

Repose: a personal and relational foundation for responding to ecological challenges

Patricia Carolina Gayá Wicks

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath
School of Management

April 2006

Copyright

Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with its author. This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and that no quotation from the thesis and no information derived from it may be published without the prior written consent of the author.

This thesis may be made available for consultation within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purposes of consultation.

Abstract

This doctorate research has drawn primarily on participatory worldviews and action research practices to explore how we might develop the personal and relational capacities necessary to engage with complex ecological challenges in current times. I consider how we might develop the capacity to hold the tensions and complexity associated with such challenges, and how we might work with these in creative and generative ways. A central question underpinning this thesis is therefore: What kinds of (inter-)personal capacities and relational processes might enable us to *stay* with these tensions, and to continue to engage with the challenges raised? I argue that sustained engagement with ecological challenges, as well as the development of an inquiry practice, may be facilitated by:

1. Developing ‘repose’ in ourselves.
2. Holding the process of engagement moment to moment, as a practice of personal development and spiritual unfolding.
3. Sustaining our engagement with this work through openness to ‘moments of grace’.

The concept of *repose* has its origins in Spinoza’s ethical philosophy. I build on both Spinoza and Arne Naess’s notions of repose, and I develop an understanding of what it would mean to act from a position of repose, and show how this might be understood as an appropriate praxis for responding to current ecological challenges. The empirical basis for this thesis lies in my participation in various fields of practice, broadly relating to *education for ecology* and *local community action for sustainability*.

I propose that a practice of acting-from-repose would entail attending carefully to the emergence of possibilities in the present moment/context, and then responding according to what appears to be called for there and then. The readiness to encounter and meet the unknown/other, in its/her/his difference, uncertainty and possibility, may be a further quality of repose. Acting in such a way would require the development of self-aware and context-aware reflexivity, mature understanding and intuition, and the courage and creativity to engage with complexity and to respond appropriately. I therefore understand a combination of ‘positive self-knowledge’, ‘mature understanding of systemic complexity’, and ‘openness to moments of grace’ as the *grounding* or *repose* from which we might then choose to move into action, of the kind that has the potential to be effective and meaningful.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to all of the people with whom I engaged in my various fields of practice. Because of you, I have felt well-accompanied as I made my way through this inquiry. I have been challenged, nourished and inspired through our conversations and interactions, and through many of the questions and experiences you shared with me regarding your own engagement with ecological challenges. I wish you all well in the process of holding so many challenging tensions, and in your work for a more ecologically and socially just world.

I would also like to offer very special thanks to my supervisor, Peter Reason, for his unflagging support and guidance, and for the inspirational example he sets in his educative practice, scholarship and work for sustainability. Had I not met you, I would not have set out on this inquiry; without the care and commitment that you brought to our supervisory relationship, I would have struggled to get through it. I hope you know how much I admire and respect you, and how much I have learned from you. Special thanks are also due to Donna Ladkin and Judi Marshall – thank you both so much for your input and interest in my work, and for your belief in me and your encouragement over the years. Having role models such as yourselves is part of the reason that I feel happy to be part of the academic community, and to commit to it as my professional context.

Of course, part of what sustains me and energises me is the love and support of my friends and family, wherever they are in the world. Thank you all. My deepest gratitude and appreciation for my mother and father, Gloria and Bart, my sister, Adriana, and my husband, Matthew. I love you very much, and I love that I've learned so much from you over the years – each of you teaches me something about living well, and living in repose, which I admire and which helps me grow...Even you, Indy. Matt, thank you so much for looking after me, laughing with me, and having such confidence in me. You are the person with whom I most frequently and clearly experience moments of grace.

Para mamá y papá.

Por traerme hasta aquí.

Y para Pachamama...

Para que no te olvidemos.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	13
1.1	Framing the inquiry	13
1.2	Roadmap to the thesis.....	24
2	Developing an inquiry practice.....	29
2.1	Framing.....	29
2.2	Action Research.....	31
2.3	Research with others.....	34
2.4	Living inquiry	39
2.5	Quality and choice-points in Action Research	51
2.6	Thoughts on data analysis.....	60
2.7	Conclusions	70
3	Fields of practice (1)	71
3.1	Framing.....	71
3.2	Individual and collective action for sustainability.....	72
3.3	The Sustainable Farmshire initiative	74
4	Fields of practice (2)	89
4.1	Framing.....	89
4.2	Management education for sustainability	89
4.3	Inquiry with the Ecological Thinking groups.....	90
4.4	Inquiry with the MSc in RBP group.....	100
4.5	An unexpected invitation...Inquiry with the Luhimba Project	106
4.6	Conclusions	111
5	Agency in relation to ecological challenges.....	113
5.1	Framing.....	113
5.2	Grounding: The experience(s) of Ecological Thinking course participants	114

5.3	Grounding: The experience(s) of the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice	123
5.4	Making sense	130
5.5	Conclusions	133
6	Developing the concept of repose	137
6.1	Framing.....	137
6.2	Repose in oneself.....	137
6.3	Moving forward with repose	150
6.4	Conclusions	164
7	An account of the Sustainable Farmshire initiative	167
7.1	Framing.....	167
7.2	November 2002: Convening our first open meeting	168
7.3	December 2002: Linking in with the Parish Plan.....	173
7.4	January 2003: Brainstorming and capturing ideas.....	176
7.5	February 2003: Articulating our sense of purpose	177
7.6	March 2003: Introduction to Spiral Dynamics	179
7.7	April and May 2003: Preparing our Exhibition offerings	181
7.8	June 2003: Holding a process review meeting	182
7.9	September to November 2003: Presenting our findings.....	190
7.10	December 2003 to April 2004: Reflecting on our experience	194
8	Repose in action for sustainability	207
8.1	Framing.....	207
8.2	On organising for sustainability	208
8.3	On particularising the concept of sustainability	214
8.4	On collaboration and the collapsing of difference.....	216
8.5	On abstractiveness and ungraspability in the ecological movement ...	231
8.6	On restlessness and the attainment of immediate paradise.....	239
8.7	On holding tension and complexity	242

8.8	Conclusions	251
9	Holding the process of engagement.....	253
9.1	Framing.....	253
9.2	Grounding: My collaboration with the Luhimba Project	254
9.3	Holding the process of engagement moment to moment	256
9.4	Sustaining and nourishing our engagement.....	273
9.5	Conclusions	287
10	Repose and self development	289
10.1	Framing.....	289
10.2	The developmental process	290
10.3	Returning to my grounding as educator.....	303
10.4	Conclusions	313
	References.....	315
	Appendix One: A further snap-shot of ecological challenges.....	327
	Appendix Two: A poem to the Night Sky	335

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Holding.....	134
Figure 2: Night Sky.....	286
Figure 3: Tending and cherishing	303