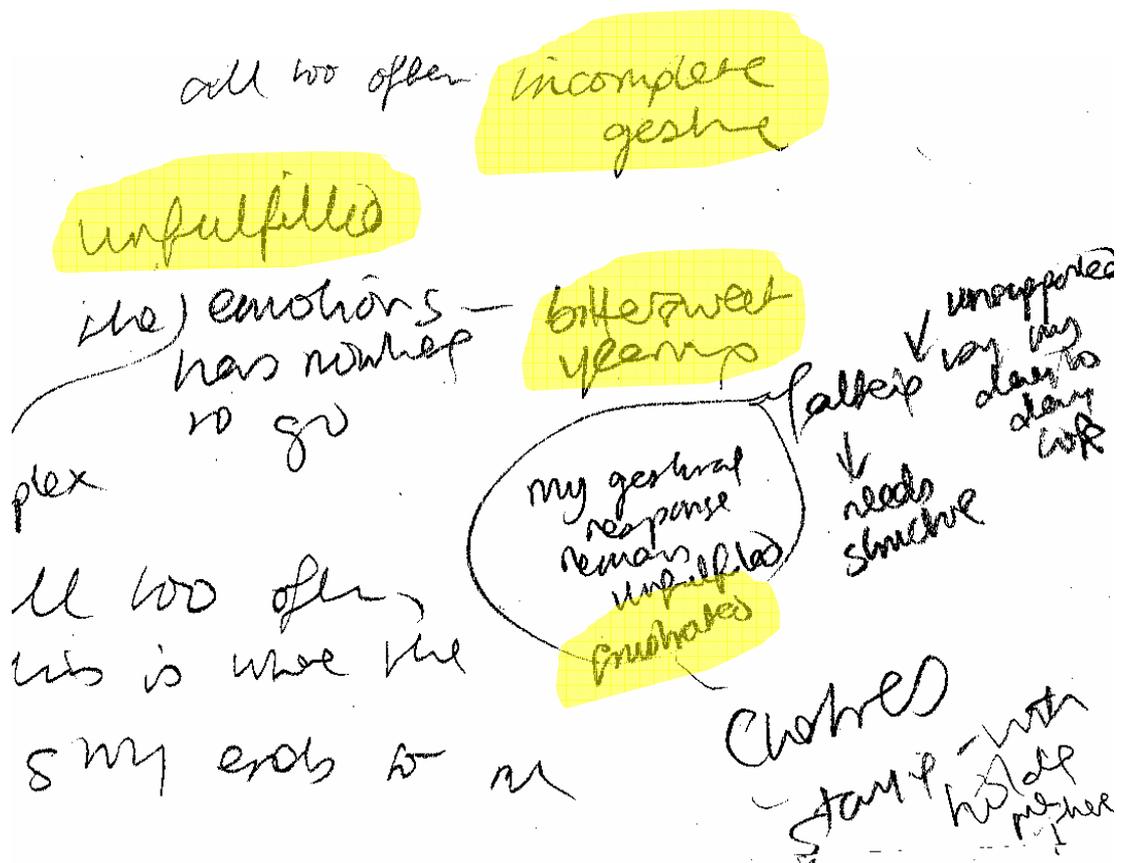
c) to use this information in relation to the more general picture of the client [audience] and the relationship between us." (Heen 2005: 267).

³¹ This also implies the lifetime's work of continually developing the capacity to discern finely emotional data as it is perceived in order to distinguish between what "rings true" and what may be clouded over with layers of projection, fear, defensiveness and so on.

Suspending, then, as a foundational element of presentational knowing, is about connection and about coming to detect, discern and pay attention to our whole body responses to experience. Without paying attention to gathering the wisps of our emotions, there's a kind of sleepy deadness and passivity which dulls expression.

My own stories of my presentational knowing all too often finish at this stage, after conception (sensuous encountering), but before birth (bodying forth). Perhaps they are aborted before they've even begun (I kill off my response during suspension). When considering the making "experience sing", psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Ken Wright suggests that "experience is latent until it finds a form (Wright, 2000: 87). In the light of these issues, my question now becomes "what happens (or not) between suspending in order to let something arise, and the expression of that emergent gesture of response?"

Both in this writing and in my life, it is all too often at this point (where the ground needs to be prepared for the expressive presentational act) that I falter. I have stumbled during this piece of writing with a week of searching for links between suspension and bodying forth. How might the process I have experienced in this act of writing (which, after all, is some form of presentational knowing) give me a clue about the point I wanted to make? How could I express the link between suspending and bodying forth? During that week of groping around for links, I bobbed up from sleep one night, scribbled this in the dark, and found my link through the idea of my emotions having "nowhere to go" and my gestural responses being somehow "incomplete", "unfulfilled" or "frustrated":



Of course, I am responding all the time, in an embodied way, to my surroundings, with no need for any “special” mediation or structure to help me express myself. It gets cold, I shiver. I recognise that here, I am writing from two different levels: one, the expressive gestures that are indicative of ongoing life (I blinked so I’m not dead yet) and the other (perhaps equally indicative of being truly alive), expressive gestures more commonly associated with presentational knowing such as making marks, juxtaposing words, making forms, singing tunes.

If I look at my everyday life, for example, walking my dog through the field at the back of the church, my experience can often be bittersweet, an unfulfilled yearning for a more profound connection. Last week, in the frosts of January 2006, I picked up a russet leaf perfectly framed with frosty edging. I admired it for some time and it began to melt in my hand. I mused about painting or photographing it. I put the leaf down and did neither³². I tend not to give space to or value the gestures which may have arisen in response to experience (although picking up the leaf was in itself a gesture). I feel too short of time, too self- and society-pressured to puritanically put “real” work before “just arty stuff”. And I’m too frightened of losing the networks that enable me to earn my living³³.

³² I am also aware of the extent to which this self-dissatisfaction may be symptomatic of the extent to which I am caught in the web of Western, industrialised social conditioning centred on achievement and striving. I am reminded of an old friend mentioning in all seriousness that she was “really trying hard not to strive”.

³³ *Everyone an Artist? No, not me, mate, I’ve got a mortgage to pay.* Do such base concerns cut me off from bringing my own presentational knowing to some kind of fruition, let alone valuing it?

Expressive gesture may be truncated or bypassed altogether in pursuit of the next “concrete” decision, proposition or answer. My ability to respond is narrowed. I notice that I do not allow sufficient space or create supportive contexts to “round my experience off”, resulting in a kind of indigestion or “serial amnesia”³⁴ where the full richness of my experience is rarely absorbed. Complex emotional cocktails of sadness, gratitude, fear and amazement have nowhere to go and my gestural response is frustrated and I feel an unmet need for expression: “the need to find forms for the self’s experience is as basic as the need for satisfaction of bodily needs” (Wright, 2000: 92). Von Emmel suggests that such a frustration contributes towards what I understand to be a misplaced addictive consumerism...

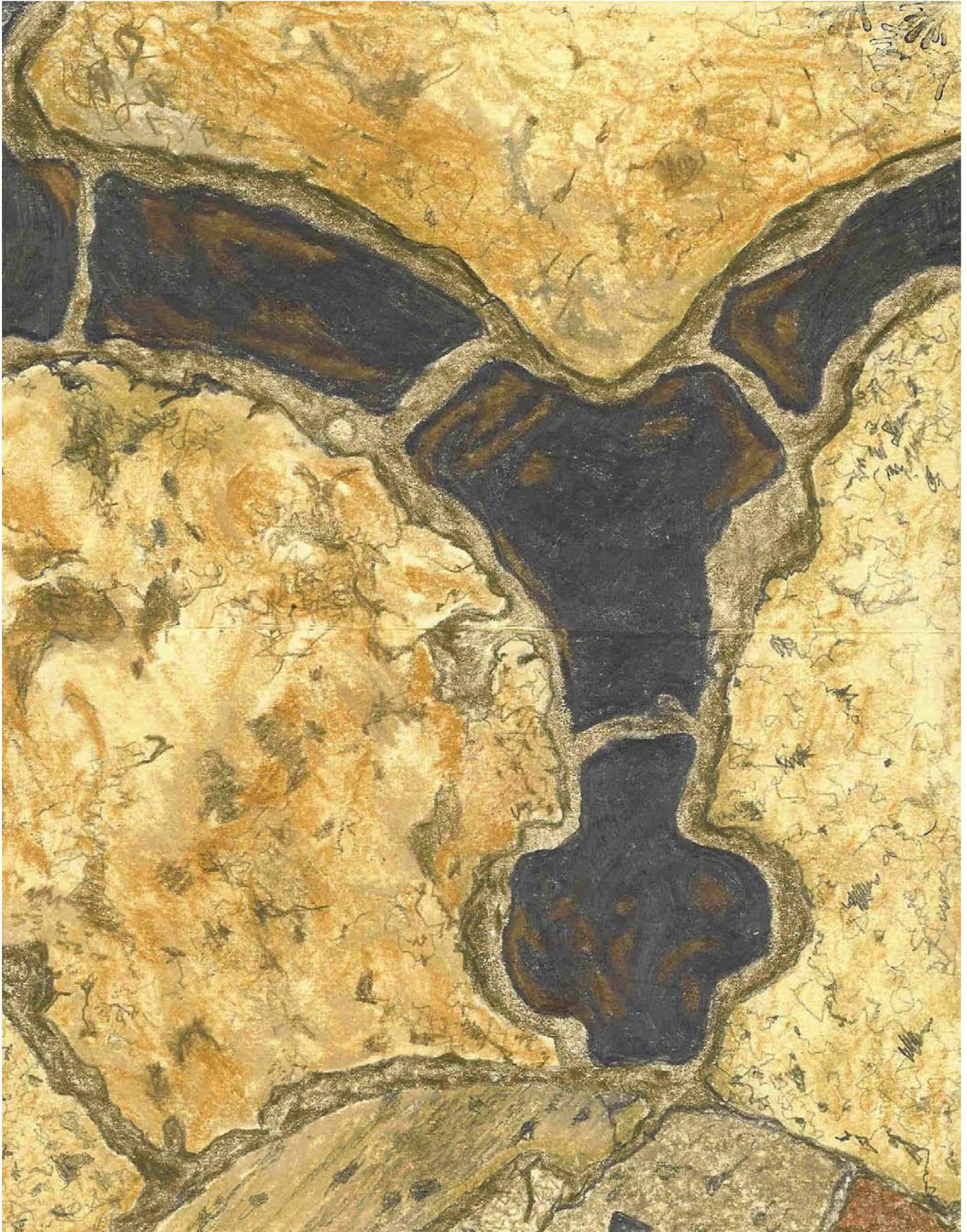
(which manifests in me primarily with book purchases)...

... she says: “I become starved for variation of deep participation as my body knows itself and the world through the participation of the senses. To find this stimulation, we turn to whatever novelty we have access to, most often in the form of consumption. In a vicious circle, as we participate through consumption, we cannot fill the lack, created by the need for deep engagement” (von Emmel, 2003).

In June 2004, I visited Chartres Cathedral, holding an intention for my first experience of this much written about place to stay close to my embodied experience. I wanted to suspend propositional knowing *about* the place in preference to being *with* the building’s atmosphere. What did Chartres mean to me, rather than what did others’ ideas of it mean to me. As Sewall noted earlier, I wandered around waiting for something to “jump into view” through “exogenous attention”. At one point I sat down near the centre of the Cathedral’s labyrinth and noticed myself becoming interested in the juxtaposition of textured stone at my feet, and the feet of thousands before me. I took out a pencil and five hours later emerged from total absorption with this drawing (shown on the facing page).

The drawing doesn’t matter, as a product (although as it turns out, I like it). What mattered to me was that I felt “with” this patch of floor for that time, offering it my full attention as people came and went, peering over my shoulder, seeing what I was up to. I came to know this patch of the cathedral as I might know a friend (*connaître*, in French) as opposed to knowing “about” it (*savoir*). This quality of “*connaître*” knowing – knowing my acquaintance - in my experience, is one I have relatively little of in contexts I find and place myself in, and one which is greatly enhanced through presentational knowing. I wonder how different English-medium first person action research might be if this language hadn’t lost the clear differentiation between “*connaître*” and “*savoir*” types of knowing? John Shotter expresses this as the difference between “witness” and “aboutness” thinking (Shotter, 2005).

³⁴ I am indebted to theatre director, Robert McNeer for naming this dark side of richness and abundance.



Bodying forth

Here, I am seeking to articulate the process of making manifest that which I have “got to know” through sensuous encountering and suspending. Bodying forth is the fruit of suspension, which may be spontaneous, or it may be a combination of spontaneity and planning. In Perls’ “Gestalt Therapy,” Paul Goodman says “The artist is quite aware of what [she] is doing... [she] is not unconscious in [her] working, but neither is [she] mainly deliberately calculating.” (Goodman in Perls et al, 1951: 245).

Bateson says that “The artist may have a conscious purpose to sell [her] picture, even perhaps a conscious purpose to make it. But in the making [she] must necessarily relax that arrogance in favour of a creative experience in which [her] conscious mind plays only a small part” (Bateson, 2000: 444).

Writing about wood carving, Peter Reason alludes to this blend of unconscious and deliberate action arising at the same time. He says that carving “is a discipline which paradoxically involves being prepared, with writing tools and time, with sharp carving tools, and creating space, opening to a wider ecology of mind. In participatory practice you no longer know where you are going to end up, and in a sense the very point is to end up with the unexpected. One moves away from the security of what is known to radical uncertainty, to almost a feeling of vertigo in stepping away from well trodden paths of expression” (Reason, 2001).

MC Richards suggests a combination of “ready vision and groping” (Richards, 1964: 116). To explore this, I have borrowed the phrase “bodying forth” from MC Richards and from David Abram, who both used it (Richards, 1964, Abram, 1997).

Richards comments with relation to her pottery practice: “Incarnation: bodying forth. Is this not our whole concern? The bodying forth of our sense of life? Is this not a sense fully as actual as our sense of touch...That is what form is: the bodying forth. The bodying forth of the living vessel in the shapes of clay.” (Richards, date unknown).

Abram’s wording is more immediately connected to the direct expressions of the body. He writes: “... communicative meaning is first incarnate in the gestures by which the body spontaneously expresses feeling and responds to change in its affective environment. The gesture is spontaneous and immediate. It is not an arbitrary sign that we mentally attach to a particular emotion or feeling; rather, the gesture is the bodying-forth of that emotion into the world, it is that feeling of delight or of anguish in its tangible, visible aspect” (Abram, 1997: 74).

Through their words, I can again see two levels at which this aspect of presentational knowing can operate – both *in* my body as the gestures I make (glances, blushes, sighs

and held breath etc), and (perhaps amplified) *through* my body, mediated by the materials and tools I might use as channels for expression (paper, pencils and crayons in my case, or clay for MC Richards, or singing, dancing etc for others). Heron stresses that there is more to presentational knowing than (just) the expression of deep feeling and emotion. He adds that the “aesthetic patterning” of presentational knowing also has “certain inherently pleasing formal properties, some basic harmonic order in the scheme of things which is intrinsically satisfying to contemplate when we discern it in nature and when the artist embodies it in a work of art” (Heron, 1992: 166). In “On Not Being Able to Paint,” Joanna Field noticed early on that drawing might be more of a “mood seeking expression” rather than a person “seeking a genuine expression of mood” though drawing (Field, 1957: 5). I tend to experience presentational knowing as a combination of expressing (in terms of a “squeezing or pressing out”) played alongside a combination of intrinsically satisfying juxtapositions of textures, colours, tones, movements, gestures, proportions, words, sounds and rhythms.

At best, this means that we constantly reveal ourselves through our minute expressive gestures (this is very clear in improvised clowning, where hopes and fears betray themselves even in the pattern of the clown’s breathing), and meaningfully (and aesthetically) express both our individual and wider truths through that which we create. At worst, the bodily gestures might be dismissed as an irrational side effect of being alive, and the expressive acts might be reified as “Art” with a capital “A”, cut off from ordinary life and only valued if produced by those society labels “Artist”.

Goethe makes the link between the kinds of grounded, sensuous experience explored earlier and art³⁵: “He to whom Nature begins to reveal her open secret feels an irresistible longing for her worthiest commentator, Art” (Thoma, 2003: 16).

Experience and expression pull towards each other and yet the link is severed again and again as arts subjects get dropped at school and people tell themselves they can’t draw, paint, sing, act. Propositional knowing then emerges as the most valuable “commodity”.

During the summer of 2003, I worked with a large, British-owned multinational company. Together with a colleague, we were looking at different ways to knowing with a team of engineers. The idea behind this work was for the participants to free themselves up from the strictures of organisational life in an attempt to develop a wider view beyond corporate boundaries. Some of the men shoehorned presentational knowing into the back end of propositional knowing when they told me that they’d “go along with this arty stuff” if it was what the CEO now wanted from them. In this

³⁵ Although this translation uses “Art” with a capital “A”, the meaning I take from this quotation is not one of reifying art, but making it an ordinary part of life. In any case, the grammar of the original German would have capitalised the noun regardless.

way they were backtracking from propositional to presentational knowing rather than building on direct experience and, in some cases, all spontaneity was lost in a rash of bullet points. Propositional knowing was masquerading as presentational knowing and both seemed far removed from the participants' exposure in the workshop to dancing, singing, meeting prisoners and conversing with recovering drug addicts: the phenomena themselves. I can feel in my own writing when words start to get unhitched from my experience, floating upwards into a headful of ideas.

Body superfluous.

Brain on a stick.

Singer / songwriter Dory Previn wrote these lyrics, which for me capture the detached skyward imaginings of the brain vs. the situated earthiness of embodied knowing:

I have flown to star stained heights
On bent and battered wings
In search of mythical kings
Mythical kings
Sure that everything of worth
Is in the sky
And not the earth
And I never learned to make my way
Down down down
Where the iguanas play

I have ridden comet tails
In search of magic rings
To conjure mythical kings
Mythical kings

Singing scraps of angel song
High is right and low is wrong
And I never taught myself to give
Down down down
Where the iguanas live

Astral walks I tried to take
I sit and throw I Ching
Aesthetic bards
And tarot cards
Are the chords to which I cling
Don't break my strings
I wish you would

Or I will fall
I wish I could, I wish I could

Curse the mind that mounts the clouds
In search of mythical kings
In search of mystical things, mystical things

Cry for the soul that will not face
The body as an equal place
And I never learned to touch for real
Or feel the things iguanas feel

Down down down
Where they play

Teach me, Teach me
Teach me
Reach me

In my life, it seems that for my expressive, presentational knowing to see the light of day with greater fullness, I need to carve out contexts for its flourishing: I cannot rely on my day-to-day working activities to automatically provide this given the prevailing western industrialised worldview and conditions of living.

I have been most successful at this when there is an “obsessed expert” holding and believing in that space for me, most often in the form of workshops and courses. Whilst I might congratulate myself on “buying-in” a generative context, I can (and do) just as easily consider this approach as a rather lazy effort which is second-best to creating and holding that space for myself in some kind of individualistic solo way. I find this much more difficult to achieve. I struggle with framing the space for my own creativity without external “help” (which brings with it a kind of nourishment, the “unknown”, surprises, territory out of myself, a greater chance of my exogenous attention being caught). I’m not as disciplined as I’d like to be at holding the structure in order to allow this writing to emerge – of holding myself to the extended task (the spaces I create for myself, by myself are more predictable and feel less nourishing). During this writing, I have been readily distracted by emails, the telephone, my dog, making toast³⁶.

My attempts to hold myself in this place of writing have been limited to using a different computer so the email isn’t right under my nose, sitting somewhere else to write (on the floor, instead of at the desk) and lighting a candle to mark the duration

³⁶ Although I was not at all distracted by the washing up which remains in the sink...

of the writing session. I notice how this contrasts with the Chartres situation – 5 hours drawing with intense concentration and joyful immersion with no real concern for the outcome. What was different there? I'd really carved out the space well. There was no competition for my attention. There was an end in sight – light at the end of the drawing tunnel. I didn't feel that I was going to be judged – by myself or others – at the end. I feel more confident in my visual arts skills than in my writing skills. I also notice that I can hold the writing space more firmly when others are around, also engaged in the same task. Sharing the creative context with others seems to legitimise the task.

Brancusi pointed out the importance of context for presentational knowing when he said: “It is not the things that are difficult to make, but to put ourselves in [a] condition to make them” (Giménez and Gale, 2004: 30). Part of that process might be described as the inner states of sensuous encountering and suspending explored above. Another part might be the context which calls forth our responses from the unexpressed privacy of our inner worlds out into the manifest arena of expression. Art critic Harold Rosenberg, in writing about abstract expressionism, says: “[the canvas is]...an arena in which to act – rather than a space in which to produce... (Rosenberg in Belgrad, 1998: 105). Creating these arenas to act, with the child-like receptivity of suspending and the expressive spontaneity of bodying forth strikes me as a description of a *liberating discipline* (Torbert, 1991, 1995, 1998), involving the paradoxical need for a strong structure within which a kind of expressive freedom can be enacted. Torbert (1998) describes three heuristics (or rules of thumb) for creating a liberating discipline:

- List all the limiting conditions that prevent one from accomplishing some desired goal. Set about inventing a structure that recognises and even uses these limits to reach the goal;
- Create a structure which, if it works, will become unnecessary;
- Ask oneself how to maximise both two apparently opposite values, such as power and justice, or inquiry and productivity.

In the clowning, the different improvisations have a structure, an informing pattern or form, within which the spontaneity unfolds. Each improvisation starts with some limiting conditions, within which the clowns are expected to at least start off. The impros have their names: the *solo*; the *Siamese*; the *two and one*, the *professor and assistant*, the *intellectual and the naïve* and so on. Often, the impro places two opposing forces, forms or archetypes in the same situation, for example, the naïve clown lives with an “overflowing raw and immediate connection with the world” (Gladwell, in conversation, 2006). The rigidity of the intellectual clown combined with the immediacy of the naïve can make for some heartbreakingly poignant

scenes³⁷. As I learn the patterns of these impros, their archetypes and their rules – I get to know them in my body (*connaître* again...) - and then I can start to break the rules knowingly. “The art of transgressing beautifully,” clowning teacher, Vivian Gladwell, calls it, and it is a major theme in the art of clowning which has implications elsewhere in life. Knowing the rules so you can transgress them with grace. Bateson says: “I submit to you that what is wrong with the international field is that the rules need changing. The question is not what is the best thing to do within the rules as they are at the moment. The question is how can we get away from the rules within which we have been operating for the last ten or twenty years” (Bateson, 2000: 485).

I have worked for myself since 1992. No two days are the same. Apart from deadlines, I am not well practiced in the disciplines of externally imposed structure. As soon as I entered the world of work I sought to subvert any attempts to slot me into a structure, constantly seeking to “get away from the rules”.

When author Philip Pullman says that “there are no rules. Anything that's any good has to be discovered in the process of writing it” (Pullman, *date unknown*, see: www.philip-pullman.com), I think he is writing of a process of presentational knowing as inquiry. Richards comments on this, too, when she says: “No matter how well we rehearse our intention, our performance has its own accidents” (Richards, 1964: 117).

Accidents are the lifeblood of improvisational clowning. Vivian says “you don’t have to do anything. Something will happen. It always does”. And when it does, the nature and response to the accident is very often highly congruent with the unfolding story.

In January 2006, I was improvising with another clown in response to a story we’d been told³⁸ from the real life of a woman who’d been knocked off her bicycle by a silver car while she was cycling in London. We walked on stage (with no plan) and laid down on the ground to become the tarmac road, and then I became the bicycle, my partner became the silver car and eventually she crashed into me. I moved in slow motion, and as I reeled, I accidentally knocked over a large wooden candlestick which had been standing on the stage draped in a white cloth. I heard the candlestick fall and turned to see what had happened. I looked down at it. I looked up at the audience. The audience looked at the candlestick. I couldn’t ignore the accident and what ran

³⁷ I remember playing the naïve on one occasion and noticing the extent to which my intellectual clowning colleague’s brow was furrowed and knotted... and just how sorry my character felt for hers. I look up at her and offer her a piece of fluff I found on the floor. To me, the fluff is a delight. She brushes it, and me, away scornfully and tells me to hurry up and get on with something. I stand close to her again, seeking eye contact. I smile. We stand in silence for some time. She looks away and checks her watch. I reach out and take her hand. Eventually, she softens.

³⁸ This is an example of social clowning, where people see events and stories they’ve experienced clowned back to them in highly improvised ways which have an uncanny ability to reflect back deeper truths, reframings and alternative ways of understanding the situation.

through my head was “this is a dead body. If this is a dead body then who am I because I was the woman coming off the bike and she’s clearly alive because she’s in the audience. I don’t want to say she’s dead. So, whose is this dead body?”

My mistake, of course, was not to transgress the scene, break the rules, move to a meta-level and say all these thoughts out loud as a clown. I looked to my clowning partner as she came over to see what had happened. The improvisation went on and the moment was lost. At the end, during the feedback, I explained everything about how I’d seen the candlestick as a small dead body, and that I hadn’t felt able to name this. The woman whose story it was asked to speak. “Yes, that would have been my dead brother. He was killed 47 years ago when he was one and a half years old. He was knocked down by a silver car as well. Sorry, I forgot to tell you.”

We work the material we have at hand. “Potter and clay press against each other. The firm, tender, sensitive pressure which yields as much as it asserts. It is like a handclasp between two living hands, receiving the greeting at the very moment that they give it. It is this speech between the hand and the clay that makes me think of dialogue. And it is a language far more interesting than the spoken vocabulary which tries to describe it, for it is spoken not by the tongue and lips but by the whole body, by the whole person, speaking and listening” (Richards, 1964: 9).

If we can keep open and allow a response to be called forth, we stand a chance of the personal and the universal uniting – the subjective immediacy and an objective (or intersubjective) immortality to be expressed at the same time in one gesture – aha! – which is at once evocative of the particular and resonant of the universal. Heen says of her action research work: “Using personal experiences has included paying attention to feelings from private life, seeing them as pointing to something larger and more general than the actual situation where they emerged” (Heen 2005, 267). Heen then goes on to speculate on the nature of that “something larger”, equating it to the “sacred”, which may be “unreachable in analytical language... and best approached through analogical communication, like poetry, storytelling or ritual expression.” She also questions “how describing or reflecting on an experience changes it” (Heen, 2005, 273-4), and it is to these two ideas – of the dialectic between experience and expression and evoking the sacred - which I now wish to turn.

*Again, I face one of these cusps where I need to receive the ways in which I can link what I had to say around bodying forth and what I want to explore around “being informed”. I know (in the *connaître* sense of being acquainted with through experience) what this link is. I feel it. I know it in my flesh. But I don’t yet know about it (*savoir*) in a way I can express in neat propositions.*

What do I actually do at this point? It is now February 2006 and I have sat with this writing for two weeks while I have been assessing student papers. Yesterday evening,

I finished the last of them, and this morning I promised myself my own writing time. And I have so far – re-read what I had already written, spent ages looking for Hanne Heen quotes, embroidered in the Bateson influences I knew I wanted included, had a bath, taken the dog out, eaten egg on toast, made 4 cups of tea, unwrapped a parcel from the postman³⁹ and basically kept myself occupied whilst, at the same time, somewhere else in my body, this chasm between this section and the next yawned at me. It feels just the same as that split second on dry land before I jump into the swimming pool. Is this suspending? Procrastination? Reflection? Which description allows me to feel better? Which story enables me to move on?

Being in-formed

...and there we go, over the gap and past the new subtitle. I've jumped the chasm and am sneaking in here using my italic voice so I can get a non-academic word in before the quotations and memories all start up again in this new section, "being in-formed". So here it is... writing as inquiry, suspending and bodying forth all at the same time. This is what I want to express: being in-formed has become important to me. I am a being that is in-formed.

If I am in-formed largely by two-dimensional emails, Cartesian thought processes, planning, time management and report writing, then how am I ever going to develop and grow my sensory and emotional capacity to respond to the more than human world in any way other than more reports, emails and abstractions? If I am in-formed by two dimensional screen images, plastic keyboards, plastic dashboards, smooth roads, flat pages, packaging and manmade materials, how will my senses get to know (connaître) the wider, deeper world?

I am seeking to enrich, not to impoverish the sensory ground of my being. That last sentence invokes my dreams of the farmer-poet, Wendell Berry and the rancher-writer Zahava Hanan, whose attunement to the richness of their land surely eclipses my potterings round my own village.

³⁹ The highlight of the morning... a consumerist hit...

Traveling at Home

Even in a country you know by heart
it's hard to go the same way twice.
The life of the going changes.
The chances change and make a new way.
Any tree or stone or bird
Can be the bud of a new direction. The
natural correction is to make intent
of an accident. To get back before dark
is the art of going.

Wendell Berry, Traveling at Home

(Berry, 1989: 23)

It is clear I was born for a placid country life.
Placid it certainly is, so much so that the days are sometimes far more
like a dream than anything real, quiet days of reading and thinking,
watching the changing lights and the growing and fading of the flowers.
The fresh, quiet days when life is so full of zest
that you cannot stop yourself from singing because you are so happy.
Many mornings I go to my secret spot with Bucky [my dog] and say,
“Aren't we lucky, Bucky! Aren't we lucky!”

Zahava Hanan, Heading for Home

(Hanan, 2001: 50-52)

It's not pots we're forming, it's ourselves...

MC Richards (*date unknown*)

The greatest art is less the creating of things than the creating of our own life.

Suzi Gablik (2002: 168-9)

In this section, I will explore how doing presentational knowing is an experience in itself, informing experiential knowing as well as being informed by it. If I perceive through experiential knowing, and I create through presentational knowing, I am interested in how this perceiver-creator interplay is imperative if we are to care for ourselves, our societies and our planet⁴⁰. We need to learn to perceive and receive other humans and the more-than-human world, and to respond by choicefully creating structures and actions which enhance rather than destroy. We need to consciously become better acquainted with our earthly home and its inhabitants such that our part of the living dialogue of planetary process becomes more generative and restorative than destructive.

I relate such a perceiver-creator dialectic to what Heron calls a “post-linguistic propositional knowing” (Heron, 1992: 171). When Heron says: “We become aware of the *interfusion* of dynamic events in mutual exchanges of information feedback: the interpenetration of cause and effect” (Heron, 1992: 172), I think of the ways in which my, and others’ states of being affect each other in virtuous and vicious circles of mutual reflection and influence (and how, at any stage, I am free to step out of playing my part in perpetuating that circle). When writing on the use of forum (and other types of) theatre in organisational life, management academic Mangham writes “As agents, we initiate actions that are stimulating to others but we are also stimulating to ourselves (since we also see and hear them) and we tend to respond to them as others respond to them... We can become aware of it, of how the responses of others (and the responses we have previously offered) shape our present and projected responses and we can use that awareness to determine what we are going to do in the future” (Mangham and Clark, 2003: 8). How I form and in-form my living in turn influences and patterns my responses to the world – and I am still ultimately choiceful about those responses.

After a week's workshop in clowning, I can become so imbued with the clown's child-like view of the world that when the workshop is over, the residual effect lingers strongly to start with. During these times, I (and others) have noticed that the world seems to respond to me more openly, as I have been opened to it. Simple encounters like buying fuel on the way home, or chatting at the supermarket checkout temporarily take on new significance and delight. People entering through doors seem to be

⁴⁰ ... even if that care might be as the care of the dying, as I can sometimes intuit from James Lovelock's recent writings on Gaian viability (Lovelock, 2006).

“making an entrance” or “doing a crossing” and I notice greater richness in the everyday gestures and eye contact which otherwise I might miss (a bit like watching film footage in slow motion where even the smallest blink or glance takes on new significance). It’s as if the heightened awareness of the clown energy calls forth greater engagement and playfulness in others. For me this evokes a feeling of shared humanity, a playful twinkle in the eye, a meta-communication about this being human which I associate strongly with our species-level need to find compassionate ways of living that are less destructive, less acquisitive, more just and more in tune with the world of which we are a part.

Sewall suggests that: “gestures are relational, moving toward and in response to the nuances of relating with an animated world. We reach out, receive, and give back, continuously engaged in the act of translating between what is and what might be” (Sewall, 2000: 234).

Similarly, Shotter says: “due to the ineradicable, spontaneous responsiveness of our living bodies, when someone acts, their activity cannot be accounted as wholly their own – for a person’s acts are at least partly ‘shaped’ by their being responsive to the others and othernesses in their surroundings” (Shotter, 2005: 137).

In addition to the reciprocity of expression, I most resonate here with Ken Wright’s Donald-Winnicott-and-Marion-Milner-inspired ideas on making experience “sing”⁴¹ (Wright, 2000). He says: “There is a circularity in this creative ‘singing’ or ‘saying’, a dialogue with the world that results in each party (world and self) becoming more alive... as the world is transformed by the creative utterance, so the artists themselves are transformed by the world – through their own visionary seeing and praising of it” (Wright, 2000: 88)⁴².

Gaia expressing herself through us.

Not denying that voice.

Sacred.

Sustainable.

Engrossing.

Fun.

More alive.

I’m writing now on the edge of my experience. This section feels more like writing out a dream of that greater aliveness, a self-soothing in the face of bittersweet

⁴¹ This is a word I tend to use to evoke the feeling of reading the distinction-level projects from MSc participants. Their projects “sing” when all the ways of knowing come together, and the project seems alive – when the whole is somehow greater than the sum of its parts.

⁴² Both Wright (2000: 88) and Heron (1992: 166) refer to Susanne Langer as inspiration for their respective understandings about expression and presentational knowing. Wright says: “As Susanne Langer (1953) says in her book *Feeling and Form*, the artist ‘finds forms for human feeling’, but equally, these forms are the forms of the world that the artist has discovered” (Wright, 2000: 88).

engagement with the seemingly intractable systemic problems that thrown up by human societies' habits of acquisition and (often unintended) destruction. To engage more fully in equal measure with both the good and the not-so-good of what's happening. At this stage in my life I am getting glimpses of "singing myself" into a more engaged being. MSc and clowning workshops, drawing, painting and creating "do it" for me, but infrequently enough for that greater aliveness and feeling of connection to get lost in between times. The forms of emailing, dull reports and filling in the VAT forms - as necessary as they are as a part, but not the whole, of the mix - simply don't fit with the richness of my experience, which all too often remains latent and unexpressed.

“Responsive dialogue involves a matching resonance of form and experience. It underpins the development of the self and the core sense of ‘aliveness’; it also underpins the work of the creative artist. In this view, the core of creativity lies in the ability to make (or find) forms that fit experience – artists are those who have developed this capacity to an extraordinary degree... Artists may believe that they are singing the *world* into existence... but even more, they are singing to *themselves* the needed maternal song, and breathing *themselves* from existence into life” (Wright, 2000: 96).

I will now finish this important-to-me-and-yet-difficult-to-express section with a final expression of the rather non-linear, circular thinking that has gone before.

*The more I get to know (both in the *connaître* and *savoir* senses) the more-than-human and other-human world... the more likely I am to respond in respectful, knowledgeable, creative, well in-formed ways... and the more likely I am to act in ways that minimise negative unintended consequences... and, in doing so, I am more likely to enhance my own experiences of this being human here and now, on this planet... so the more alive and engaged I'll feel... and if I am more engaged and alive I am more likely to feel the emotions that enable me to engage with discernment with the contexts I am in... which means I will get to know (both in the *connaître* and *savoir* senses) the more-than-human and other-human world...*

Summary

I will now summarise my understanding of an epistemology of presentational knowing, which forms a foundation for the rest of this thesis:

- I started with a kind of a prologue which, through looking at my own practice and, particularly, that of MC Richards, sought to establish that **non-intellectual ways of knowing are ordinary**... that we engage in them all the time, but things can get in the way to stop us.
- Next, I introduced John Heron's theory of an **extended epistemology** which values ways of knowing beyond the intellectual which so dominates the norms of Western industrialised mindsets. Many ways of knowing says that we don't just know through books and brains. We know through experience and expression and doing. We need to value all of these ways of knowing if we are to enjoy a less unsustainable place in our world.
- Looking more closely at **presentational knowing** specifically, I introduced, described and offered examples four elements relevant to this way of knowing.
- First, I introduced **sensuous encountering**: using all my ways of sensing to directly experience the world with a whole-body sense of curiosity and appreciation for the glorious mundane;
- Second, I introduced **suspending**: hanging fire with fresh rounds of clever intellectual retorts in order to become more deeply acquainted with the responses to experience of my more-than-brainy body to the more-than-human world;
- Third, I introduced the idea of **bodying-forth**: inviting imaginative impulses to express themselves through the medium of my body without my intellect throwing a spanner in the works and crushing those responses with misplaced rationality or premature editing and critique;
- Finally, I introduced the concept of **being in-formed**: becoming a being whose living and actions form and are in-formed by the rich experiences, surprises, provocations and evocations of presentational knowing, both as a perceiver and as a creator.

Next, I include a second interlude which describes and shows my experience with Goethean science, a holistic way of receiving and responding to the world with discipline. Then, the thesis will move on to a chapter which seeks to make specific links and explore the potential for a more fully realised presentational knowing within the framework and disciplines of action inquiry.