10   Repose and self development

10.1   Framing

In the previous chapter, I reflected on my experience of collaborating with the Luhimba Project, and I suggested that in seeking to develop qualities of repose we might do well to:

- hold the process of engagement with complex challenges moment to moment, understanding this as a practice of personal development and spiritual unfolding; and
- sustain our engagement with this work through openness to moments of grace and to joyful living.

In this chapter, I wish to expand on the suggestion that developing the capacity to respond appropriately to ecological challenges may be linked to a process of personal unfolding. Specifically, I do this by considering my understanding of repose in relation to Torbert et al.'s (2004) perspectives on self-development and self-transformation.

Indeed, in developing my thinking around the concept and practice of repose, I have come to realise that much of what I propose could be understood to correspond to the post-conventional stages in Torbert et al.'s (2004) theory of self-transformation. I wish to make these links explicit in this chapter, and to draw on Torbert et al.'s thinking as a lens through which I might make sense of the developmental journey upon which I understand myself to be embarking.

In the latter half of this chapter, I return to my experience of working with the Ecological Thinking intakes. My aim is to conclude the thesis with a grounded account of some of the ways in which I am seeking to develop a practice of acting-from-repose in my educative practice and my professional context.

10.2   The developmental process

Torbert et al. (2004:66) suggest that self-transformation toward an advanced capacity for action inquiry is a lifetime path, and that each major step along this path corresponds to a particular action-logic, or 'an overall strategy that so thoroughly informs our experience that we cannot see it'. Indeed, Torbert et al. argue that we only develop the ability to 'see' our own action-logics when we reach the stage along the developmental path where we recognise that there are indeed multiple action-logics, and that unexplored differences amongst these are key causes of degenerative conflict within human networks. Becoming aware of the limitations of particular action-logics, and seeking to move beyond these, can help us to reduce unintentional conflict and misunderstanding. Thus, Torbert et al. make a distinction between those action-logics which precede and those which follow on from the attainment of such awareness, referring to these as *conventional* and *post-conventional* respectively.

The particular stages will be described later in this section; briefly, the conventional ones are those of the Opportunist, Diplomat, Expert and Achiever, while the post-conventional are those of the Individualist, Strategist and Alchemist. Torbert et al. argue that there is much developmental theory and research which offers strong cross-cultural support for the notion that as human beings develop, we progress sequentially through these action-logics, with only a minority of people moving beyond the first three or four, and onto the post-conventional stages.

I must be clear that the decision to draw on Torbert et al.'s (2004) model of self-development in this concluding chapter poses something of a challenge for me, since I have often struggled with aspects of this model. In particular, although I am prepared to acknowledge that conceptualising the developmental process as a series of stages may be a useful and valid representation, I find myself feeling uncomfortable with the tendency towards categorisation of self and others which ensues. Torbert et al. (2004:69) are clear that, when used as a diagnostic tool, the intention is not to pigeon-hole self or others, but to 'test whether your hypotheses about your own or another person's developmental action-logic lead you to choose more effective actions as you work with them'. Nevertheless, I find that this jars with the concept and practice of encounter (Mathews, 2003) on which I have drawn

at various points in the thesis, and which I have come to understand as respect for and openness to the subjectivity, mystery and 'otherness' of others.

At the same time, I recognise that my discomfort with Torbert et al.'s proposals could be rooted in my own anxieties and insecurities regarding my positioning and progress along this path, and how this compares with others around me. In accordance with the advice given by Devereux (1967) and by Peter, my PhD supervisor (who, as I have mentioned previously, has encouraged and challenged me to more actively and curiously engage with the tensions and anxieties raised by the inquiry process), I have chosen to engage with the challenges, and the possibilities, which Torbert et al.'s framework of self-development and action-logics raises for me.

I now turn to each of the action-logics identified by Torbert et al. (2004), and I consider my own sense of undergoing a developmental journey in relation to these. As I consider each of these, I intend to keep in mind Torbert et al.'s recommendation that we identify both our primary action-logic, and our secondary or fallback action-logic, to which they argue we retreat when we are under duress.

10.2.1 Conventional action-logics

The first action-logic described by Torbert et al. (2004) is that of the Opportunist. People acting from this action-logic view unilateral power as the only effectual form of power, and furthermore tend to reject critical feedback, externalise blame and have a fragile sense of self-control. This action-logic also tends to view rules as a loss of freedom and draws on deception and manipulation as forms of self-protection, much in the manner of Mathews' (2003, 2005) autoic self. The Opportunist focus is very much on the short-term, and timely action is equated with 'winning'.

The second action-logic is that of the Diplomat. The Diplomat concentrates on gaining self-control in order to act effectively, and sees imitating organisational routines and the behaviour patterns of high-status group members as an adequate strategy for doing so. Diplomats therefore tend to conform, work to group standards, and prize group membership and acceptance highly. Diplomats equate

negative feedback with loss of face and loss of status, and seek to avoid and smooth over all potential conflict, 'masking both true feelings and objective data in an effort to maintain harmony at all costs' (Torbert et al., 2004:73).

Reflecting on these first two action-logics, I can see that I particularly embody elements of the Diplomat in situations of stress and/or discomfort. In Chapter Eight, I suggested that anxiety around conflict has been a recurrent theme in my interactions with others, and that a tendency towards conflict-avoidance and the collapsing of difference may well have been at the roots of the difficulties we experienced in the Sustainable Farmshire initiative, and of my inability to creatively engage with the MSc group. I have been aware of my tendency to revert to Diplomat-like behaviour for some time. For example, in my MPhil to PhD transfer paper (written in the Spring of 2003), I wrote about referring to my undergraduate seminar groups of the 2001-2002 academic year as either 'good' or 'bad' groups. Having reflected on what these labels meant, I realised that I identified the good groups as those where things flowed smoothly, where the task was completed satisfactorily, and the process was fairly straight-forward and amicable. Meanwhile, those groups which I distinguished as bad were characterised by difficult processes, where I experienced rebellion from group members and a tendency for me become ruffled as a result. In my transfer paper, I wrote about working with this anxiety, and indeed in the past five years I feel that I have gained a degree of maturity in my teaching practice, so that I am now better able to hold conflict and tension in a teaching situation. Through this thesis, I have sought to demonstrate how I am developing the capacity to encounter conflict and tension in my action research practice and in action for sustainability in more effective, creative ways.

The next action-logic along the developmental path identified by Torbert et al. is that of the Expert. The Expert seeks to move on from the Diplomat's tactics of unquestionably agreeing with others and meeting their expectations, and instead seeks a 'more internally consistent, a more reliably value-adding, and a more objective basis for decision making' (2004:80). Experts therefore set out to master a specific craft-logic capable of providing them with a single right answer, with the result that they give less importance to others' judgments of quality, and more to their own and/or to other recognised masters of the craft. The Expert is therefore likely to exhibit tendencies towards dogmatism and perfectionism, and to see him/herself as unique and distinct from others.

The action-logic which follows that of the Expert is the Achiever. While the Expert's rather narrow focus is on mastering a specific skill or craft, the Achiever deliberates more broadly on 'how to be effective in one's wider surrounding and on how to help the organization as a whole be effective' (2004:83). In a departure from previous action-logics, the Achiever attends to differences in perspectives and seeks mutuality in relationships, for example valuing agreements reached through consensus. Although this action-logic has an appreciation of complexity and systems, it lacks the capacity to engage with feedback and/or information which challenges the Achiever's already-established worldview. People acting from this action-logic could therefore be described as 'blind to their own shadows' and 'to the subjectivity behind objectivity' (Torbert et al., 2004:86).

I would say that in the final year of my undergraduate degree, when I first made the decision to pursue this inquiry, I was acting from what could be understood as an Achiever action-logic. While in my final years of secondary school I prided and congratulated myself on mastering the skills necessary to succeed academically (in a manner similar to that described of the Expert action-logic), I feel that four/five years on, I was not only developing an appreciation of complexity and of systemic qualities, patterns and interactions, I was also intentionally seeking out opportunities which would allow me to more positively and effectively contribute to wider human and ecological well-being. Likewise, I can acknowledge that as I embarked on my doctoral inquiry, my thinking and behaviour could have been described as rather inflexible and uncompromising. I felt very strongly that particular perspectives (including those of capitalism, consumerism and the rhetoric of growth and progress, for example) were 'wrong'. My response to such perspectives was one of antagonism and disaffection, and although of course I experienced myself as part of a capitalist, consumerist system, I could find little ground on which to meet proponents or uncritical followers of such a system. Thus, as I set out on my inquiry, I experienced myself as occupying something of a moral high-ground, and perceived a fairly clear distinction between what might be understood as 'good' and what might be understood as 'evil'.

10.2.2 Post-conventional action-logics

The action-logics described thus far are the conventional ones. I now turn to the post-conventional action-logics. Torbert et al. describe the key differences between the two in the following way:

> Whereas the conventional action-logics appreciate *similarity* and *stability*, postconventional action-logics increasingly appreciate *differences* and participating in ongoing, creative *transformation* of action-logics…[and furthermore] are less and less *implicit frames* that limit one's choice, and more and more become *explicit frames*… (Torbert et al., 2004:93)

Torbert et al. suggest that the Individualist is the action-logic which bridges the conventional and post-conventional stages. The individualist takes a relativistic perspective, and in the manner described above, is more attracted by difference and change than by similarity and stability. He or she is less inclined to judge or evaluate, and is more likely to influence by listening and finding patterns than by advocacy. A person acting from this action-logic starts to notice their own shadow and negative impact, which can in itself lead to decision paralysis. Torbert et al. describe the Individualist's experience in the following way:

> The *Individualist's* dark side includes troubled feelings of something unravelling or needing resolving, along with a sense of paralysis about how to move, because we have not yet developed postrelativistic principles. Yet this is also likely to be a time of renewed freshness of each fully tasted experience, of dramatic new insight into the uniqueness of ourselves and of others, of forging relationships that reach new levels of intimacy, and of perusing new interests in the world. Excitement alternates with doubt in unfamiliar ways. If this sounds like a contradictory jumble…then this is a fair representation of the *Individualist's* experience. (Torbert et al., 2004:101-102)

I would argue that my own experience of engaging in this inquiry has parallels with that of the Individualist action-logic as described above. Throughout the thesis, I have suggested that I experienced many tensions and challenges as I participated in various fields of practice, and that particularly distressing and unsettling was my seeming inability to construct an appropriate sense of positioning and activeness. Especially in the early stages of my inquiry, I felt ill-equipped to deal with the various tensions and contradictions I experienced, and through the thesis I have sought to evidence my emerging willingness and ability to stay with complex challenges and with the experience of anxiety, vulnerability and conflict. For example, in the previous chapter, my aim was to demonstrate that in the midst of the murkiness I experienced while engaging with the Luhimba Project, I was able to find a way of appreciating and attending to the opportunities for learning and for personal unfolding which were inherent therein.

Indeed, my hope is that the accounts I have presented in this thesis are understood as evidence of my evolving ability to hold tensions in more joyful, restful and curious ways, both in my capacity as an action researcher/inquirer and as someone wishing to respond appropriately to ecological challenges. I therefore suggest that the practice of repose towards which I aspire might be understood to correspond to the action-logic which follows on from the Individualist, namely, that of the Strategist:

> Unlike the *Achiever*, the *Strategist* is open to the possibility of rethinking and even altering his or her viewpoint and purposes in a situation and helping others do the same. The *Strategist* consciously seeks and chooses new ways of framing opportunities, dilemmas, and conflicts that accommodate the disparities, paradoxes, and fluidity of multiple points of view. From the *Individualist*, the *Strategist* inherits the ability to acknowledge and deal with inner conflicts, such as conflicting needs and duties. But, whereas the *Individualist's* relativism can make him or her feel paralyzed by such conflicts, the *Strategist* comes to appreciate the tension of opposites as paradoxical and seeks resolutions that transform the very differences that initially seem irreconcilable. (Torbert et al., 2004:106)

The Strategist places a high value on timely action inquiry, mutuality and autonomy, and is attentive to particular historical moments. He or she interweaves short-term goal-orientedness with longer-term developmental process-orientedness. Furthermore, the Strategist is creative at conflict resolution and enjoys playing a variety of roles.

I believe that I have aspired towards such Strategist-like qualities in a variety of ways. As I have stated already, my wish to engage in processes and practices which allow me to develop and experiment with qualities of repose (which we could also refer to as post-conventional action-logic behaviour) is not founded on a desire to find new answers or alternative solutions, nor does it revolve around a wish to tidy up the messy-ness I have uncovered while participating in my various fields of practice. Rather, experiencing repose, as I understand it, is about learning to hold all of these questions and tensions *while* keeping on working with commitment and joy. In Macy's words (1991b:27): 'Waiting does not mean inaction, but staying in touch with our pain and confusion *as* we act, not banishing them to grab for sedatives, ideologies, or final solutions'.

My understanding of repose could also be linked to Robert French's (2001) work on 'negative capability', which I would argue also holds strong links to the Strategist action-logic. Originally coined by John Keats as a way to describe the 'prime essential' of a poet (Muir, 1958:107), the concept of negative capability has been further developed in relation to psychoanalysis, with Wilfred Bion (1978, 1990, 1991) for example suggesting that 'the analyst's ability to bring about change in a patient depends on…negative capability' (French, 2001:481). According to French:

> Negative capability indicates the capacity to live with and to tolerate
> ambiguity and paradox, to 'remain content with half-knowledge'
> (Ward, 1963:161) and, therefore, to engage in a non-defensive way
> with change, resisting the impulse merely to react to the pressures
> inherent in risk-taking. It implies the capacity to integrate emotional
> and mental states rather than dissociating oneself from aspects of
> emotional experience or attempting to cut oneself from such
> experience altogether. These capacities allow one, in addition, to
> identify with the moods and modes of suffering of the other…
> (French, 2001:482)

French (2001) suggests that the paradoxical image evoked by the term 'negative capability' appropriately represents what is required by analysts, organisational consultants, and others acting for change. He explains that the root meaning of 'capable' and 'capacity' (though not of 'ability' or 'able') is 'containing' or 'spacious', since these are derived from the Latin word *capax*, meaning 'able to hold much' (French, 1999). He makes the point that 'the volume of any container is, of course, a measure of its internal "negative" space' (2001:483) and following Bion, suggests that 'a person's negative capability can "take in" the emotions evoked by a situation and "digest" them on behalf of the whole system' (2001:484). He concludes:

> …For an organizational actor, the outcome is an intervention or a
> refraining from action – a pause to think – which may facilitate a
> change of mind or heart in self or colleagues, and hence learning in
> the wider system. (French, 2001:484)

The sensitive attention to self and others implied by the notion of negative capability is arguably also evidenced in Strategist action-logics, and in my own efforts to develop an understanding of and practice of repose. For example, Torbert et al. suggest that:

> The person with the Strategist worldview sees purpose in life beyond
> meeting his or her own needs. Continuing development of self and
> others is a primary concern. The Strategist also seeks to discover
> what he or she does uniquely well. This person is involved in a
> personal quest—a life work—with a sense of vocation…The
> question of identity for the Strategist includes the question of his or
> her social and spiritual vocation. (Torbert et al., 2004:107)

Through my inquiry I have sought to discover what it is that I do 'uniquely well' and what my particular vocation or contribution might be. In previous chapters, I suggested that experiencing repose in oneself may be akin to experiencing restfulness. Such restfulness may be as the grounding in which we may rest, the 'truth' to which we may come home, especially if, as ecopscyhologist Andy Fisher (2002:85) maintains, a characteristic of the current human condition is that we feel 'empty, cut-off, homeless, soulless; many of us frantically trying to "be"

somebody'. This 'truth' to which we come home might be a more robust, well-rounded sense of self from which to act, in which to place and ground ourselves while encountering others and while shaping and extending our offering to the world. Having engaged in this inquiry, I consider myself to be speaking from a more restful place, where I feel better able to *both* hold questions around my own role and place within all of this, *and also* able to hold appreciation and respect for the ground from which I am speaking, and for my own lived experience of grappling and playing with these questions. This is something which I seek to evidence in the following section of this chapter, when I return to my educative practice and my experience of working with the Ecological Thinking groups.

The final action-logic identified by Torbert et al. (2004) is that of the Alchemist. The Alchemist continually exercises his or her own attention and intentionally participates in work of historical/spiritual transformation. He or she is co-creator of mythical events that reframe situations and stands in the tension of opposites. Not surprisingly, Torbert et al. suggest that the attainment of this action-logic is very rare indeed and that

> …the distinctive quality of the politics and spirituality of the
> Alchemist is not whatever conventional or unconventional package
> of beliefs a person may espouse (e.g., Protestant Republican, Jewish
> Democrat, Pagan Anarchist, etc.), but rather the moment-to-moment
> inquiry into the source of life and love that he or she practices.
> (Torbert et al., 2004:182)

The distinctive quality of the Alchemist as described above reminds me of the qualities of the erotic self valued by Mathews (2003, 2005) and the self-directedness (as opposed to other-directness) espoused by Naess (1995). Reflecting on Mathews', Naess' and Torbert et al.'s proposals, the developmental process with which I might usefully engage would include *not* taking refuge in other-directedness through, for example, attempting to comply to the image of 'the environmentalist' or 'the action researcher' or 'the young academic' as ascribed and/or imagined by others, and as a method of side-stepping the challenging process of giving shape to my own sense of self and place in the world moment to moment. Rather, engaging in a process of self-development would require that I maintain my composure as I make my way through these questions and attempt to give form and substance to my offering, acknowledging the creative tension (and

the possibilities for degenerative conflict) to which this may give rise as I position myself in relation to the world, and of course, to others working in this field.

10.2.3 Reflections on the developmental process

It seems clear from the description of the various action-logics that moving from one stage to the next, and particularly from conventional to post-conventional action-logics, is a tremendously challenging process. Indeed, Torbert et al. (2004) repeatedly make the point that a very small percentage of adults ever reach the post-conventional stages, and that this tends to happen (if at all) in later life. For example, reflecting on the Opportunist, Diplomat and Expert action-logics, they propose that

> After the strategy, performance, and outcome territories of
> experience have been mastered one by one (usually between the ages
> of six and twenty-six), most people never again transform their
> action-logic. But a solid minority (about 40 percent) of highly
> educated, professional adults do transform once more, to the
> Achiever action-logic… (Torbert et al., 2004:66)

The above statement is one of the reasons why I remain somewhat uncomfortable with the theory of self-transformation proposed by Torbert et al.. Firstly, I am unsure what to make of the reference to 'highly educated, professional' adults. Is this meant to suggest that such people are more likely to make these shifts than non-highly educated, non-professional adults? If so, how might such qualities of 'education' and 'professionalism' be understood, and to what extent might this be considered a fairly exclusivist and elitist perspective? Mathews (2005), for one, is suspicious of the value placed on formal education and the standard of professionalism, arguing that the 'native' (in opposition to the abstractive 'modern') is likely to shun such narrow, constricting definitions of self.

Secondly, according to Torbert et al.'s typology, at twenty-six (my current age) I am unlikely to have developed an appreciation (let alone qualities) of post-conventional action-logics. To be clear, my intention in this section has *not* been to suggest that I *have* reached post-conventional action-logics, but that the qualities of

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repose towards which I *aspire* might be understood to correspond, to a certain extent, to the later stages of Torbert et al.'s model. I am quite prepared to admit that shifts towards a practice of repose are likely to prove immensely challenging, and indeed, throughout the thesis I have often made the point that I see this as relating to a process of *ongoing* personal and spiritual development.

It has been pointed out to me that many of the writers and thinkers whom I quote (including Naess, Berry and Macy) are much older than myself and have undergone particularly challenging developmental processes across their lifetimes. While I agree that, with the passing of time, we may progressively develop the ability to enact the kinds of qualities and capacities to which I have referred in the thesis, I suggest that an *emerging appreciation* of the *need* for such qualities and capacities may be less a function of age and/or stage in one's life, and more closely related to the opportunities with which one is presented and with which one may choose to engage. In my case, I feel it is unlikely that I would have developed an understanding of these qualities and capacities had I *not* engaged in this inquiry in a systematic and sustained way over the last five years, and had I not been supported in doing so by others who have also chosen to engage with such challenges, including Peter, Donna and Judi in the CARPP community, the many writers with whose work I have engaged, and the many other aspects of my life which have given meaning and joy to my being in the world over the years.

Furthermore, I have a growing (although largely undefined) sense that, while we may usefully seek to engage in processes of self-transformation, the extent to which our capacity to respond to complex challenges develops is less to do with our sense of intentionality and purposiveness in doing so, and more to do with the particular moment and place in which we find ourselves, and what unfolds therein. In exploring what I mean by this, it helps me to turn to Mathews' (2003) suggestion of how communicative order might be understood in a soulful, panpsychist universe. Mathews explains communicative order between the One and the Many

> …in terms of the holistic tendency, within the primal field, to return differentiated parts of the field to a common ground state i.e., the communicative impulse was portrayed as a holistic countertendency to the tendency towards self-differentiation. Such a tendency would presumably be particularly activated when the differentia were not

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only distinguished from, but acting in opposition to, their
environs…The one can draw the wanderers back to its Way only if
they are sufficiently receptive to notice its signals. Wherever such
receptivity exists, however, the One would have reason to
communicate its presence to its creatures, conveying to them their
origins in primal desire. When answering desire springs up in them,
the One would affirm them. And, when it feels the stirrings of
genuine perplexity in them, it might offer glimpses into the mystery
of the Way to guide their steps…Such communications could be
carried out via synchronistic configurations of objects or elements of
the environment: the world 'speaks' through symbolic constellations
that are, though within the causal parameters of the context, uniquely
apposite to the situation at hand… (Mathews, 2003:66)

What Mathews suggests, then, is that the primal field or ground of being out of
which our own subjectivity arises could, by virtue of its self-actualising nature,
communicate to us the wisdom we need in order to shape our own modes of being
in ways which are life-affirming (for us, and for itself as a whole). Such wisdom
may be made available to us through signals, symbols and/or primal desires,
towards which we must be receptive and open and which we must also learn to
read, judge and interpret. Thus, such encounter or engagement with the world
requires from us the development of certain capacities and aptitudes, the likes of
which we are not normally encouraged to develop within materialist, dualistic
paradigms. Communicative engagement with the world requires that we attend not
only to the universal aspects of things and beings (as we are apt to, through the
universalising lenses of science), but that we also attend to the detail at the level of
particulars: 'for communicative cues reside deep within the particularity of
things…at those junctures at which behaviour departs from an anticipated norm'
(2005:16).

Cultures of *essential attentiveness* might thus unfold as the praxes of panpsychist
metaphysics (Mathews, 2005). Mathews suggests that the materialist cultures of
essential bruteness-and-blindness might actually not be considered cultures at all.
The word *culture*, she explains, derives from the same root as *cultivate*, viz the
Latin *cultura* meaning tending; *cultura* is in turn derived from *colere*, to till or
cherish. The concept of culture, then, is

> …essentially to do with cherishing, with developing expressive forms of life within a field of cherishing. But what can this cherishing be but the cherishing of existence itself, the orchestration of praise—via praxis—for the ground beneath our feet, the ground we must tend and husband, attentively, if we are to remain in psychic dialogue with the sources of our being. (Mathews, 2005:21)

This recovery of the original meaning and associated praxes of culture may be understood as analogous with the reading (offered by many ecopsychologists/deep ecologists) of humans' proper role and positioning as that of cosmological celebrators:

> …it is our nature, our deepest calling, to articulate and tend to the cosmos, to call forth or lay open the world by means of ceremony and ritual, storytelling and myth. Heidegger came to this theme by saying that through our poetic attending to things we mortals participate, along with the earth, the sky, and the gods, in the gathering and illuminating of the world. This world-disclosing process is at the same time a playful celebration, an expression of the 'simple, flexible characteristic of our human be-ing to care for others, to laugh, dance, and sing in otherness' (Bigwood, 1993:206). (Fisher, 2002:106)

I suggest that the cherishing 'of existence itself' and of 'the ground beneath our feet' proposed by Mathews (2005) and the human capacity for 'playful celebration' and 'to care for others, to laugh, dance, and sing in otherness' proposed by Fisher (2002) and Bigwood (1993) is not best understood as the domain of highly educated, professional and/or middle-aged people, and rather represents a more appropriate understanding of the kinds of life processes and day-to-day experiences to which we might open ourselves, at whatever stage of our lives, in seeking to develop capacities for repose, reverential encounter and ecological/psychological healing.

I drew the below picture while reflecting on my experience of moments of grace in relation to nature. Beholding it now, I feel that it might also be understood to represent a practice of tending, cherishing and reverential encounter.

Figure 3: Tending and cherishing

10.3 Returning to my grounding as educator

As I explained earlier in the thesis, I have increasingly come to understand that I may be able to contribute to developing ecological wisdom, and play a part in responding to ecological challenges, through the broad field of education for ecology. In Chapters Five and Six, I began to develop the main concepts and ideas I have put forward in this thesis (those revolving around repose) while reflecting on my engagement with the Ecological Thinking intakes in 2003 and 2004, and on the anxiety, helplessness and hopelessness expressed by many course participants. Having reflected on my experience in several other fields of practice, and having considered how various theoretical and practical perspectives may contribute to the ways in which I/we may appropriately engage with complex challenges, it is fitting that I now return to my experience of fulfilling a role which I increasingly see as providing me with a sense of grounding: that of being an educator at the interface between management and ecology.

10.3.1 Enabling others to engage with complex challenges

As I explained in Chapter Four, part of my engagement with the Ecological Thinking intakes came to revolve around the sculpting of feedback loops and processes which allowed cycling between course participants' responses (which with their knowledge and consent were where appropriate fed back to Judi Marshall, the course leader) and the further shaping and unfolding of the course structure and processes.

Based on the themes emerging from my research with the 2003 intake, Judi and I discussed ways in which participants could be better supported in dealing with their response to the course material. We agreed that a careful balance would need to be struck between supporting participants in processing any uncomfortable feelings, while at the same time, allowing them the space to engage and *stay* with these as valid and perhaps necessary responses to current ecological and social problems. To this end, participants were further invited to develop attentional disciplines with the potential to allow them to notice and track their responses as they made their way through the course—in fact, my own involvement with the group, and the data-gathering exercises in which I invited them to participate, were also framed as opportunities for course participants to track their own learning and movement through the course. Significantly, without seeking to negate, preempt or smooth over any distressing or difficult responses, Judi also informed students of other resources with which they might like to engage, including alternative career websites and examples of the kinds of change initiatives which *are* gaining ground. In preparing the lecture series for the 2004 intake, Judi also scheduled in a session to look specifically and explicitly at *approaches to change – individual, organisational and societal*. In outlining this lecture (which was scheduled as session 7 of 11) on the course handout, Judi summarised *'Change is a theme throughout the course. Session 7 looks at how people – including 'ordinary' people as citizens, consumers, investors – try to influence change. Whether individuals can have any impact may well be an issue by this stage in the programme'*.

Moreover, a final feedback session, facilitated by myself, endeavoured to provide a shared forum where we could together discuss how it may be possible to make sense of and build on from these experiences in seeking to engage with ecological

challenges. In the course handout, this session was labelled *Building capacity to engage with and respond to ecological challenges*, and was introduced as follows: *'Session 11 provides a further course review. Patricia Gayá has been studying people looking at ecological challenges for her PhD research, this has included people doing Ecological Thinking in 2003, and will include your group. She will report on her work, including on your comments'.* In leading and facilitating this session, I sought to attend to how I might understand my role in that space; how I might understand my intentions and purposes in mirroring back to the group the kinds of comments they had shared with me throughout the semester; and how I might appropriately frame and communicate what we might together seek to do in that space. In approaching this session, I sought to position myself in a way that could be described, following Reason (forthcoming), 'as simultaneously appreciative and question-posing'. So, for example, after sharing some of the comments I had gathered from both the 2003 and the 2004 intakes, I suggested that the following questions might be understood as being raised:

- How do we deal with feelings of guilt and/or distress at understanding ourselves as contributing to the problem?

- How do we deal with conflicting pressures and desires, that is, how do we make sense of ourselves as concerned individuals *and* consumers *and* part of the business world, and so on?

- How might we understand, and balance, an appropriate sense of humility with an appropriate sense of agency?

- How might we understand and appreciate the kinds of contributions which we do feel able to make?

- How might we move forward from such complexity and lack of definitive answers, and begin to take tentative steps? What might these steps look like?

- And how can we seek to maintain awareness around our experimenting, and reflect on the usefulness and appropriateness of what we are doing?

In considering these questions, I shared some of the experiences of the Sustainable Farmshire initiative, particularly around the challenges we experienced in staying with the difficulties and in carrying on working with commitment and joy. Sharing stories from others' practice felt important in communicating that others are also struggling with similar concerns and responses to these issues, *and also* that ordinary citizens *are* choosing to ask questions and work towards an understanding of how we might appropriately respond to ecological challenges. Such confirmation felt especially necessary for this group of people, many of whom appeared to be grappling with the relative lack of support, inspiration and exemplars upon which they felt they could draw within the context of their management degrees. Following Macy, I believe that a sense of community and wider networks of support are important in sustaining our engagement with this work: 'Despair work is not a solo venture, no matter how alone one may feel. It is a process undertaken within the context of community, even if a community of like-minded others is not physically present. Just knowing that one's feelings are shared gives a measure of validation and support' (Macy, 1991:28).

Moreover, of importance to me in raising these questions, and in sharing tales from the Sustainable Farmshire and Luhimba Project groups, was *not* to come within reach of any answers, nor to seek to resolve felt tensions or the experience of complexity, but rather to encourage and make space for *engagement* with these. As such, I attempted to present, tentatively and humbly, my own emerging understanding of sustainability work as linked to a process of personal and spiritual development, where *the very holding of these questions in itself* may be understood as a valuable learning process, and as a necessary initial step for committing oneself for the long haul.

As well as suggesting that posing questions, or the holding of inquiry around these issues, might be considered a viable position to occupy, and might indeed be more generative and life-affirming than seeking to 'save the world' or the pursuit of quick-fix solutions, I also sought to put forward some alternative understandings of what action might mean (if not related to heroics or grand visions of change). So, for example, we talked about the notion of small wins; we discussed again the concept of tempered radicalism (Meyerson and Scully, 1995); we considered what it might mean to experiment, to act and attend to what response we get; we reflected on the extent to which non-action might also be seen as a valid choice, and so on. We also talked about the importance of grounding these questions in a

lived process, and Judi and myself invited course participants, in the moment, to reflect and comment on the course itself as a learning process, posing questions such as *'What about the course helps/hinders you in engaging with these issues in a way that is appropriate for you? What is helpful and unhelpful?'*. My impression is that course participants generally enjoyed and valued this session. There seemed to be good levels of engagement, discussion and holding of tensions evidenced, and a number of people approached me at the end of the session to express their appreciation and to give me their contact details so that we might stay in touch after their graduation.

The important point for me is that, in matching form to content (Marshall, 2004), neither myself as researcher and fellow traveller, nor Judi as course leader, sought to tidy up or smooth over the (at times difficult) questions raised for participants as they engaged with the course material. Rather, our intention was to gently but explicitly encourage participants to attend to and track the processes they were going through, and we sought to offer the space and resources with which they might begin to more consciously explore and make sense of their own individual responses to the course. I can therefore understand my own positioning as an educator to also revolve around the need to *let go* of some of the control and influence often associated with a more typical educational role. Arguably, such relinquishing of a felt need to control and provide answers may be a key insight upon which I might draw in developing qualities of repose in this context. Nevertheless, my experience is that this takes considerable effort, particularly when we want course participants to feel able to stay with these questions, and might therefore wish to help them through this process. As already mentioned, I also struggled with this tension in my collaboration with the MSc group. I consider that making my way through this tension is a crucial and necessary part of my developmental process.

Indeed, finding ways to appropriately support others and give shape to processes/spaces where they feel able to engage with these challenges, while *not* seeking to tidy up any messiness and/or complexity they might experience, is a key competency which I am seeking to develop in my role as educator and/or inquirer. I feel that I have been able to develop my understanding around this challenge by attending to how Judi made and held space for inquiry and for exploration of complex issues in lectures. As an example, I present an extract from my journal, which tracks my awareness of my own and others' behaviour through a difficult

group interaction during one of the lectures in the 2003 series. I propose that this experience could be understood as an illustration of acting-from-repose. In particular, I feel that I learned much from witnessing Judi attend carefully to the emergence of possibilities in the present moment, and then respond according to what appeared to be called for there and then:

Journal entry: 19th of March, 2003.
Written whilst in Judi's Ecological Thinking course.

…Ten minutes ago a group of student protestors burst into the lecture room and asked the group to come now and join the demonstration on the Parade [against the war on Iraq, which had just started]. They gave us estimated death tolls and number of refugees. It felt a sobering example of people trying to make use of figures, statistics and indicators as a way to convince us of something, (which coincidentally, was a topic that we were covering in that lecture). More importantly, it was also an example of the tension that these kinds of change efforts can give rise to – one male student said 'I'm trying to get my education here, could you please leave', to which the demonstrators replied, with passion and feeling, that we need to stand together, that as youth we should have these kinds of opinions and oppose those who are making these kinds of decisions in our name. I felt incredibly tense and upset, I felt myself welling up, my heart beating quickly, I didn't trust myself to speak, for if I had, I know that my voice would have quivered, and I would have spoken from an angry, anxious and alienating place, from an 'us versus them', 'right versus wrong' stance…

And then, immediately after the student protestors left, I witnessed Judi doing something quite amazing…she did a wonderful job leading a short discussion 'in the moment', as to what had just happened. She pointed to the parallels across all of these issues, and to the trend of people trying to enact change…in discussion with the group, some of whom were very damning of the actions of the student protestors, she raised important questions as to how this could be done appropriately…as to the choices that we make in trying to influence people to think in different ways…She pointed to the difficulties of working across tensions and to the notion that seemingly progressive practices, such as that of stakeholder dialogue, can be flaky, tension-filled processes.

This was a huge learning point for me—watching, in the moment, an intervention effort fail, and bring forth tension and bad feeling amongst it recipients, and noticing the importance of being careful as to how one tries to enact change, and the place one speaks from. Had I spoken in that moment, I would have been predominantly advocating, and perhaps alienating many people in the process. What Judi did really well was to keep calm and curious, not coming down hard on one position or the other, but pointing out that there is no absolute 'right' outside of the situation, reminding us that, through the course, she was encouraging us to approach these issues with curiosity and openness. Thus she posed more questions than answers. One other thing that really struck me was a student's comment that 'since Tony Blair has more information than us, we should trust him to make these kinds of decisions for us', and Judi's timely response that this raised questions about the kind of knowing that we choose to value, and that we have different kinds/sources of knowledge to that of the Prime Minister, which we could choose to value as highly. Developing the capacity to make these kinds of interventions in the moment, assertively and yet with a certain lightness, holding an inquiring, open pose, is a quality that I am seeking to develop, and which I find myself practising when responding to challenging questions within my first year Organisational Behaviour seminars, for example.

The experience I recount above struck a chord with me, and the reason I have chosen to relate it here is because it is so firmly linked to the kinds of questions and tensions that have been at the forefront of my own first-person inquiry through the PhD process, regarding

- How I might appropriately position myself in seeking to influence and make effective interventions in local and wider systems;
- How I may maintain a sense of restfulness, or repose, in holding and making sense of the many tensions and complexities that emerge; and around
- How I may contribute to making it possible for us to hold these tensions within a group space.

Reflecting on how unsettled and distressed I felt in the immediacy of this experience, I realised that a significant challenge for me was that of becoming able to handle these kinds of situations, which may be difficult, complex and hugely

multi-layered, particularly when I feel strongly about a certain issue, and when I am trying to engage with people who I believe to be misguided in some way. This challenge is of course related to that of how I understand and position myself in situations of conflict, and around how I can maintain a degree of calmness and composure while acknowledging and respecting difference and disagreement. The developmental challenge I perceived in my response to the above interaction is also related to my aspirations to take on the role of a change agent; for how do I position myself, in the various interactions, fields of practice and systems in which I take part, in such a way that I do not begin to alienate as soon as I begin talk about these issues (which is the experience that many in Judi's class seemed to have had in reaction to the protestors' efforts)?

I believe that these kinds of questions, around how I may appropriately position myself, appreciate my grounding and articulate my offering to others, and around how I may seek to encounter the world/the other in such a way that I do not seek to collapse or deny or explain away its/his/her mystery, difference and ineffability, are key questions that I have held throughout my inquiry, and which are just as relevant as I occupy my place as an academic/educator in a Higher Education context.

10.3.2 The challenge of speaking out and skilful sharing

I wish to end this section by reflecting in further detail on a key challenge I have encountered (and continue to encounter) in seeking to position myself as an educator and engage with students/participants in management programmes. This is the challenge of articulating and giving voice to the complex issues and challenges which I believe deserve close attention, and doing this in such a way that my offering can be heard and engaged with. Thus, questions around language choice and presentational form have become increasingly central to my inquiry/pedagogical practice. On the one hand, I empathise with Thomas Berry's suggestion that

> …our limitations as theologians in speaking the language of this new
> cosmology are everywhere evident…To envisage the universe in its
> religious dimension requires that we speak of the religious aspect of

the original flaming forth of the universe, the religious role of the
elements, the religious functioning of Earth and all its components.
(Berry, 1994:3)

And yet, having worked throughout my inquiry with people who locate themselves
within fairly mainstream management practice and education, within a fairly
conventional, affluent British way of life, I know also that this speaking differently
can alienate and distance, and can seem obscure and even overly-intellectualised. I
am aware that the use of the words *love* and *spirituality*, and even the mention of
the word *tree*, can shock and estrange undergraduate management students, while
even the supposedly more objective, practical and technocratic language of
sustainability can seem confusing, ambiguous and controversial. Ecopsychologist
Andy Fisher points to the challenges and tensions experienced in seeking to speak
in ways which feel *both* legitimate to ourselves *and* to others:

> ...[Ecopsychologists and ecological advocates] are burdened with the
> task of finding a language capable of honestly illuminating their
> ecologically and psychologically informed accounts of what truly
> and finally matters, while at the same time being respectable or
> legitimate before a public audience. (Fisher, 2002:30)

As Ballard (2006) suggests, the unskillful sharing of environmental information
itself can be understood as reinforcing avoidance processes. I agree that those of
us who wish to play some part in influencing others so that they too choose to
engage with these issues need to find some way of communicating and sharing
what it is we know and feel in such a way that it will open, rather than shut down,
the wish and capacity to engage.

In my experience, unskillful sharing is not just about whether we allow our
language to be labeled new-agey, soft, tree-huggy and so on, it is also about the
ways in which our communication/articulations are framed, and what form these
take. Thus, I have experienced different responses depending on whether a
positive or negative stance is seen to be taken, whether this work is framed as a
crisis or an opportunity, and part of what I grapple with in engaging with students
is finding ways of communicating the complexity and the many dimensions of the
condition in which we find ourselves, so that we understand the condition the earth

is facing as one of *both* sadness and of joy, of crisis and opportunity, of endings and new beginnings.

I also empathise with ecophilosopher Frederic Bender's (2003:298) condemnation of 'many of our environmentalist movements [which] frame the idea of living in faithfulness to Earth quite joylessly, as yet another set of obligations piled onto our already otiose sense of guilt – due to Platonism and Christianity – for being earthly'. Throughout my work with various groups, and particularly within the MSc and the Ecological Thinking groups, I have at different times been part of conversations where humans have been referred to as wreckers or destroyers, as a plague or cancer to the world. My own experience is that it is easy to despair at the arrogance and single-minded ignorance which humanity in general sometimes evidences. I see this in myself also, and in my darkest moments, I wonder whether there is any worth or meaning to what I am doing, entrenched as I feel in certain political, economic and cultural systems. At the same time, though, I have come to wonder whether such a critical understanding of humanity's role and potential is helpful. For example, it is possible to understand that the notion of humans as guilty perpetrators is in itself a lens or frame through which we can choose to make sense of what is going on. As such, it tells a part of the story only, and ignores many other ways of interpreting and understanding the role and place of the human in the world.

Neither does it seem to me particularly helpful to understand ourselves as eco-warriors or stewards of the Earth, unilaterally seeking to save the world and heroically and self-righteously acting in pursuit of change of grandiose proportions. Thus I have become increasingly interested in how the stories we tell and the assumptions we hold about ourselves and others can be understood as alternatively holding or blocking possibilities for generative and locally-relevant change. If we consider the discourses around 'humanity as plague' and 'humanity as stewards' as lenses or stories through which we can make sense of our place in the world, then the construction and communication of meaning becomes a key consideration in how we are moved to respond to ecological challenges (if at all). Donna Ladkin makes a related point, regarding the appropriateness and usefulness of the stories and/or creation myths which inform our being-in-the-world:

> Perhaps the ecological crisis we now find ourselves facing is, in part,
> the legacy of an underlying mythology which posits Earth as a way-

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station between heaven and hell. Once uncovered, however, an informing mythology can lose its potency, and other choices can be made about ways of interpreting experience. (Ladkin, 2001:8)

As such, I feel the need to find a way of speaking, a way of framing and presenting my work, which is both critical and appreciative of humanity's role and of my own place in all of this.

Thus, the questions with which I am left and with which I plan to engage as I ground myself in my educational practice are the following:

- How might I balance a wish to support and enable others to hold complex questions/tensions, so that together we develop a capacity to engage with these challenges, with the insight that I need *not* resolve the complexity, uncertainty and distress that such a process might bring to myself and others?

- How might I, in my pedagogical offering, communicate to course participants that we might usefully seek to balance an appreciation of the enormity of the challenges facing us with curiosity around our own place within this, and with a willingness to experiment and to offer something of ourselves in response? How might I model this?

10.4   Conclusions

My aim in this thesis has been to show how it may be possible to develop the capacity to respond to ecological challenges, and to engage with the many tensions raised in doing so, by developing and enacting qualities of repose.

I have reflected on my participation in the Sustainable Farmshire initiative, the Luhimba Project, and in the MSc and Ecological Thinking programmes. I endeavoured to show how through my engagement in each of these spaces I have come to understand that a practice of acting-from-repose would entail attending carefully to the emergence of possibilities in the present moment and/or context, and then responding according to what appears to be called for there and then.

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Thus I suggest that qualities of attentiveness, groundedness, as well as a willingness to encounter difference, conflict and complexity, are called for in responding to ecological challenges of the kind facing us in current times.

I have also suggested that it is in the *holding* of the process of engagement moment to moment that we might find that which sustains us through the vulnerability and uncertainty which we may well experience. A large part of what sustains me as I seek to engage with ecological challenges is my sense of joyful living and receptiveness to moments of grace; moments which I feel are defining in the creativity and potential and poignancy that they hold, and in the qualities of awareness and attentiveness they call forth from me.