

*...and...*

between I ***and*** Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

Christopher Walton

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School of Education and Lifelong Learning

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the nature of children's experience of solitude in the natural world (Magic Spots), during an earth education programme called *Earthkeepers™* over a period of ten years at Ringsfield EcoCentre, Suffolk. It explores the practice of stretching *metaxic space*, that is the creative space in-between one and another, to enable children to begin a way of learning which in turn will facilitate ways of being, or better, ways of becoming which can befriend the planet and not destroy it.

The thesis is also the story of my own process required by the exploration.

I have told this story through the lenses of hermeneutic-phenomenology and autoethnography while developing a diacritical hermeneutic of my own life and spiritual journey, which includes multiple 'horizons', in order to interpret the children's responses. Finding the notion of the hermeneutical *circle* inadequate I have developed a dialectical hermeneutical, resonating and oscillating *spiral*, which demonstrates that in metaxic space children can be active agents in their own discovery and creation of self and meaning.

Just like the developing children themselves, the process, the opportunities, and the space for the process are fragile and precious. It is easy to damage the spiral, thus the thesis also explores some implications for adults' relationship with children.

'...and...' produces not conclusions but restless anticipations which are a contribution to the articulation of metaxic space in which children negotiate some meanings which have an adequate fit for a new way of being or way of becoming which suggest new directions for relationships with self, Others, the more-than-human-community and the cosmos.

## Keywords

children, metaxic space, dialectic hermeneutics, hermeneutic spiral, relational consciousness, parenthesis, earth education, clowns.

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## Charts

- 1. POSTMODERN DISQUIETED GLOBALIZATION CONSUMERISM DISORDER or CONSUMERISM DISORDER**  
Radical disassociation from inter-connective relational consciousness, with soul-less introversion; noting in detail the postmodern intellectualistic defence against Dread of Certainty.
- 2. THE WOMB OF METAXIC SPACE**  
An ontological analysis of the child-natural world relationship. This model is suggestive that the normal (i.e. 'unspoiled', rather than 'average') child-nature relationship is dependent on a good very early relationship with mother, but that, even when this relationship and other human relationships are lacking, congruence with the More-than-Human-Community can 'make up for' and 'repair' what might have been damaged.

## DVD

### Track 1

*Presenting the work of Ringsfield Hall* which is used on The Ringsfield EcoCentre website and in talks given to introduce the Centre and its work with children.

### Track 2

A series of sequences which animate the Figures of the hermeneutic spiral in Chapters 4 - 8 accompanied by part of Rachmaninov's second piano concerto (see Chapter 1, p.32) and a narration.

### Track 3

An animated example of the hermeneutic spiral at work. This illustrates the reverie, the horizons, triggers, opportunities and break-throughs which make up 'metaxic space'. This is accompanied by part of Taverner's, *Tears of the Angels* (see Chapter 8, p.285).

### Track 4

*...and a little child shall lead them* which illustrates in pictures and music how Ringsfield Hall aspires to foster the spirit of the child. It moves gently from starlight and early dawn till sunset, and leaves us with the mystery of the night sky (when the story of the universe can be more deeply attended to) which we encourage all groups of children to experience (see Chapter 7 pp 248-251).

To my wife, Ross Ashley

my soul friend who gave me love, time, energy and patience  
while producing her own doctoral thesis which I will be  
honoured to read now we have completed the task

and

To my grandchildren

Chloe, Lauren, Ben, Megan, Maya, Ashley and Joseph  
and, still enjoying the womb, Connie

for whom I pray both in lament and celebration  
and give them my blessing  
and gladly receive theirs

### **Acknowledgements**

This thesis has taken nearly a decade to emerge and there are so many people to thank over all this time. Thanks go first to my mother who, until her death in May 2006, supported me enthusiastically in this project both through her prophetic rage and her generous financial support.

I thank my Supervisor, Dr. Judith Moore, whose enthusiasm, patience and wise critique has kept me going; my proof readers, Nicky Bull, for some work early on, and especially Barbara Echlin who gave more than her meticulous work, she gave her encouragement and wisdom; those whose IT expertise made the animation, the DVD and the charts possible, Mark Murphy, Stefan Anfield and Peter Lux; all the staff at the Ringsfield EcoCentre who have so generously accepted the many times when I have been away or shut up in my study and have carried on regardless; all my interviewees from Christian Ecology Link and earth education UK who shared their own stories so openly; and finally all the children I have had the privilege of meeting, playing with and sharing their secret, profound experience of themselves, Others, the earth and the Other.

# Chapter 1

## First Words



You can hear the wind breezing in all different directions. You can sit there peacefully and think of your own intentions or just day dream. If you look all around you, you can see rocks, sheep and nothing but greenery. My secret spot makes me think sad and happy memories and about all my secret stuff

I LOVE MY SECRET SPOT!

(Jenna 10yrs, Magic Spots, Back at Home p.1. (This refers to the words, not to the picture).

# Chapter 1

## First Words

### 1. *and*

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate the nature of children's experience of solitude in the natural world (Magic Spots), during an earth education programme called *Earthkeepers<sup>TM</sup>*. The thesis explores the practice of stretching *metaxic space*, that is the creative space in-between one and another, to enable children to begin a way of learning which in turn will facilitate ways of being, or better, ways of becoming which can befriend the planet and not destroy it. It is therefore an investigation of the *and* between Buber's I and You.<sup>1</sup> The notion of metaxic space is explored at length in *Parenthesis 1*. It is also the story of my own process required by the exploration.

I have told this story through the lenses of hermeneutic-phenomenology and autoethnography.

Experience does not name itself but good conversations – those where ...., hermeneutic-phenomenology and autoethnography lenses are used – can help people understand and relate to their experience in meaningful ways. (Strong et al 2008, p.3)

I have sought a diacritical hermeneutic of my own life and spiritual journey, which includes the experience of other adults, in order to interpret the children's responses. Finding the notion of the hermeneutical *circle* inadequate I have developed a dialectical hermeneutical, drilling and oscillating *spiral*, which

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<sup>1</sup> Until recently I had read the first translation of Buber's I and Thou text. In 1970 Walter Kaufmann retranslated the work at the request of Buber's family. 'The old version was marred by many inaccuracies and misunderstandings, and its recurrent use of the archaic "thou" was seriously misleading (back cover of the 1970 version of Kaufmann's translation). Though the book is still called *I and Thou*, only I-You is used in the text. "It is hardly surprising that the concrete value of human relation, as articulated by Buber in Ich und Du was lost in translation from Jewish Existentialism to popular Christianity" (Heyward, 1982, p.5 footnote 5).

demonstrates that in metaxic space human beings can be active agents who through a process of hermeneutics are recalcitrantly engaged in negotiating and adjusting, as Bergson suggested, even the most pervasive and imperative patterns and meanings of existence (Broughton, 1993, p.41).

My thesis proposes that children are active agents in this process too. If my life can be represented by a turning and oscillating spiral<sup>2</sup>, then so can a child's. Just like the developing children themselves, the process, the opportunities, and the space for the process is fragile and precious. It is easy to damage the spiral, thus the thesis also explores some implications for adults' relationship with children.

## 2. Magic Spots

*Magic Spots* is the name given to the activity embedded in the Earthkeepers,<sup>TM</sup> Programme of The Institute of Earth Education (see Chapter 2, p.52ff). Magic Spots are times of solitude in the natural world, sharpening nonverbal skills like 'watching and waiting, silencing and stilling, opening and receiving' (Van Matre, 1990, p.69) and, as I demonstrate, reflecting on and articulating silence and interconnectedness.



As part of their residential experience during Earthkeepers each child chooses a special place where they are comfortable and are not distracted by

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4, p.128; Chapter 5, p.183; Chapter 7, p.254; Chapter 8, p.283 and p.288

the sight of others. They will return to this spot for at least two organised times during their stay, but also, of course, at any other time during their 'free time'. This is their 'Magic Spot'. It is part of their experience of the natural world; it is also an introduction to solitude. The time spent alone is usually about ten minutes for the first experience and lengthens to perhaps twenty minutes, or more, by the end of the week. They are to go to their magic spots in silence and maintain silence until the group reconvenes for some reflective feed-back. They are to sit, look, listen, smell, think, watch and, if they want to, write in their diaries at the time or later.

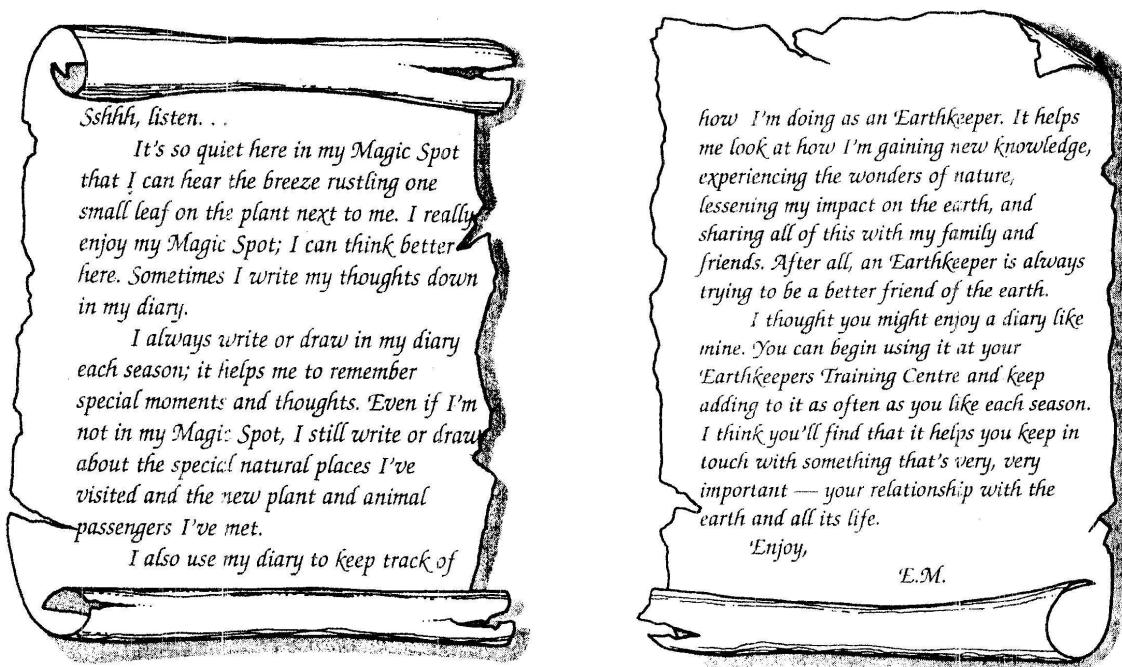


Figure 1 Pages from EM's Diary

For most children this is a novel idea, and certainly the first time there are usually a few who, at first, find the task impossible. They find a place well in sight of someone else and they start chatting immediately, perhaps more

embarrassed than anything else; others can't even sit down anywhere and wander around trying to find the others.

Remarkably, without any insistence that they must comply, by the end of the week, the power of the experience reaches virtually every child.

First, when we<sup>3</sup> gather with the children for their first experience of Magic Spots, we explain that we are challenging them to do what might be the most difficult thing they have ever done in their lives! We read the message from EM<sup>4</sup> and explain how we are going to do this, being silent from the time we start finding our special places until we all gather back again.

Then, we 'close the curtain of silence'. We enact the closing of curtains together with the children.. Not until we 'open the curtains' will any of us talk to or communicate in any way with each other. We all walk off, no running, to our special places. The 14 acre site becomes quiet, then after a time quieter, and then, quieter still. A clanging bell signals the end of the time, and the children return in silence until we are all together again, then we enact the opening of curtains. A great cry of 'relief' goes up, with plenty of excited chatter and often it takes time before they settle down for a very short reflection session. When asked whether they enjoyed the experience we find that at least 90% say they did. Those that didn't include the restless ones and others who found it lonely, or perhaps they had a frightening

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<sup>3</sup> I have decided to use 'we' when I am describing work at the Centre, as my colleague (and now my wife, since August 2006) and I work closely together with the children and develop the work of the Centre. Through out the thesis I use 'I' to indicate my own reflections and hermeneutic.

<sup>4</sup> EM is the mysterious character who loves the earth so much that EM wants to share how the earth works and all the wondrous sights and sound of the earth with everyone. EM has already written a letter to each child when they were back at school together with a map of the Earthkeepers' Training Centre. The identity of EM remains a mystery until the end of the programme back at school again, when they open the last box, the S box, then they, finally meet EM (see Chapter 2, pp.52 and 62).

experience with an insect. The first reactions to come from the majority are words like ‘quiet’, ‘calm’, ‘peaceful’, ‘strange’, ‘wet’, ‘hot’, ‘a bit scary’.

Some longer reflections include:

‘I loved feeling the wind in my face.’

‘I could hear so many birds.’

‘The sky was so blue.’

‘I saw this amazing red thing on the back of a leaf, it was long, bright red and had three black legs sticking out from both sides.’

‘I felt all rustle-ly inside.’

Comments from a Year 6 group from a Colchester Primary School, 2004  
(Magic Spots described p.7)

Everyone is encouraged to write down what they experienced, especially their feelings, whether they were good or bad. When the children are told that they will do this again tomorrow a cheer usually goes up!

The idea is that they should experience magic spots at different times of the day and in different weather. So it is organised that the next day magic spots should be at about 7.30am before breakfast. One group were told by their teachers that as it was raining they should not go. It was a beautiful sight to see a good dozen children (from a group of 40) walking away from the house, boots on, Earthkeeper badges round their necks, bags over their shoulders, ‘sit-upons’<sup>5</sup> underarm and going off to find their magic spots anyway (see also Chapter 10, pp.337-8).

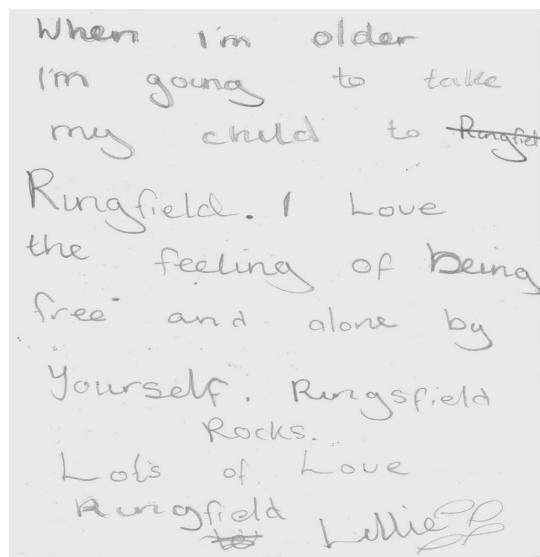
Since I got back from Ringsfield I feel that when I’m here [Holloway] with all the noise and pollution I feel that my thoughts are in prison, they are all a blur, but when I was there, sitting in all that silence

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<sup>5</sup> Simply, squares of waterproof material to sit on!

with all the space, all my thoughts came flowing out of my brain, like I couldn't stop them.  
(Girl, 10 years old, *Magic Spots described*, p.6)

What is it about this activity which makes children so willing to participate?<sup>6</sup> Why do they get so animated about being alone and quiet? Why are they so excited about this? Why is it so enjoyable? Why so sustainable? This thesis presents a way of giving meaning and significance to these children's responses and to explore the extraordinary transformative power contained within their embryonic relationship with the natural world.

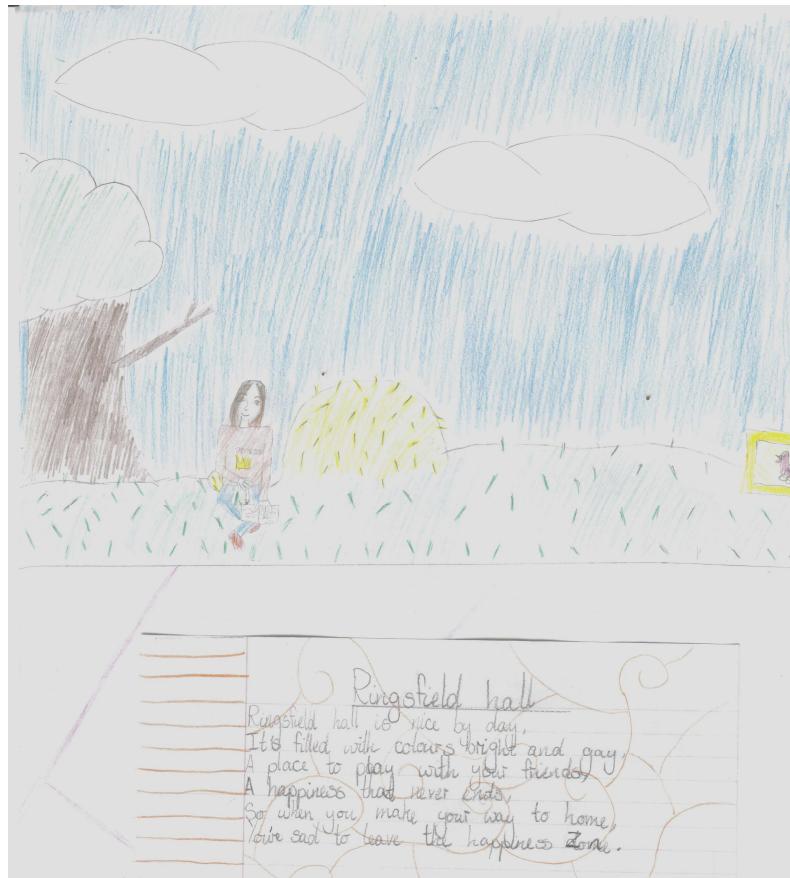


Girl, aged 8, Magic Spot, 2010

When I'm older I'm going to take my child to Ringsfield. I love the feeling of being free and alone by yourself. Ringsfield Rocks.

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<sup>6</sup> Since we began the Earthkeepers' programme at Ringsfield EcoCentre in 2001 we have experienced Magic Spots with nearly over 1,500 children (see Chapter 3 p.73)



Ringsfield Hall

Ringsfield hall is nice by day  
Its field with colours bright and gay  
A place to play with your friends  
A happiness that never ends,  
So when you make your way to home,  
You're sad to leave the happiness zone.

(Poem written after a visit 2003, Girl, aged 9)

### 3. In Parenthesis



The corners of the spirit waiting  
to be developed... (see p.21)

(from Resurrections, R.S. Thomas, 1995, p.47)

Dr. John Kent was one of my lecturers when I was studying theology at university in Bristol, 1966-1969 (I continued studies at Oxford University and was ordained into the Baptist ministry in 1971). To my delight Dr. Kent used to start his lectures with the first half of a statement or sentence, the next fifty minutes were in parenthesis - asides, wisdom, stories - then on the dot of the hour he would finish his original sentence.<sup>7</sup>

I tell this story when I want to share the significance of being able to 'sit at a teacher's feet'. I long for more teachers like this: I enjoy reflecting in parenthesis; I

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<sup>7</sup> A fuller version of this story can be found in Appendix 4, p.xx

seek to live in parenthesis, in the in-between. In the preface to his book, *In Parenthesis*, David Jones wrote, ‘This writing is called “In Parenthesis” because I have written it in a kind of space between – I don’t know between quite what ... because our curious type of existence here is altogether in parenthesis’ (Jones, 1961, p. xv).<sup>8</sup> He was referring to the First World War and his time in France. I experience my life as ‘in parenthesis’.

Early in my research I wrote a poem and called it ‘*in parenthesis*’ (see p.22 below). It was trying to encapsulate five decades of reflection.

First, a story to contextualize the ‘corner’ metaphor (see R.S. Thomas, p. 20):

*I remember walking in Leicestershire – scouts, young people’s groups, alone. I used to love a certain sort of field, or rather corner of a field. It would be short grass, sheep grazed, abundant hedgerow, may be a tree or two. I never knew what the feeling was about; I had no way of processing it. I expressed it to myself, and sometimes to others by saying that I would like to own a field like that. I now live in a place where those corners exist. I still wish I would inhabit them more often but I connect the feeling with the new experience of animals in the last few years. Animals, most particularly pets (indoor pets) have never been my thing. In fact I have been, probably still am, anti. Friends from the past would be amazed to see me daily feeding and watering the horses, goats, ducks and guinea pigs. The ‘corner of the field feeling’ is akin to this ‘water and animals’ experience. It started last summer(2001) in the hot period. One day I*

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<sup>8</sup> This book was first published by T. S. Eliot (Faber and Faber Ltd). It is a work which he regarded as ‘a work of genius’ Eliot in Jones 1961, original 1937, p.vii).

*suddenly realised that the guinea pigs had run out of water. I just filled their bowls and bottles put them in place and I watched them lapping up the water, queuing up for the bottle and pushing each other away to get at it I was overwhelmed by this sense of gratitude, compassion, thankfulness and connection. Their 'gratitude' and their joy, at receiving this clear water made me weep. I was humbled by the connection between us* (Walton, 2002, personal journal).<sup>9</sup>

### **in parenthesis**

it all seems to be packed into a corner,

the mysteries of interconnection

storms of pain, and joy

passion for justice and peace

humility from in-between aware<sup>10</sup>

of becoming a part of the whole earth

hypocrisies and contradictions

searching to process it all

gentle and generous hospitality,

of a certain type of field.

(Walton, 2002, experimental exercise)

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<sup>9</sup> A further reflection, more recent, is recorded in Appendix 4, p.xxi.

<sup>10</sup> This line originally read: 'abject humility aware..' I am not sure, now, whether this was the result of my emotional state or the simple choice of a wrong word. I prefer this latest redaction, 2009.

#### 4. A Bricolage of Sauntering

This thesis is a bricolage. This is a term used in several disciplines, among them the visual arts and literature, to refer to:

- ▣ <sup>11</sup>the construction or creation of a work from a diverse range of things which happen to be available;
- ▣ a work created by such a process

It is borrowed from the French word *bricolage*, from the verb *bricoler* – equivalent to the English ‘do-it-yourself’. The core meaning in French, however, is ‘fiddle, tinker’ and, by extension, ‘making creative and resourceful use of whatever materials are to hand (regardless of their original purpose)’. In the context of post-modernity Lakeland has defined it as, ‘a non-systematic approach to understanding, which proceeds by the piecemeal gathering and juxtaposition of apparently disconnected items’ Lakeland, p,124).

During this thesis I attempt to articulate my own fiddling and tinkering, along the walk of my life, developing an ecological existentialism<sup>12</sup>, from the eventful birth canal (see Chapter 5, p.165) to my sixty-fifth year; it reflects on the metaxical<sup>13</sup> (see *Parenthesis*

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<sup>11</sup> *I have long objected to the use of the term ‘bullet points’ and have been strengthened in my resolve not to use violent language by Mark Chater, ‘To summarize points quickly on paper is to use bullet points. Bullets are fast; they do their work directly, and are a substitute for extended discussion. When Goering became weary of culture, he reached for his revolver: when policy-makers want no more discussion, they reach for their bullet points’ (Chapter 2006, p.49). In April of 2009 while attending a Trustees’ meeting of the Quiet Garden Trust I discovered that this gathering some years before had decided to rename ‘bullet points’ as ‘pigeon-points’. No-one could remember the significance of pigeons! Through out this thesis I will be using ‘leaf-points’, thus the icon found here.*

<sup>12</sup> *An autobiographical note is to be found in Appendix 4, p.xxi.*

<sup>13</sup> *‘All spirits occupy the middle ground between humans and gods. As mediators between the two, they fill the remaining space, and so make the universe an interconnected whole’ (Plato, 1994:43-44). ‘Middle ground’ in this passage is translated from the Greek, metaxu, meaning “between + in, in the state of the middle, betwixt, between, between-whiles, in the interval, neither good, nor bad” (Liddell, 1996 in Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.114).*

1) process of integrating, merging and giving meaning to a diverse range of people, events, faith, theology, philosophies, struggles, disturbances, ecstasies and downright ordinariness which have happened to be available along the way; some of great significance, some tiny seeds which elicit speculation and faith. Jim Cotter<sup>14</sup>, now (since April 2008) the Vicar of St Hywyn's Church in Aberdaron, Gwynedd, North Wales (the significance and reverie associated with this place will become apparent, along the way, R.S. Thomas was the priest here) has a phrase or two about 'sauntering' in a visitor's welcome leaflet.

He writes, ““To saunter” comes from the French, “sante terre”, or “holy land” and was used to describe how pilgrims walked across Europe towards Jerusalem in the Middle Ages’ (Cotter, 2008). It is in this sense that I speak of my wandering, walking or sauntering. It is the process of moving from place to person, from person to place, from idea to action, from action to realisation, from connection to connection thrown up by different triggers (Chapter 8 p.276ff), different from one year to the next, from one day to the next, from one hour to the next, and with constant movement through the restless space of the in-between. The journey is nothing out of the ordinary. The story being told here unravels itself because of the notion that ordinary people experience themselves, others and the world immanently, without analysis, in a spiral of events and meanings, together with the whole of the more-than-human earth community.<sup>15</sup> It is not so much a search for meaning as a declaration of the extraordinary transformative power that is

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My first encounter with the notion of the ‘in-between’ or metaxic space being not only real space but the place of creation and creativity was back in the 1970s. (see *Parenthesis 1*, p.86).

<sup>14</sup> My association with Jim Cotter began in the 1980s through his many books of prayers. He particularly provided sustenance for those in struggle and pain and became a deep resource in my pastoral counselling. I am fascinated and delighted to find that Brian Thorne quotes Jim Cotter's *Prayers at Night*, 1983 as epigraphs to some of his chapters in his *Behold the Man*, (1991, reprinted 2008)

<sup>15</sup> See Chapters 4-8, Chapter 4, p.128; Chapter 5, p.184; Chapter 7, p.253; Chapter 8, p.283 and p.288.

contained in the in-between (the metaxis) of every ordinary story, event, idea and recollection. It is a story about imagination, soul and improvisation. As the process reveals, stories told are transformative. ‘They are not merely about movement, they create movement’ (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.131). Though I lost my habitual practice of walking very early on, as long ago as 1965 when I was only nineteen, after returning from Sabah, North Borneo (see Chapter 5 pp.169ff) where I spent a year on Voluntary Service Overseas, such has been my approach to life that the following quotation from an appropriately named book, *Wanderlust*, about walking, describes how I would like to experience the journey:

Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts ... Moving on foot seems to make it easier to move in time; the mind wanders from plans to recollections to observations. (Solnit, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.5)

The walking, or sauntering, which characterises this thesis is not, however, wandering aimlessly. Rather it is living and dreaming with intention and direction. My own Christian faith and my own context as an ordained minister play a fundamental part in this metaxical, sauntering process. Thus an interpretation of an otherwise particularly dense New Testament text (Hebrews 11.1: Faith is the substance of things unseen, RV) ‘resonates and reverberates’ (Bachelard, 1994, p.xxiii) with this ‘directed sauntering’ – ‘Now faith is the turning of dreams into deeds’ (Jordan, 1987, p.35). So, like the clown, the Jester or Joker (an image I have always associated with Christ, and particularly with Jesus<sup>16</sup>) facilitates the process which ‘creates movement at a pace in which everyday life is brought

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<sup>16</sup> It is my practice to use the name ‘Christ’ as relating to the Christ, now risen from the dead, and the name ‘Jesus’ to signify Jesus of Nazareth when he walked the earth, in the flesh.

closer and noticed' (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.132).

'This is theatre,' says Boal, the originator of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), 'the art of looking at ourselves' (Boal, 2002, p.15). It is rather like Jill Lane's description of walking the city in the context of TO.

... walking the city is a textured, bodily practice of rehearsing its social life and memories. The aim of such pedestrian storytelling is not just to invest or retell the good stories of old, but to reveal their ghosted presence in things as they are. (Lane, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 2006, p.132)

These stories, she continues, offer counter-memories of the silencings that tame and commercialise urban space. In the process of sauntering,

... the art of looking at ourselves shifts to an analysis of the total environment: we can take it all in and it becomes the theatre that expands our minds. It teaches us to recognize that in society power itself is never fixed and closed, but rather is exercised along a grid that is an endless and strategic game that we must continually learn to imaginatively and tactfully outwit. (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.132)

This thesis describes a 21st-century pilgrim, not walking across Europe towards Jerusalem, but sauntering through life and searching out ways to outwit the Cartesian dualism which is now marked by the 'catastrophe of economic and ecological exploitation' (Soelle, 2001, p.89). In his book *Ecopsychology*, Fisher acknowledges his mentors in ecological psychology.

My work has effectively become a response to theirs, a conversation with theirs. I like to frame it as such, in any case, as a strategy for bringing some focus to my own critical recollective project. (Fisher, 2002, p.53)

His words are an appropriate way to describe my own thesis. Fisher named his mentors and described them as those with whom he was engaging as his strategy for bringing 'some focus to my own critical project'. My project has become a response to children like Harry, 8 years old and Rory, 9 years old, (see Chapter 4,

p.129f) and many, many like them. They are my mentors. It is a conversation with their energy, imagination, pain and joy, their sayings, their lives. However, it is not only a response to the children but to their teachers and those who provide their care and protection; and not only to the children and their carers but also to my adult colleagues, the many clowns and jokers, prophets and inner children whom I will introduce throughout the text.



My methodology is described in Chapters 4-8. It is a hermeneutic methodology which uses a heuristic approach. It is not simply heuristic research, but contains the six phases in that there is the initial engagement with and immersion in the children's experience of Magic Spots and the question, 'Why is it that I regard with such significance the children's responses and interpret them they way I do?' here is incubation over many years, explication through the developing spiral and a creative synthesis (Moustakis, 1990, pp27-31). This approach is intertwined with Narrative Enquiry in that the 'field texts' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.80ff) in this thesis, the interviews with adults, the stories about the children and their responses to Magic Spots, define the inquiry space, that is Dewey's

‘foundational place’ (ibid, p.50). This metaphorical three dimensional space which has ‘temporal dimensions and addresses temporal matters; it focuses on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and it occurs in specific places’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.50) is represented in this thesis by the oscillating Spiral and its triggers (esp.see Fig.10, p.288).

I will introduce the context of my ‘critical re-collective’ bricolage in terms of the vow of stability in the Rule of St. Benedict.

The Rule of St Benedict is 1500 years old. It is about the rules for a monastic way of life, yet it remains alive, immediate and relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians, or for some of them and one of them is me. The rule has three vows: to Stability, to Fidelity of monastic life and to Obedience. ‘They involve us in the need to face a number of very basic demands: the need not to run away, the need to be open to change, the need to listen’ (de Vaal, 1999, p.39). In 1988 I was part of a community which embraced the ethos of this Rule making the vow of Stability by accepting commitment to this particular place, with these particular people, at this particular time<sup>17</sup>.

## 5. In this particular place



<sup>17</sup> The Wildfire Community which consisted of 14 children and 9 Adults was committed to starting and running a Retreat House particularly for those working in the inner city. I refer to articles I wrote in the community magazine, Wildfire, see Appendix 5, p.xxxv.

The Ringsfield Hall Trust is a Christian foundation but its function is not evangelism. We seek to provide a developing awareness of Self, Others, the Earth and The Other through:

### **gentle and generous hospitality**

We wish to create a safe place of welcome for all who come, no matter who they are, where they come from or what age they are. Hospitality includes paying attention to group and individual needs. The decoration and ambience of the whole house is directed to the inspiration of guests; meals encourage an awareness of the connection between the land and our food and also foster a sense of community. Hospitality includes the warmth of fires as well as personal relationships.

### **a safe environment for recreation**

The large, yet intimate grounds of the Hall provide the ideal space for children of all ages to play in freedom with mud, trees and animals – in secret places, quiet corners, long grass meadows and on the playing field. In this natural environment, children can enjoy co-operative, physical and spiritual activities which can encourage their soaring imaginations.

### **space for the development of spirituality**

The idyllic setting of the Hall encourages an awareness of the human spirit, that is: values, meaning, purpose. It also enables a turning inwards, to human traits of honesty, love, caring, wisdom, imagination, appreciation of space, solitude, compassion, creativity, and contemplation, as well as a turning outwards, towards community and celebration.

## educational resources

We are particularly concerned to facilitate a variety of sessions, including:

-  studying the ecology and natural world through creative participation in the rich variety of habitat and wildlife in the grounds
-  introducing children to the concepts of emotional intelligence
-  promoting free-range childhood

The centre team offers help by participation in forming and developing the programmes and by working with children and adults if asked to do so.

### **With these particular people**

These ‘particular people’ includes the children who stay at the centre, their teachers, and the staff and volunteers of the centre. The Ringsfield EcoCentre is, and has been for forty years, a centre which hosts schools which wish to arrange residential visits away for their pupils.. It has long been accepted in schools that residential visits from about Year 4 (8 years to 9 years old) are an important part of a child’s education. While our centre advertises its accommodation and various programmes and sessions it plays no part in choosing which school or which children eventually come on residential visits. Many schools, from all over the country, from all kinds of areas and backgrounds, from the centre of London and other inner cities, to country schools in the Southwest come to Ringsfield to run their own programmes. These programmes need to fulfil part of the national curriculum, for instance, ‘Changing Habitats’ with visits to heath and coastlands in Suffolk. Increasingly, over the last ten years schools, have chosen to come to Ringsfield because of the ecological programmes we

offer. But also our emphasis on social and emotional learning attracts some schools to visit. Schools build a relationship with a centre which they have been visiting for years and that is so at Ringsfield. Some schools have a tradition of at least one year group (Year 4, 5 or 6) visiting us for a week each year. Some have been coming for over 30 years. Other schools visit different centres in different parts of the country from year to year. Recently many schools' choice of Ringsfield has been influenced by the cost of travel, so we are hosting more and more local schools. We host mainly primary schools, but some secondary schools have visited and a number of special schools. The Earthkeepers™ Programme is for Key Stage 2, so the children who appear in this thesis are from some of those state schools who have chosen to participate in this programme.

These 'particular people' (p.30) also include members and friends of Christian Ecology Link and the UK branch of the Institute for Earth Education. What inspired this research is the participation in the activity in the earth education programmes called Magic Spots (see p.14 and chapter 2, p.59). The children's responses to this experience have been recorded in a variety of ways at the centre and back at school. This is explained in detail in Chapter 3, pp.71-74. A description of the interviews with adults is also found in Chapter 3, pp74-76.

### **At this particular time**

This is the eleven years of life, work, reflection at the centre from February 1999 until 2010. These are the years during which I have lived and worked at Ringsfield Hall. However, as will emerge, each moment can expand into years of

perception; each moment of perception now is related to experience and activity in time to experience and activity in time past in my life and very often beyond just one life. The concentration on ‘this particular time’ could isolate the present from both past and future and produce a disembodied notion of the human spirit, no longer earthed in a body or the natural world. ‘At this particular time’ is timeless, not in the sense that there are no connections between one particular time and another, but in the sense that there is no particular time apart from all the other particular times.



## 6. The Presentation of the Thesis

In my view the nature of what I am exploring really requires a presentation which is more akin to an orchestral score. Below (p.33) is a page from the orchestral score of Rachmaninov’s second Piano Concerto. While the piano may be seen as the key instrument, every other instrument and section of the orchestra plays at the same time as the piano, thus the conductor’s score has the line of music for each

printed one underneath the other (in this section of the concerto<sup>18</sup> flute, clarinet,



Piano Concerto No. 2 (III) 253

corangle, trombone, trumpet, tuba, timpani, the string section). What is more important, of course, is that when the music is heard all the instruments are *playing together at the same time*. In the same way, because my research is the

<sup>18</sup> It is this particular section of the concerto which was a teenage passion of mine, and is used on the DVD. The page illustrated is played at the end of Track 2.

exploration of how the many texts *playing at the same time* give meaning, it would be better, if it were possible, that instead of chapters following after one another, for them to be presented underneath one another as a musical score. It is not possible, I have tried it! I have had to choose an order of presentation which, as I have written this thesis over some considerable period of time (10 years), keeps changing, revolving, needing to oscillate from one event, idea, time, concept and back again (see Track 2 on the DVD).

All these elements, influences and reflections are tightly woven together (to change the metaphor) in my particular life process, finding (as with any ordinary life) complicated resonances, connections, contradictions, puzzles, mysteries, meanings and knots with Others<sup>19</sup> of faith and no faith.

I have attempted both to unravel the weaving and also to re-weave it in a way congruent with a holistic way of being (becoming) which seeks meaning by striving for genuine participation with nature. The process of writing this down has seen the continual, insistent need to explain something else before setting down the present point. Nothing quite makes sense without both what was before and after it. Therefore in addition to the formal text I have produced two Charts and a DVD as an aid to the presentation of the whole thesis.

## Charts

The charts are inspired by those to be found in Frank Lake's *Clinical Theology* (1969). This book and Frank Lake are part of my narrative (see Chapter 4

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<sup>19</sup> I have decided to follow Levinas' practice of using a capital 'O' for Other or Others in order to emphasise the priority of the Other over Self. See Parenthesis 3, p.186ff. for an more extended discussion of the relationship between the self and Other. The use of the capital letter for 'Other' is consistently followed throughout the thesis.

p.166ff). After 1282 pages, including the indexes, Lake produces 10 charts which reveal and articulate life-nurturing conditions or summarise serious disorders and maladies, from Chart 1 *The Womb of the Spirit – an ontological analysis of the normal Mother-Child relationship* to Chart 10 *Chronic Addictive Alcoholism*. I present two summary charts of my own (enclosed in the pocket inside the back cover of the thesis) The first (because I confess I am rather enchanted by Lake's portentous phraseology) is entitled: POSTMODERN DISQUIETED GLOBALIZATION CONSUMERISM DISORDER<sup>20</sup>. It is an attempt to capture in this more fluid and graphic way the context in which my reflective, hermeneutical sauntering bricolage takes place (see p.23 above). The chart is based in style on Frank Lake's Chart 7 (Lake, 1966). My second chart, THE WOMB OF METAXIC SPACE, is lightly based on Lake's Chart 1(ibid) and summarises my thinking after my research.

## **The DVD**

The DVD presents an animated model of the hermeneutical spiral, which I develop in the text (See Chapters 4-8: Chapter 4, p.128; Chapter 5, p.184; Chapter 7, p.253; Chapter 8, p.283 and p.288). It is my conceptualisation of the form and action of relationship and communication between self, Others, and the more-than-human community (see Chapter 11). The DVD contains:

### **Track 1**

***Presenting the work of Ringsfield Hall*** which is used to introduce the Centre to new users and in talks we give to introduce the Centre and our work with children.

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<sup>20</sup> The first three words of this title come from Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004, p.38

## Track 2

A series of sequences which animate the Figures of the hermeneutic spiral in Chapters 4 - 8 accompanied by part of Rachmaninov's second piano concerto (see p.32) and a narration.

## Track 3

An animated example of the hermeneutic spiral at work. This illustrates the reverie, the horizons, triggers, opportunities, break-throughs which make up 'metaxic space'. This is accompanied by part of Taverner's, *Tears of the Angels* (see Chapter 8, p.285).

## Track 4

*....and a little child shall lead them* which illustrates in pictures and music how Ringsfield Hall aspires to foster the spirit of the child. It moves gently from starlight and early dawn till sunset and leaves us with the mystery of the night sky (when the news of the universe can be more deeply attended to) which we encourage all groups of children to experience (see Chapter 7 pp. 248f).

The process which lead to the decision to describe *first* what appears, in a different format, and only attached to the *back* cover of the thesis, illustrates the difficulty of finding an appropriate way to present this thesis. Unless the existence of the charts and DVD is indicated at the start it is possible that the reader will only have the option of looking at them after the reading the whole thesis. Whereas some readers might want to have an anticipatory look at them, thereby gaining a measure of insight into the process of the writing, others may not.

## Reading the Text

This is a step by step description of the simple sauntering (see pp.23) of a journey which turns out to be too complicated to express in a straight forward linear fashion.

### ***The Parentheses***

In between some of the chapters are six *Parentheses* which explore key concepts which have taken hold of and guided my way of seeing and being in the world.

Fundamental to each of these ‘in-betweens’ are illustrative explorations of experiences of my life’s story; my sauntering the journey of spirituality. I am an ordained Christian minister, called to the ministry when I was 17. The *Parentheses* represent this voice, and its many stories, and do not attempt to take an objective stance, rather authentically record my particular journey. Inasmuch as it is possible to present a more objective voice this can be heard outside the *Parentheses*. However, in developing the dialectical hermeneutic spiral, I need to remain firmly inside the spiral.

So my suggestion is to read **Chapters 1-3**, the introductions and ***Parenthesis 1*** which describes my understanding of metaxic space, first. Then I suggest that the reader should feel free to read the rest in any order. For instance *Parentheses 2-6* could be read first or last or in the order I present them. While the same story will be told, the order in which you encounter the material will alter the way you perceive the re-weaving and the re-collecting. As with many ordinary lives, this one can be perceived in many ways.

### **Fonts and Footnotes**

■ Through out the thesis three different fonts are used. New Times

Roman is the basic font.

■ When New Times Roman is italicised a personal story is being told.

*This may be from the past in sauntering life, or it may be from the present. These bricolage events, memories and interpretations*

*represent some of the raw foundations which form the horizons from which I participate in the dialectical spiral of interpretation.*

- ▣ *When a footnote is italicised it is indicative of similar bricolage events and triggers which are part of the spiral of horizons for interpretation, but which, included in the main text would serve more as an interruption than a trigger.*
- ▣ *Comic Sans MS font, pt. 10 is always used for the children's responses to Magic Spots. All the children's words are reproduced with unaltered spellings, grammar and sentence construction. Occasionally brackets are used to make the meaning clear. The references refer to the categories and page numbers in which I have arranged these responses for my easy access.*

## **SECTION 1: Introductions**

**Chapter 1: First Words** is a series of introductions

**Chapter 2: earth education** describes earth education which, appropriately, was conceived out of protest. The name Environmental Education had become misused and the originator of earth education Steve Van Matre sought to make amends. This chapter also describes the Earthkeepers programme for Key Stage 2 children and surveys research about and into Earth Education.

**Chapter 3: Data** details the process of the research plan and the collection of data. It describes the journey from a faltering start to details of the eventual research plan and the categories of data used as well as setting the whole in the context of the present ecological crisis.

**Parenthesis 1: metaxis** explores the notion of the in-between.

## **SECTION 2: Spiral Hermeneutics**

**Chapters 4-8 Hermeneutics: an interpretative methodology** explore hermeneutic inquiry with a view to understanding how it is that I come to value the response of the children in their Magic Spots and interpret the significance of the meanings they are expressing. During this exploration I develop the model of a hermeneutic spiral in which the major “texts” which form the whole thesis are spun, yarn like, together by the action of the turning and oscillating spiral.

**Chapter 4: An Introduction to the “texts” and the turning spiral** includes the four main “texts” of my own spiritual and theological journey; the written responses of the children to their Magic Spots; the interviews with other adults; and the poetry of R.S. Thomas. The multiple nature of these horizons is explored and I indicate signs of the difficulty of linear writing. The hermeneutical circle is developed into the turning spiral.

***Parenthesis 2: Breakthrough*** tells the story of my life-time involvement with the notion of the incarnation of God in Christ.

**Chapter 5: Hearing my own voice** sets down three foundational experiences which have influenced, not only my life’s story, but also my reflection and interpretation of it. This chapter, along with *Parentheses 1 and 2*, articulates both the spirituality of that journey and also the nature of the spirituality of my life. This chapter also introduces a life-long inquiry into the nature of the *Self* and the *Other*.<sup>21</sup>

***Parenthesis 3: Selfhood: a dose of radical alterity, every time until better*** continues the inquiry and reflection about selfhood and relates it to the children in their Magic Spots.

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<sup>21</sup> A reminder, see the footnote on page 33 for my use of a capital ‘O’ for ‘Others’.

**Chapter 6: Hearing Other adults** offers a selection of parts of the narrative of Other adults who have agreed to be co-researchers with me, in that they have answered a questionnaire and have agreed to recorded interviews (see Appendix 3).

*Parenthesis 4: Prophets and Clowns* details my own relationship with Christian faith, clowning and the way of being developed in my own life story which offers reverie and insight into my spiral interpretation.

**Chapter 7: Hearing the voice of R.S. Thomas** acts as an introduction to the poetics of experience mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 5. The insistence of the hermeneutic spiral to include (at the same time) the many strands of Self and Other experienced over time is illustrated by the fact that this chapter does not, indeed cannot, keep the influence of R. S Thomas isolated or separated from the other horizons I have previously identified. Illustrating the multi-horizon nature of the process of interpretation this chapter also includes reflection on children's and young peoples' voices as well as some aspects of the current education system along with the culture that spawned it.

**Chapter 8: 'Shame on your face'** concludes the hermeneutical reflections of Section 2 and further develops the hermeneutical spiral while arguing the need for adult relationships with children to be characterised by care, nurture and empathy.

### **SECTION 3: The Children**

*Parenthesis 5: Childhood the least of the least* introduces Section 3 reflecting on the nature of Childhood.

**Chapters 9 and 10** describe the 'solo' instruments in the children's Concerto (see above p.32). **Chapter 9: Hearing the Children's Voices - a way of being**

presents the children in their Magic Spots by carefully detailing the conditions and relationships which seem to be necessary to foster the spirit of the child.

***Parenthesis 6: WOW!*** uses my experience of counselling to elaborate further the transformative way of being opened up for and received by the children in their Magic Spots.

**Chapter 10: Hearing the Children's Voices – Breath** continues to uncover the oxygen and magic of metaxic space.

## **SECTION 4**

**Chapter 11: Shaping the Dancing Earth** is in many ways a conclusion. I could not have been written it without the preceding experience, analysis, reflection and reverie. It certainly would not have been possible for me to write it without the turning spiral spinning metaxic space. Here the words of the children appear throughout, I tried to write this chapter as a *parenthesis* without the children's voices, but they insisted. The children's voices must be heard. I have decided that there is enough, exploration, analysis, reflection and explanation everywhere else for there to be any need to explain why each and every sound of a child's voice is heard when it is heard. Indeed, some times a child will be heard repeating what she said in another place. Sometimes a child insists that he must say it again.

**Chapter 12: Last Words: Restless Anticipations.** This might be entitled simply 'Conclusions' but the title *Restless Anticipations* accepts that the ontological hermeneutic process has no conclusions. I, hesitantly, define Restless Anticipations, as negotiations of ways towards reconnections with Self, Others,

the earth and God. So this final chapter offers some recalcitrant<sup>22</sup> anticipations spinning in my hermeneutic spiral concerning interpretation and the children's responses to Magic Spots and reflections concerning adults' relationship with them.

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 8, p.286

## Chapter 2 earth education



The best part of Earthkeeping, I think, was the web of life because it was really fun and it was so tangled I thought we would never get out of it - and I suppose we won't.

Kate, Thank you Letters, 2002

# Chapter 2

## earth education

### 1. The Institute for Earth Education

The story of the development of earth education is told by American professor Steve Van Matre in *Earth Education: A New Beginning* (1990). In this and in previous books he argues that environmental education had become co-opted by industry and multinationals who were causing most environmental damage, diluted by educational units devised by those in general outdoor activities, and trivialised by definitions like 'environmental education is education that is in, about, or for the environment'.

Gosh, no wonder people got confused. Under that definition, what isn't environmental education. And if any of these perplexed people went off to a national conference looking for answers, they would probably find everything from orienteering to acid rain on the program. (Van Matre, 1987, p.4)

Why do I sound so angry? Sure it bugs me that I have watched a number of people sacrifice significant portions of their lives to the goal of making a focused educational response to environmental crisis, only to be thwarted over and over by people who are patently less concerned, less committed, and less skilful than they are. However the main source of my vitriolic comments is the escalating destruction of this planet and a feeling of immense sorrow that we have failed to do enough. In a couple of generations we have destroyed much of the earth; in a couple more it may be too late to reverse the process. I say a pox on all those in education who feel no bitterness, who refuse to speak out, who cannot bring themselves to take a negative stand against the sad state of our field. (Van Matre, 1990, p.v)

It must be said that Van Matre always apologises for his 'histrionics' (his word). He assures his readers and hearers that he is not trying to belittle the good work that others have done, and that he is not claiming that earth education is the only way. However, he continues to lead the Institute for

Earth Education with pre-post-modern inflexibility and firmness, for fear that it will be diluted and trivialised.

*In the year 2001, when I first presented my proposal for this thesis, I had not long come from a lecture by Steve Van Matre where we were inspired to embrace earth education for our centre. In an attempt to promote my proposal to Professor Maggie McClure (known for her enthusiastic espousal of postmodernism) I jumped up and enthusiastically mimicked Van Matre's 'turn', with actions, about the need for **focused, sequential, accumulative** programmes of education with **specific outcomes**. As I sat down the professor physically shuddered at the thought! I felt I had blotted my copybook, but apparently not.*

Earth education is:

- the process of helping people live more harmoniously and joyously with the natural world;
- the process of helping people build an understanding of, appreciation for, and harmony with the earth and its life;
- the development of structured programmes which include understanding basic ecological concepts, systems and communities (how the earth works), increasing good feelings for the earth, and processing them both (how to live on the earth).

Van Matre's first books, *Acclimatization* (1972) and *Acclimatizing* (1974) were written as a result of his experience with boys' summer camps in the north woods of Wisconsin.

I arrived on the scene at a private boys' camp there after my sophomore year in college, and the magic of those lakes and forests under a summer sun captivated me immediately. Although it was not my first counselling job, there was something about the land and life at Towering Pines that spoke to my deepest feelings and set the stage for events that would have totally unexpected results. (Van Matre, 1990, p.52)

He was asked to set up a new nature programme for the camp, which is a seven-week camp for over a hundred boys aged from seven to seventeen.

After discovering what had been done before – identifying things, collecting things, dissecting things, experimenting with things – he developed nature experiences to develop a sense of relationship with the earth. In his book he uses the word 'fellowship' interchangeably with 'relationship' (ibid, p.49).

Here is his description of the defining moment when earth education (first called Acclimatization) was born:

I decided that what I really wanted to do was to turn the kids on to the natural world. I wanted to convey my love of the earth and its life, not for its labels and fables and fears, but because of my rich firsthand experiences with it. I wanted to convey a feeling of at-homeness with the earth, a feeling similar to what you have in your own house. You know what I mean, you feel good there; you understand its moods, its smells, its nooks and crannies. You return each evening, open the door, and say, 'Hey, home.' I wanted the kids to have that same feeling of security and comfortability that they have in their own homes, but with the planet itself – our preeminent home – the earth and its communities of life. (ibid, p.53)

Van Matre's description of the development of the Acclimatization programme displays his determination to pay attention to the process of learning experiences, to produce carefully crafted, structured discovery learning experiences, based on 'the brain's natural tendency to relate things to one another, to seek meaning, to reach closure' (ibid, p.53).

Disappointment that many people understood Acclimatization as a programme just for sensory awareness was the beginning of the motivation to change the name of this new education programme.

It actually has four components:

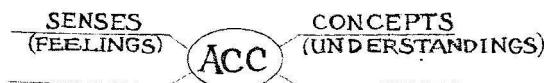
1. The Senses (feelings). This involves sharpening perceptions of the natural world – smelling, touching, feeling.

### 1. THE SENSES



2. The Concepts. This is understanding how life on the planet works.

### 2. THE CONCEPTS



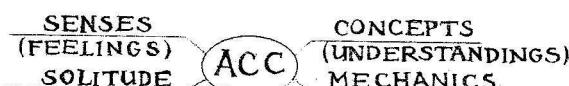
3. The Mechanics. This is the mechanics of learning.

### 3. THE MECHANICS



4. The Solitude. This is times in the natural world, sharpening nonverbal skills like ‘watching and waiting, silencing and stilling, opening and receiving’ (ibid, 1990, p.69).

### 4. THE SOLITUDE



This last element of earth education most enticed me. Ever since my own experience of corners (see Chapter 1, pp.20-22), followed up by the practice of meditation and contemplation throughout my Christian journey, I had realised the necessity of solitude. Now here was a passionate argument for it to be a part of education. In the process of crafting the Acclimatization programme solitude was discovered as:

Chances for participants in our programmes to be out there in touch with nature, one on one, in direct contact with the elements of life – light, air, water, and soil – unchanneled, unfiltered, unmolded by man. We found that daily periods of solitude would help our learners process what was happening to them while getting closer to the natural world at the same time. They could feel the processes and process their feelings. (Van Matre, 1990, p.70)

Solitude-enhancing activities were designed to allow people to get out of their boxes – the boxes of city life and the box of their heads. By the time we heard Steve Van Matre for the first time we had designed our own logo – restoring the connections to self, others, the earth and God (or the Other). Here was a passionate advocacy for just that.

In Acclimatization we wanted to get people out of their boxes and in touch with life again. We wanted them to reach out and touch the earth, to feel themselves as something like microscopic parts of much larger systems ... When you are too full of your own thoughts, you cannot make room very easily for the impression of the other life around you. Today, the other creatures of the earth can only be heard by those who work at freeing themselves up to listen.

On the other hand we wanted people to spend some time thinking about what was happening to them in our program. (ibid, p.71).

## 2. The Secret Ingredient

For all the emphasis made by Van Matre on educational practice, crafted structure, attention to detail, and the elements of discovery learning there is a further ingredient in the earth education mix (or ‘edifice’ as Van Matre calls it). Here, he is building up to it:

Well, that was Acclimatization: the senses and the concepts and the solitude all wrapped up with the mechanics of how people learn. In the beginning we had the nice diagram you see here:

## “THE SECRET INGREDIENT”



It looked like just another one of those dead dumb diagrams that people put in educational texts. Then one day it struck me that it was no wonder it seemed that way, our diagram was missing what made the whole more than the sum of its parts, what made it synergistic. We called it the glue of Acclimatization. It was the element that glued those rather disparate pieces together and made them something more than they appeared to be. Sometimes we called it ... the secret ingredient. Very simply: it was magic. (ibid, 1990, p.72)

In this section of the book Van Matre declares he cannot define what he means and instead tells a number of stories which illustrate what later he calls ‘educational magic, not stage magic’ (ibid, p.198). ‘This mysteriously enchanting element of our work ... promises you something that will dazzle and entrance you, even though it may be offered quietly and softly’ (ibid). It involves an element of fantasy, the sort of fantasy that you know about, but gladly, joyously create. One of my grandchildren was playing in fantasy serving up a meal to me. When I, as a sort of grand-dad joke, said, “But there’s nothing on the plate,” when I had asked for fish and chips, Maya said, in a very disparaging tone, “I know granyan-ho-ho (her name for me, she was 4!), it’s pretend, you have, to pretend.” The earth education programmes are fun, serious but ‘learning about the earth and its systems of life should be a joyous experience. If we force someone into doing it, we run the risk of diminishing the very understandings and feelings for which

we strive. Instead we must entice our learners into our activities.' (ibid, p.197)

In one of the activities one of the leaders becomes the Connection Inspector, with labelled cap and jacket; in another, the participants are wearing blindfolds and experience different textures, then they are led to a place where a magnificent view over distant mountain peaks and dark mysterious caves is described, and when the blindfold comes off everyone is looking at a large crack in a rotting log. To the cries of 'Derrr, that was stupid,' 'I knew it wasn't real,' and 'That was just a trick' the participants are suddenly grabbed by great interest in the amazing world of decaying wood. The magnifying glasses are at the ready; the fantasy lure worked!

All the programmes are full of 'educational adventure'.

Of course the very essence of adventure is immersing yourself in new sensory stimuli. On an adventure you know you will see and smell and hear and taste and touch new things. That is why adventures in the natural world work so well; you always have the continual bubbling and churning of life to stimulate you. (ibid, p.199)

Behind it all there exists the empathic heart. 'Magic involves caring; adventure includes daring' (ibid, p.200). The earth education programmes require a great deal of planning, props and setting-up. Van Matre reports that one trainer explained the magic element this way: 'It's three people spending three hours setting up for a twenty-three-minute experience.' This is likely to be a reference to EM's Lab. In our centre we have a dedicated EM's Lab, so we don't have to set it up each time it is needed. But the same is true: to create the 'magic' we have spent time and money, so that when the children enter there is always a sigh of wonder and surprise; it is 'real', the rocking chair is moving, the curtains move by themselves ... it starts the new adventure. But Van Matre confides:

Don't be fooled on this one. Magic is not easy. It is not just an extra dose of energy or a dollop of exhibitionism. It is caring deeply about the experiences of others. It is both watchfulness and playfulness in adding that extra element. (Van Matre, 1990, p.200)

Van Matre makes the plea that all activities need to be devised and executed from the children's perspective. He insists that the learners are central.

In earth education we have to be very careful to keep the kids on centre stage, and limit ourselves to supporting roles. This is hard, especially for some outdoor leaders who may have got involved in the first place seeking starring roles for themselves. You will have to keep reminding them: the only stars in earth education are the learners. (ibid, p.200)

While Van Matre does not discuss the nature of childhood or refer in his books to it when he writes about the 'magic', his text is surrounded with border quotations such as the following:

The dynamic principle of fantasy is play, which belongs to the child, and as such it appears to be inconsistent with the principle of serious work. But without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever come to birth (C. G. Jung in Van Matre, 1990, p.285).

The great man is he who does not lose his child's heart. (Meng-tse in ibid, p. 202)

Genius is childhood recaptured. (Baudelaire in ibid, p.299)

The genius of earth education is due to Steve Van Matre's own serious playfulness, in short his own recapturing of childhood, the desire to protect children from losing their heart and his inspiration and passion to encourage educational and environmental leaders to do the same.

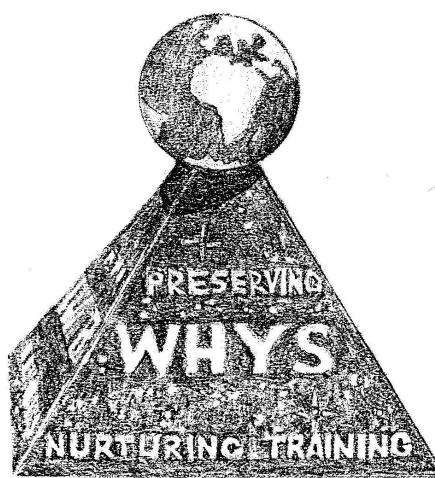
When the name Acclimatization was changed to earth education the de-capitalisation of the first letter was deliberate. 'Why? Because we also wanted to broaden our base. We wanted people to see earth education as an alternative to the ineffective, moribund environmental education movement not just a product of our making.' (ibid, 1990, p.83)

Van Matre is keen on ‘organisers’; the earth education pyramid is one of them, representing the Whys, Whats and Ways of earth education.

**Why earth education?** Simply because the human passengers on board the planet earth are endangering most other living things that share the planet with them and their own life support systems in the process (Preserving). Today, earth advocates are desperately needed to serve as teachers and models to champion the existence of our fellow non-human passengers (Nurturing). We also believe that people who have broader understandings and deeper feelings for the planet as a vessel of life are wiser and healthier and happier themselves (Training).

**What does it include?** Understanding, feeling, and processing are the key components of the earth education edifice. In order to live in harmony with other life on our planet people first need a basic understanding of its ecological systems and communities (Understanding). Next, they must feel a deep and abiding emotional attachment to all life (Feeling). And finally, they must begin processing their new understandings and feelings by making changes in their own lifestyles (Processing).

**How is it accomplished?** First, careful structuring provides the framework for creating complete programs with adventuresome, magical learning experiences that focus on specific outcomes (Structuring). Second, earth education immerses its participants in lots of rich, firsthand contact with the natural world (Immersing). And third, relating these experiences to their own lives is encouraged by providing individuals with time alone in natural settings where they can reflect upon both the other life around them and their own actions (Relating). (Van Matre, 1987, p.5, 6, 7)



You learn that if you sit down in the woods and wait, something happens. (Henry David Thoreau in Van Matre 1990, p. 90)

### 3. The Earthkeepers<sup>TM</sup> Programme

*The final ‘ceremony’ at the Earthkeepers Training Centre is finished and it is quiet and still – remarkably so. Thirty-seven children have piled into EM’s Lab at the end of their week as Earthkeeper Apprentices. They have seen a presentation summarising what they have done, and demonstrating what is still to come in their training back at school before they can receive two more keys for their key rings, discover the last two secret meanings of EM, receive their certificates and finally call themselves Earthkeepers. The final projected picture of the Earthkeepers’ symbol is showing. Ross, my colleague, is standing at the door, I’m standing at the back, the children are facing forward and I say, ‘Well, you have come to the end of your stay at the Earthkeepers Training Centre and it is time to go.’ Some faces turn towards me; there is still silence. The tape begins to play a gentle ecological folk song; still quiet.*

*‘Now you still have to complete your training back at school, so you will need to take the Y and S boxes with you.’ A few restrained ‘cool’, and ‘wicked’ whisper-shouts go up. Two children are chosen to carry the boxes to the coach. Still no one moves; the song goes on. (Their teacher snatches a few moments of tears, tears of wonderment and joy, experiencing the children’s quietude.)*

*‘So it really is time to go now, we will see you in July – back at school, you will open the boxes and we can, can’t we, Ross, promise you that you will meet EM.’*

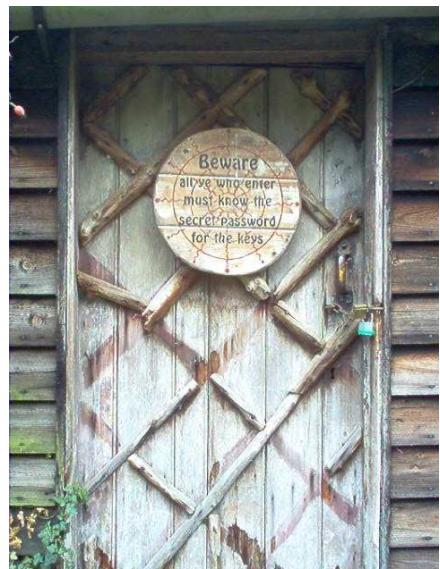
*‘Oh yes, most definitely.’*

*'So it really is time to go now.' At last, movement and noise – the children, boxes and all, rush to the coach. In a few moments we will be waving them off, for a few seconds EM's Lab is empty and the last notes of the song die away. I switch off the projector. I look around in the deliberate gloom at this wonderful, even if it is contrived, secret place and I hear a remarkable definition as it were audibly spreading round the room: Spirituality is the interconnectedness of life.*

I thought this was a direct quote from Alastair McIntosh in *Soil and Soul: People versus Corporate Power*. However, I can't find it anywhere, but anyway I agree with him about the 'central issue of our times': 'How can we invite and accept the spirit of life back into our world?' (McIntosh, 2001, p.214)

### 3.1 EM's Lab

EM's Lab is not the home of a mad scientist, but the refuge of a friendly, yet shy nature lover. EM is never seen and is neither male nor female. Eventually the trainees discover the real meaning of EM. Picture the interior of a kindly old nature lover's special workroom.



Part study, part retreat, the whole place is suffused with the feeling of its owner.

There is nothing like the usual sterile lab, nor is it filled with preserved and stuffed creatures unfortunate enough to have been collected for ‘scientific’ study. It’s a bit cluttered, inviting exploration. It’s the kind of place you would really like to poke around for awhile; a place filled with the detritus of a lifetime or roaming the land, of living closely with the natural world.

Formed by three walls one of which contains an old fashioned sash window, the room includes a simple wooden desk, a carved wooden rocking chair, an ancient trunk (with an old lantern sitting on it), a keg of walking sticks and a coat tree. Next to the rocking chair there’s a floor lamp made from the trunk of a tree and a low, cloth-covered table holding a teapot and cup. In one corner there’s a pile of wooden crates and metal buckets with a pond net leaning against them.

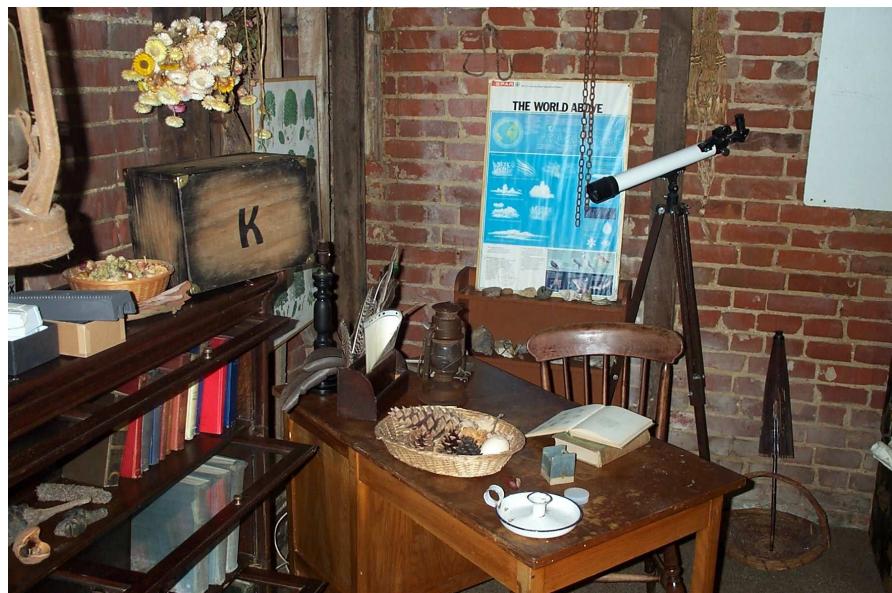
Cupboards make up the bottom third of the walls, while the upper area is covered entirely with shelves.

The only light comes from a brass kerosene lamp on the desk and a couple of candleholders clipped onto the edges of the shelves.

Those shelves are covered with natural treasures picked up on countless expeditions: skulls and assorted bones; gnarled pieces of wood and chunks of fossils; a jar of seed pods, a kaleidoscope, a framed picture of a fox; a couple of shells; and maybe a hornets’ nest or the head of a sunflower.

Numerous unusual containers, wedged in among lots and lots of nature books are odd-shaped tins and one or two sturdy baskets with solid handles. Scattered around the room you will find lots to catch the eye: perhaps an old microscope, a pair of snowshoes, a simple telescope; certainly a cloth bag or two, a carved wooden bird, a piece of antler, a pair of binoculars. Once you settle in and your eyes adjust to the dim light you may notice four wooden boxes stuck here and there and labelled with one of the letters K-E-Y-S. On the desk

there is a Training Manual and the owner's personal diary. (Van Matre, 1987, p.47)



This is EM's place and so the children do not go to it very often. During the four days of the programme, the opening ceremony, one of the key award ceremonies and the final session take place here and, hopefully, they sneak in at other times! Part of the delight and romance of the Earthkeepers programme is the attention to detail in order to make both the whole programme and its several parts a significant experience for the children. Great efforts are made with the props, the special places, atmospheres, ceremonies and occasions to give moment to the learning process.

### **3.2 Hooks, experiences and significant moments**

At the opening ceremony the children are presented with their own name badge – this is a cross section of wood with their name already on it – it is threaded with string and worn round their necks for the whole four days. Every time I have helped lead this programme there has been the immediate

cry, ‘Can we keep this?’ ‘Is it for us?’, ‘Cool!’ etc. They also receive a map of the Earthkeepers Training Centre and its grounds, a Training Manual, which contains all the activities with pages to complete and to be signed by teachers (now renamed Guardians – Guardians of the Secrets). The Diary also given to them at the start refers to EM’s diary and encourages them to keep a diary of their own experience of the natural world, both at the centre and when they get home. A shoulder bag to hold all this equipment is provided too.

### **3.3 The Programme**

The structure of the programme is built around gaining four keys – the K-E-Y-S keys. Each of the keys opens a box containing the secret meanings of EM relating to the progression of learning the four main concepts. At the end of the first day they receive their first key – in a ceremony where the K box lies in the woods lit by EM’s lantern, they discover the first meaning of EM. It is ENERGY AND MATERIALS, and in the box there is a key ring for the children to keep and use for all their keys. Most of the children approach the idea of being invited out into the woods by themselves with caution (we should be glad of this). However, they are given their first key, they are invited to open the box (most struggle in their excitement), they read that the first meaning of EM is Energy and Materials, they take the key ring with, ‘Can I really keep it?’, and, after being told to keep every thing secret until everyone has their key, they rush off back to the house, often with whoops of delight and pride.

To gain the K key they have participated in two activities. The first demonstrates sunlight energy flow and food chains called Munch-Line Monitors, the second called Spec-Trails demonstrates the cycling of materials – air, soil and water.

The next day brings an activity, which requires their newly acquired K Key.

This is the third ecological concept: the Interconnection of all Things.

A large web, the Web of Life, is strung between large trees representing air, soil and water cycling powered by the energy of the sun. The facilitator suddenly dons an inspector's cap and becomes the Inspector of Connections. The web is used to illustrate how all things are connected through eating and the exchange of air. (This activity is described in detail in Chapter 10, pp.326-328).

The final concept is demonstrated by an activity called Time Capsules. It is the concept of the process of Change over Time. The children have used the map of the Earthkeepers Training Centre but now they are given another map. It is a map of how the 14 acres might have been, say, 70 million years ago. A few key landmarks remain to give them some orientation. EM has buried nine Time Capsule boxes in the places marked on the map. Divided into nine groups the children have to discover their box, dig it up and bring it to the Time Room. In the Time Room, filled with all sorts of artefacts from the natural world but also memorabilia from 'the old days', is the Time Cupboard. They open their box, with their K key and discover that in their box are artefacts from one of nine periods of time. Nine posters around the room relate to the nine time periods, as do the nine shelves in the time cupboard. The task is to place the contents of their box on the right shelf.

After this wild activity dies down, the group reflects how since the beginning of the earth's existence it changes, that life needs change, and we speculate about how, with the energy flow, the cycling of materials and the interconnectedness of all things, the earth might change in the future.

The evening of the second day comes and with it the E key ceremony. Of course, by now the children know the score, they have been asking all day when they are going to get their second key. They are given their key and all go off to EM's Lab to open the E box. One by one they discover the second secret meaning of EM – MY EXPERIENCE – and collect from the box an Earthkeepers Apprenticeship Card signed by the leaders.

K stands for knowledge. The four activities – Munch-Line Monitors, Spec-Trails, Connection Inspection and Time Capsules – demonstrate basic concepts about how the earth works.

### **3.4 Knowledge without experience is not knowledge**

An under-girding principle of the theory of the programme is that knowledge and experience go together. Without experiencing good feelings about the natural world knowledge will not create a real appreciation of the need to care for the earth. Various activities are aimed at a close and enjoyable experience of the natural world. Earthwalks are a series of activities using the various senses, feeling with a blindfold, producing a cocktail of scented (good and bad!) leaves and plants, discovering the abundance of colour by creating colour cards, seeing things from different perspectives using mirrors. The children also follow one of EM's walks outside the centre and are encouraged to draw or write about it in their

diaries, just like EM. Whenever EM is mentioned in this way there is a barrage of questions about EM's identity.

'Is it you?'

'No.'

'Is it Ross?' (my colleague).

'He's not there, is he?' 'He's not real,' 'Yes he is, it's God.' 'No, it's not.' 'Is he real?'

'Who said he's a he?'

'Who is it then?'

'You will find out.'

'I don't think we will.' 'I think we will.'

### **3.5 Magic Spots** (see also Chapter 1, p.14)

EM also encourages them to find a 'magic spot' and spend time in it. In our grounds this may be in some of the woodlands, maybe leaning against a tree; it may be sitting in long grass in the meadows; near the pond; in the dell, or even up a tree. The programme includes times when the whole group participates, but also encourages children to use their magic spot during their free time, any time.

This boy in the woods at Ringsfield was writing a poem having watched a squirrel running nearly over him!



A pupil at a magic spot at Ardroy Outdoor Centre in Argyll, Scotland is engrossed in his diary (Martin, 2007).



### **3.6 Isn't the conceptual base more important?**

Why have I chosen to describe some of the practical activities, the experience of the children, and the devices used to encourage and maintain their interest before describing what Earthkeepers is about conceptually? It is, I think, to do with my experience over the years in the church and my understanding of the processes of conversion, particularly the process of staying converted.

*In Birmingham 1976-1986 in a church community setting we engaged in the process of defining the concepts of our belief and understanding how we came to make a commitment to them. We discovered that we needed knowledge and understanding but also that we needed experience and good feelings. It was the interaction of both intellectual assent and community experience that encouraged commitment. Then we sought to design the strategies that were needed to deal with the consequences of a lifestyle which resulted from living according to the demands of our commitment.*

*So, two issues arise: knowledge and experience need to be combined in order for a concept to be understood and, secondly, in order to live out the consequences or demands of that concept both group encounter and strategies are needed. When I first came upon this earth education programme I was excited to see these elements present.*

The priority aim of the Earthkeepers programme is to enable children to reduce the impact of their personal lifestyles on the natural systems which support life on earth. In order to achieve this, participants need to know the four basic concepts; to understand them they need to be experienced and enjoyed. A series of activities designed to help participants experience good feelings in and about the natural world are interspersed with the learning of the concepts. These include Earthwalks (using all the senses); Seasons, discovering artefacts and role play; EM's Walk, a longer walk of discovery and fun; and Magic Spots (experiencing solitude in the natural world). This is E, the second key.

### **3.7 Consequences for lifestyle**

Once these concepts are understood there is an opportunity to make a commitment to making less impact on the earth's life-support systems. This is supposed to be carried on at school with the making of promises about lifestyle and the gaining of the third key, the Y (Yourself) key. The first meaning of EM is Energy and Materials so participants are asked to make two promises, one about using less energy and one about using fewer materials and recycling materials. The promises are recorded and

emphasised by encouraging parents to join in the decision by signing the declaration of the promises.

Once this has taken place the Y box is opened and the third meaning of EM is revealed – MY EARTH.

Making the promises about lessening impact tasks is one strategy for maintaining commitment. Accountability to self and others is another strategy provided by the tasks related to the S (Sharing) key. Here the task for the children is to share their knowledge and experience with others. Two K concepts and two E experiences are to be shared with family or friends. This action consolidates the knowledge or the experience and increases commitment to it. When these tasks are completed the S box is opened. The final meaning of EM is discovered and the children finally get to meet EM. The box contains a mirror; EM is ME. They finally get to meet EM!

#### **4. Research**

While it is not the purpose of this thesis to analyse or examine earth education or the programme Earthkeepers it is relevant to observe that over the years there has been considerable attention and research concerning earth education. There has been theoretical work, including work that has cited Earth Education as exemplary practice, work that has attempted to analyse Earth Education critically (Gough, 1987; Greenall-Gough, 1990; Keen, 1991a; Keen, 1991b; Robottom and Hart, 1993; Job, 1996; Beder, 1997); practitioners' autobiographical or anecdotal accounts of experiences with Earth Education, research into the efficacy of Earth Education programmes and activities in terms of their effect upon knowledge (Duckworth, 1985; 1986; 1988; Cree and King, 1988; Dyer, 1988a; Rhymer,

1992); feelings (van Wissen, 1992; Farnbank, 1993), and behaviour (Payne, 1981; Bires *et al.*, 1982; Mulligan, 1989; Park, 1997) and finally studies that have examined the potential for Earth Education to deliver the national curriculum (Rowbotham, 1983; Heath, *ca.*1988; Mollard, 1991).<sup>23</sup>

In his summary of the research of Earth Education Martin concludes that:

Earth Education programs and activities have not received an equal amount of attention. Most studies have been directed at examinations of the Sunship Earth program or at Earth Education in general. Other published programs such as Sunship III, Earth Caretakers, Earthkeepers and the ACC programs have been largely ignored. Likewise, individual activities, such as Conceptual Encounters, Magic Spots or Earthwalks, have also been considered only partially by studies that have attempted to examine their contribution to the Earth Education approach in general. Therefore priorities for future work include thorough examinations of Earthkeepers, Sunship III and ACC programs where possible, or more focused examinations of Earth Education Vehicles such as Magic Spots, Conceptual Encounters or Earthwalks (Martin, 2007, p.35).

Earth Education programmes like, Sunship Earth, Sunship III, Earth Caretakers are not discussed in this thesis but all contain Magic Spots. Earth Education Vehicles – Conceptual Encounters, Earthwalks and Magic Spots – appear in all programmes and are the means whereby the programmes impart knowledge, feelings and awareness. Martin suggests that there should be more focused examinations of Magic Spots as well as the other ‘vehicles’.

I need to make it clear that this thesis does not represent such a study. It is not designed to critique the efficacy of Magic Spots in terms of the national curriculum, or its integrity as part of an educational programme, or its place as part of educational theory or pedagogy. My interest is the nature of children’s experience of solitude in the natural world. Participating in the leadership of the

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<sup>23</sup> These references from Martin, D. (2007) PhD: An Interpretation of "Earthkeepers" at a Scottish Outdoor Education Centre, Liverpool John Moores University.

earth education programme, Earthkeepers, is the context and opportunity which enables me to pursue this research.



## Chapter 3 Data



In my magic spot I have noticed some really amazing things. I noticed a colourful ladybird and bugs. My favourite is hearing the wonderful trees going 'Wisha wisha wisha', it sounds as if they were really enjoying their selfs. And the fresh air makes me think of a new world.  
(Unnamed, Magic Spots 2005 10 year old)

# Chapter 3

## Data

### 1. Initial Research Plan

I have, throughout my Christian ministry, discovered, practised and taught the art of contemplation, silent prayer, and solitude. Many Christian adults, in my particular non-conformist evangelical tradition, struggled with both the theory and the practice. In turn I struggled to find ways to teach and encourage stillness with workshops, tapes and books. It took a great deal of effort for the church to discover a way of being which supported a way of living against the dominant culture.

My Christian preaching/pastoral role demanded the use of some religious language but my aim then was to dismantle that language and disengage it from a privatised devotional context in order to make it both sensible and usable. Over a long period of ministry in the inner city groups involved in practical ministry engaged in an attempt to clearly identify and describe the concepts of our religious faith and set about experimenting and discovering the sort of life-style, mind-set and action which followed from those concepts. The church, as a body encouraged the awareness of: the need for process, the exchange of ideas and the inevitability of change, as we learned the ability to develop a life-style of our own choosing and strategies which conform less to the dominant culture and more to learned and chosen concepts for life and action. The cultivation of contemplative reflection was a fundamental part of this process and it took many years to develop.

Therefore, I was surprised when we conducted our first Earthkeepers™ programme in 2001 how easily children took to Magic Spots. They live in a world of continual electronic interaction, of consistent sound, music, noise and traffic

and often with very little opportunity to be alone. Yet the enjoyment and delight in the experience was evident from their willingness to repeat it, gaining insights from each opportunity and from their determination to continue the experience both during their stay at the Centre and afterwards back at home. What triggered my fascination beyond this surprise was the profundity of the children's responses to the experience of solitude in the natural world. In the feedback sessions after Magic Spots in conversations during the rest of the programme; in letters and other writing sent to us after the visit.

I watched the drops of dew on the grass, they were reflecting the sun back, it was beautiful, then I realized that they were reflecting everything to everything.<sup>23</sup>

My experience of bringing up children of my own, my Christian faith and theological reflection about children (see *Parenthesis 5*, p.256ff) made me want to listen *to* and listen *for*<sup>24</sup> these children in this particular experience. So I determined to interview children about their Magic Spot experiences. As I was considering how to do this along side our experience of working with the children at the Centre I became concerned about the possibility of a child, during such an empathic and attentive session, making a personal disclosure. Thus in co-operation with my Supervisor I decided to make a submission to the research Ethics Committee of the university.

The decision to submit this plan for research to the EDU Research Ethics Committee for consideration was not made about the subject matter of the proposed interviews but rather because of the possible personal disclosures, which might be made.

(Submission to the UEA Research Ethics Committee, May 2003)

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<sup>23</sup>I write this note on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 but, alas, I have no audio or written record.

<sup>24</sup>Listening to....listening for....: a theological reflection on spirituality in early childhood, in J. Erricker and C. Erricker (Eds), 2000, p.76 Spiritual Education, Cultural, religious and social differences: new perspectives for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I submitted my report together with proposed letters to parents and head teachers, and an information sheet about the research. It included the following summary:

Some of my data will be collected from conversations with environmental educators and children who participate in the Earthkeepers™ Programme.

All the children will have taken part in an environmental programme called Earthkeepers™ at the Eco-Study Centre where I work.

The subject of the conversations with the children will be about their experience of the natural world and in particular their reflections concerning the experience of solitude and how it affects their perceptions, thinking and behaviour. I will talk only to those children who expressed enjoyment of the experience. My purpose is not to investigate the extent to which this experience contributes to environmental education but rather, when solitude is a positive experience, what is the nature of that experience.

I wish to see each child at least twice in the year of their Earthkeepers™ programme and, when possible, follow them through for up to three years, even if this means they will have changed from primary to secondary school.

I expect to talk to between 25 and 50 children per year, following up to 10-20 children through a three-year period (*ibid*).

The response from the Ethics Committee was surprising and aggressive. At first they declined to give permission for the collection of these data without convening another meeting. Finally the response from the Chairman was guarded and made a proposal which shattered my plans for the research. The Committee required me not only to gain permission from the children, their parents and head teachers but insisted that both parents and teachers should be present during the interviews. In my view, then and now, such a presence would interfere with the purpose of the interviews: to gain, through shared experience and the trust of relationship with us at the Centre insights into the children's perceptions and thinking (Hay and Nye, 2006, p. 88). An important condition would have been to minimize pressure from people and culture which had resulted in the fact that for

most of the children Magic Spots was their first experience, if not of solitude, then of intentional solitude in the natural world.

In my aggrieved surprise at such a requirement which would subvert the point of the interviews. I abandoned this method of collecting data, and nearly abandoned the research project all together.

## **2. Re-thinking the research plan**

The experience leaves some negative reflections unresolved (see p.65f above). My submission to the Ethics Committee is itself proof of my own sensitivity to the needs of the children, and also the need to protect caring adults. Apart from my own counselling experience and pastoral ministry over many years I may not have perceived the need to make a submission to the committee at all. The subject matter of the interviews did not require it.

‘None of the children talked with will be less than 8 years old, and the subject of the research is not the focus of their possible vulnerability, for instance any possible abuse, or the fact that they may have been recently bereaved etc’.

(Submission to the UEA Research Ethics Committee, May 2003)

The manner in which the interviews might have been conducted provided a completely safe environment, both protecting confidentiality and the safety of the children. The interviewees were to be well prepared and the place and style of the interview were to be informal.

All children are vulnerable and in the information given to them before deciding to participate the style and place of the conversations will be clearly described. While conversation will be between the child and myself only, it will be informal, the subject will be the Earthkeepers<sup>TM</sup> Programme and particularly ‘Magic Spots’, and it will take place in a room, for example the Centre’s common room or a school’s library *while others are present*. In other words the conversations will take place in a place apart but visible, ensuring both the safety of the children and the protection of their confidentiality. (ibid, 2003, italics added 29.9.09)

Nevertheless the Committee, in my view, exemplified the kind of ‘silencings’ which, de Certeau suggests, tame thinking and imagination by maintaining a

culture of ‘spatial organisation, according to which everything that happens is classified, distributed and conceived’ (de Certeau, 1997, p.56 in Popen, 2006, p.131). This was not the outcome I would have expected from an institution so renowned for its postmodernism. The strictures ensuring parents and teachers being present during the interviews would make it less likely that any disclosure was made. Thus, in my view, the provision was being made to protect the wellbeing of the university (not difficult situations about disclosures) rather than to care for the children. The series of *Parentheses* provide plenty of data about my life story, I believe, to justify an indulgence here.

The indulgence is not only to align myself with Brian Thorne by admitting to ‘two apparently conflicting and alternating states of being – passionate hope and passionate anger’ (Thorne, 2003, p.2); but also to allow myself, reluctantly, like Professor Thorne, to accept the role of prophet with hope as my inspiration, and anger as my driving force (ibid). *Parenthesis 1* has a story which illustrates this, for example the story about compensation (on pp.108-9 and Appendix 4, p.xxiii). The inspiring hope is the vulnerability and openness of the children represented in this thesis; the anger comes from the silencing of these aspiring spirits by an social and political culture and an educational system which, to use another of Thorne’s apt words, *reifies* children.

However I still needed to gather data from the children. I decided to collect written material from children who had experienced Magic Spots during their stay at the Centre. I would also record, in journal form, conversations with the children during their stay and some memorable comments and experiences noted by our expanding earth education team.

My retreat from interviewing the children also promoted reflection about my own journey and the way it impacts on my way of looking at the world and the

children in it. I decided that I needed to focus more on the nature of my own experience and that of other environmental educators and activists. My interviews would now be with adults.

### **3. Gathering the data**

#### **Written responses from children in their Magic Spots**

Magic Spots, the experience of solitude in the natural world which is part of Earth Education programmes is described in Chapter 1, pp.14-19 and in Chapter 2, pp.59-60. The quotations from children which are included in the text are written responses either:

- ▣ from their special Earthkeeper Diaries given to them at the beginning of the Earthkeepers programme. It is stressed that these diaries are private and will only be seen by others if the children themselves choose to show anyone. Children write in these diaries either during the time of solitude or any time afterwards
- ▣ written by my request some three months after their visit when I have re-visited the school. They are asked to draw, paint or write anything, just a list of words, a poem, a thought, a sentence, a paragraph. No guidance or restriction is given. If a child can't think of anything, or doesn't want to do it, I indicate that this is fine. They are *not* forced to do it anyway.
- ▣ written by request of the teacher as above
- ▣ written by request of the teacher often used as part of the process of teaching 'creative writing skills' (COVP).
- ▣ from letters, sometimes from individual children from home, but mostly written as a result of a class activity at the request of their teacher, including artwork.

from group work, that is, greeting cards, reports, ‘magazines’ worked on by the whole class and their teacher as a response to their visit.

I have not conducted any interviews with any of the children (with the one exception of Rory and Harry (see Chapter 4, p.130 and Chapter 12, p.371f) and this was at the invitation of the head teacher of their school. The “texts” of the children’s responses are held at Ringsfield Hall. If a name is given with the response I keep the name, but reveal no information about the child, apart from the year the Magic Spot occurred. If there is an indication of geographical significance, then I have changed the name. I have permission for the reproduction of all the photographs which include children (see Appendix 2, p.vi). In all examples, apart from those of my own family, the photographs were taken by the teachers of the children.

These written responses arise, not normally from a classroom atmosphere, but from the relationship we endeavour to create with and for the children who come to the Centre.

My colleague/wife and I personally make a pre-stay visit to every school before they arrive on their residential. We attempt to sense and feel the children’s neighbourhood as well as that of their school; we meet the children, give a fun, ‘clowning’(see Chapter 8) presentation about the Centre, and make friends with the children, insisting that the first of our three rules at the centre is that they should at all times ‘Have Fun’!<sup>25</sup> When they do arrive, they feel ‘at home’ and feel free to chat to ‘Ross’ and ‘Chris’ even if we do sometimes have to combat the following kind of incident.

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<sup>25</sup> The only two other rules are simply (2) not to wear outdoor shoes or boots in the house, in order to keep the mud outside, and (3) remembering to listen to trainers and teachers and do as they say when giving instructions.

*John has put his bag down in the hall and has entered the dining room as instructed, he sees us through the hatch where we are dealing with the drinks and biscuits.*

*‘Oh, hi Ross and Chris,’ he says, ‘it’s great to be here.’*  
*‘Hello,’ we reply. ‘How was the journey?’ He is just about to reply when a voice off left (we can’t see the body, it’s the wrong angle through the hatch) shouts, ‘John, what do you think you are doing?’ Quite shaken, John says, ‘I’m just talking to Ross and Chris,’ looking worried in the direction of the voice, and back at us. The voice answers, as the teacher comes into our view, ‘Did anyone give you permission to talk to them?’*  
*We smile and wink at John, while assuring the teacher (whom we did not meet, in this case, when visiting the school) that we did ‘give him permission’ and at the same time coping with the sense that this might be an uphill struggle for the next four days.*

The style of ‘teaching’ during the activities is participatory, informal and dialogical (Freire, 1996, p.67). The sharing of learning together seems to rub off (to some degree) on to even the most controlling teachers by the end of the week. This means that the recorded responses of the children are supported by getting to know them and by friendship and conversation during the activities.

In the last six years we have been training a team of ‘Earth Educators’ to deliver the Earthkeeper’s programme. While responses to the children’s Magic Spots is gathered in the same way after the visit, I also have collected reports from this team of their own and the children’s experiences and recorded them in journal form. I have a large collection of quotations, anecdotes and art work from all these sources over a period of some nine years. In all this means some 60 groups, representing over 1500 children. I have also asked for written responses to Magic Spots from the network of Earth Educators across the world and have contributions from New Zealand, America and Finland.

I use these data in two ways. First, Chapters 9 and 10, Hearing Children's Voices, are an immersion in the words and pictures of these children together with an analysis of the categories of their response to:

- (a) their whole visit
- (b) the Earthkeeper's Programme, and
- (c) Magic spots in particular and some considered reflection.

Secondly children's quotations, most particularly arising from Magic Spots (but also from the other categories, always in Comic Sans font) appear throughout the text of the thesis as either an illustration, or a comment on the development of my hermeneutic spiral. The thesis contains contributions from over 80 children.

#### **4. Gathering data**

##### **Interviews with environmental educators and activists**

I am a member of Christian Ecology Link (CEL) and currently edit the magazine of the organisation, *Green Christian* and so serve on the Steering Committee. I am also an Associate of the Institute for Earth Education (IEE) and also serve on its Council as the Ringsfield Centre hosts the office of *Earth Education UK*.

I chose to interview some Steering Committee members of CEL, and Council members of IEE as well as some members of both organisations. The process began with sending a request for participation in the research project, together with an Agreement for Participation as a co-researcher (Appendix 2, p.ix). As a result of receiving 25 responses, over a period of three years I have chosen to conduct seven interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. In three cases I have returned to make a further interview, also recorded and transcribed.

In the first instance I asked participants to answer a few questions in writing (Appendix 2, p.viii). I use some of these responses in the text of the thesis. The interviews were carried out in a conversational style. Each interview started using the participant's written material to give the conversation a context and a

beginning. After that, we talked together. In the follow-up interviews I requested time to talk further about specific issues or aspects of their lives, influences and experiences revealed in the first interviews. I use moments, quotes, attitudes and stories from these interviews within the text of the thesis. My intention, which was made clear to each participant, was to see if there were resonances between their experience, my own experience and the experience of the children who have participated in the environmental programmes at Ringsfield EcoCentre.

The experience of the interviews was enjoyable, very moving, often profound. We often shared the sense of the ‘sacred’, whether the participants were people of faith, or of none. It was not an information-gathering exercise; rather it was an experiment in community. We listened to one another, and listened to the silence and the gaps and the ‘static’ in between.

The epitaph at the beginning of *Chaos* (Gleick, 1987)<sup>26</sup> is:

Human was the music  
Natural was the static.

Ruth Sanford, in a paper entitled ‘The *Person-Centred Approach and Chaos: From Rogers to Gleick and Back Again*’ (Sanford, 1992) points this out and comments:

In these two lines is the clue to the relationship between Rogers’ listening and the new science (Chaos). It is the awareness of ears that had been tuned to the beautiful ordered sounds of music created by human beings. I think the parallel there is with the pre-structured, well-organized systems of Psychotherapy from which Rogers came, created by human beings and the intrusion of static, the disruptive, the unexpected, the unintended sounds or noise that interferes with the pursuit of the orderly beauty of a created structure. The static for

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<sup>26</sup> See also Chapter 8, p.282

the therapist can be the individual, the unexpected, sometimes unintelligible attempts a client makes to express deep feelings (Sanford, 1992, p.2).

The interviews I conducted were not, of course, therapeutic sessions, or rather that was not their intention. There was often, however, an unexpected, mutual sense of well-being created by the mutual sharing of our stories. The stories are retold, as you would expect in the presentation of bricolage (Chapter 1 p.23), in between chapters and alongside reflections about the nature of our relationship with the natural world and about the nurturing of children.

## **5. Gathering Data**

### **Hermeneutics: Life story**

The first time I saw the word ‘hermeneutics’ was back in 1965 when I returned from Borneo<sup>27</sup> and arrived at Bristol Baptist College and Bristol University. I read that every week we were to study hermeneutics, which I was very soon to discover meant the interpretation of the text of the Bible. I have been fascinated to see over the years how the word has been more and more liberated from its imprisonment to only interpretation of Scripture; to the interpretation of any significant text; to the interpretation of story; to the interpretation of one’s own life story. The data for this thesis are not my autobiography they are the hermeneutic of the triggers<sup>28</sup> and recollections from that life story.

I tell the story of my warmth towards a word, in this case ‘hermeneutics’, (see *Parenthesis 4*, p.217f) generated by an early passion to expound the Word,

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<sup>27</sup> After leaving school in 1965 I went to Sabah, N.Borneo, Malaysia on Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). I taught in a primary school for one term, then in the Secondary School in Beaufort (now named Kota Kinabalu). I was a ‘live-in’ Boys’ Boarding House ‘master’. A life changing incident occurred when leading a group of boys on an expedition to climb the highest mountain in SE Asia, Kinabalu, (see Chapter 5, p.169ff.)

<sup>28</sup> ‘Triggers’ are those memories, of fact, of emotion, of significant experience which are continually, as it were, waiting to present themselves and influence any moment of time, any relationship, any experience in the present. This is more fully described in *Chapter 8* pp 277-283.

because it led me to openness towards its use in new ways, especially when I discovered ‘Hermeneutic Counselling’. By this time (the 1980s), a seasoned person-centred pastoral counsellor, I was immediately caught up with a model of counselling which enabled client and counsellor to walk together (or better, saunter, see Chapter 1, p.23-24 and Figure 1: Spiral 1, p.128; Figure 8: Spiral 3, p.254; Figure 10: Spiral 5, p.288), acknowledging their own hermeneutic and each other’s story. It is quite possible that without my warmth towards the concept of hermeneutics (albeit, at first a rather stunted version of the concept) I may never have embraced the idea of the therapeutic relationship as being two alongside each other, in a mutually therapeutic communion. This warmth became part of the process whereby I gained insight into the notion of interdependency being a part of becoming self, or the self having meaning. So that being alongside another means participating in their story as well as disclosing something of mine. (This was made much more significant in my own journey through the interpretation of the Holy Spirit being the ‘Counsellor’, the One-alongside-accompanying-us, see *Parenthesis 2*, p.94). In turn, without experience of the practice of such a model of counselling, I would have been left to find a different route to interpreting my current participation in the lives of children, being vulnerable and available (see Chapter 11, pp.361ff) to them, so that part of my story becomes theirs and theirs mine. In another turn, without such an interpretation of the text of my story in what way would my appreciation of the possibility of communion with the more-than-human community of the earth have come about? I might have had a commitment to a life of service toward others, even self-surrender in a commitment to Jesus Christ, by which I mean, a decision and an intentional discipleship which follows the downward way and rejects upward mobility

(*Parenthesis* 2, pp.159-162). But would that have necessarily involved rocks and soil and bugs and water and air and animals?

With Rilke we ask: Earth, isn't this what you want: an invisible arising in us? With the question we pledge ourselves to linger in the gap between in-spiration, when we breathe in the world and are nourished by its pathos, and ex-piration, when on a subtle waft of air we die for the sake of the world, [and] surrender ourselves to speak its visions and dreams. (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.170)

My own story inevitably influences how I understand and make sense of the Magic Spot experiences of the children I have met in the last ten years. And this is precisely why it is essential that my life story is interwoven with my research story. 'One benefit of the postmodern movement...is the clarity it gives to our understanding that there is no such thing as an objectively situated neutrality in human affairs...Everyone, without exception, is situated within a context of beliefs and values that both blinds and enlightens them to aspects of reality' (Hay, 2006, p.82). Hay makes it clear that no researcher, especially in a field like spirituality<sup>29</sup>, can possibly claim to embrace a superficially neutral, open position and that an honest acceptance of affirming that the primary goal of research is knowledge will reduce 'the likelihood of our personal bias distorting the data to fit preconceptions about how the world ought to be' (ibid, p.85). Hay makes reference to Gadamer's insistence that prejudice is necessary for effective understanding. Gadamer claims that when we listen to someone or read a text we cannot either forget all our 'for-meanings' concerning the content and all our own ideas, or pretend that there is no meaning in another's words other than our own (Gadamer 2006, p.271). Rather the important thing 'is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings' (ibid).

The hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things and always in part so defined....A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring consistently and stubbornly as possible the

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<sup>29</sup> Hay and Nye's research was investigating children's spirituality; my research is investigating children's response to the experience of solitude in the natural world. I am aware that my own 'fore-meanings', as is made clear in the Parentheses through out the thesis, suggest a bias towards interpreting the children's "texts" as expressions of spirituality. However, hopefully sensitive to the "text's" alterity what emerges is an insistent need for adults to adopt a certain way of being in relationship to children if they are to be nurtured (see Chapter 8 pp.286-287 and Chapter 12, pp.372).

actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. (Gadamer 2006, p.271)

My own hermeneutic itself is questioned by the ecological context<sup>30</sup> in which I have lived and even more which the children who appear in this thesis are facing.

## **6. Gathering Data**

### **The Ecological Context**

From Waldo Emerson in the 1870s and John Muir in the 1890s to Jung in the 1920s and Rachel Carson in the 1950s to James Lovelock in present day there have been many prophets to warn us of the ecological crisis. Any one of them could be quoted. However, here is as good a summing up as any.

What is missing from this agenda (the rise of corporate power machines intent on extending their control and manipulation of natural resources for their own gain) is any conception of the cumulative impact on the Earth's ecosystems.... What we now face is a transformation of our world and its ecosystems at an exponential rate, and unprecedentedly brought about for the first time in the history of our planet, not by natural forces, but by the activities of the dominant species – us – across the Earth. The engine of that transformation is driven by three forces which have been steadily gathering pace over a long period: unfettered industrial exploitation, growing technological control, and soaring population growth, now joined by a fourth – climate change, the overarching dominance of which opens up an apocalyptic scenario for humanity. (Meacher 2004, an edited version of his Schumacher Lecture, 2003 by *Resurgence*, Issue 222, p.28)

Michael Meacher, MP goes on to describe the current consequences of the ecological crisis with facts like: 420,000,000 people live in countries which no longer have enough cropland to grow their own food; consumption of fresh water is doubling every twenty years and 500,000,000 people already live in areas prone to chronic drought and by 2025 that number is likely to have increased five-fold (i.e. to between one-third and one-half of the entire world population). Meacher

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<sup>30</sup> See my discussion of Gadamer's horizons and 'fusion of horizons' in Chapter 4, p.114ff).

adds the effect of rapid climate change on ecosystems which will become increasingly unbalanced – hotter deserts, land degradation becoming irreversible, marine systems, wetlands, coral reefs all becoming at risk; forests already severely devastated – ten million hectares in Indonesia alone burned in 1998, the hottest year on record, and the projection that by 2050 the Amazon rain forest will have died back. During this process the forests rather than absorbing carbon dioxide, would be releasing their stored carbon by the billions of tons.

The risk in all these accelerated phenomena is the run away feedback effect whereby shifts away from an equilibrium state unlock other changes which interact with the original shifts and grossly magnify their effects until the whole process spirals out of control and makes our planet uninhabitable. (ibid, p.28)

Meacher asks the question, ‘So what is to be done in the face of this apocalyptic scenario?’ (ibid)<sup>31</sup> My point here is that this is the context, not only of our work at the centre and the research for this thesis, but of all our lives at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However the description would be woefully inadequate if it was left there. It is unrealistic to isolate ecological crisis from world justice.

The G8 (in its original form as the G6) met for the first time in 1975. They have had 30 years to alleviate the misery and poverty endured by people in some of the poorest parts of the world. Yet at the beginning of the twenty-first century:

- A child dies every 15 seconds from lack of safe water.
- Most of the estimated 30,000 daily human deaths are preventable. Of the 20 countries with the highest mortality rates, 19 are in Africa, the only exception being Afghanistan.
- Half the people living in sub-Saharan Africa are living on less than a dollar a day, which is half the level of subsidy given to European cows.
- One billion people – approximately one-third of the world’s urban dwellers and a sixth of all humanity – live in slums.
- While at least a billion people on the planet subsist on the equivalent of a dollar a day or less, the concentration of wealth among a handful of people at the top has set new records. In March 2004 *Forbes* magazine listed a record 587 individuals and family units worth US\$1 billion or more, an increase from 476 in 2003. The combined wealth of billionaires also reached record levels – a

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<sup>31</sup> Meacher, in a more recent interview in *The Ecologist*, July 2010, suggests that the human race has 200-300 years before extinction.

staggering US\$1.9 trillion, an increase of US\$500 billion in just one year.

These figures suggest that the G8 either have a penchant for keeping the majority of the world's population in a perpetual state of impoverishment, or head a global system that is out of control. (Hubbard and Miller, 2005, p.2)

Poverty, injustice and violence are not new in the last thirty years. If they are as old as 'civilisation' the growth economy has exacerbated environmental destruction which in turn impacts the planet with even more poverty, injustice and violence. Thus when I meet a group of excited, eager 10 years olds and introduce them to the grounds of the Centre I am all too aware, for instance, that during the 45 minutes or so of the tour round our grounds, at least 180 children have died some where in the world and that, without knowing it the children on the tour, imprisoned, as they are, in a unlimited-growth-economic system, are being taught to live in a way which will only increase that number,

## **7. The Hermeneutical Process**

It would be an illusion to suppose that the context of this thesis is the global ecological crisis, far from it. Rather it is the global crisis processed through my own life and faith; or my own spiritual journey processed by the impact of the global crisis. A book which among other goals tells the story of one man's mission to 'make a dent in the monolith of academic psychology, with its frightening numbers and its cold anonymity' (Freeman 1993. p.2) begins:

I begin this introductory chapter, along with each of the chapters to follow, with a life. My reasons for doing so are straight forward. First and foremost, it seems to me to make good sense to ground what are ultimately some very difficult issues concerning human life in life itself. (ibid, p.1)

The first chapter heading is 'To be mindful of Life'. The context in which my thesis emerges is to be mindful of life and faith by inquiring into my faith and the faith of others. Freeman describes his work as *about* the rewriting of the self (the title of the book), 'the process by which one's past and indeed oneself is figured

anew through interpretation' (ibid, p.3). The process of interpreting my journey of faith and spirituality becomes rewriting my self as the back-cloth to the recollective process. 'For this very process, in addition to being an interpretive one through and through, is also a recollective one, in which we survey and explore our own histories, toward the end of making and remaking sense of who and what we are' (ibid, p.6).

Freeman argues for an acceptance of a hermeneutic of one's own story where connections are made from past to present to make meaning. 'My own way of understanding things, as local and transient as it may be, tells me so' he writes (ibid, 14) and it is this existential connectivity which requires parts of *my* story of faith and life to be told through out the text.

Hay introduces Muneo Yoshikawa's discussion of four ways of handling the crossing of a cultural boundary because he understands that adults attempting to understand the spirituality of children even within their own society may require the same skills as those investigating a culture remote from their own (Hay, 2006 pp.83, 84). In summary these are: the *ethnocentric mode* which according to Hay takes no notice of the perspective of with whom I am speaking; the *control mode* – using information from the other in order to explain their actions from my point of view; the *dialectical mode* where the objective becomes a fusion of ideas so that there are no differences after all. Fourthly there is the *dialogical mode*. This mode draws on the ideas both of Martin Buber and Buddhist philosophy in seeing human beings as complete only in relationship.

Whilst the dialogue is between two people who are separate and independent, they are simultaneously and inevitably interdependent. It is from this stance of mutual respect that the difficult process of entering the gap in understanding takes place. (ibid, p.84)

The *Parentheses* between the chapters of this thesis are retrospective reflections of how the dialogical mode has become the driving force of a life long process of entering into the gap which is the *and* between I and the Other.

This project is about my journey home. From that moment of, though illusory, ontological complete aloneness in the birth canal (see Chapter 5 p.165ff) which led me away from self, others, the earth and God, I am able to re-collect my life, but now in relationship, grieving, reconnecting, listening and sharing, using the moments of perception and tools of experience which have come to hand.

For instance, as I have mentioned, when a group of children arrive at our Centre I take them on a ‘tour’ of the grounds. It is a time to have fun discovering the fourteen acres which is theirs to explore during their stay. It is not a time of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’, though admittedly opportunities are found to point out some potential dangers and how to deal with them. I always take the time to ‘close the curtain of silence’ (see Chapter 1, page 16). Suddenly, in the middle of all the running and discovery, we will take time to listen. Some children find it very funny at first, especially of course if someone sneezes or farts, but remarkably it is a joyous moment. We have stopped; we hear the birds, insects, wind and rain; we see rabbits, squirrels, bees, blue, wet, mud. We move off on our way happily full of the sights and sounds ...

The journey of reconnection begins when ‘we shut up enough to hear the Angel in the moment’ (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.169).

... unless, that is, some dried-out young (or older) control manager, sometimes called a teacher, in the middle of it all lets rip, pulls a child aside and shouts, ‘**Will you be quiet, do what you have been asked to do, just keep quiet.**’ It is then that I need help to grieve, and say with my broody companion R. S. Thomas.<sup>32</sup>

Somewhere beyond time’s

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<sup>32</sup> R.S. Thomas is part of my life story. See Chapter 7, pp.239ff.

curve civilisation lifted  
its glass rim. There was  
a pretence of light

for nations to walk by  
through the dark wood, where history  
wintered. Following I came  
to the foretold frontier

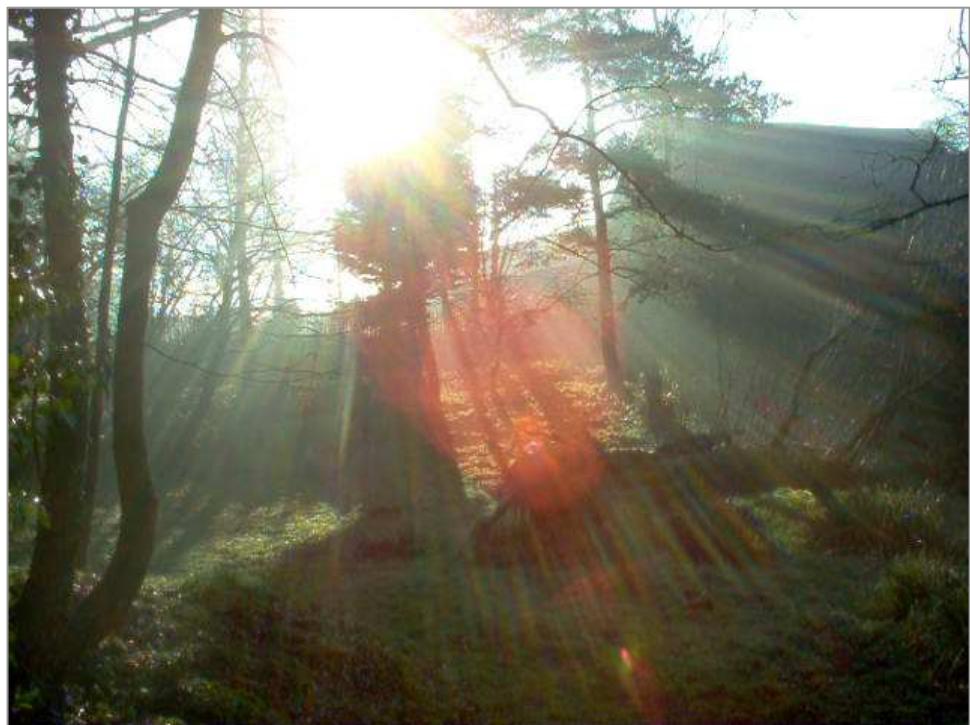
where with a machine's  
instinct the gun's nostrils  
flared at the blooms held out  
to them by the flower people. (Thomas, 1986, p.37)

The journey home through the pathetic heart awakened by grief is a journey of remembrance. In its pathetic condition, the heart awakens to its imprisonment within a world that has lost its vision of the visible order of things as a dehiscence, a flowering, of the invisible. Because the heart cannot bear this absence of the invisible world, because it cannot bear what the mind in its isolation has done, its journey becomes one of grieving the broken connections between itself and nature, a grieving which in its remembrance of those connections begins the process of restoring them. (Romanayshyn, 2002, p.172)

This thesis is in dialogical mode. The dialogue is between children in their magic spots, and adult friends and working colleagues and my own spiritual journey. It identifies a spirituality which may provide a new way of being outside the Cartesian dualism which is now marked by the 'catastrophe of economic and ecological exploitation' (Soelle, 2001, p.89).

## *Parenthesis 1*

### Metaxis: sauntering in the in-between



We have stared and stared, and not stared  
truth out, and your name has occurred  
on and off with its accompanying  
shadow.  
(from Hebrews 12<sup>29</sup>, R.S. Thomas, 1986, p.11)

## *Parenthesis 1*

### Metaxis: sauntering in the in-between

All spirits occupy the middle ground between humans and gods. As mediators between the two, they fill the remaining space, and so make the universe an interconnected whole' (Plato, 1994, p.43-44). 'Middle ground' in this passage is translated from the Greek, μεταξύ (metaxu), meaning "between + in, in the state of the middle, betwixt, between, between-whiles, in the interval, neither good, nor bad" (Liddell, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.114)<sup>36</sup>

My first encounter with the notion of the 'in-between' being not only a real space but the place of creation and creativity was back in the 1970s. It was articulated by John V. Taylor in his award winning, *The Go-Between God* (1972). It is Taylor's description of the Holy Spirit. The phrase, *go-between*, is not only a definition of the space which is the 'in-between' but also the description of the energy, movement, the awareness and communication alive there.

I will spend considerable time and space exploring Taylor's approach because his way of thinking has turned out to be a significant key in opening my mind, heart and soul during my oneric, sauntering journey. I remember reading the book when I was the minister in a Baptist chapel in Magor, South Wales. I was 27 and remarked to those who gave me the book as a present that it seemed so 'unfair' that anyone could write a book which was so inspired and life-changing on every page! It was as though the very 'ruach' which Taylor seeks to reveal was breathed into me as I was touched and activated by something that comes from the fiery heart of the

divine love' (Taylor, 1972, p.18) and experienced an annunciation of desiring and experiencing 'the elemental energy of communion itself, within which all separate existences may be made present and personal to each other' (ibid).

I had been through two theological colleges, completed two theological degrees as well as preparing for the pastoral ministry in the shadow of the 'Honest to God' revolution which escalated into endless debate about the meaning of the word 'God' and all religious language. And yet, all of this, apart from one series of lectures (delivered by Dr Kent, see Chapter 1, p. 20 and Appendix 4, p.xx), was ignored, presumably intentionally, from both the academic and the pastoral training. Suddenly I was faced with:

All is imagery. Or, rather, all is experience which only images can adequately convey. We do well, therefore, to remember that the word 'Spirit' itself is a metaphor, just as the words 'Father' and 'Son' are also metaphors. The Hebrew *ruach*, the Greek *pneuma*, the Latin *spiritus*, all mean 'wind' or 'breath'. Even the north European *geist* and *ghost* are linked, according to Webster, with the Anglo-Saxon root *gast*, meaning 'breath'. In other words, we are dealing with a double analogy. Something in the physical world – the fierce wind of the desert, the breath of a living creature – is used as an image of an incorporeal element in man which cannot easily be named in any other way; and then this human 'spirit' is itself used as an image of another ineffable force which man feels working on him and believes to be divine. Maybe he concludes that his own 'breath' is derived from this 'Breath of God', but with regard to his understanding and naming of things he has worked it out the other way round. So we too must think what we mean by the 'spirit of man' in order to see better what we mean by the Spirit of God. (Taylor, 1972, p.7)

So began the lifetime struggle to 'do' theology by starting with experience and the point of view of humankind, rather than approaching humankind

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<sup>36</sup> This has been quoted previously in footnote 13 on p.24.

from the outside with the Bible and assertions about God. It was a struggle because it put me ‘on-the-edge’, experiencing liminality and its chaos, especially in the face of the certainties of ‘sound’ evangelical faith.

*Ruach* is a different kind of power inherent in man, associated not so much with his being alive as with his being a person. We might call it the power of his personhood, the power of his separate otherness, the power by which he is recognized as himself. But it is also his power to recognize, and to be impinged upon by, the otherness of the persons, things, realities which are not himself. For, as Hegel, says, ‘the truth of personality is just this: to win it through immersion, through being immersed in the other’. (Taylor, 1972, p.7-8)

Here was the beginning of another journey, or rather, another element of the same liminality: understanding the ‘self’ in terms of relational consciousness, let alone understanding that ‘relational consciousness’ (Hay and Nye, 1998, p.109) is, for many, as good a description of ‘spirituality’ as you are going to get (see *Parenthesis 2*, p.156; Chapter 4, pp.136,138,140; Chapter 6, p.204ff).

By this time I already had a working familiarity with Martin Buber’s work on the ‘I-Thou’ relationship (and the consequences of embracing this ‘way of being’ in pastoral care). But Taylor once again clarified the glaringly obvious (for those who could see). He pointed out that:

Eddington said some years ago: ‘We often think that when we have completed our study of *one*, we know all about *two*, because “two” is “one and one”. We forget that we have still to make a study of “and”.’ It seems that we have touched the Go-Between again. Here it may be apt to point out that Martin Buber did not normally omit the word ‘and’ as is done by those who, misquoting him, talk about ‘the I-Thou relationship’. Whether betokened by a word or a hyphen, however, it looks as if nothing can emerge from chaos without that mediation between one *and* another which I have suggested is the action of the Holy Spirit. (Taylor, 1972, p.29, my emphasis)

In the same ‘spirit’ as that which insists on studying the ‘*and*’ I have been unable to let the ‘consciousness’ of relational consciousness lie unattended because Taylor would not either, though Taylor preferred the word ‘awareness’. He doggedly, in the early part of his book, insisted again and again that part of the work of the Go-Between was to make the ‘one’ aware of the ‘other’. He gave illustrations and examples from the biologists and physicists of the time: ‘Biology is the study of the larger organisms, and physics is the study of the smaller organisms. And every organism, large or small, is a perceiving entity … a perceiving, responding being’ (Birch, 1968 in Barbour (Ed), 1968, p.211). Birch accepted that terms like ‘awareness’ or ‘recognition’ are, at best, models, or metaphors, however, he argues, ‘that everything, down to the primary particles of matter, seems to be capable of “awareness” (not consciousness, of course) and of response, not only towards the wholeness of the system of which it forms a part, but also to the upward pull of unrealized potentiality’ (ibid, p.212). I had, of course, not yet heard, in 1973, of Gaia scientists like Harding and his ‘Bacteria are deeply sentient creatures …’ (Harding, 2006, p.159)<sup>37</sup>, or even Rogers and his ‘actualising tendency’ (Rogers, 1980), see Chapter 11.

In his primordial nature God is ‘the absolute wealth of potentiality’ of the universe. God confronts the world in his primordial nature which is the lure of unrealized possibility. The world experiences God as the world is created. (Birch, in Taylor, 1972, p.31)

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<sup>37</sup> The full quote can be seen in *Parenthesis 2*, p.152.

Over thirty years later, Berry supports this understanding of the continuity of all parts of creation, inorganic, organic and reflexive as being fundamental to the concept of the interconnection of all things. ‘The materialism of science of the spiritualising tendencies of religion that refuse this continuity of the human and all our capacities with the natural world ends up with a radical disassociation of the human from the universe about us. Moreover, to identify this disassociation with spirituality is to mistake the entire meaning of the significance of spirituality in its human expression’ (Berry, 2006, p.56). Fundamental to the theology of the Go-Between is that both human and spirit are on the *inside* of creation.

... if we are to think of a Creator at all, we are to find him always on the inside of creation. And if God is really on the inside, we must find him in the processes, not in the gaps. We know now there are no gaps, no points at which a special intervention is conceivable. From first to last the process has been continuous. Nature is all of a piece, a seamless robe. There is no evidence of a break, as we once imagined, between inorganic matter and the emergence of the first living organisms; nor between man’s animal precursors and the emergence of man himself. If the hand of God is to be recognized in this continuous creation, it must be found not in isolated intrusions, not in any gaps, but in the very process itself. (Taylor, 1972, p.28)

The activity of the spirit is the process of creation. But Taylor’s articulation of this notion that the spirit always acts in the ‘in-between’, also includes the understanding that to choose a way of being and knowing like that of the Go-Between is to live, aware of, if not in, the in-between too. This disclosure in particular was emblazoned in my own being when, on page 27 of this in-between book, two sentences grasped at me, made contact and dragged me into the in-between. Taylor continues with the first of ‘my

sentences': '*Creation, providence and redemption are aspects of one action*' (Taylor, 1972, p.27).

Back in 1973, only twelve years after my 'yes, to God, in Incarnation' (see *Parenthesis 2* p.143ff) I was still struggling with the idea that faith in Christ, God incarnate, necessarily required a 'redemption story which saves individuals out of the world rather than integration into the world' (Berry, 2006, p.69). Here suddenly, Taylor released me from the prison of dogma and the need for certainty. In an ordinary, common-sense way concluding a paragraph about the unflagging, continuous work of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the second of 'my sentences': '*Whenever faith in the Holy Spirit is strong, creation and redemption are seen as one continuous process*' (Taylor, 1972, p.27). So evangelical faith for me became, very clearly, what it had been for my early mentors: a participation in the continuing ongoing work of creation and not simply in the redemption of and away from that which had been created long ago. So Taylor made it crystal clear, to evangelise means 'to recognize what the Creator-Redeemer is doing in his world and try to do it with him'. He quoted Professor Leonard Hodgson:

The following that Jesus wanted was not that of man drawn by personal devotion to himself, or of those who were concerned about their own salvation, but of those who would share with him in his devotion to the finding and doing of the Father's will. To Jew and Gentile alike this was so utterly incredible to them that he could possibly think of religion as not involving concern for God's favour and the soul's salvation, or of these not being blessings promised to God's elect. (Hodgson, 1967, p.29)

Now I was being lured to saunter with Teilhard de Chardin (*Parenthesis 2* pp.156f; Chapter 5, p.174; *Parenthesis 3*, p.188; *Parenthesis 6*, p.322f) and

Carl Rogers (p.89; Chapter 5, pp. 183f: Chapter 11, p.343ff), with R. S. Thomas (Chapter 1, p.20; Chapter 3, pp.83; p.85; Chapter 4, p124 and 137; *Parenthesis 2*, p.149; Chapter 7; *Parenthesis 4*, p.234-5 ) and Martin Luther King Jnr. (Appendix 5, p.xxxxviii; Chapter 9, p.291), with Christians and Sufis, with ecologists and peace activists, with poets, clowns and Mother Teresa (see p.96), prophets and atheists, jesters and jokers. Taylor gathered together for me poets and mystics, prophets and children, the great and famous in the ‘ordinariness of this kind of knowing’(Taylor, 1972, p.18).

To envisage creation in terms of life-giving energy and inspiration is a far profounder insight than the earlier image of God the potter or builder who remains outside and essentially separate from his handiwork. The poets and mystics have always been aware that the whole earth is full of his glory. ‘We are all in him enclosed’, said Julian of Norwich, ‘and he is enclosed in us!’ And the pagan Plotinus anticipated the same thought: ‘We must not think of ourselves as cut off from the source of life; rather we breathe and consist in it, for it does not give itself to us and then withdraw itself, but ever lifts and bears us.’(Taylor, 1972, p.26-7)

So in the process of my life there began a growing appreciation and acceptance of the clowns, the clowns of God<sup>38</sup>, the in-between people.

My spirit, therefore, is never uniquely mine as are my body, my life, my individuality. It resides only in my relatedness to some other. Spirit is that which lies between, making both separateness and conjunction real. (Taylor, 1972, p.8)

The Go-Between God has her<sup>39</sup> being in the in-between and moves from one to the in-between to the other and back, never staying with

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<sup>38</sup> *The Clowns of God*, West 1982. See also *Parenthesis 4* Prophets and Clowns p.238f.

<sup>39</sup> *Ever since the early days of my Birmingham ministry (1976 -1990) I have used the feminine pronoun for the Holy Spirit. In the Latin and Greek translations of the Old Testament ‘wisdom’, the Spirit is translated from the Hebrew as a feminine noun. In the days when we were trying to struggle with Christian masculine descriptions of God I found this ‘device’ a creative way of introducing the concept of God as ‘mother’ as well as ‘father’.*

one or the other and, just like the break-through of incarnation (*Parenthesis 2* p.151f), belonging entirely to both. This resonates with Plato's metaxu (see page 86): 'he underlines that the metaxu is a dynamic space between two separate things where mediation keeps the universe together' (Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.114).

Human's existence takes place in tension in the space between, not at the poles. Rather than seeking to move to one pole or the other we should explore this in-betweenness. (ibid, p.115)

Lind quotes Boal, the founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed, who speaks of metaxis as:

... the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image. The participant shares and belongs to these two autonomous worlds; their reality and image of their reality, which she herself has created. (Boal, 1995, quoted by (Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 2006, p.114)<sup>40</sup>

The Spirit (I choose to call her 'Holy') is that which *is* the metaxic space and also that which *operates in* the in-between, that is, between a 'one' and an 'Other'. It is incarnation seen as 'break-through' from one to another which insists that without real embodiment of the spirit, there is no 'inspiriting of the flesh'. Where there is no acknowledgement of this

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<sup>40</sup>Lind helps with a note from 'Myth and metaxy, the myth of metaxis' unpublished manuscript prepared for the 4th World Congress for Drama/Theatre and Education, Bergen, Norway, July 2-8 2001 'Tor Helge Allern underlines that Plato and Aristotle only write of metaxy, metaxu and methexis, and not metaxis, a word commonly used to describe the theatrical process but which does not exist in Greek. The word's etymology and history, however, do help us understand its potential' (Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.114).

continuing soul-work, there is not likely to be space for life. Rather, the more the in-between is closed up, the more life is shrivelled and lost.

That is the gift of the Go-Between God, the Spirit just as he opens my eyes in recognition of some other being and generates a current of communication between us, in the same way he can open my awareness towards the reality of myself, my shadow and my light, and give me an empathy towards both ... This also is his essential act of creation – either in the cosmos or in the self. It begins with the recognition of absolute otherness and goes on to the interplay of communion. (Taylor, 1972, p.22-23)

All faith in God is basically a way of “seeing the ordinary” in the light of certain moments of disclosure which have been the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Taylor movingly describes such a moment of disclosure: He describes an occasion when a West Indian women in a London flat was told of her husband’s death in a street accident. The shock of grief stunned her and her trance-like silence went on for days, embarrassing family and care workers who went in and out. Then the schoolteacher of one of her children came and, without a word, she threw an arm around the tight shoulders, clasping them with her full strength. The white cheek was thrust hard against the brown. ‘Then as the unrelenting pain seeped through to her the newcomer’s tears began to flow, falling on their two hands linked in the woman’s lap. For a long time that is all that was happening. And then at last the West Indian woman started to sob. Still not a word was spoken and after a little while the visitor got up and went, leaving her contribution to help the family meet its immediate needs.’(Taylor, 1972, p. 243)

Taylor’s comment is simply, ‘And the Holy Spirit is the force in the straining muscles of an arm, the film of sweat between pressed cheeks, the

mingled wetness on the backs of clasped hands. [The Go-between] is as close and as unobtrusive as that, and as irresistibly strong' (ibid, p.243).

The Go-between is also active in young ones. First, in that irresistible urge to feel, touch and enjoy. In this picture of one of my grandchildren, you can see that Ashley (8 months) has already picked a blade of grass.



She has it in her right hand. She has already stroked it, felt its almost unfeel-able shininess, and softness and the slight resistance as she pulled it and heard the tiny popping sound as it broke off the plant. She holds on to it. She has looked, gazed at it long and intently. Now her attention is with

her left hand, touching the very tip of another blade of grass. The Creator-Spirit is coursing through these blades of grass. Ashley is in communion with Her. The oscillating, reverberating life of the Spirit is speaking to an 8-month-old. She will never forget it. And, when a child is older and articulation is developing, that same spirit is present. Communion and communication is remembered and received.

*My magic spot was by the wooden playground under a tree. It was very quiet and peaceful. But I heard lots of banging from the stable being built. I saw lots of little bugs and conkers. I also saw a field of green grass. It smelt very earthy and musty. It made me feel peaceful and at rest but also very sleepy. I was in the middle neither happy nor sad but just right.*

*(Saeng, aged 10, 2002 Magic Spots described p.7)*

That same Spirit is active betwixt and between people in crowds:

*In 1981 I met Mother Teresa, along with four thousand other people! I was in Detroit visiting an inner city Christian community, not unlike my church in Birmingham. Mother Teresa was coming to town so we went to see her.*

*After the grand service Mother Teresa spoke. Almost before you could start to hear, it was over. She told us that if we wished to live in this disturbed world in truth, with effect and with dignity then we should, ‘Love God, and love our neighbour.’ Then she went and climbed up on to her chair (and her legs still didn’t reach the floor). I was stunned – is that all, I thought (to my shame ever since). As I ‘woke up’ from my shock or disappointment I realised that the silence was still as perfect. I looked up and saw what I had not been able to see when she was standing, Mother Teresa’s eyes. Even from the huge distance of the length of Detroit Cathedral they shone out with a speech that seemed to engulf us all. The still silence remained for 35 minutes. I saw no movement, I heard no movement; it was simply silent. I have often wondered about all the children and*

*babies who were there, why did they not stir, how could they keep so still so long? And what about all those outside? After 35 minutes the silence dissolved. The trumpets started again, the procession went out. But I was there in the in-between and I didn't need the trumpets and I guess it was the same for many; we just went home, now changed.*

*(Walton, personal journal, 1981)<sup>41</sup>*

Dorothy Soelle suggests that there are three indispensable linguistic elements in the tradition of mysticism. They are negation, paradox and silence. Relevant here is the paradox; it is here that the in-between is held apart for long enough for exploration. She says that the paradox is ‘an attempt to approach from two opposite directions a factor that cannot be perceived or understood’ (Soelle, 2001, p.69). She offers bold word images as examples: ‘whispering silence’ or ‘eloquent silence’; ‘fertile desert’; ‘soundless tone’; and ‘silent cry’ (Soelle, 2001, p.69). The significance of the language is that no synthesis can be made; there can be no reconciliation of polarities. The ‘silent cry’, the title of Soelle’s book, is a mystical name for God, whose divine power is not grounded in domination and commandment. ‘It is a name that everyone can use, everyone who misses the “silent cry” that has often become inaudible among us’ (Soelle, 2001, p.69).

She gives another powerful example, this time with verbs from a poem originating in the circle around Meister Eckhart.

O my soul, go out; God, come in!

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<sup>41</sup> The full version of this story is in Appendix 4, p.xxii.

When I flee from you, you come to me.  
When I lose myself, I find you ...  
(Buber, 1948, in Soelle, 2001, p.70)

And Soelle comments, 'Fleeing and coming, losing and finding become one process' (Soelle, 2001, p.70). This is the process where 'enfleshed spirit' and 'inspirited flesh' (see below, Walton, 1985) exchange life and love.

The notion of embodiment is central to understanding this in-between state because meaning emerges through our bodies acting in metaxic space. Embodiment refers to the double sense of the body as living and the experimental structure or context of cognition where living is embedded. The body is not an object, but a grouping of constantly changing lived-through meanings. (Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.114)

Over twenty years ago I wrote in a series of Advent meditations:

So, here it is, the description of God born in human flesh (referring to Luke 1.46-55). God promises us that the consequences of his divine Yes to our humanity is that our flesh is inspirited ... Adherence to theological doctrine is insufficient reason to celebrate the incarnation. We miss the point of God's love if we leave the mystery of the divine oneness with Jesus Christ. For the purpose of God enfleshing his spirit in Christ was to fulfil his promise to integrate *our* flesh and his Spirit. (Walton, 1985)

While Taylor's account of creation, creativity and the Go-Between includes the interconnection of all species, his message is focused, though by no means exclusively, on the communication and communion between the human and the divine and therefore between human and human. Lind's commentary on metaxis in and out of the context of the Theatre of the

again not exclusively, on human relationships. Lind refers to the work of the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty and so widens the focus to include the

more-than-human earth community. Berry's focus (see *Parenthesis 2*, p.151) is the continuity between all matter, including every single atom of the whole cosmos. My thesis explores the notion that it is the in-between, metaxic space, where communion and communication throughout the whole web of life can take place, including very often that which takes place at far below the level of conscious awareness.

David Abram, who drew on the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty to explore language, ecology and perception writes:

Perception is precisely this reciprocity, the ongoing interchange between my body and the entities that surround it. It is a sort of silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness – and often, even, independent of my verbal awareness. (Abram, 2004, p.52)

Metaxis, is the place where paradox transcends contradiction. Richard Louv tells of the effect of nature games played by mother and daughter Janet and Julia. One game, as they wandered through the woods, was 'to listen for sounds they could not hear'. They called it 'The Sound of a Creature Not Stirring'. Their list included sap rising, snowflakes forming and falling, sunrise, moonrise, dew on grass, a seed germinating, a leaf changing colour, a spider weaving its web. 'Unlike many of her peers, Julia is not impressed by "stuff",' says Janet. 'What's real, what's enduring – a view from a mountaintop, a soaring bird of prey, a rainbow after a summer's rain – these things leave a lasting impression on her' (Louv, 2006, p.75). This was time spent in the 'in-between' where there is both communication and communion. Metaxis is 'where dialogue with difference takes place, where spirit and flesh, or matter and soul combine; where different voices,

worldviews, systems and beliefs converse with one another' (Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.123). Thomas Merton journals another example.

The rain surrounded the cabin...with a whole world of meaning, of secrecy of rumour. Think of it: all that speech pouring down, selling nothing, judging nobody, drenching the thick mulch of dead leaves, soaking the trees, filling the gullies and crannies of the wood with water, washing out the places where men have stripped the hillside...Nobody started it, nobody is going to stop it. It will talk as long as it wants, the rain. As long as it talks, I am going to listen. (Merton, in Abram, 2004, p.73)

This is echoed in the experience of a 10 year old participating in an Earthkeeper programme at the Kangaroo Island Earth Education Centre in Australia.

*Waves patter as I sit there and relax. When I look around I see birds flying free in the sky and rocks seem to be talking to each other in a kind way. Although people talk to me I take no notice. I am too involved in watching and listening to the earth speak. After listening to the earth I try to listen to my friends, but all I can hear is nature calling me to listen.*  
(Pupil aged 10, 1997 Magic Spots Observation p. 4)

Abram cites Richard Nelson recording the communication between birds and the Koyukon people. According to the Koyukon, when the *nodneeya* (the horned owl) speaks to humans, it utters only what is certain.

When it is about to speak prophetically, the bird first makes a muffled squawking sound – then it hoots in tones and patterns which can be interpreted. The most terrifying words it can say are 'Soon you will cry' ('Adakk'ut daa'tohtsah'), meaning that someone close to you will die. It may seal the forecast tightly with a name, and not long afterwards its omen will be fulfilled. (Nelson, in Abram, 1996, p 149)

Merleau-Ponty was committed to 'an exploration of the fundamental entre-deux [in-between] between science and experience, experience and the world' (Valera et al., in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.120). He

described patterns of interacting as ‘action-a-deux’ or dialogue. His essential position resonates with Taylor in that he was setting about the task of ‘relearning how to look at the world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xx), not with detached objectivity but from the inside. ‘We witness every minute the miracle of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationship’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xx). In his book, *The Web of Life*, Capra, who is investigating ‘a new scientific understanding of living systems’ suggests that the binary ‘either-or’ perspective is incapable of addressing global, ecological, and social problems. The web of life, is ‘not empty but alive with intentions, responses and actions arising from the system’s poor history. Complicity holds each of us responsible for the good or bad of the whole and bids us perceive and pay attention to the in-between’ (Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.120).

*In the mid-eighties, in my church in Birmingham, we were trying to pay attention to the ‘in-between’; relearning how to look at the world; slipping in to the in-between as a means of disengaging from our compliance with the powers that be, the status quo. We summarised our position like this:*

*We can now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, do all that Jesus did, and more, by living as if the Kingdom of God is present now, and accept the consequences.*

This is presented in the biblical and theological language we used together in the church, but it bears a resonance with the following: providing a context in which to set this thesis, namely exploring how to stretch metaxic

space enough to enable children to engage in learning which is available for future explorations of new ways of being, or better, ways of becoming, which will befriend the cosmos and not destroy it.

... we begin to see Boal's 'rehearsal for reality' as a reworking of real acts' in a constantly shifting *as-if* world. Performance, in play or presentation, enables continuous disruption of the taken-for-granted necessitating questioning of the binary distinction between body and mind. Through metaxic action, our bodies become generative sites of knowing; learning is tangible and available for future exploration. (Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.114)

In *The Theatre of the Oppressed*, the Joker plays the role of facilitating the 'disruption of the taken-for-granted'. 'S/he is the wild card: sometimes director, sometimes referee, sometimes facilitator, sometimes leader. The Joker is not neutral, merely passing messages from one side to another. The Joker enables metaxis to occur by constantly stretching the space to engage in a discourse of embodied critique and possibility' (Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.114). This is the role of the archetypal Joker, the role of court jester in the royal palace, the role of the prophet in Old Testament Israel or the poet/preacher in the church. Thirty-five years after reading *The Go-Between God* I find myself playing this role at this educational centre where we aim to so stretch the space, time and place to 'enable the conditions of metaxis so that stories can emerge into and from the world' (Lind, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.114).

Stories are transformative. 'They are not merely about movement, they create movement' (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.131). Popen is describing the work and philosophy of Michel de Certeau related

to urban planning. She quotes him, ‘In present-day language, nothing is as fundamental … as spatial organization, according to which everything “that happens” is classified, distributed, and conceived’ and comments, ‘He replaces that with the messier tactics of language use – narrating and speaking, suggesting a role for stories that is about seeing urban space as a fluid arena of narratives. Stories in motion’ (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.131).

It is not surprising that Taylor identified limitless energy with the function of the in-between Spirit. Commenting on Tillich’s chosen ‘name’ for God, Taylor writes, ““Ground of our Being” has always seemed to me too static a concept of God. “Ground of our meeting” is nearer the mark, and I think of the Holy Spirit as the *elemental energy of communion*’ (Taylor, 1972, p.18). And later (p.26), he refers to the opening of the Genesis story, where once again the image of the Spirit is irresistible energetic movement translated either as the gale force of a great wind, or ‘an oscillating movement more like the fluttering of wings, as in Deuteronomy 32.11: “As an eagle … hovers above its young.” So we are given the image of the Spirit of God brooding over the formless deeps in which nothing exists because nothing is separated, overshadowing them as one day he will overshadow a girl in Nazareth’ (Taylor, 1972, p.18) (Luke 1:35).

This movement and energy, which can be identified as creative restlessness (see restless anticipations in Chapter 12 p.366ff), is characteristic of what De Certeau uses to ‘take over the fixed places defined in advance by the

planners, and convert them for the purposes of ordinary people'. He calls the process 'the art of the weak' – the spatial practices of ordinary people (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.131). Popen refers to Deleuze and Guattari, who connect this movement with the symbol of the nomad.

The aesthetic human symbol for Deleuze and Guattari is the nomad, constantly translating striated space into smooth spaces of play. This translating is a kind of travelling that is simultaneously a mode of thinking in place. To voyage, they say, is to think. The nomad is not a migrant who leaves one place behind and enters another, but a nomadic traveller who 'voyages in place' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.482). 'We can say of nomads that *they do not move*. They are nomads by dint of not moving, not migrating, of holding a smooth space that they refuse to leave.' Thus, voyaging smoothly is a becoming – a difficult, uncertain becoming. (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.130)

Before I continue with the symbol of the nomad, I will deal with these new metaphors, 'smooth' space and 'striated' space. Though at the beginning of this chapter I stated that I first encountered the *notion* of the in-between in Taylor's book, *The Go-Between God*, I sub-consciously encountered the in-between space very early, possibly before I was seven.

As a child and teenager I used to have a recurrent dream. The dream subsided but has occurred occasionally throughout my adult life, and just recently has reoccurred a few times again. It is always the same. It goes like this.

*I find myself moving along just above the ground. I am standing, but moving, smoothly, very smoothly. There is no effort, I am not flying, I am simply moving just above the ground. At first the experience is good, but then the ground underneath begins to get bumpy and uneven but I continue to move over it all very smoothly. The journey (which never goes anywhere) continues with the ground getting*

*more and more uneven and difficult terrain, but I simply continue to move over it. It goes on so long and so smoothly it becomes a nightmare, which must stop. I simply cannot cope any longer with the roughness underneath and my smooth travel. I only stop when I wake.*

That middle ground, the space between humans and gods or between the exercise of power and the complicity of the weak, or between the status quo and improvisation, is not always an easy space to inhabit, which is why for many years I have carried this dream with a heavy negative interpretation. I discovered a long time ago that to move and act in ways which subvert the status quo, which imagines new ways of being and living, let alone to advocate such behaviour, brings with it consequences: opposition, rejection, pain and struggle (see *Parenthesis 4*, p.225f). Yet until recently, some part of me (see rebirthing in Chapter 5, p.165f), aroused by this dream, has been trying to escape painful consequences. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) in their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, have reinterpreted the dream for me. They describe two sorts of overlaying spaces, 'smooth' and 'striated' spaces. Striated space is walled and ordered, fixed and unchangeable. Smooth space on the other hand is the dimension of the imagination, uncertainty and the space of endless possibilities (ibid, p.481). I had been holding on to the 'striated space' dominant view, that struggle and pain have no useful role, and so I assumed that the 'nightmarish' feeling of moving smoothly signified that smooth was negative, that it represented the mechanical, unimaginative, stereotypical thinking of globalised consumerism, in which the individual becomes merely a unit of production and consumption. All this is packed into R. S. Thomas' image of 'the

machine' in his later poetry. Significantly for me, in several of these poems the word 'smooth' repeatedly had signalled the individuality-denying presence of the machine world.

The machine  
is our winter, smooth  
as ice glassing  
over the soul's surface. (Winter, MHT 69)

Nothing to show for it now: hedges  
uprooted, walls gone, a mobile people  
hurrying to and fro on their fast  
tractors; a forest of aerials ...

They copy the image  
of themselves projected on their smooth  
screens to the accompaniment of inane  
music. (Gone, F34)

I had assumed that, in my dream, the smooth space of moving was opposed to the roughness underneath and that communication or movement between the two was impossible. Whereas, a presentation of the image 'smooth' as meaning not the 'machine' but the place of 'uncertain but endless possibilities' of the imagination means that I have been able to connect this lifelong dream to the presence of the oscillating spirit of the in-between:

Smooth and striated do not cancel one another out so much as overlay each other. They permit a transition, a two-way passage between order and indifference ... There are openings in striated space, however narrow and occluded, for dodging into smooth space. This shifting brings dyssymmetrical ...

movements into play – it is transitive space. (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.130)

Popen is writing in the context of the Theatre of the Oppressed and she continues to give a playful and profound description of the role of TO actors. For me it is also a description of the Go-Between Spirit and all in-between people: ‘Actors [in TO] do not transcend one space into the other so much as they slip in-between them’ (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.130). The ‘roughness underneath’ of my dream becomes representative of the striated space which does offer ‘openings’, however small, to move from the one space to the other, through the in-between space.

That is the gift of the Go-Between God, the Spirit ... This sudden recognition in a single vision of what is and what might be is ... his essential act of creation – either in the cosmos or in the self. It begins with the recognition of absolute otherness and goes on to the interplay of communion. (Taylor, 1972, p.23)

I can now wait to experience the same dream, but with a difference. I will be getting to the time when the pain of moving so smoothly over the rough ground is too much to bear (as above, p.105) then I will suddenly see a narrow fissure. I will drop down into that fissure and slip in-between the rough and the smooth and enjoy the play of communion. Finding that metaxical space triggers memories of many incidents in my life. Here is one of them.

*In the middle of my ministry in Birmingham we were in the process of acquiring a number of plots of land around the church building in order to build an extension. The third plot was owned by a self-employed carpenter who had a workshop on the land.*

*There was a meeting of Baptist Church big-wigs to discuss compensation for the carpenter. The property adviser informed us that the minimum compensation we could pay would be seven times the rateable value of the workshop. But, he went on to say, he had done some investigations and discovered, much to his delight, that the rateable value had not been reviewed since 1920 and so we would only have to pay £70! A big smile went round the table and the chairman said, 'So, no more discussion needed, all those in favour?'*

*I leapt up in an instant rage. Red in the face, I asked them who they thought they were, what were their beliefs and why were they being such hypocrites? I read them passages from the prophets, Amos and Jeremiah and the rest, and a few words from Jesus too. I ranted and raved. Finally I proposed that we should do nothing now, but investigate what in fact the rateable value would be now if it had been reviewed, times that by 7 then decide how much more we should pay the carpenter and that we should commit ourselves to helping him find new and suitable premises. There was silence. The meeting was closed by the chairman who, as he went, suggested that we should all calm down and we would discuss the matter at the next meeting.*

*But there is more! That evening back at the Manse with the family there was a loud commotion on the street outside. I rushed out, to find the carpenter, brick in hand, leaning on the front wall weeping and shouting to me about the church and its evil ways seeking to ruin him. Eventually he told me what had happened.*

*The property adviser had gone straight from the closed-down meeting to visit the workshop. He told the carpenter that the meeting had decided to give him the compensation due to him; he had explained the facts and told him that it was £70 and he could do nothing about it. It was time for my rage again. We sorted it after a long hard battle of egos, of losing friends and making a couple of enemies, of persuading good Christians what we should be doing. The carpenter did have considerable thousands in compensation; we helped find him new premises not too far away and helped set him up to continue his business. And I used the story in my sermons for years!<sup>42</sup>*

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<sup>42</sup> A full version of this story is to be found in Appendix 4, pxxiii.

I now return to the symbol of the nomad. Popen suggests that the figure of the nomad is the same as the Joker in TO. ‘Boal has identified the Joker as the wild card figure, able to jump in and out of the performance, but never fully leaving – “he is magical, omniscient, polymorphous, and ubiquitous” (Boal, 1979, p.82)’ (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.130).

The Clown (my preferred image rather than Joker) is, then, both a harbinger of in-between or smooth places and acts as a midwife for anyone who wishes to saunter, or is voyaging, ‘a difficult, uncertain becoming’. In my own experience of clowning, under the tutelage of Vivian Gladwell of Nose to Nose (a clowning workshop group)<sup>43</sup>, it was the radical change from experiencing the world through the mind to experiencing the world through the body which enabled me to take notice of the extraordinary in the ordinary of everyday life and offers ‘counter-memories of the silencings that tame and commercialise’ (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.131) contemporary spaces, like education or care of the planet’s ecological systems, which grasped at me. This radical change made contact and dragged me back into the in-between to explore creativity and redemption *into the world* (see Berry’s ‘inscendence’, *Parenthesis 2*, p.158).

When we facilitate earth education with children at the Centre, their teachers become ‘Guardians of the secrets’. In reality their task is to play with us the role of jokers and clowns and midwives. One of our major

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<sup>43</sup> [www.nosetonose.info/index.htm](http://www.nosetonose.info/index.htm) - see also *Parenthesis 4* p.232.

shortcomings is our failure to find adequate ways to stretch the in-between space which the teachers need to inhabit ‘to engage in a discourse of embodied critique and possibility’ (Lind, p.123). It is a failure to lure teachers into the in-between so that they can become clowns themselves, stretching the metaxic space around the children. ‘Like a midwife, the Joker enacts and enables the conditions of metaxis … This task enables different voices, process, knowing to unfold, dancing metaxis into being’ (Lind, p.123). But it is difficult for teachers, stuck, as many of them are, in the ‘linguistic model of orderly grammar’ which has become an educational strategy ‘for taming thinking’ (De Certeau, in Boal, p.131) to allow the (significantly, teachers often refer to the children as ‘my children’) children on to a stage ‘of possibility and interaction enchanted with randomness that is not chaos and a serendipity that is festive and spirited’ (De Certeau, in Boal, p.131).

We have developed the habit of celebrating school visits by providing a Banquet – a special meal – on their last evening. In many ways it is not out of the ordinary. Normally the children would have set the tables themselves, but this day the dining room is locked and we set the tables for them: a bright runner on each table, flowers, lit candles, glasses with decorative napkins and a carafe of cordial. A notice of welcome to the Banquet displays the menu, surrounded with more candles. No great announcement is made; when the time comes the doors are unlocked and the inquisitive (because this time they did not set the tables and why were the doors locked?) children race in to choruses of squeals and ‘wows!’.

After one such meal, a teacher, a particularly golden hearted teacher as it happens, came up to us and said, 'Oh, Ross and Chris, that was lovely, the tables, the candles, it was lovely. What did you do that for?'

(How do we answer that?) 'It was for the children.' The teacher looked bewildered.

In a festival, as in an artistic creation, something exists that is not a means, but that is sufficient unto itself: the discovery of possibilities, the invention of encounters, the experience of these departures for 'other Places' – without which the atmosphere becomes stifling and seriousness amounts to everything that is boring in society. (De Certeau, 1997, p.118, in Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.131)



Transitive learning does not exist in the objectivity of bricks and mortar, in systems, attainment tests and curricula, but in the subjectivity of those who practise it, at the moment when they practise it (see Boal, p.125). What is true of the Theatre of the Oppressed should also be true of earth education at its best:

In TO it is common sense itself, as it has been constructed, that must be escaped and reinvented ... We are at risk of becoming dispossessed of the ability to venture beyond proscribed limits of thinking and acting. The task then is to find opening, slippages, fissures, spaces that can provide footholds onto different ways of thinking and acting. As TO practitioners, we seek aesthetic spaces to conjure alternative images and possibilities for those of us who are in the world but not *of* it in many ways. (Popen, p.125)

Transitive learning requires a space in which active engagement of the imagination can be realised. It may be that the priority in education is not the children but adults, especially teachers and young people's leaders who need to be liberated from the oppressions of the consumer society – loneliness, fear of emptiness, the impossibility of communicating with others. Anyone who cannot perceive why children should not be treated to a banquet on any day of the week may benefit from 'spaces of liberty where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future instead of waiting for it' (Boal, 2002, p.5).

## SECTION 2: The process toward the hermeneutic spiral

### Chapter 4 Hermeneutics: an interpretive methodology

#### Part 1 An Introduction to the “texts” and the turning spiral



‘Learning is circles and spirals. Circles are lazy learners. Spirals are excited learners. The roots go down deeper and deeper.’  
( 9 year old Rory, see pp.129,30)

# Chapter 4

## Hermeneutics: an interpretive methodology

### Part 1

#### An Introduction to the “texts” and the turning spiral

##### **Introduction**

The evolution of hermeneutics has been described by Prasad (2002) by identifying three classifications: classical, philosophical and critical.

The history of classical hermeneutic theory reveals its progression from a set of tools and techniques for understanding a text, usually a sacred text, (as often as not the text of the Bible); to general principles about textual interpretation in order to recover the author’s originally intended meaning (Schleiermacher, 1985, in Prasad, 2002, p.14); to a general theory about the interpretation of social phenomena and systems (Dilthey, 1976 in Prasad, 2002, p.15). The definition of the “text” dramatically changed through this development, from written holy text, to written texts in general to an understanding that ‘similar to texts, all social phenomena arise from human externalization (or objectification) of inner feelings and experiences’ (ibid, p16).

Philosophical hermeneutics is concerned not so much with a set of methods and theories for regulating interpretative practice, but rather with the understanding which takes place at the site of the encounter between reader and “text”<sup>43</sup> (Freeman, 2007, p.927). Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer contributed

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<sup>43</sup> I use “text” as a means of referring to the point just made that by “text” I mean not only a written text but any relevant social phenomena.

to the development of a hermeneutics which set the notion of interpretation free from the single focus of the intention of the writer to include not only the role of the traditions and contexts of the reader (interpreter) but also understood interpretation as a dialogue between the “text” and the reader.

Critical hermeneutics appears first to be a reaction against philosophical hermeneutics insisting that the first and foremost goal of interpretation must be the recovery of the original intention of the text’s author. However, writers like Ast (1980) and Habermas (1990) have built on the insights of philosophical hermeneutics to develop a more fully dialogical hermeneutics which brings a richer transformational potential for the exploration of meaning. The debate between Gadamer and Habermas was focused on the role of the prejudices brought by the “reader” to the interpretation. Gadamer’s prejudices are ideas, conceptions, views, ways of being which come from our own historico-cultural tradition which define ‘the limits and potentialities of our own horizon of understanding’ (Prasad, 2002, p.18). Gadamer regards them to be the *necessary* conditions of all understanding, not obstacles to interpretation. He does make a distinction between “productive” prejudices which are legitimate in the process of interpretation and prejudices which hinder the process. Habermas took issue with this distinction and the ways which Gadamer sought to filter prejudices. For Gadamer this process meant that, once unproductive prejudices were filtered out, the act of interpretation involved a “fusion of horizons” (that of the interpreter and that of the text) which is understanding meaning. Habermas’ objections are based on differing views of language. His view is that language itself is altered by culture, tradition and history and therefore inevitably becomes ‘a medium not only for the manifestation of a benevolently-understood tradition’, but also a ‘medium for domination, deception and social power’ (Habermas, 1990, p.128 in Prasad,

2002, p.22). Critical hermeneutics thereby insists on a more radical critique of “prejudices” influenced by the dominating culture of the age of the interpreter (see *Parenthesis 4*, pp.220f) while accepting the notion that interpretation is always rooted in the present and can only take place in and through the interpreter’s own horizon of prejudices.

Ricoeur (1990) develops the evolution of hermeneutics in a way which resonates with my own views. He suggests that both Gadamer’s and Habermas’s analyses are right. Gadamer does insist on a critique of one’s own “prejudices” and is not in opposition to Habermas’s critique of one’s own dominant culture.

Ricoeur seeks to reconcile two distinct moments or aspects of hermeneutic interpretation, namely, those of faith and doubt. The hermeneutics of faith interprets a text primarily with a trusting disposition; the hermeneutics of doubt, in contrast, adopts a critical and sceptical stance towards the text. (Prasad, 2002, p.23)

‘The critique of ideology is the necessary detour that self-understanding must take’ (Ricoeur, 1981, p.144).

I need to declare my own prejudice (in the Gadamer-ian sense, see p.115) or my “fore-conception” (Heidegger) even in this discussion about the methodology of interpretation. In my early theological training where my association with hermeneutics began (see also *Parenthesis 4*, p.218f) I learnt little about the history and evolution of hermeneutics, but what I did learn influences the way I interpret the texts about the concept and methodology of hermeneutics and the approach I intend to take. At college (1966-1969)<sup>44</sup> the course called ‘hermeneutics’ was about preaching. It was about preaching through the interpretation of the Bible.

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<sup>44</sup> Bristol Baptist College (est. 1742), the oldest Baptist College in the UK. Proudly I tell the relevant story of the college’s willingness in the eighteenth century to stand against the dominant culture. At that time there were Muslims in the city (it being a large trading port) and it was in 1759 that the college led demonstrations and protests on behalf of the Muslim community in order to gain their freedom to worship (Underwood, 1961).

In order to achieve this with integrity the preacher first needs to investigate the original text (if in Hebrew, for the Old Testament or Greek, for the New Testament then all the better); explore the text's context (i.e. history, culture, place in the Biblical story of salvation history); then tease out its meaning for those participating at the time. At this point the task has only just begun, we were taught. For then the preacher needs to investigate her or his contemporary context, individual, local, corporate, global, history, culture and place in the biblical story. Only then can the art of applying meaning from text to contemporary situation begin. Looking back it seems to have been a master class in the evolution of hermeneutics, a fusion of classical, philosophical and critical hermeneutics described above.

It certainly prepared me for Kearney's diacritical hermeneutics. It is a middle way between what Kearney describes as *romantic* and *radical* hermeneutics. That is in-between the 'appropriation' of Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Gadamer – discovering the original meaning of a "text" and pursuing a reconciliation between that and our own understanding, and the infinite alterity of Levinas, Caputo and Derrida – which 'invokes an irreducible dissymmetry of self and other' (Kearney, 2003, p.17). 'The key is to let the other be other so that the self may be itself again' (ibid, p.8). Thus diacritical hermeneutics 'explores the possibilities of intercommunion between distinct but not incomparable selves' (ibid p.18). My thesis includes the more than human community in those 'selves'. Kearney's description of his diacritical hermeneutics would make a good definition of metaxis (see *Parenthesis I*, pp.85-112), or rather a good description of what happens in the in-between, 'It champions the practice of dialogue between self and other, while refusing to submit to the reductionist dialectics of ego-logy governing by the *logos* of the Same' (Kearney, 2003, p.18).

Before I make a detailed survey of the “texts” (in Chapters 5-8) I will clarify five significant essential concepts for my exploration of self and Others.

1. Definitions of “text” (pp.118-125).
2. The hermeneutic circle (pp.125-127).
3. My own device of a Spiral as a hermeneutic model for indicating how a self might make sense of our being in the world (pp.127-132).
4. The global cultural context in which all this takes place (pp.132-136).
5. A way of being outside both Cartesian dualism and postmodern disquieted globalisation (pp.137-140).

## **Essential Concepts**

### **1. Definitions of “text”**

As I have suggested above hermeneutics is no longer seen as being confined to merely the interpretation of written documents sacred or otherwise. Ricoeur (1971) argued that any human action can be considered as “text” and now contemporary hermeneutic thought has expanded to include the story of any human endeavour. The definition of the term “text” is changed from a physical meaning to a metaphorical one. Different human actions ‘are texts because they may be “read”, understood and interpreted in a manner that is similar to our reading/understanding/interpretation of written texts’ (Prasad, 2002, p24, referring to Francis, 1994).

My texts are fourfold: (a) my own sauntering journey of life, (b) interviews with Other adults, (c) children's responses to their Magic Spots, (d) R.S. Thomas and his poetry.

### **(a) A “text” of my sauntering spiritual and theological journey.**

This “text” is seen through the perspective of three life defining incidents (see Chapter 5, pp.165) as well as six auto-ethnographic *Parentheses* in-between some of the chapters of the thesis. *Parenthesis 1*: Metaxis, the central concept which inspired this thesis; *Parenthesis 2*: Breakthrough, the development of an understanding of Incarnation<sup>45</sup> the key concept which holds my faith together; *Parenthesis 3*: Selfhood, an analysis of how I have sought to interpret the wound inflicted by the consistent inability to acknowledge oneself-as-another (Kearney, 2003, p.11) ; *Parenthesis 4*: Prophets and Clowns, an explanation of a learned way of being in the world; *Parenthesis 5*: Childhood, a reflection of the nature of childhood; and *Parenthesis 6*: WOW! – a brief glimpse of my experience and practise of the concepts of person-centred counselling. All these stories and corners (see Chapter 1, p.20f) contribute to the process of my interpretation of the children in their Magic Spots.

### **(b) Interviews with Adults**

These “texts” include written responses to an initial set of questions (see chapter 3, p.74 and Appendix 2, p.viii) sent to some adults from two organisations, the

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<sup>45</sup> Whenever the word ‘incarnation’ is used in this thesis it refers to the Christian theological concept of God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ.

Institute for Earth Education<sup>46</sup> and Christian Ecology Link<sup>47</sup> and the transcripts of interviews (and sometimes follow-up interviews) with a selected number. All the interviews and comments included in my text appear with permission. Each person whose words and opinions are included has signed a permission form (see Appendix 3) The Interview texts are more fully explored in Chapter 6, *Hearing Other Adults' Voices*, p.195ff.

In the preliminary questionnaire potential interviewees were asked to describe any particular and/or significant experience of theirs in the natural world. Laura wrote a very long and moving description of pony riding. 'There are memories of fearless, ecstatic, racing riding that will stay with me forever. I was the native Indian, swift and sure-footed, galloping over plains, jumping streams, touching wild energy, God's energy' (Christian Ecology Link Interviewees: Laura, Questionnaire, September 2006). Then this:

*I am indebted to my father's love of trout fishing. Thanks to his love of fishing we spent many happy holidays on the Island of Mull living in a caravan in the middle of what seemed like nowhere, just under the sky and by a loch. I too fished for trout and salmon, rowed the boat out into the loch to fly fish in stormy weather, stayed up late in the twilight by the river with the bats, hoping for a last catch. I dammed streams, wandered off on my own to search for I don't know what, swam in the clear seas around Mull, surfed the waves on my board, saw seals and otters and birds of prey, shells and seaweed. I fell over and fell in, and learned not to panic. We learned about the history of Mull and the Western Isles, visiting castles, local towns, museums, as well as soaking in the wildness of it all. What a fabulous education for a child/teenager. Unfortunately, the wonder of those days did not last beyond my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, as I became a solitary and angry teenager at odds with my parents, and our holidays together came to an end.*

Here is the experience of free range childhood<sup>48</sup>. Here are adult memories of childhood which resonate with both my own memories of Wales, climbing

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<sup>46</sup> The Institute for Earth Education founded in 1976 by Steve Van Matre is an international network of those who insist that environmental education must include response to the ecological crisis by life style changes. The programmes reflect this underlying principle.

<sup>47</sup> Christian Ecology Link founded in 1981 is a network of Christians concerned for the environment – *Extraordinary Times, Ordinary Christians*.

<sup>48</sup> For a definition of the phrase 'freerange childhood', see footnote 123 on p.295)

mountains, swimming in sea and pools, experiencing storms; memories of searching and trauma. Most of the Magic Spots responses I have collected are experiences in 14 acres of flat Suffolk countryside, but nevertheless Laura's account brings a sense that these children's responses are trustworthy and genuine. The hermeneutic dialogue intensifies as this girl shares her mixture of happiness and sadness and yet, also, peace among the experience of the natural things.

*My magic spot was on a load of wet leaves, with holly in my face and under a conker tree. It was very peaceful because it was so quiet. I saw holly trees and birds and fields. I could hear birds and the wind rustling the leaves. There were wet leaves and spikes from the holly. I couldn't smell anything because I had a cold. It made me feel happy, but kind of sad because I was remembering sad things and I felt at peace with myself.*  
(Girl, aged 9, 2005, *Magic Spots: Sad And Difficult* p. 2)

### (c) Magic Spot “texts”

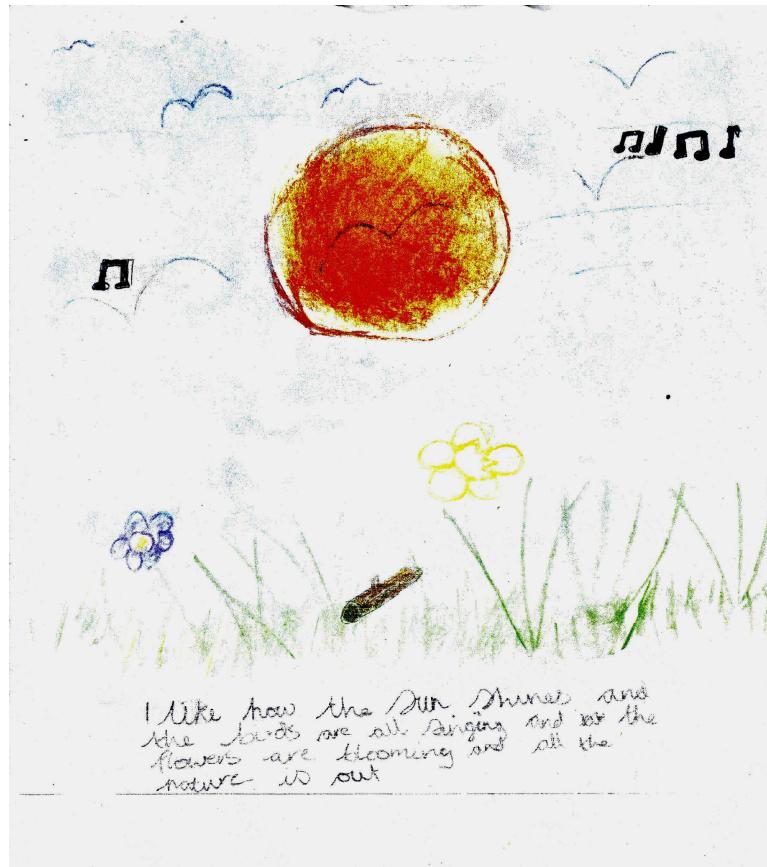
These are the “texts” from children's response to their Magic Spots (e.g. above). They include poems, reflections, descriptions, some crafted, mostly “raw”<sup>49</sup> and drawings and pictures, as well as some reported conversations with me and other adults and stories about backgrounds from children and teachers. The Magic Spot “texts” are more fully explored in Chapters 9 and 10: *Hearing Childrens' Voices Parts 1 and 2* as well as appearing (mostly without comment) throughout the thesis. I have categorised each of the “texts”. The references are from my categorised lists of quotes. Both these pages and original writings and drawings by the children are kept at Ringsfield EcoCentre.

At this point I present one example from these “texts” to demonstrate the way in which resonances and triggers from the children to my own “text” and from my “text” to the children form a dialogue during which an event of meaning-making is achieved. On the following page is the drawing and writing from an 8 year old's

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<sup>49</sup> By “raw” I mean that most of the children's comments and responses to their magic spots are direct from the children without any direction or ‘interference’ from adults (Chapter 3, see p.71f).

diary. EM's diary (see Chapter 1, p.15) is for no one but the owner. The children and teachers are told that they can only read someone's diary if they are given permission by the owner. This child was pleased to show me this entry. It was his first entry, after one Magic Spot on the second day of his visit at the centre.



'I like how the sun shines and the birds are all singing and the flowers are blooming and all nature is out' (unnamed boy 8 years, 2002, Magic Spots: Pictures p.2).

Together with the picture and the words this "text" also includes the age of this boy (8), his address in a down-town part of Chiswick next to the railway line, and the picture of his face during his time in his magic spot – bright eyes, broad grin, face turned up to the sun, and his unrecorded immediate response after this first experience of magic spots – 'I didn't know it was like this!'.

Martin in his analysis of an Earthkeepers' programme makes the following comment about children's "texts".

In this case the context is the program and the experience the pupil has had whilst on the program and the way in which these experiences are then interpreted to make them meaningful to the child. These programs were intended to provide novel experiences and these are sometimes so unusual the children have no appropriate language to conceptualise them. This is just the starting point as this will not tease out every nuance of intended meaning. It is extremely difficult to access the meanings of children. This is an extremely complex task that has been embarked upon. It reinforces the need for some form of triangulation, a sensitivity to metaphor, imprecision, undeveloped language, and insecure language skills. Whilst this process is occurring during the research through observations and interviews, the researcher has to be careful not to lead the child too much. ( Martin, 2006, p.34)

Martin's purpose was to understand meaning in order to assess how well the children, in their Earthkeeper programme, fulfilled certain criteria of gaining knowledge as per the National Curriculum. Martin interprets Denzin's (1970) proposal of a typology of triangulation comprising time triangulation, space triangulation, combined levels of triangulation, theoretical triangulation, investigator triangulation and methodological triangulation in the following table.

#### **Triangulation Used in the Earthkeepers Evaluation (Martin, 2006, p.358)**

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Time Triangulation               | Taking in the factors of changing meanings over time by conducting research longitudinally                   |
| Combined Levels Of Triangulation | The use of analysis from more than one level within the phenomenon (organizational, individual and cultural) |
| Theoretical Triangulation        | Comparison of findings with competing theories.  |
| Investigator Triangulation       | The use of more than one observer  |
| Methodological Triangulation     | Use of the same method on different occasions or different methods on the same occasions.                    |

Figure 2

My purpose, on the other hand, is to understand meaning in order to construct some criteria for adults to relate in a nurturing way to children ( Chapter 12: Restless Anticipations 3, pp.370-373). Sensitivity to metaphor, imprecision, undeveloped language, and insecure language skills are certainly needed - 'all nature is out', says the eight year old. In as much as the notion of triangulation is useful for appreciating the ontological condition of understanding or meaning, rather than for assessment, two components of a form of triangulation are in place here: the warp and the weft, that is first, the children's own words and responses, and secondly my own hermeneutic horizons. The third is Other adults' reflections also woven in to the fabric on the loom. These interviews and their horizons also appear throughout the thesis. They are tucked in, as it were, between the warp and

weft as the weaving is in progress.

#### (d) R.S. Thomas

Diacritical hermeneutics requires a double critique according to Kearney. That is the critique of *self* and ‘an equally indispensable critique of the *other*’ (Kearney 2003, p10). *Others* must not become too transcendent or we will lose contact; nor must *Others* become too immanent or they will become indistinguishable from ourselves (ibid). It seems to me that R.S. Thomas epitomizes this delicate balance as he articulates his relationship with God and Others.

Here is an R.S. Thomas poem published, after his death in the year 2000 aged 87, in *Residues*. On the back of the book the notes say: ‘*Residues* shows Thomas in a winter light, his fury concentrated on the inhumanity of man and modern technology, his gaze absorbed by the God he felt in Nature, but finding nourishment in “waste places” (Thomas, 2002, p.69). *Don’t ask me* is the final poem.

Don’t ask me;  
I have no recipe  
for a poem. You  
know the language,

know where prose ends  
and poetry begins.  
There should be no  
introit into a poem.

The listener should come  
to and realise  
verse has been going on  
for some time. Let

there be no coughing,  
no sighing. Poetry  
is a spell woven  
by consonants and vowels

in the absence of logic.  
Ask no rhyme  
of a poem, only

that it keep faith  
with life's rhythm.  
Language will trick  
you if it can.  
Syntax is words'  
  
way of shackling  
the spirit. Poetry is that  
which arrives at the intellect  
by way of the heart.  
(Thomas, 2002, p.69)

In my view this is an R.S.Thomas-contribution to the process of hermeneutics. It seems to me that interpreting "texts" is akin to writing poetry, a spell woven/ by consonants and vowels/in the absence of logic. Ask no rhyme/ of a poem, only/that it keep faith/with life's rhythm.

I tell the story of my association with R.S. Thomas, his place and poetry in Chapter 7, pp.239ff. which explains why he is a part of this bricolage (see Chapter 1 p.23).

### **Essential Concepts**

#### **2. The Hermeneutic Circle**

The hermeneutic circle represents the notion that understanding is a referential operation; we know something by comparing it to something we already know. We understand the whole through the parts and the parts through the whole, 'an individual concept derives its meaning from a context or horizon within which it stands; yet the horizon is made up of the very elements to which it gives meaning' (Palmer, 1969, p.87). Not only does this dialectical interaction require an element of intuition but also some area of shared understanding.

The hermeneutical circle...operates not only on the linguistic level but also on the level of the "matter" being discussed. Both the speaker and the hearer must share the language and the subject of their discourse. Both on the level of the medium of discourse (language) and the material of

discourse (the subject) the principle of preknowledge – or the hermeneutic circle – operates in every act of understanding.  
(Palmer, 1969, p.88)

This circularity of understanding means that there is no particular starting point for understanding or meaning so there can be no “presuppositionless” understanding. This was one of Dilthey’s contributions to this debate. He conceived interpretation as focused on “lived experience”. This is particularly important within this thesis. I am attempting to interpret or understand children’s “texts” about their experience of solitude in the natural world but I cannot do this from outside the hermeneutic circle since we understand from within our own horizon.

The methodological task of the interpreter is not that of immersing himself totally in his object (which would be impossible anyway) but rather that of finding viable modes of interaction of his own horizon with that of the text. (ibid, p.121)

If understanding occurs only by constant reference to our own experience then a viable mode of interaction with the “text” will include as wide an exploration as possible of that experience. The purpose of this section is to describe the nature of that exploration through the dialogue with other adults with whom I relate in the journey of my life and work.

Heidegger’s development of the hermeneutical process is characterised by his unique definition of “understanding”: ‘the power to grasp one’s own possibilities for being, within the context of the lifeworld in which one exists’ (Dilthey, 1969, p.131). Here is a progression from Schleiermacher’s resonating with the inner realities of the originator of the “text”; to Dilthey’s wider notion of understanding as an expression of inner realities and ultimately of life itself (ibid, p.131); and to Heidegger defining understanding ontologically, so that hermeneutics becomes an ontology of understanding and interpretation. ‘Hermeneutics with one step, has become,

“interpretation of the being of Dasein” (Heidegger in a letter to W.J. Richardson, in Palmer, 1969, p127). Dasein is the notion that ‘our being in the world does not come from a consciousness that looks at the world but from our experiences in the world that we must then make sense of’ (Freeman, 2009, p. 927). Heidegger places understanding and interpretation not only as a matter of reference to a context of relationships, but also in the context of all human existence and understanding. The hermeneutical circle is still intact; understanding always operates within a circular rather than an ordered linear progression, but includes an ontological possibility of the disclosure of the being of things and the potentialities of Dasein’s own being (Palmer, 1969, p.130).

### **Essential Concepts**

#### **3. My Hermeneutic Spiral**

It is at this point that I find that the analogy of a two-dimensional circle is not complicated enough to represent the process of interpretation. I find it easier to think in terms of a moving spiral so I represent my sauntering through life journey as a revolving spiral, see Figure 3 on the next page. I have not abandoned circularity altogether, but now the dialogical nature of the hermeneutical process has an openness which, in this representation, includes three “texts”: my own story, Others and their stories, and the story of my involvement with the earth and God. The spiral is in the constant movement of dialogue and interaction with the many horizons, made up of my own lived experiences, the lived experiences of Others, my lived experience of soul craft, and the coming together of flesh and spirit.

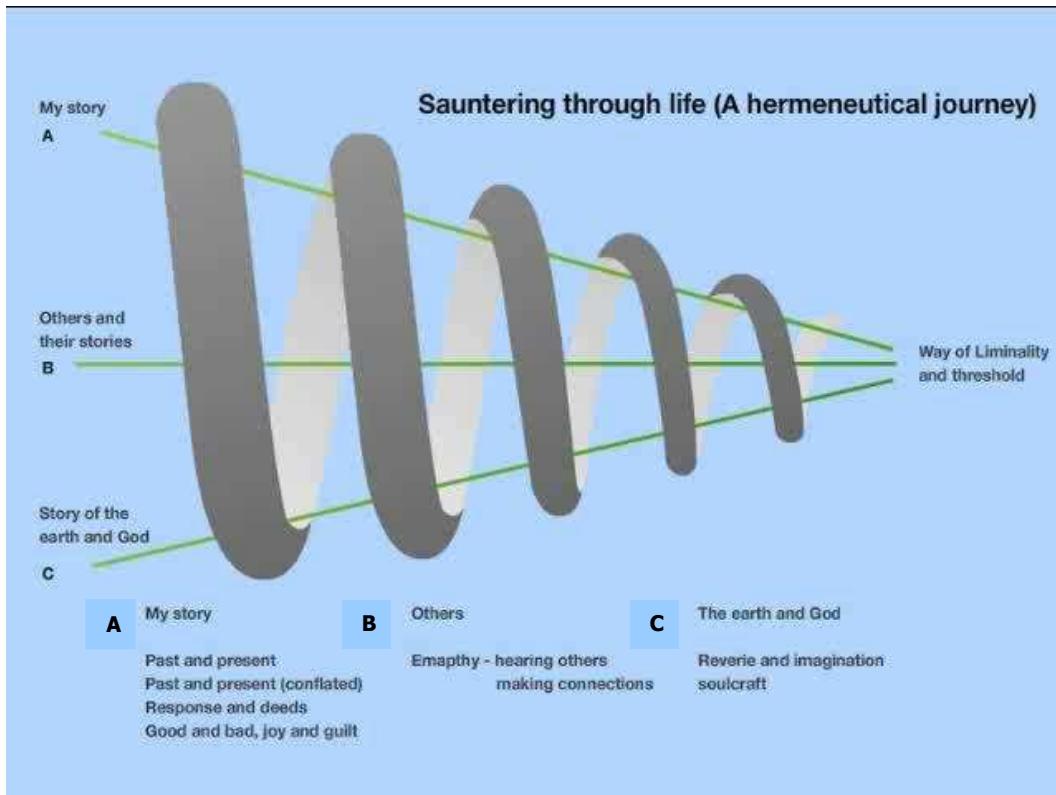


Figure 3. Spiral 1: Sauntering through life

The spiral represents the constant movement of the journey of homecoming. (See the DVD, Track 2 for the animation of this spiral). It embraces Levinas' concept of illimitable alterity or 'being-for-the-other' (Levinas, 2006, p.52; also Eppert in Alexander, 2004, p.48), but only a dose of it! (see *Parenthesis 3* p.186) and so includes the conscious engagement and involvement in Others' lives and their different stories, as with Kearney's self-as-another and his diacritical hermeneutics (see p.117). It also includes the totality of what is, the conscious visioning of being part of the more than human community, even the cosmos. There is a constant revolving movement, almost drilling movement

(see Rory, below ) towards the wild, wide eyed<sup>50</sup> maturity of living on the edge, a liminality for and with Others and the Other.

This relational consciousness begins to inform the construction of meaning when the hermeneutical circle turns into a spiral. I will later develop this spiral further to demonstrate the horizon of the spiritual journey which I offer to the hermeneutical task (see Figure 7, Chapter 5, p.183) and further again to illustrate the energised, resonating movement of the spiral when I dialogue with the past and present, and with Others (see Figure 8, Chapter 7, p.254).<sup>51</sup>

Not long after a school from Essex had experienced the earth education programme Earthkeepers<sup>TM</sup> I received an e-mail from the head teacher which included the following.

Thought you might like these quotes from Harry (aged 8) and Rory (aged 8). I asked the children to tell me about their ideas on learning – what it is like to learn for them.

Harry said: ‘Learning can change your mind.’

Rory said: ‘Learning is circles and spirals. Circles are lazy learners. Spirals are excited learners. The roots go down deeper and deeper.’

I am hoping for a school full of spirals ...

With best wishes – Julie

(personal e-mail, 10 October 2008, see also Fig.4, p.130)

Harry and Rory, and many, many like them, are my mentors for this project (see Chapter 1, p.26). It is a recollective process.

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<sup>50</sup> In the final revisions of the thesis I have noticed how often I mention “wild eyes”. I have written up this example of what I often refer to as “Triggers” which are the cause of the oscillating movement of the spiral, see Appendix 6, p.xlii.

<sup>51</sup> The development of the spiral is demonstrated on the DVD provided with the thesis (with animation and my own commentary, Track 2).

Learning is like building a tower of BRICKS. When your work gets better the tower gets bigger, which you make mistakes + a brick falls off but cause you to + it breaks.

2.

Learning is like a never ending staircase... because sometimes I think it will go on and on.

3.

Learning is like CYCLES and spirals. CYCLES are lazy spirals work really hard going down and down deeper!

Learning is like a park. the roundabout and SWINGS work hard they SWAY and twist and turn. the climbing frame stands still with NO motion

Figure 4    Rory's original notes, see section 3  
Learning is circles and spirals. Circles are lazy learners. Spirals work really hard going down and down deeper.  
(I personally checked out with Rory himself that he did mean 'circles' when he wrote 'cycles').

Continual immersion in this sort of experience, the joyous and the grievous, produces the opportunity for a process of re-collection to take place. Dorothee Soelle, a contemplative and activist in peace and ecological movements, identifies it as a release from a prison in the context of reading Christian mystics of the past.

To read texts of mysticism is to have renewed recognition of one's self, of a being that is buried under rubble. Thus, the discovery of the mystical tradition also sets free one's own forgotten experience ... I look for something among mystics that I, a prisoner in the huge

machine, do not receive. It's not my wish to admire the mystics, but to let them re-collect me so that daily I see the inner light as clearly as possible, for it is hidden also within me. (Soelle, 2001, p.5)

In sufi mysticism this process is described as 'ta'wil', 'a carrying back'; it is learned by 'lending the ear of the heart' (Corbin, 1997, p.242). Romanyshyn, who concludes that 'language is our vocation' and that we 'have a duty and obligation to speak in the service of the silence' (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.170), agrees with Nouwens, who describes three aspects of silence: Silence makes us pilgrims, Silence guards the fire within, Silence teaches us to speak (Nouwens, 1981, p.49). It is a process out of which lessons for both spirituality and education emerge. A way of being which embraces the benefits of silence and listening would also transform many children's education through facilitating the same process of re-collecting in the lives of many teachers.

I agree with Harry, above, and, as will become apparent, I would argue that learning should also change mind-sets as well as set minds. I also agree with Rory that learning is a spiral. The process of interpretation, understanding and meaning is circular, but it also has the characteristics of a spiral in constant movement. So I am further fascinated by Rory's articulation of spirals being 'excited learners'. He (and maybe most children are) is way ahead of most of us when he designates circles as *lazy* learners, when after many of us are still only linear learners. He appreciates the chaotic, excited, oscillations of the spiral. In his experience linear learners accept fixed, set principles and facts and are content!

The interweaving on the turning spiral, of these four "texts" (pp.118-125) provides the fusion of horizons which Gadamer believes is essential in hermeneutical inquiry and also reveals the process which Heidegger suggests

means that one's encounter with the world is always dynamic and full of possibility (Freeman, 2007).

But before I offer more detail about the four texts (Chapters 5-8) of my hermeneutical methodology and their horizons I reflect on the global and cultural context in which we all participate, and on a way of being outside both Cartesian dualism and postmodernism (p.137).

### Essential Concepts

#### 4. Disquieted Globalization Disorder<sup>52</sup>

Walsh and Keesmaat in *Colossians Remixed* use the phrase 'disquieted globalisation' in their analysis of the present day context in which they are attempting to write an interpretation of the Letter to the Colossians<sup>53</sup>. They suggest that there are two seemingly irreconcilable perspectives on our cultural context. There is 'postmodern disquiet' and 'cybernetic global optimism' (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004, p.21 and p.26).

The postmodern outlook is suspicious of definitions so the following characterisation is given with caution; it is more descriptive than definitive.

Postmodern culture has:

☒ A sense of betrayal.

'This is at the heart of the cultural crisis and is the emotional source for a widespread hermeneutic of suspicion – not just of ancient authoritative texts but of any systems or institutions of authority' (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2008, p.22).

This generation feels that 'someone has told them a story, spun them a line, about the good life, and it has proved to be a lie' (ibid).

☒ Incredulity toward all meta-narratives (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv)

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<sup>52</sup> See the Chart, provided with the thesis, POSTMODERN DISQUIETED GLOBALIZATION DISORDER, a la Frank Lake, 1966.

<sup>53</sup> The Letter to the Colossians is a letter understood to be written by St Paul to the church in Colossae c 70AD. It is in the second half of the Bible, the New Testament.

‘We live inside the future of a shattered past because that past told grand stories that have proved to be destructive lies’ (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2008, p.23). The Marxist utopia and the progress myth of democratic capitalism have collapsed and failed, they are not stories anymore about emancipation and progress but rather stories of enslavement, oppression and violence. All such religious stories, like the Christian narrative of redemption are deemed to have common cause with such violence and oppression (ibid).

▣ Uncertainty, no fixed ethical anchors and moral instability  
‘I can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if I can answer the prior question “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?”’ (MacIntyre, 1984, p.216).

▣ No absolutes, moral or otherwise, continuous flux  
‘Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality gives way to reflexive questioning, irony and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The centre fails to hold’ (Gergen, 1991, p.7).

Postmodernism is a culture of disquiet. ‘A single story, providing coherence to personal identity, grounding for ethical action and passion for life in history, is displaced by a carnivaleque existence of fragmentation, numbness and boredom’ (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2008, p.25).

The second perspective on the present cultural context according to Walsh and Keesmaat is ‘cybernetic global optimism’ (ibid). This optimistic view is held at one and the same time with postmodern fragmentation and numbness. Cybernetic global optimism turns out to be ‘a retrenchment, intensification and rebirth of a

worldview or cultural myth' (ibid) which is the same as the meta-narrative rejected by postmodernism. It is characterised by:

- ▣ describing the past as a time of terror, ignorance and hierarchical control while the future is depicted as a time of peace, egalitarianism and natural harmony. 'For the first time in a long time, prosperity in the world is expanding faster than the population because we have entered "the Long Boom" with 'the arrival of personal computers, open markets and globalisation in the early 1980s' (Article in *Wire Magazine*, Change is Good, in Walsh and Keesmaat, 2008, p.27).
- ▣ a confident belief that technology will be able to deliver what all previous ingenuity could not: 'autonomous human beings once again can have history under control, once again can determine for themselves what life is all about' (ibid).
- ▣ A meta-narrative about the myth of progress with the right technology. 'This cultural force promises nothing less than the blossoming of a new civilisation that will eventually bring an end to international conflict, resolve hitherto intractable problems like poverty and environmental degradation, and produce increased prosperity for all...We are facing the most powerful, fastest growing and most successful religion in the history of the world' (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2008, p.28).

The context for Walsh and Keesmaat's hermeneutic of *The Letter to the Colossians* is the present fusion of these two perspectives not only in one culture, but also very often in the same person. It is also the context of my interpretation

of the children's responses to their times of solitude. The children are caught up in the tension and resolution of these two apparently contradictory perspectives. Globalization and a postmodern world view come in the same package (Anderson, 1990, p.25). 'The belief that there is, no single truth and a single world, but a multiplicity of untranslatable perspectives, is strangely analogous to the belief that the market is a boundless medium with which perfect competition is possible between an infinite number of discrete commercial identities' (Boyle, 1998, p152). While globalization maybe characterised as a meta-narrative, the fragmented self of postmodernism does not need to accept such a story of progress, all it needs to do is to make consumer choices. Thus the Cartesian dictum, 'I think therefore I am' is replaced by 'I consume therefore I am' (Walsh and Keesmaat, 2008, p.32) or as Mary Grey has it. ' "I shop, I spend, therefore I am" ' (Grey, 1997, p.1).

There is at one and the same time a participation in postmodernism's apocalyptic anxiety and nihilism *and* a grasping after the buoyant humanistic optimism of globalization. Both postmodernism and globalization share the same anthropology for in both humans are understood primarily as units of consumption.

The market does not concern itself with whether my choice is rational, whether it is identical or consistent with choices I made yesterday or may make tomorrow, nor does it concern itself with any purposes I may have in making my choice or any consequences of my choice insofar as these do not themselves involve market decisions. Indeed, as far as the market is concerned, I exist only in the moment of making a single commercial choice. (Boyle, 1998, p.153)

To accept the dazzling optimism of cybernetic globalization a person necessarily has also to buy in to the notion that everything is commodified, even beliefs, worldviews and cultures. When this takes place, as it is doing rapidly, then the 'imperial hegemony of global capitalism has been established' (Berger, 1967, p.138). These words were written in 1967 with a perceptive, prophetic acumen.

Peter Berger was arguing that once the character of reality was understood to be constructed, then traditions, religious traditions in particular should no longer be imposed but must be marketed. He pointed out that the pluralist situation is a market situation.

Children are both victims and consumers of globalization and commodification (Grey, 2006, p.13). The victims are the children who are used as labourers, 250 million worldwide; or exploited through pornography, trafficking and prostitution; or abused as child soldiers, an estimated 300,000 through the world. 'Poverty, gender, wars, environmental disasters, caste and social position, and lack of legal protection, all determine the contours of a child's world. And now market forces, competition and profit are forcing half the world's children into degrading work and the other half into consuming the products (ibid p.14). The technological optimism described above feeds off the low esteem of digitalised children and deliberately uses the needs of such children, for example the need to belong. Grey quotes McNeal, 1999.

The belonging affiliation need, which causes us to seek cooperative relations, is very strong in children....Also children are looking for order in their lives. There are so many things to encounter that some order is necessary to cope with them all. A trusting relationship in which satisfying acquisitions can always be expected helps to give order to an increasingly complex life. (McNeale in Grey, 2006, p.15)

Grey echos Walsh and Keesmaart, above, in her analysis of both the paralysis of those imprisoned between 'disquieted postmodernism' and 'optimistic globalization', and the use by the market of 'spirituality'.

The magic of global capitalism has succeeded in spinning an all-encompassing web, a corporate enslavement to money, sex, alcohol, drugs and shopping, or a concoction of all of these. Inside this web we – *and now especially children* (my italics) – are indeed bewitched, and robbed of heart, health and wholeness. This addiction has all the trapping of a religion. *Tesco ergo sum* is one expression of the recent, and pervasive claim to self-definition. Shopping malls encourage even openly a spirituality of shopping. (Grey, 2006, p.12)

## Essential Concepts

### 5. A way of being outside both Cartesian dualism and postmodernism

Reductionism is the predominant scientific style of thinking, that is ‘as Descartes taught, it attempts to gain complete understanding and mastery of a phenomenon by breaking it down into its component parts’ (Harding, 2006, p.31).

Reductionism assumes that ‘objects matter much more than relationships between them (ibid, p.32). Dualism is the notion of an eternal heaven hidden beyond the material world, where the true source of things really exists, leading to a way of thinking according to which everything meaningful and wondrous about the world was assumed to exist elsewhere (ibid, p.23).

Reductionist dualism is therefore a way of being, a mind-set which assumes human kind’s task is to become masters and owners of nature (Soelle, 2001, p.237). Postmodern disquiet leaves that task to the market and destructive consumerism. Soelle asks how are we to wean our selves from ‘being masters and owners’ Soelle, p.237)

I think that mystical spirituality of oneness with nature is the best preparation for the other life we are looking for. Dealing sacramentally with bread and water with one’s own body and our non human sisters and brothers, and with energy, the cosmos itself will grow from the abyss that is our domination ground. (ibid, p.112)

R.S. Thomas also faces the domination of the machine (his metaphor for the world given up to the market).

God,  
looking into a dry chalice,  
felt the cold touch of the machine  
on his hand, leading him

to a steel altar. ‘Where are you?’  
he called, seeking himself among  
the dumb cogs and tireless camshafts  
(Thomas, 1975, God’s Story, p.7).

The point of all this is to clearly understand that this is the context in which a young child gets comfortable under a tree and participates in the ‘strange’ or at least unusual activity, Magic Spots. They are tied into the knot of ‘the machine’ and the ‘disquieted market’. This context is included in the hermeneutic methodology I have developed to interpret the children’s responses.

My magic spot was under a bushey tree and fields of lively animals here and there. Seeing the sun shining and the horses galloping made me think that i was in heaven. I could smell the fresh air and the spring leaves all around me. the sound of the birds and swaying of the trees and grass swaying back and forth it's just beautiful. Leaning forward i could see the house of Ringsfield and the stones staying still. All was quiet. The fresh daffodils were growing slowly i couldn't hear a thing. I saw a little ant crawling on me when i leaned to put it back i could see a whole line of ant do the jumteny. I saw a lady bird crawling on a tree i gave it a leaf and it went back up the tree. When i touched the floor it felt rough and when i touched the grass it was so wet but soft.

(Magic Spot, unnamed 10 years, Magic Spots: Observation p.3)

Mary Grey describes what she says Thomas Merton called, ‘the secret that is heard only in silence’. It is she writes,

‘a spirituality of epiphanies of connectedness a way of healing fragmentation and brokenness. It is putting together the fragmented pieces of our broken selves; it is creating a soulscape by giving our emotions time and space...it is ‘re-membering’ ...even through reaching backwards into the past. (Grey, 1997 p.20)

In my experience children are more adept, more ready, than adults to discover the ‘secret that is only heard in silence’.

It would appear that those adults addicted both to reductionist dualism and to a cynical postmodern narrative of uncertainty, are the ones who devise ways in which to educate children out of creativity and spirituality in order to become masters and owners in the globalized, commercialised disquiet.

In my thesis I see the need to model a new way of being outside Cartesian dualism and disquieted globalization. It is a way of being which discards Descartes' vision of the material world as a great machine which asserted a fundamental distinction between matter and mind.

In essence, Descartes declared that the material world we see and sense around us was devoid of soul, and that it was nothing more than a dead, unfeeling machine which we could master and control through the exercise of our rational intellect. (Harding, 2006, p.27)

This post-Cartesian new way of being also rejects the postmodern fear of certainty, while at the same time accepts a new meta-narrative: the interconnection of all things in the web of life.

I agree with Purton that the Cartesian knot needs to be untied.

Descartes detaches us from the world, and condemns us to living within a bubble constituted by our subjective experiences...

We must reject the view that life begins with a baby's subjective awareness out of which it constructs an external world of material objects and other people. It is, rather, the other way round: the baby starts a nexus in a network of personal relationships. There is, as it were, a place for the baby in the interpersonal network even before it is born. (Purton, 1993, p157)

I also agree with Walsh and Keesmaat's unravelling of the post-modernity knot that, as I have commented above (p134), we live in a culture where at one and the same time we participate both postmodernism's apocalyptic anxiety and nihilism and the buoyant humanistic optimism of globalization. In both was of seeking meaning humans are understood primarily as units of consumption.

Vandana Shiva, the physicist and environmental activist argues that we need a paradigm shift from:

- ▣ A reductionist to a holistic worldview based on interconnections
- ▣ A mechanistic, industrial paradigm to an ecological one

■ A consumerist definition of being human to one that recognizes us as conservers of the earth's finite resources and co-creators of wealth with nature (Shiva, 2008, p.44).

The knots need to be untied by adults or they will continue to steal from their children 'the imaginal realm which is *between* matter and mind' (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.90, my italics).

It is the machine wins;  
the land suffers formication  
of its presence. Places that  
would have preferred peace  
have had their bowels opened; our  
children paddle thoughtlessly there in the mess.  
(R.S. Thomas, 1975, p.6)

However, children it seems can re-member the inter-personal and the inter-more-than-human relationships and relax into an earth-related spirituality without untying knots they have not yet come across. Very significantly I quote Mary Grey about that word spirituality.

Spirituality is understood here as the spiritual dimension that undergirds a person's life, expressed in a myriad of different ways, giving meaning and coherence to even the most trivial of everyday actions, as well as inspiring the most idealistic expressions of human beliefs and aspirations. (Grey, 2010, p.69)

The significance lies in the fact that Mary Grey is here describing the spirituality of the Dalit Women of India. What they have in common with children is that they are considered and treated as the least of the least yet still they possess an in-depth sense of relational consciousness, their spirituality (see *Parenthesis 5*, p. 259).

## *Parenthesis 2*

### Break-through: a hermeneutic of Incarnation



Horizons

Chris Walton, age 15: Hell's Mouth, 1961<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This photograph was taken by my father for a leaflet called 'Caring and Sharing' for the church my parents belonged to, Wycliffe Congregational Church. It was on the occasion of the opening of a new church building on the edge of Leicester, the church having moved from the City Centre where the church was led by Rev. 'Father' Seaward Beddow for some 40 years (see Chapter 5, p.179).

## *Parenthesis 2*

### Break-through: a hermeneutic of Incarnation

Skylines are not the same as horizons

Views are not the same as visions

Definitions are different from dreams.

In my view skylines are definitions

My definition of horizons is ‘opportunity to dream’.

Yet I dream of making a skyline out of my vision

And my vision fades into a view of the horizon.

The horizon is confused with the skyline.

Definitions devalue and dreams inspire

Nevertheless, in my view, turning dreams into views

And visions into skylines is necessary.

The seed which dies and grows into the life

Which provides the seed which falls and dies

And grows into the life which...

(C. Walton, 1990s)<sup>55</sup>

#### **New Horizons**

My journey of escape from the entrapment of reductionist dualism is best

described as a reflection on the notion of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ:

‘The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood’ (The

Gospel According to St. John 1:14, *The Message*<sup>56</sup>).

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<sup>55</sup> This is an approximate date. I possess my original hand written text of this poem, but it is undated.

<sup>56</sup> Peterson, 2002, *The Message*, The Bible in Contemporary Language. A more familiar translation is: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” Revised Standard Version.

This *Parenthesis* describes the process of my developing relationship with the notion of Incarnation: ‘turning dreams into visions and visions into skylines’. This process is key to my interpretation of the children in their Magic Spots. It is the at-one-ment of Being and Doing.

Incarnation is a word to which most people find it hard to give a meaning. It violates, as a concept, our sense of divine and human decency; it crosses a barrier which we require, for our mental and psychological comfort, to be impermeable. A God who creates, who orders, a God whose bliss we can, maybe, come to share beyond death – this kind of God many can accept as thinkable, even if not believable.

But a God who is immediate, historical, demanding, personal, and passionately human – that is altogether too much.

And Jesus, also, we can take. Jesus who was heroic, gentle, whole, healing, poor and persecuted – we have plenty of time for him. Everyone can love Jesus, as long as he is not God. But Jesus who is God is too difficult and demanding. Separately they will do. God and Jesus, in some close but imaginable relationship.

But a totally unimaginable oneness, a God so passionate he has to be Jesus, a Jesus so passionate he has to be God – he is so outrageous a demand on human intellect and human courage that there are only two possible responses: utter faith or utter rejection. (Haughton, 1981, p.7)

My experience of Incarnation was innocent of all this. My response was plain and simple. I was only fifteen (1961) when I came to the acceptance of God incarnate; for me it was ‘no Incarnation, no God’.

*In the early sixties Denis Potter wrote Jesus of Nazareth. It feels like it was a weekly series on TV, but maybe it was a single play. It was this which inspired me to believe in the God of whom Jesus was the perfect image. Two or three incidents from it are key.*

*In the TV play Jesus was represented as a man in traumatic struggle. He was first portrayed during the Temptations in the Wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). Naked but for a loincloth he was on all fours in the sand rushing round and round in identity crisis. His*

*eyes were wild<sup>57</sup>, his attention to possible interruption like a wild deer. His constant muttered question was, “Who am I?”. He seemed to fear that he really might be the son of God. But more significantly who he was seemed to make a difference to the way he would live his life. Being and doing were connected.*

*The next incident was the portrayal of the healing of the boy with the evil spirit – what we tend to call now the Healing of the Epileptic Boy (Luke 9:37-43). Until this play I had seen Jesus represented in films as healing people by standing some feet or yards away, putting his hand up towards heaven and praying, but this was different.*

*Jesus encounters the boy as he is starting to fit. Jesus holds him and both of them fall to the ground rolling over and over with Jesus holding the boy in an ever-tightening body hug. Eventually they come to rest holding one another tight. Here was the beginning of my understanding of atonement and Incarnation.*

*The final incident was fun (and I still relish it and tell the story whenever I can!). The scene is on the way to Jerusalem before the Passion. Jesus appears at the site of a wooden cross alongside the road; he grabs the shaft of the cross and with a strained face caresses it. Then Peter arrives, closely followed by some of the other disciples. He sees Jesus and says, ‘Lord, what’s the matter, are you alright?’ This is done very dramatically, Peter, played by a young Brian Blessed, asking with great concern, while Jesus continues to*

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<sup>57</sup> This is a reference to a recurring theme or ‘trigger’ (see p. 201) of ‘eyes’. Every encounter of ‘wild eyes’ triggers the memory and reverie of this experience of Jesus’ wild eyes undergirded by my own mother’s wild eyes (see Appendix 7, p.xlvii).

*caress the cross, looking at it intently, “Are you alright, Lord?”*

*Finally, Jesus speaks: “Lovely piece of wood.”*

Great fun; this is the earthed Jesus.

After this experience when I came to the acceptance of God incarnate, for me, as I have said, it was and is, no Incarnation – no God. My way of being and what I do are so connected that if being becomes whole, or true, then being and doing are one and the same..

So there followed a time of integration as I accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour, followed by a year of struggle and identity crisis as ‘I felt the call’ to be a minister. The culture of the radical but evangelical church to which I belonged encouraged me to see this as the call of God versus my own desires. Forty-five years later I would reframe that and see the experience as the beginning of a lifelong search for identity and whether or not I was prepared to live under the permanent struggle of enabling being and doing to become an integrated whole. Thus, when I said, ‘Yes’ to this question I said, ‘Yes’ to God. I always considered that this was part of my continuing conversion.

I was two years into my first ministry in a church, at a Welsh (English-speaking) Baptist chapel<sup>58</sup>, when I read *The Go-Between God*. I was not in the habit of annotating books (I have now overcome the ‘You don’t do that to books’ syndrome!) so it was all the more significant that I marked the following passage with a bold line and two asterisks.

We might call it the power of his personhood, the power of his separate otherness, the power by which he is recognized as himself. But it is also his power to recognize, and to be impinged upon by, the otherness of the persons, things, realities which are not himself. For,

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<sup>58</sup> Ebenezer Baptist Church, Magor, Gwent (formerly Montgomeryshire).

as Hegel says, 'the truth of personality is just this: to win it through immersion, through being immersed in the other' (Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1962, p.25). My spirit, therefore, is never uniquely mine as are my body, my life, my individuality. It resides only in my relatedness to some other. Spirit is that which lies between, making both separateness and conjunction real. (Taylor, 1972, pp.7-8)<sup>59</sup>

Years later another writer articulated the process of my thinking:

The truth of the Incarnation; of the taking of humanity into God, is the basis both of a materialistic, earthy and fleshly spirituality and of a spirituality-based commitment to action in the world. (Leech, 1986, p.38).

By the time I was forty (1986) I was interpreting the Incarnation in a series of Advent Meditations as follows:

God has enfleshed his Spirit in Jesus. God promises us that the consequences of his divine Yes to our humanity is that our flesh is inspirited.

God is determined to put flesh and spirit together (it as though the one is not complete without the other) first in Christ, then in his other daughters and sons.

With Christ enfleshed and his people inspirited we are to become another enfleshment of Christ on earth. (Walton, 1985, Vol.1 p.48)<sup>60</sup>

### **From Theology to Nature**

This radical oneness of spirit and flesh led me, in this process, to an appreciation of the oneness of the material and soulfulness in the whole of the more-than-human-community I discovered that it is not a dangerous flirtation with pantheism to relish Pelagius the 6th-century Celtic theologian.

Look at the animals roaming the forest: God's spirit dwells within them. Look at the birds flying across the sky: God's spirit dwells within them. Look at the tiny insects crawling upon the grass: God's spirit dwells within them. Look at the fish in the river and the sea:

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<sup>59</sup> I have previously quoted part of this passage in *Parenthesis 1* p.92.

<sup>60</sup> From 1985 to 1995 I was co-producer/editor of a magazine called *Wildfire* where these meditations appeared.

God's spirit dwells within them. There is no creature on the earth in whom God's spirit is absent. Travel across the ocean to the most distant land, and you will find God's spirit in all the creatures there. Climb up the highest mountain, and you find God's spirit among the creatures who live at the summit. When God pronounced that his creation was good, it was not only that his hand had fashioned every creature; it was that his breath had brought every creature to life.

Look too at the great trees of the forest; look at the wild flowers and the grass in the field; look even at your crops. God's spirit is present in all the plants as well. The presence of God's spirit in all living beings is what makes them beautiful; and if we look with God's eyes nothing on the earth is ugly. (Pelagius, in Adam, 2003, p.68)

Nor is it a concession to animism to embrace Fisher's reflections on flesh and spirit. He first quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

The body...offers to him who inhabits it and senses it the wherewithal to sense everything that resembles himself on the outside...If it touches [things] and sees them, this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each exists as an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of things as the world is universal flesh. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, in Fisher, 2002, p.132)

Asking the question, 'But what is "flesh"?' he responds, 'much of what this term implies *is* readily graspable once we enter into an interactive or ecological framework. For it points to how all phenomena interweave as a single cloth or "common tissue," how they are mutually informative in their commingling with one another – the being possible only because they are of the same elemental stuff' (ibid, p.133).

He reflects that the 'world experienced by primary peoples is often described as one with fluid boundaries, such that no absolute lines can be drawn among human, animal and spirit realms; a world of metamorphoses, shape-shiftings, transformations' and he concludes.

A naturalistic psychology would explore these correspondences or resonances, would be a project of learning to recognise ourselves in what was formerly alien, of shifting ourselves along the kinship

continuum or deepening our perception of the unity of the world's flesh. It would also emphasize that hyper-differentiation or splitting is a possibility given in the very differential structures of the flesh, and that when we harden our boundaries, and so attenuate our sense of kinship with others, we suffer spiritual loss (Fisher, 2002, p.139).

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, in Fisher, 2002, p.133)

The fact that I am defending myself against charges of pantheism and/or animism indicates that there are any number of evangelical Christians who would fear a 'descent' into a theology which does not name God as separate from matter and wholly other. They would call this, especially if promoted as Christian faith, at best 'heretical' and at worst 'of the devil'. However, while I do not assent to either of these interpretations, what is certain is that the use of language (or the cultural and faith assumptions behind the language) is under strain. Part of the process of hermeneutics is to discard redundant or inconsistent notions in order to embrace a new and radical meaningfulness. For instance poetry expresses a new way of understanding without the same sense of confusion or outrage. Three poets provide examples, Wordsworth, Manley Hopkins, and R.S. Thomas.

Thus, often in those fits of vulgar joy  
Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits  
Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss  
Which, like a tempest, works along the blood  
And is forgotten; even then I felt  
Gleams like the flashing of a shield. The earth  
And common face of Nature spake to me  
Rememberable things; sometimes, 'tis true,  
By chance collisions and quaint accidents  
Like those ill-sorted unions, work supposed

Of evil-minded fairies, yet not vain,  
Nor profitless, if haply they impressed  
Collateral objects and appearances,  
Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep  
Until maturer seasons called them forth  
To impregnate and to elevate the mind.

(*Wordsworth*, ed Stephen Gill, 1997,  
The Prelude, Book 1, lines 609-625, p.167)

And, for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

(*Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Davies 1979, ‘God’s Grandeur’, p.27)

I became aware out on the peninsula<sup>61</sup> of the wide seas, the starry sky at night, and the ocean around me, and this naturally led me into more contemplation of the universe.

Every night  
Is a rinsing myself of the darkness  
That is in my veins. I let the stars inject me  
With fire, silent as it is far,  
But certain in its cauterising  
Of my despair.

(R. S. Thomas, ‘Night Sky’, 1978, p.18)

Rosemary Haughton (1981) seeks to find a language which enables us to ask and answer the question, ‘What happens if we take the Incarnation seriously?’ instead

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<sup>61</sup> The ‘peninsula’ is the Llyn peninsula where R.S. Thomas carried out his final pastoral ministry. He lived very near, almost on the 5 mile beach, Hell’s Mouth, which I refer to often, for instance, Chapter 5, p.172; Chapter 7, pp. 239 and 246).

of answering it as many non-Christians, but also many Christians, have done since the nineteenth century by saying, ‘Don’t take it seriously; in fact don’t take it at all.’ She suggests that we use simple imaginative models of reality as an ‘everyday’ occurrence. ‘These models are, for most people (including the highly educated), a fearful hotchpotch of successive philosophical fashions, each providing certain mental patterns to ease our struggle to make sense of the world around us’ (Haughton, 1981, p.19). She suggests that these ‘residual’ models which settle in the imagination appear to make sense of some aspects of reality while at the same time excluding other ‘experience’ as unreal. These models tend to be static and limited. She proposes the model of ‘exchange’ which does not exclude any kind of experience or known reality. ‘It is simply a picture of life as given and received in exchange, without ceasing, forever’ (ibid, p.21).

‘Life’ in this context means all of reality, apprehensible and inapprehensible, all that is and all that could be, and it involves thinking of everything not just as a part of an infinitely complex web of interdependence, but as a moving web, a pattern of flowing, a never-ceasing in-flow and out-flow of being. (ibid, p.21)

Haughton argues that language is still wrong because the word ‘being’ has for us a ‘stopped’ quality. Her choice of word for never ceasing in-flow and out-flow is ‘love’.

The description of the operation of love as exchange is a description of the basic nature of material reality, as it is the description of the most intense human experience and of the very life of God. It is also the experienced operation of exchanged love in our bodies and minds, and those same bodies and minds exist only in exchange with other kinds of life and on un-living matter, from basic rocks to the heart of the divine love itself. (ibid, p.22)

This is the language of ‘upward integration’ to use Berry’s phrase as opposed to ‘downward reduction of wholes to their parts’ (Berry, 2006, p.55). So if ‘we take

the Incarnation seriously' we end up with not only an understanding of the interconnection of all things, but far more seriously and joyously the interchange, or better the exchange, of life and love from all things to all things.

### **Breakthrough**

Haughton adds that the model of exchange seems to require, as part of the language, the concept of 'break-through'. This is the impulse, of need or of love to breakthrough from one mode of experience to another. It might be personal, like breaking through into shared understanding, or physical like water breaking through a dam find a new way of moving forwards. She cites mystical experiences and scientific discoveries; 'a chicken breaking its shell or the signing of a peace treaty' (Haughton, 1981, p.18). It could be the influence of carbon (see Berry, below) breaking through into our thinking, feeling and being.

I have no reason to suppose that there is any contact or relationship between Haughton and Thomas Berry but here, I believe, Berry gives an example of what Haughton describes as 'break-through'.

We cannot understand any part of the universe until we understand how it functions in the whole. For example, any study of the element carbon limited to its inanimate form provides only minimal understanding of carbon, (*in Haughton's terms a 'static' model*) since carbon has astounding capacities for integrating the basic elements needed for organic existence. Even beyond the organic and the qualities associated with living things, there is the capacity of carbon to enter into the process of thinking. Thought itself and the highest of human spiritual achievements are attained through activation of the inner capacities of carbon in its alliance with the other elements of the universe. Thus carbon has varied modes of expression, from inorganic to organic to conscious self-awareness in the human. (Berry, 2006, p.55)

It seems to me that Berry is speaking Haughton's language of love. Berry is describing the point at which carbon has come to the point at which it *needs* to

breakthrough into the process of thinking. This astounding idea, or more truly this outstanding idea is mirrored in Harding's description of bacteria as deeply sentient creatures.

The earliest spread of bacterial sentience around the globe some 3,500 million years ago lead nascent Gaia into an increasingly animate relationship with the brightening sun above, and with carbon dioxide emitted into her atmosphere via volcanoes from the vast realm of semi-fluid rocks below. This great bacterial web has run the planet to this day, and is, in a way, rather like the unconscious processes that operate key aspects of our own metabolisms. There must be a seamless transition from this bacterial sentience to our own, for ... our very own cells are associations of once free-living bacteria that now engage in sophisticated intra-cellular communication. If our cells are fundamentally bacterial, then a continuous thread of sentience runs from us right back to our earliest bacterial ancestors. (Harding, 2006, p.159)

Thought itself and human spiritual achievements are attained through an exchange of life and love with the other elements. Haughton agrees that it may seem strange to talk of love in connection with rocks, or carbon, but she describes the evolution of the earth from a ball of fire 'whirling out from the sun, as if the sun could not bear its own privacy but must share itself with space, to the present blue planet emerging from the incandescent core, "chemicals" constantly formed and re-formed, giving and receiving in patterns of inter-action, in a flux of becoming' (Haughton, 1981, p22). Brian Swimme, the mathematical cosmologist joins her, 'The Sun is, with every second, giving itself over to become energy that we, with every meal, partake of' (Swimme, 1996, p.40). We give little attention to the spiritual significance of this, 'as each day the Sun dies as Sun and is reborn as the vitality of Earth (ibid, p.41). 'The dance of the shaping earth is echoed by the dance of exchanged life in the cells of living bodies. In them life is exchanged and finds new ways to love'(Haughton, 1981, p.22).

We notice also that exchanges in nature, as in human love, seem to press towards a point at which they 'need' to break through to

‘something else’. The breakthrough from non-life to life is the most obvious and dramatic of these, only equalled, perhaps, by the breakthrough from ‘instinct’ to self-conscious-awareness, and crowned by the mysterious point at which the human thing becomes capable of God. (ibid, p.23)

Haughton describes the Incarnation, the flesh-taking of God in Jesus, as a unique example of the ‘ordinary’ event of break-through. ‘Incarnation is breakthrough, and it involves every level of reality from the most basic particles to the ultimate being of God’ (ibid, p.18).

In my process the Incarnation became the ‘ultimate break-through’, the model for all creation. In the Incarnation there is exchange of love: the passion of God broke through in Christ. For me it is the way I can make sense of the poetry of ‘the dance of exchanged life in the cells of living bodies’ or ‘our participation in the great cosmic liturgy: the exhilaration of the dawn, the healing of quiet evenings’ (Berry in Plotkin, 2003, p.xvi). Incarnation means we are not body (flesh) destined to be spirit. We are not spirit trapped in unseemly flesh requiring to be released. Rather we are soul-beings - spirit and flesh which belong together. Redemption is the reverberating dance of the shaping earth, the dance of exchanged life in the cells of living bodies. ‘In the body the knot of Being is tied which dualism does not unravel but cuts’ (Jonas, 1966, in Fisher, 2002, p.64). Levinas’ insistence that “being must be understood on the basis of beings’s other” (Caygill, 2002, p.131) so that “Illeity is the origin of being in which the ‘I’ itself of objectivity anticipates in betraying (ibid, p.149) supports my understanding of Incarnation as the breakthrough of illeity into being (see Chapter 4, p.117).

## Faith is Process

So my spiritual journey includes uncertainty, rejects universal objectivity, remains in parenthesis and is nurtured by provisionality. ‘The emphasis upon the relation that one has towards meanings implies that one can “hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know it might conceivably be false”’ (Polanyi, quoting Kierkegaard in Webster, 2004, p.214). As Kierkegaard has argued: ‘what matters is to find my purpose, to see what it really is that God wills that I shall do; the crucial thing is to find a truth that is truth for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die’ (R. S. Webster, 2004, p.12).

When I read Buber for the first time<sup>62</sup> I was aware that I was reading the explanation of something I had perceived already. Underlying this was a passionate belief that individuality only had any sense as a concept if it was understood as part of relationship. In Buber’s *I and Thou* (see footnote 1, Chapter 1, p.14) relationships were about each individual in the relationship being seen in terms of being-in-the world and therefore being-with-each-other. The reality in which both participate is not the reality either of the one self, or the other self, but the reality in which beings exist together.

I was nurtured in my early years by parents for whom the central concern of spirituality was how the individual comes to understand the meaning and purpose of his or her existence and therefore how they lived their lives. Quite obviously I was greatly influenced by their minister Revd Seaward Beddow, who was frequently criticised for being Marxist, by which the critics meant ‘lost in the things of the earth’, rather than ‘buried in the things of heaven’ (maybe they would have said, ‘enlightened with the things of heaven!’). I remember those early resistant days to Sunday School, when not only did I not participate for weeks but right from the moment I did I felt strangely disrupted when singing the children’s chorus,

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<sup>62</sup> 1966 in my first year of university, I was 19.

‘You in your small corner and I in mine’ – with a passion I felt, but only articulated years later, ‘Why, oh why do we have to be separate?’ In later years another chorus required re-writing if it was going to communicate my understanding of the meaning of my relationship with God in Christ. So for me:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in his wonderful face  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of his glory and grace.

became

Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in his wonderful face  
And the things of earth will grow **passionately near**  
In the light of his glory and grace.

I also first read *Le Milieu Divine* when I was nineteen. Reading it thirty years later made me wonder if I have based all my reflections, theological and spiritual, on this one text! Whether this is because the resonances which occur with every page are due to a coming to the same sort of ‘way of being’ which de Chardin describes (for example the notion of not simply interconnection but ‘in each of us, through matter, the whole history of the world is in part reflected’ (de Chardin, 1964, p.59), or because all those years ago I secretly stored an agenda for the process of development, may not matter. But, whatever is the case, I find that not only the concepts, but also the words used to describe the ideas, are familiar and meaningful.

I am fascinated that de Chardin’s first interest was not people, but vegetation, fauna and deserts. It was only in the latter part of his theological education that he began to work out a philosophy of the person. ‘The world now became for him a vast whole, making its way towards a supreme personality’ (Leroy, in de Chardin,

1972, p 21). His vision of a universe in process of self-creation sprang out of his understanding of the Incarnation. If God became flesh, (the spirit became matter), then matter and spirit are not two separate substances, set side by side. Rather, they are distinct aspects of one single cosmic ‘stuff’. Not only different aspects but mutually dependent aspects. Thus ‘consider the spread of our being – then we shall be astonished at the extent and the intimacy of our relationship with the universe’ (de Chardin, 1972, p.59). So when considering death, redemption is not seen as an escape from the world or from flesh but rather as a further stage of relational depth!<sup>63</sup>

That I may see you (addressing God) under the species of each alien and hostile force seems bent on destroying or uprooting me...It is you painfully parting my fibres in order to penetrate the very marrow of my substance and bear me away within yourself....It is not enough that I should die communicating...teach me that death is a communion. (de Chardin, 1964, p.90)

Teillard’s elaborate description of this relationship moves on to argue that Christian spirituality is about participation in the world, not detachment from it. My own experience of ‘conversion’ and ‘journey’ in a Christian tradition resonates with Berry’s description, in correspondence with Plotkin, of the uncovering of vision and dream.

Through an individual’s initiatory time in the underworld of the soul, she uncovers a dream, a vision, or a revelation that will ‘inspire, guide and drive the action’ for the rest of life, as Thomas says, ‘The dream provides the energy for adult action’. (Plotkin, 2008, p.8 – the two quotes are from personal correspondence between Plotkin and Berry, see Plotkin, p.468)

The process of my spiritual journey is characterised by a series of ‘conversions’. The first a personal commitment to the ways and love of Christ; the second a

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<sup>63</sup> See also Chapter 6, p.210.

commitment to Others, to ‘heal’ and to nurture; the third a commitment to a corporate understanding of Being.<sup>64</sup>

Each of these awakenings provided the seeds of development over the next years, inspiring, guiding and driving and providing the energy for adult action. This journey of the soul provided the resources for pastoral care and preaching and was, in 1986 encapsulated in a series of articles for the magazine *Wildfire*, significantly entitled ‘Becoming’. Like Haughton (p.150 above), for me ‘being’ was not a fluid or active enough word. My journey and process has been a search for a way of *becoming*.

My developing theology of Incarnation was preparing me for the concept of *break-through*, the dance of love from God to people, from people to the more than human earth community, from bacteria to molecules. The process of becoming was moved on by a fourth ‘conversion’. This was an awakening to the notion of ‘voluntary displacement’ (Nouwens, 1982, p.62ff) or the downward way or ‘in-scendence’ (Berry in Plotkin 2008, p8). This part of the process became a synthesis of my understanding of Christian faith and the eco-psychologist’s existentialism<sup>65</sup> which I have been discovering in the last ten years (Romanyshyn, 2002; Fisher, 2006; Zimmermann, et al, 1993).

I started with biblical texts:

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<sup>64</sup> *The personal stories which carry this process can to be found in Appendix 4, p.xxv*

<sup>65</sup> ‘As a popular movement in mid-twentieth-century Europe, existentialism became associated with the idea that existence precedes essence, that is, that our nature is purely what we choose it to be through our free actions. I oppose that idea, so do not want the term *existentialism* to be limited to it. I am using the term more broadly, to indicate an emphasis both on the primacy of experience and on a confrontation with the ultimate concerns in life ... My specific goal is to develop a kind of ‘*ecological existentialism*’ wherein the ultimate concerns of life are worked out in the context of our membership with the community of all life’ (Fisher, 2002, p.213).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (The Gospel According to John, 1:1-5, NRSV)

In your minds you must be the same as Jesus Christ:

His state was divine,  
yet he did not cling  
to his equality with God  
but emptied himself  
to assume the condition of a slave,  
and became as men are;  
and being as all men are,  
he was humbler yet,  
even to accepting death,  
death on a cross.

(The Letter to the Philippians 2,6-8, Jerusalem Bible)

This ‘self-emptying’ of the One who was in the beginning is known as the ‘*kenosis*’ of God, and is the key part of my understanding of Christology which has motivated me to explore the disconnections of our society with the natural world (the creation) and understand Christian salvation as the means of reconnection. It goes further than the *kenosis* of God in Christ.

To be the very power of God yet to wait in frustration and hope until the whole be brought to fulfilment, might be called the *kenosis*, or self-emptying, of the Holy Spirit. For him it has been so from the beginning. If now we are caught up into his being, we must share his humiliation as well as his power. (Taylor, 1972, p.117)

So we live in the Spirit, suffering with the Spirit. *Kenosis* is the soul’s journey as Berry describes:

We must invent, or reinvent, a sustainable human culture by a descent into our pre-rational, our instinctive resources ... What is needed is not ‘transcendence’ but ‘inscience’. This descent, this inscience, is the journey of soul discovery, which can be engaged only by those who have moved beyond the early adolescence in which our society has stalled. (Berry, in Plotkin, 2008, p.8)

This form of Christian theology has immediate and surprising resonances with Sufi mysticism.

Henry Corbin, the foremost western scholar of Sufi mysticism, tells us that sym-pathy is a ‘condition and mode of perception,’ which

stem ‘pathy,’ comes from ‘pathos,’ which means feeling, emotion, passion, suffering. This stem is also joined with the prefix ‘com,’ meaning ‘with,’ and gives us our word com-passion. Sym-pathy and com-passion, then, are the ways of the heart, which make us like others and bring us near to them. In our feeling, passionate, and suffering hearts we are in communion with others who are like us. (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.159)

Henri Nouwen, the foremost interpreter of the Christian monk and philosopher, Thomas Merton, in a book written with others called *Compassion* reflects:

The word *compassion* is derived from the Latin words *pati* and *cum*, which together mean ‘to suffer with’. Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. (Nouwen, McNeill et al., 1982, p.7)

Romanyshyn’s *Ways of the Heart, Essays towards an Imaginal Psychology* focuses on the need for a return, a looking back to that which is lost, namely the human relationship with all of creation.

It seems, then, that we should admit that tears and laughter make us human because they do knit us into the web of creation. When we cry, or laugh we, momentarily, out of our minds, and outside of ourselves in this way we are joined to a mystery larger than ourselves ... Tears and laughter are like harmonic resonances that attune us to others, vibrations on the web of being that place us in sympathy with all creation. (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.158)

The ‘downward way’ is a journey of passion. It is a journey of love and of breakthrough. And so a journey of suffering. In Christian terms Christ’s passion (described in the Philippians passage above), that is the way of the cross, is the

demonstration of God's love towards his world. It is now the way for his disciples who, like him, suffer with and for Others – 'Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish'.

I have the Incarnation of God in Christ, the ultimate 'breakthrough' where only the language of love is adequate to describe this divine way of being.

Something of this dialectic love beats within the sym-pathetic heart of the neo-platonist philosopher, the Sufi mystic and the poet. For Proclus, all things of creation aspire towards the next level of being above them in an act of loving desire. For the Sufi mystics, this desire is matched by God's original desire for us, a desire that springs from a deep loneliness. Corbin in fact suggests that the root for the divine name, Al-lah, means sadness, and he speaks of a 'pathetic god' who in a sigh of sorrow releases all the names of creation hidden within himself that then manifest as the visible world. (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.170)

For the Christian disciple this desire is demonstrated in the passion of Christ, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life' (John 3:16). Here is a pathetic God who in an act of self-emptying, demonstrates his grieving heart and facilitates a way for all his creatures to journey back to himself.

Where there is love there is also loss, and if the cardio-gnosis of a hieratic science is about awakening to what we once knew and had, there is at the heart of this work a sense of grief. (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.171)

Jesus said, if any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. (The Gospel of Mark 8: 34, 35)

A hieratic science requires that we be fully in the world without being of the world. It is a way of being that asks that we hold onto the world in love by letting go of it. (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.171)

In the pathetic state, one is being a witness for values lost and forgotten, for passion, feeling, suffering and emotion as fundamental attributes of a way of knowing and being, which web each of us within bonds of sym-pathy and com-passion not only with one's fellow creatures, but with all creation. (ibid, p.159)

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now: and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, grown inwardly as we await for adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:22-23)

Romanayshyn uses the metaphor of forgetting and remembrance to express the same idea of preventing the culture shaping us in our own image. The radical change of mind is a return to the awareness of being a part of the natural world. It is a process of unforgetting to remembrance: 'In its pathetic condition, the heart awakens to its imprisonment within a world that has lost its vision of the visible order of things as a dehiscence, a flowering, of the invisible' (Romanayshyn, 2002, p.172).

Thus my working strap-line - 'no Incarnation – no God' - has also come to mean 'no relationship with the natural world, no relationship with God'. For me, the process of returning to that relationship with the natural world is 'redemption', a renewal of the awareness and the experience of flesh and spirit being 'at home' with one another. The journey of redemption, or conversion, is a continual downwardly mobile journey, a 'letting go'. It is a descent or 'insecendance' (Berry). It is a way of being or, as Haughton prefers, a way of loving or, more accurately, a way of love. It includes pain, suffering and grief; it is the passionate way. The more relationship and empathy we develop towards the more-than-human community the more we will need to face the trauma and loss of our separation from one another and the natural world.

Proclus gives a beautiful example of the atunement of the pathetic heart to an otherwise ordinary moment. In its heliotropic movement, a flower manifests its affinity with the sun. In this tropism or inclination, the flower and the sun exchange their mutual regard for each other. This turning of the flower, he says, is a conversion towards its 'Angel', an action that is an expression of the pathos between them, the feeling of the one for the other. Heliotropism is a

helio-pathy; the rhythms of nature are tides of passion. Out of the pathetic resonance, a bond of sym-pathy is made between flower and sun. Imagine how upsetting all this can be to a mind that has taken flight from the pathetic heart. The flower, in its turning, shamelessly displays its attraction for the sun, an erotic act performed in public for all to see, even the children. Scandalous! (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.161)



Not only is there the pain of 'letting go' (see Figure 7, Spiral 2: The Journey of Spirituality, Chapter 5, p.183, and stage B, p.184) of the world of mind and reason, which does not allow the attribution of human qualities and feelings to the non-human world, but also there is the sadness and grief at the realisation of the trauma of loss. This is the loss of the awareness of the connection between all things. We have become separate and lonely, unable to make meaning out of isolated minds with hearts forgotten. Romanyshyn pleads that we 'awaken the heart in our time, when mind, unhinged from nature, has all but taken leave of its senses and drifts in a cold, dark universe, whose stars no longer seem to be beacons for our journey home' (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.154).

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.  
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:

Heaven lies about is in our infancy!'

(William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality From recollections of Early Childhood')

The posture of the 'downward way' of the incarnate God is a presence that is able to respond because it has listened to and for the 'Other'; it is the experience of metaxic space.

I regularly experience children displaying the characteristics of the 'pathetic heart'.

I wondered about that bird and why it made that noise, maybe it was angry, sad? Who knows! Next I was feeling a mixture of anger, sadness and loneliness, I understood the anger, sadness but not the loneliness, perhaps it's to do with the amount of space there is around here.

(Magic Spot, 2006, unnamed 10-year-old)

Is it that somewhere within these young living bodies they are remembering what we, as a species, once knew but have forgotten? 'To see in this way is to grasp the invisible kinship and hidden solidarity among things, so see that matter is haunted by spirit and that spirit belongs to matter' (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.167).

My understanding is that the downward way of the pathetic heart is God's way.

'He reveals himself as God in that he is the only one who can empty himself of his divine privileges and become as we are' (Walton, 1991). This means that we, emptying ourselves, will experience the same oneness with all things.



New Horizons

My 2yr old grandchild, Megan, standing on the same beach, 2008 (see p.141)

## Chapter 5

### Hermeneutics: an interpretative methodology Part 2 Hearing my own Voice



Winning the 220yards in school athletics 1963, despite a dislocated shoulder.

‘If I do not perform successfully, then I will die’<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> An early negative script of mine, see p.173

# Chapter 5

## Hermeneutics: an interpretative methodology

### Part 2

#### Hearing my own Voice

Nind, in his doctoral thesis, identified two kinds of perspective in his own story.

Two kinds of discourse or perspective emerged within his text, one was ‘a step back, a reflection upon, an account almost within parenthesis, and then the stronger explorative account was that leaning further and further towards the poetic use of language and what I had begun to conceive as the poetics of experience’ (Nind, 2003, p.202).

These two perspectives appear in my own story, but I add a further distinction.

First then, in the text, there is the step back, ‘reflection upon’ but also within these reflections there are further steps back which tell some of my stories, and these appear in italics. In the interpretative consideration of the children’s responses there emerges the ‘stronger’ reflection which leans ‘further and further towards the poetic use of language’, the ‘poetics of experience’.

In order to understand how I interpret the children’s responses, I need to interpret my own journey (see Figure 3, Chapter 4, p.128).

First, taking a step back, there are three key stories which contextualise a hermeneutic of my spiritual and theological journey.

#### **1. The Birth Canal**

My mother gave birth to me on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1946. The story goes that I was ‘on the go’ since I was born. Today we would call it hyper-active, then ‘Oh yes, he is a handful.’

After 4 years of ‘successful’ ministry<sup>67</sup> I had a mild dose of pleurisy which stopped me for the first time in years. I had to stay in bed for some days and the frustration of this together with the appalling pain of being unable to do anything clearly brought out the script: ‘If you don’t do more, they’ll never love you’. I had already been to a number of ‘courses’ and workshops based on Transactional Analysis, and had begun a course with Frank Lake’s Clinical Theology Association. I moved to Birmingham, new church, new opportunities, huge amount more work, so I recovered quickly and covered up the agitating subterranean script, ‘If you don’t work harder, you’ll die’.

So it was that some time later I was participating in a Frank Lake Workshop. It was the day for ‘re-birthing’ and by this time (early 1980s) this eccentric man was in the practise of re-birthing 20 or 50 or so people at a time! By this time I had experienced the ‘technique’ in Christian healing circles where a state of emotionally reliving the past was induced by prayer and waiting, understood to be the action of the Holy Spirit. Frank Lake did it with L.S.D or blankets! It was blankets for me. This is what happened.

*First there was a period of silence and darkness under the blanket, together with feelings of boredom, frustration and impatience began as others began making various reactive noises. I simply waited and waited and waited as the hall filled with crying and weeping, shouts and screams. I was extremely angry, suffering a great internal roaring of rage in fact. These things never worked for me, I felt.*

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<sup>67</sup> Ordained in 1971 I took up my first ministry (1971-1976) in Ebenezer Baptist Church, Magor Gwent. I moved to Birmingham in 1976 to the Church of the Redeemer, a Baptist church in the process of re-building in the inner city.

*It appeared that there was no individual supervision and I am not sure how long I went on stuck in this rage, but I was aware that others were ‘finishing’ and by the time I ‘started’ there was a small group around me.*

*Then it started, I had the sensation of being squeezed until I couldn’t breathe, there was a rushing sound in my ears, and a big base drum beating. I was curled up on the floor, the blankets by now thrown off. The squeezing sensation eased; the squeezing sensation started again, and I moved along the floor, this was repeated many times. Each time my little group of ‘supporters’ moved with me, enclosing me in a small circle.*

*(Throughout the whole event I had this uncanny sense of ‘knowing’ everything I was doing and seeing everyone around me, hearing their talk, while at the same time, being someone else, experiencing a strange event as new. So, for instance, I was thinking it through, very much aware that I was experiencing my birth and having the odd sense that maybe I was making it up, because I knew what happened at births, and at the same time I was living in the world of feelings which as far I was aware then until now, were not of my own making). During the squeezing time, I shouted and cried out, during the quiet times I went silent. Then everything stopped. Everything was quiet, no squeezing, in fact nothing. I had a rising sense of boredom. Gosh, was I bored. Nothing happening at all. I clearly remember drumming my fingers on the floor and saying, ‘Oh come on!’ This phase seemed to go on for a long time (it turned out to be over an hour).*

*I remember thinking, ‘I’ll just have to do something myself’. I remember feeling, very angry that nothing was happening, the sense of things was, ‘Why can’t I get out? Why are they keeping me here? And on...and on,*

*until 'I'll die if I don't get out'. So I tried. This seemed to be manifest by holding my breath and trying to move myself along which now I couldn't do. I have no idea why, in terms of the physical effort, as I had done it through out the 'contractions'. The effort, the holding of my breath made me madder and madder. I struggled (with whom or what I don't know) until I just couldn't make any more effort. I wanted out, I could not get out, no one would help me, I must do it myself, but I couldn't, so I gave up. I stopped trying (I had been shouting abuse and crying out obscenities, my 'support group' told me). I stopped, gave up and d.... Then suddenly I let out the primal scream (or two), breathed again, moved and I was out. The moving this time consisted of first kicking a 'supporter to the floor', then getting to my feet in a strength of rage and throwing myself on this poor man; whereupon others attempted to drag me off, and finally managed to do it but with resulting injuries to faces and bodies. It took two of three men to hold me down and hold me until the screaming blue murder and the attempt to deliver murderous blows gradually ceased. I became calm, quiet and started to cry. I cried like never before, deep soul, body crying. I remember that I was feeling, " Why did I do that to her, I didn't want to, I love her'. I remember that I was thinking, 'I kicked her, once I was out, I kicked her, and enjoyed the idea that I was hurting her'. This made me cry all the more.*

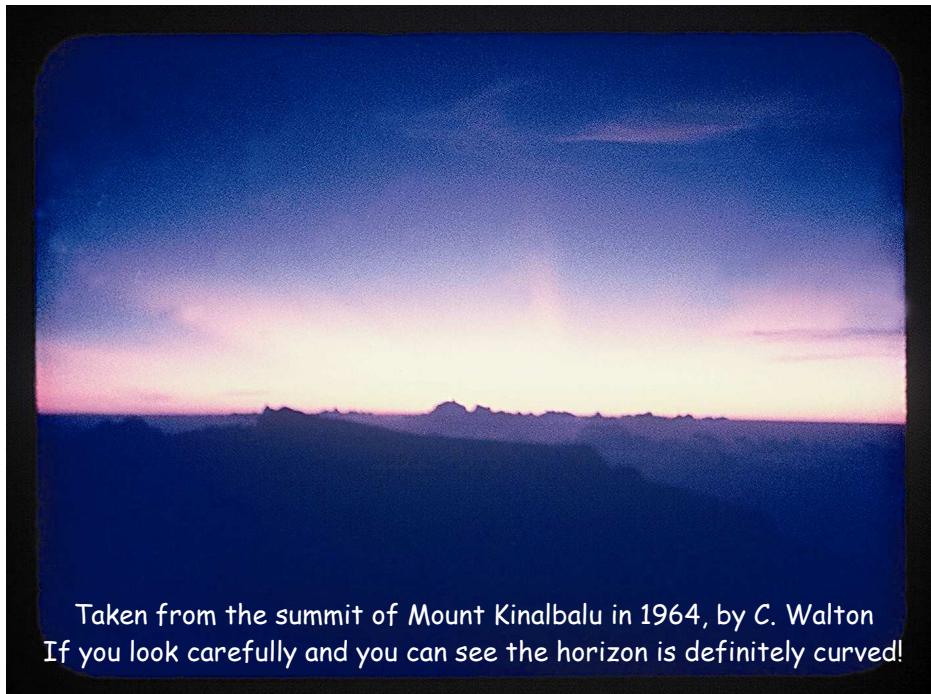
It was months later that I talked to my mother (she must have been in her early 70s) about my actual birth on 16.11.46. She told me that it was fine, but that during labour the contractions, even after they were very strong and the head could be seen, stopped for a couple of hours, then just when the midwife was

getting concerned there was a sudden contraction which did the job and I came kicking. She told me that she needed quite a good deal of repair.

## **2. Near death in Borneo**

Having been accepted at Bristol Baptist College and the University of Bristol to pursue a BA in Theology and ministerial training I was advised (at eighteen) to have a break from school. I went to Beaufort, Sabah, North Borneo with Voluntary Service Overseas for the year 1964-65. I taught in a C of E Mission School, which was already a part of the Malaysian State Education system. The first term I was in the Primary School and for the next two terms I taught the Cambridge Overseas Board GCE.

Just outside the capital, Kota Kinabalu (Jesselton in 1964 but renamed not long after I returned home), there rises the highest mountain in S. E. Asia, Kinabalu, 13,457 (4,101m) feet high. In the January of 1965, together with another VSO volunteer, Graham, and our groups of teenage boys, we set off on an expedition to climb the mountain. We achieved our goal. Before dawn one morning we emerged from our overnight hut just a few hundred feet from the summit, made the last clamber to the peak to be greeted by the sun rising over the curvature of the earth. This experience stirred memories and recollections of the birth canal, disrupted certainties about the nature of humankind and the universe and set up reveries of the future, following as it did a near-death experience on the way to the mountain.



Taken from the summit of Mount Kinabalu in 1964, by C. Walton  
If you look carefully and you can see the horizon is definitely curved!

*From Beaufort we had trekked 75 miles of jungle to some villages near the river. We worked three days in their paddy fields to earn a passage by dug-out canoe to travel another 70 miles down river to the foot hills of the mountain. The time came and we loaded up the canoes, the village men took control of each canoe and we were off.*



*Many gruelling hours later we were passing through some particularly rough white rapids when the canoe that Graham and I were travelling in filled with water and suddenly we were in the water, under the water, being rushed down river, struggling to keep heads above water. It was two miles down river that they caught us and steered us into the bank and dragged us out, pumped the water in our lungs out and gave us mouth to mouth.*

*That night, reunited with all our boys and round a campfire, recovering from grazes, shock and near death we heard the story, one of the Malay boys, Charles! (he was, after all, studying in an English C of E Mission school) interpreting for us. As soon as it was realised that our canoe was in trouble the other canoes went to the bank and jettisoned all baggage and people and the villagers chased after us; they caught up with us and saved us; saved our lives. Three weeks before, we were told, the village lost three of their men at the same place, on the same curve of the river. Their boats filled up and they drowned. We asked why no one had been able to save them like us. No attempt was made to save them. Why? His eyes widened further and further as Charles translated the reply. The men were left to assuage the evil spirits. But why weren't we left for the same reason? The evil spirits are angry if white men are not saved, black men can drown because white men are more valuable than black men. After further conversation we discovered that this tragic and bizarre lie came from missionaries of the Borneo Evangelical Christian Mission.<sup>68</sup>*

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<sup>68</sup> An example of synchronicity - meaningful coincidence, or acausal connecting principle - see Jung 2010: in January of this year 2010, one of the VSO volunteers present in the above adventure tracked me down through the internet to invite me to hold a reunion of 1963-4 Borneo volunteers at the Centre here! Will Sykes has sent me his personal journal recording the whole trip together with the photographs. It is good to have the story corroborated, the copies of that journal are held at the Centre.

### 3. Determined to die at Hell's Mouth<sup>69</sup>

*The waves pounded the beach, rollers twenty feet high. It took a good twenty minutes to struggle against the wind over the dunes – a five-minute amble normally. I did something I had never done in thirty-eight years. I walked, struggled, crawled through the rain, waves and spray to the northern end of the beach and climbed. I climbed up the head rocks - I'm not a rock climber and I don't know how I did it – until I came to a tiny flat bit a hundred feet up, nearly reached by the waves it felt as they came crashing past the cliffs. I remember that day too. As I clung on, as the storm raged I had to make a decision about continuing to cling, or to give up and give in to the storm.*

***There was no one there, but I was seized with a sense of presence, more than a strange misty light of a presence than 'someone'. It struggled like me to hang on and in my rage I knew it would, hang on, that is, for however long the storm.***

*I have never actually climbed that cliff again, but I can still return to that particular storm (written in April 2004).*

My memory of writing up this incident is that I wrote in much more detail. I was at Hell's Mouth, climbing up the cliff because my marriage had broken down, my wife was moving out of the Manse with the children and I was in trouble. I was desperate; I climbed up the cliff because I decided that I could not take any more. I thought the storm was a good cover for jumping off the cliff, and disappearing for ever.

Long before, I had already started a process of 'discovery' which included what I now would call 'scripts' in Transactional Analysis style.

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<sup>69</sup> Hell's Mouth, Porth Newgal, is a four mile long beach facing west and the open Atlantic ocean, see Chapter 7, p.139.

‘Unless I work hard and prove I am successfully achieving then they will not love me’

And another:

‘If I do not perform successfully, then I will die’.

These are the underlying scripts which were swinging over me like the sword of Damocles. However I had recourse to Frank Lake and his Clinical Theology. I share the following because it is a part of the re-collection of my own self.<sup>70</sup>

### **Clinical Theology**

In chapter nine, ‘Schizoid Personalities’, of his magnum opus, *Clinical Theology* Lake embarks on a biblical-cum-philosophical-cum-theological discussion, which as he says takes him away from the medical and psychiatric concepts of the schizoid personality, but which he feels is required in order to better understand the coming discussion of the existential and ontological analysts.

The existentialists are students, above all, of the schizoid position. It commonly represents their own basic ontological universe. They are struggling, from within this universe, to achieve a standing ground and a point of vision or vantage which is no longer obscured by their own strained and narrowing perspective. But since Pascal himself, with Kierkegaard, Unamuno, Simone Weil and many others personally acquainted with schizoid affliction regard Job as their great Biblical representative in the Old Testament, as Jesus is their remedy in the New, we will turn first to Job. (Lake, 1966, p.581)

I remember identifying with a statement like: ‘Job did not curse the catastrophe that brought his prosperity to an end. He cursed the night of his conception and the day of his birth’ (ibid, p.582). Here I saw echoes of Jeremiah, a prophet who

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<sup>70</sup> I have tried to write remembering that at the time the terms and concepts which helped me through the process are not the terms and concepts I would wish to use now, most particularly because there was such a concentration on interior psychology and little or no reference to exterior relationships.

had inspired me to write my first full blown sermon at the age of 17 at the bureau desk seen in the DVD, to the agonised existential pain of Rachmaninov<sup>71</sup>.

Cursed be the day  
On which I was born!  
The day when my mother bore me,  
Let it not be blessed!  
Cursed be the man  
Who brought the news to my father,  
“A son is born to you,”  
Making him very glad.  
(Jeremiah 20 vs.14,15 RSV)

Kierkegaard, afflicted with the same dread and incurable melancholy, saw the real significance of the Book of Job in its condemnation of those who, in Shakespeare's words, go about to 'apply a moral medicine to a mortifying mischief' (Much Ado about Nothing, Act I, Sc.3).

Kierkegaard wrote, 'The significance of this book really lies in showing the cruelty we men commit when we look upon unhappiness as a guilt, a crime. For it is human selfishness which desires to escape from the impression, the solemn and moving impression of suffering, of what can happen to a man in life – in order to protect oneself against it one explains suffering as guilt ..' What concerns Job is to be right, in a certain sense even against God, but above all against his friends who instead of consoling him martyr him with the proposition that he suffers guiltily. (Lake, 1966, p.586)

In my own life I found past trauma which was making severe restraints on 'making my own soul' (de Chardin, 1972, p.61). For me these early years struggling to identify my 'I' were dominated by the hopeless task of trying to live by scripts designed to defeat me. I discovered that an underlying desire to die is the most characteristic distinguishing factor between

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<sup>71</sup> I remember where I wrote it - the bureau in the lounge of the house in Leicester. (Now that bureau is in my own house, after my parents' deaths). I remember Rachmaninov's second piano concerto (a piece which always increased or echoed my own ontological dreads and fears, while motivating further efforts in work and care) playing again and again as I wrote a passionate adolescent version of prophetic passion and justice, 'From the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, every one deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, "Peace, peace", when there is no peace.' (Jeremiah 20, vs 13,14 RSV).

schizoid and non-schizoid persons. This seemed to be about me. Lake refers to a story told by Guntrip, which he believes points to a factor which helps to produce the schizoid infant. It is the sudden and catastrophic, all-or-nothing, paradoxical nature of an early traumatic experience. The story: a child who as a baby was left screaming and no one was allowed to pick him up. Then, quite suddenly, he stopped dead and was silent. Lake comments: 'In that moment his spirit of trust, his ego-in-relationship, his courage-to-be-as-a-dependent-term-in-a-bonded-link-with-mother, his I-myself, or nascent self-hood was annihilated' (Lake, 1966, p.581).

For me it was when I was just months old that I used to be put in my cot upstairs in the small bedroom in the afternoons for a nap. I didn't like naps very much, so I didn't go to sleep. This is the way I remembered it in counselling sessions many years ago.

*Up in the cot, OK for a bit, then bored, very bored, nothing happening, must make something happen, call out, no answer, call out, no answer, keeping calling, then crying, then bawling with sadness, then bawling with rage, then suddenly stop – silence. No point, no one is coming, no one will come. I'm finished.*

I'm not sure how long this went on; it was the daily routine. I guess my mother needed some rest from a highly overactive baby.

Others can say how extreme a schizoid personality belongs to me, but I resonate with the struggle about 'being'. This quote from Lake, describes not me, but a more extreme 'me'.

The 'I' remains, but it has no corresponding 'self', so that there is nothing to justify the use of the possessive pronoun 'my'. The 'I-my-self', has become an 'I-nothing-nothing'. (Lake, 1966, p.581)

I am nowhere near the Kierkegaardian extreme experience of ‘the horror of everything disappearing before a sick brooding over the tale of one’s own miserable self’ (Kierkegaard, 1946, p.140). However, I do brood. I believe struggle is a necessary part of living. I assent to this:

The man who, holding fast to God, remains with the dread which obedience involves does not allow himself to be ‘deceived by its countless counterfeits’. Then at last the attacks of dread, though they are fearful, are not such that he flees from them. For him dread becomes a serviceable spirit which against its will leads him wither he would go. (ibid, p.142)

So it occurred to me, back in the 70s that I experienced a resoundingly schizoid position: a decision during birth is made that I have been abandoned so that no one can help, no one does help; I will have to do it myself but when help comes, life had already been given up. The offer of being has been lost at the beginning. This produces the script:

“No one will ever help, I’ll have to do it myself, otherwise I will die”.

The script is reinforced by the experience of being left abandoned in the cot. Then I get saved from drowning (pp.169-171). “No one helps”, says the script, but they did. They did. BUT, because of a lie. It was an event of injustice which gives me life and being. “I’m alive, but I shouldn’t be”, says the script.

Guntrip suggests that the ultimate aim of psychotherapy concerning the schizoid condition is:

To help the patient to tolerate the conscious re-experiencing of his profoundly repressed and fundamental weak infantile ego, which he has spent his life trying to disown in his struggle to feel adult. When he can tolerate its return to consciousness, he secures at last an opportunity to start growing again towards maturity in this all-important, dynamically fundamental part of his personality which represents his primary nature. (Guntrip, 1961, p.427)

My mother, together with the natural world and the corner feeling (see Chapter 1, p.21), my awe of the stars, my relationship with hills and mountains and sea, have been key to this ‘patient’ gaining enough courage-to-be to tolerate enough of his

profoundly repressed infantile ego to live through the struggle to reconnect the ‘split’ and experience the journey towards rebirth of ‘true-self-being-in relationship’. Or, as Rogers might have put it, my mother and the natural world contributed to the conditions which were sufficient and also necessary to bring about constructive personality change, that is, enough change to bring about greater integration and less inner conflict and an increase in energy for living and a shift from immature to mature behaviours.

What was missing from those early years was the explicit understanding that there is no daimon, ‘true-self’, *without others*. It has always seemed to me that the extremes of emotional and psychiatric condition, individually experienced by some, can also be seen as a description of the corporate experience of humankind. If, for instance, the fundamental condition of human ‘beingness’ has a schizoid tendency, because of the need to recover *from* the trauma of having been so utterly divorced from connection and unity with all life (Fisher, 2005, p.52), then to a greater or lesser degree everyone experiences fear and dread of being without a ‘self’ in relationship with another. It then follows that the way to heal the split between selfhood and ego-in-relationship is by facing the dread and to discover a new way to be-in-relationship-of-trust-with-another. Everyone requires assistance to establish and maintain the broken connections between the ‘me’ who is in danger of being the ‘I-nothing-nothing’ and the ‘me’ who is the I-in-relationship-with-you-and-Thou. This is the ‘I’ who is protected from being the ‘I-nothing-nothing’ by the ‘Other’. This Other is ‘Another’ in danger of being an ‘I-nothing-nothing’ but can be protected by the me who is becoming an I-in-relationship-with-you-and-Thou.

Any culture, religion or spirituality which promotes escape from the dread of ‘being-nothing’ as a way of ‘being-in-the world’ will encourage strong egos to cover pain, resulting in the loss of empathy and concern for the ‘Others’. To be in relationship involves the continual struggle through such structural change and integration and so risks the experience of new abandonment, essential, it seems to me, for any practical way of being in the world which both lives in it and cares for it.

So relationship and involvement with the ‘Other’ is a very significant ‘horizon’ through which I understand who I am in the world. This is one of those horizons through which I interpret the words of the children in their Magic Spots.

### **My Journey of Spirituality**

In 1942, four years before I was born, my father wrote,

In the meantime, an individualistic spiritual attitude is not enough. I must continually seek to witness to the truth as I conceive it. I must not neglect social action. (Ralph Walton, 1942, p.89)

He wrote this in an unpublished collection of essays, *My Christ in War*, written in wartime, (and written by hand) when Dad was a conscientious objector. Rev. Seaward Beddow wrote in the Foreword, ‘The pages reflect the writer’s spiritual struggle, his desire for knowledge, his search for truth and his yearning to follow it’ (p.179).

My own story mirrors this struggle. It is a struggle of resistance against the isolating consequences of individualism, often generated by the conceptual split between heaven and earth, or body and soul; and a struggle towards, in John Davis’ terms, ‘corporate virtues’ (Chapter 6 p.204). In my terms the struggle is relational; it is about the relationship, not the ‘either / or’ (between Earth and

## Foreword

**F**am glad to contribute a Foreword to introduce this collection of Essays written by my friend Ralph Walton. They are full of good things and they contain many a telling phrase. The author is a young man who has thought deeply on his experience in this searching period of war and each of his chapters possesses the interest of the personal note. This makes the book a valuable contribution to any inquiry about what people are thinking today.

**T**he opening chapter is concerned with the meaning that Christ holds for the author in the present bewildering state of the world, and the answer he gives to the question is found to be the guiding theme of the whole book. The pages reflect the writer's spiritual struggle, his desire for knowledge, his search for truth and his yearning to follow it. The range of the chapters is wide for it includes things personal, national, international, ethical and religious. But this diversity of subject does not leave an impression of scattered writing, for the reader becomes conscious that all is held together by the personality of the writer.

**T**he Essays end with a notable confession of faith in God as ready to aid man in the

present extremity. I quote from the final chapter the heartening words : "Surely He who planned the earth and administers its affairs has the power to extend in some special way a Helping Hand to men *in extremis*." It is well said.

**T**his is a book for today. It has been a privilege to read it and write a Foreword. And it is almost unique as a volume for it comes literally from the pen of the author. It is fine penmanship and adds a further touch to the personal note of the book.

*T. Seamus Beeson*

Wycliffe Church, Leicester.  
April, 1942.

Heaven, body and soul, you and me, the individual and the corporate) but the 'both / and'. More particularly it is about the nature of the 'and' between the 'either' and the 'or' and the 'both' and the 'and' (See *Parentheses 1 and 2*). My working inclusive definition of spirituality is a 'metaxic relational consciousness'. Even thirty years ago the use of the word 'spirituality' was not widespread. But in the 1970s terms such as "pastoral", "myth" and "spiritual" became no longer seen as purely "religious" and began to be appropriated into secular society (E. Bailey, in Moore and Purton, 2006, p.3). The term spirituality then is no longer attached to organized religion. It represents a 'turn away from worlds in which people think of themselves first and foremost as belonging to established and "given" orders of things' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, in *ibid*, p.3). However, this does not mean that those associated with established religions do not also have a

contribution to make; in fact this disassociation with religion has a liberating effect on many within those religions. For instance my spiritual journey is not constrained by old religious dogmas or rituals. Spirituality is mystery, it is otherness, it is always present in the in between, ‘making both separateness and conjunction real’<sup>72</sup> (Taylor, 1972, p.8), that is, a place to become a person at home in the world. It feels uncertain, vulnerable. It is very akin to my sense of living in parenthesis (see Chapter 1, pp.20ff). Harris summarises:

I use the term to refer to our being in the world in the light of the Mystery at the core of the Universe: a mystery that some call God. The term also includes understanding what that Mystery requires of us, such as a classic set of demands recorded in Micah 6.8: “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”. (Harris, 1996, p.75)

This is a spirituality which demands involvement and immersion in the world because of the belief that all things are sacred. Harris, following Jesuit Bill Callahan’s idea of ‘noisy contemplation’ calls this spirituality ‘noisy’ ‘based on the conviction that those who withdraw their hands make them dirty’ (*ibid*). A metaxic relational consciousness accepts that sacredness comes from keeping dust and breath, the inseparable mix of creation, together (see Genesis 2.7). ‘Dust and breath make us “members of the holy community of creation”, and the dustier and breathier we are the better’ (Berry, 1993, in Harris 1996, p75).

At The Church of the Redeemer during the 1980s in my ministry at the unusually named inner city Baptist church, we developed a way of ministry which was not a strategy to communicate faith by insisting on adherence to the ‘certitudes’ of doctrinal statements, but rather ‘a demonstration of the life and ministry of the

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<sup>72</sup> See liturgy from Iona Community in the first edition of their *Wee Worship Book* p.8:  
Before the world began,  
When everything was shapeless  
You were there...  
Turning the random into real  
AND FOR THIS WE PRAISE YOU.

Lord Jesus Christ lived out in a particular neighbourhood' (Walton, in Calver, Copely et al., eds, 1984, p.82). We understood that we were to be 'a Christ-like corporate servant to the neighbourhood' (*ibid*, p.83). In 1984 I referred to the life and *ministry* of Christ, now I would refer to his life and *spirituality*.

During this time my own understanding of the word spirituality was refined through struggle. I struggled in resistance to the indoctrination of some Christian evangelical teaching, which preached against the world in an attempt to set people on the path to heaven and which I found in young Christians joining my church in Birmingham; I resisted the idea that faith has nothing to do with politics – national or local; I resisted the notion that faith and the condition of one's soul or spirit has nothing to do with the way you live in society except for your personal and interpersonal relationships, especially sexual morality. In short, the church was involved, as I saw it, in a tumultuous struggle to re-engage with the Lord of all Creation who became our flesh in our earth, in our own neighbourhood, among the people with whom we lived. After all, my first acceptance of Christ involved the passionate belief that in Christ God became a human being and lived among us (see *Parenthesis 2*, p.141ff).

The truth of the Incarnation, of the taking of humanity into God, is the basis both of a materialistic, earthy and fleshly spirituality and of a spirituality-based commitment to action in the world. (Leech, 1986, p.38)

Buber's I-You<sup>73</sup> relationships can only be seen in terms of being-in the world and therefore being-with each other. The reality in which both participate is not the reality either of one self, or the other self, but the reality in-between which emerges in, through and for the relationship (Buber, 1970, p.84).

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<sup>73</sup> See footnote on Chapter 1, page 13 referring to the 1970 translation of *I and Thou*.

It is Dorothee Soelle's *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* which encourages me to use the word 'resistance' in the previous paragraphs. The concept of 'journey' to describe spirituality has always been attractive to me, ever since I used a popular poster that described the Christian life as 'not so much a destination, more a way of life'. But as the church in Birmingham discovered trying to be a 'corporate servant' demanded less clarity, rather than more; and less certainty with fewer rules, but more passion. It was a journey of resistance. I would have used 'struggle' in the previous paragraph until Soelle articulated for me how spirituality and resistance are a part of one another.

Are there not enough mystics who have turned their backs on the world, who politically are totally resigned and swallowed up by their own narcissism? (Soelle, 2001, p.5)

Soelle's theme is the necessity of resistance for mysticism: or, more exactly, the meaning of the 'and' between mysticism and resistance. Spirituality is not spirituality worth its name unless it resists all that would separate ethics and religion. Or, as Soelle puts it herself: 'If it is true that God is love, then the separation of religion and ethics – or, in technical terminology of the academy, the separation of systematic theology and social ethics – is dangerous as well as detrimental to both sides. It is self-destructive for religion and ethics because it empties religion, reducing its basis for experiencing the world. It turns ethics into arbitrary arrangements of individual tribes and hordes' (ibid, p.5).

I have already represented my own life journey as a revolving spiral in Figure 3, p.128. I now offer another spiral in Figure 7. This represents my spiritual journey and is more complicated than Figure 3 because it is designed to represent the way of being which is interpreting the world when my spiral turns and drills (see p.125f and Track 2 on the DVD).

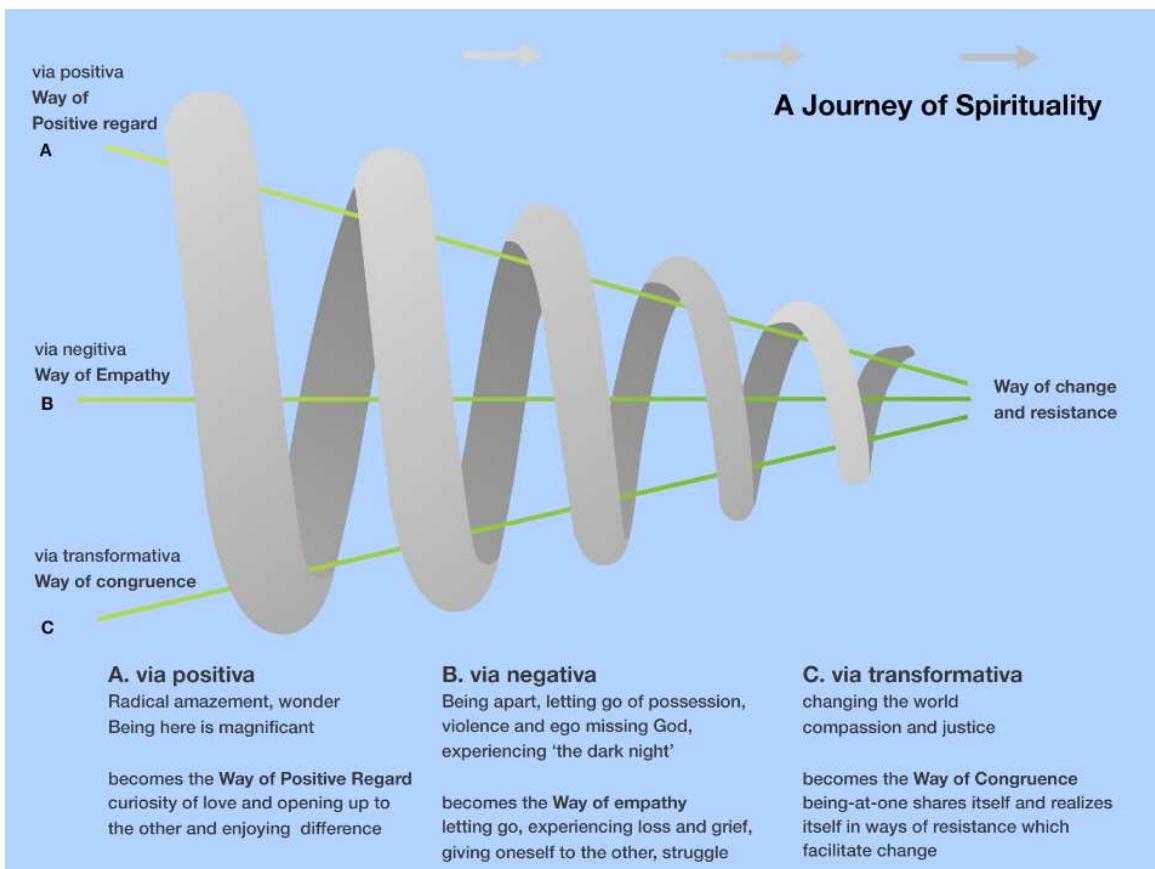


Figure 7. Spiral 2: A Journey of Spirituality

My diagrammatic representation of the journey of life (Figure 3, p.128) now becomes a metaphor for the journey of spirituality. I have combined the stages of the journey of life from Christian mystical tradition<sup>74</sup> with the three core conditions of Rogers' 'way of being' (Rogers, 1980).

Some explanation is necessary.

The first stage (A) is *via positiva* and 'it occurs in the primordial image of the rose that blooms in God' (Soelle, 2001, p.90). It is wonderment, amazement in the world around us, of other people; delight in life itself. 'What it means in relation to where the journey takes its beginning is that we do not set out as those who seek but as those who have been found' (ibid, p.91). The gift of wonder is not

<sup>74</sup> See an outline of a mystical Journey for today, Soelle 2001 where using the foundations of classic mysticism, purgio, illumination and unio – purification, illumination and unification, she names three stages of a mysticism for today acknowledging the work of Matthew Fox (1995). His names for the three stages are: *via positiva*, *via negativa* and *via transformativa*, Soelle's names are Being Amazed, Letting Go and Resisting.

only the positive acceptance that one is here, alive and being, now, but also it implies a self-forgetfulness. It is the beginning of leaving oneself. *Via positive* can therefore be understood as ‘unconditional positive regard’ both for oneself and Others.

This leads to the next stage (B) - *via negativa*. This does not simply mean a negative stage. This stage is the time for letting-go of attitudes, ways of being which have become our own but cause problems for Others. It is the stage of *μετανοία* (*metanoia* - a turn around and a continued and sustained life-style change within oneself and towards Others<sup>75</sup> (see also Chapter 11, p.349). In post industrial consumer society our letting-go is related above all to our growing dependency on consumerism, both in the coercive mechanisms of consumption and in the addictions of the every day working world (Soelle, 2001, p.92). Inevitably this also means letting-go of cultural denials and entering into the suffering and pain of the world, of Others and ourselves. Therefore, this means letting go of self enough to enter into the life of Others. It is the stage of empathy, a way of being for Others.

The third stage is (C) *via transformativa*. This is a stage of entering into a way of being (or way of becoming, as I prefer) where self is shared. It is a life of compassion and justice, which is energised to resist oppressive and unjust power, people and structures. It is a way of congruence, a unity with Others, the earth and God (or *the Other*). There is a constant revolving movement, almost drilling

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<sup>75</sup> *metanoia* - *μετανοία* I am used to using this Greek word in my theological context. It is the word which is translated ‘repentance’ in the New Testament. I am following the tradition of many Christian writers who, when they want to revitalise or reinterpret an often-used ‘religious’ word, use the Greek word and then fill it with new meaning or re-establish its original root. The context of many uses of the word *μετανοία* – repentance, suggests that it is an apology for sin and a return to good moral behaviour. However, the word has a fuller, richer, less judgmental meaning than this. It means a turn around, a change in belief, behaviour and feeling. In the context of this thesis it encapsulates the idea of seeing things differently with new eyes, with a new perspective, therefore changing one’s behaviour, and so thereafter including this new way of responding, this new way of being, or becoming, as an integral part of belief, relationships and action.

movement towards the wild, wide eyed maturity of living a way of change and resistance.

My ‘schizoid’ history above (pp.173-175), as interpreted here by the spiritual or mystical journey of the in-between, is the voice, my own voice such as I hear it, which leads this exploration of the children’s response to Magic Spots. Kearney has provided me with a useful description of any ‘conclusions’ that present themselves in the hermeneutical journey. He does not make claims, bring presumptions, or come to conclusions, rather he offers ‘wagers’. His central wager is that if the enigma of the Other has been largely ignored by the mainstream metaphysical tradition, then it continues to resurface again in the guise of strangers, gods, monsters which keep demanding our attention (Kearney, 2003, p.7). He quotes Rudiger Bubner who describes hermeneutics as being able to make cross connections between many different disciplines. ‘In this way, the traditional philosophical *claim to universality* is renewed under another name’ (Bubner in Kearney, 2003, p.19). Kearney responds, ‘I would simply want to preface the term ‘universality’ with the qualifier ‘quasi’, thereby retaining the claim as a *wager* rather than a presumption (my italics).

...if hermeneutics extends horizontally across disciplines it also extends historically across temporal horizons, reinterpreting the myths and memories of our past in the light of future hopes for a more mindful and compassionate understanding of our Others.(Kearney, 2003, p.19)

My wager is that stretching metaxic space for children, enabling them to discover oneself-as-another then they are more likely to enjoy a journey of spirituality which may provide a new way of being outside the Cartesian dualism which is now marked by the ‘catastrophe of economic and ecological exploitation’ (Soelle, 2001, p.89).

### *Parenthesis 3*

Selfhood, being mindful of life: a dose of radical alterity  
every time until better<sup>76</sup>



Response to a second Magic Spot, 2010  
Boy, aged 10: Who am I? (my title)

<sup>76</sup> When I was in Sabah, N. Borneo (see Chapter 5, p.164) in 1964 I bought a Chinese powder to treat a bit of a cold. On the back of the packet, apart from suggesting that the powder would heal anything from a headache to cancer, there was the instruction: Dosage: Take every time until better. Whatever that means is what I mean here.

## *Parenthesis 3*

### **Selfhood, being mindful of life: a dose of radical alterity every time until better**

#### **Advice from a caterpillar**

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at one another for some time in silence: at last the caterpillar took the hookah out of his mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.

“Who are you?” said the caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, “I – I hardly know, Sir, at present – at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.”

“What do you mean by that?” said the caterpillar sternly. “Explain yourself!”

“I can’t explain myself, I’m afraid, Sir,” said Alice, “because I’m not myself, you see.”

“I don’t see,” said the Caterpillar.

“I’m afraid I can’t put it more clearly,” Alice replied, very politely, “for I can’t understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.”

“It isn’t,” said the caterpillar.

“Well, perhaps you haven’t found it so yet,” said Alice, “but when you have to turn into a chrysalis – you will some day, you know – and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you’ll feel it a little queer, won’t you?”

“Not a bit,” said the Caterpillar.

“Well, perhaps *your* feelings may be different,” said Alice, “all I know is, it would feel very queer to *me*.”

“You!” said the Caterpillar contemptuously. “Who are you?”

Which brought them back to the beginning of the conversation.

(Carroll, 1998, p.40)

I have no intention of joining this closed circle. My intention is not to define the ‘is-ness’ of ‘I’, or ‘self’, but rather to make sense out of the experience of the 7-year old Alice’s (Haughton, p.xii in Carroll, 1998) ‘at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times

since then' with the notional acceptance that Carroll is describing the ordinary experience of ordinary people, and especially children. This is to say that our perception of ourselves changes according to our relationship with Others and our current experience of what is happening (to the extent that we know about it) in the world.

It is not surprising that having espoused the notion of a self-creating universe which requires 'making my own soul' and so contributes to the 'vast becoming of the world' (de Chardin, 1972, p.61) this thesis assumes that it follows, that when considering Self, we choose and make self.

When we say that man chooses his own self, we mean that every one of us does likewise; but we also mean by that that in making this choice he also chooses all men. In fact, in creating the man that we want to be, there is not a single one of our acts which does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be.  
(Sartre, 1957, p17)

But more than that: this not-knowing-who-we-are, once we represent it not as a circle but as a moving, open spiral, continually tangling in 'whirligogs' (Laing, 1966) and with Others, then Levinas' concept of radical alterity brings an end to Alice's confusion but not, it must be said, to her uncertainty.

... in the philosophy of Levinas the tragic self is challenged to become the ethical self. That is, beyond the hopeless, self-enclosing indulgence of a tragic response to existence, there is an alternative; the encounter with the Other. (Salverson, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.147)

How do we move from confusion to uncertainty? In 'the other person through whom we become, not a mastering subject of, but, rather, a *subject to*' (ibid, p.147). In Kierkegaard's understanding this not confusing, but uncertain. Being-in-relationship is the *spiritual* nature of existence. That is, to be who we are is to respond to the call of another. 'Call' is Levinas' word. To respond to the call of

another is the very thing that makes me an ‘I’. It is found in my capability to respond to the Other’s need of me (ibid). To the caterpillar’s question Levinas would answer, ‘I am the one who finds the resources to respond to the call’ (Levinas, 1985, p.89).

David Walters, an existential psychotherapist, tells the story of 8-year-old, Simon, who had experienced the sudden death of his father in a workplace accident. ‘His case is outlined to demonstrate that once the *spiritlessness* of the adult world is confronted and rejected, children like Simon may readily take on the pain and suffering of loss … Hence, the corresponding hermeneutic, that of the choosing and making of self, is highlighted as ‘an intimate and valuable part of childhood adjustment to grief’ (Walters, 2008, p.277). It is a helpful explanation of the subjectivity of the existential ‘making of self’ when he concludes that ‘this “subjectivism” may be seen as a type of *transformational learning*, one where action is seen as defining character’ (ibid, p.283). Thus, this is a discovery of self in relation to Others:

In a real way, then, Simon’s experience of loss and grief in existential psychotherapy is *hermeneutic*, i.e. one that comes to recapture, recover and reconstruct his self in relation to loss. (ibid, p.284)

I have described this thesis as ‘re-collection’. Every ‘self’ has, to a greater or lesser degree, experienced loss or trauma and, if that is not true - something I cannot imagine - then ‘to recover a sense of connection and unity with all life is also to recover *from* the trauma of having been so utterly divorced from that experience’ (Fisher, 2005, p.52) is the experience of us all. Fisher appeals for the development of a more concrete detailed

understanding of the nature of this trauma and of the specific processes necessary for some genuine recovery.

In order to understand ourselves and heal ourselves in this age of abstract horror, we must regain the sense of totality and the immediacy of human experience. (Diamond in Fisher, 2005, p.51)

First we need to see humans as a ‘totality’ rather than ‘as a collection’ (Sartre, 1957, p.13). It is not my purpose here to establish a new definition of the self, but rather to put my own self-journey into the context of everything that has happened to me and my relationship with Others including, especially, my relationship with the children at ‘this particular time, in this particular place’. In Exodus, when Moses meets God in the burning bush, he asks God what his name is. God says, ‘I am who I am’ (Exodus 3.14). God is in everything God is involved with and in relationship with all over all time, in all places. I am who I am too, in my time and place.

Given this view of the need for human attitude, adjustment and behaviour to be integrated, a prevailing goal of existential analysis is that not only of ‘deciphering’ the ‘empirical aspects’ of humans and their lives, but also to ‘bring out into the open the revelations which each one of them contains and to fix them conceptually [Sartre, 1957, p.68]’. (Walters, 2008, p.283)

The re-collective process of identifying those revelations includes any trauma and suffering involved in any self-journey. I am who I am, suffering and all. Walters refers to Soelle’s work on suffering: ‘There are certainly damaging and eroding influences in the experience of suffering, for example, forms of powerlessness and meaninglessness associated with poverty, disease, minority rank or victimisation’ (Soelle, 1975 in Walters, 2008, p. 284). These may lead to an erosion of hope, self and faith in the

perception that ‘personal suffering is to be a natural part of life’ (Walters, 2008, p.282). I regard the process of unravelling a hermeneutic of self as a necessarily therapeutic endeavour where ‘each individual *totality* is seen as reflecting a fundamental choice that links one with Others, with faith, with self and spirituality … the *sorting through* of such analysis requires the *conscious* experience of anxiety and pain at, appropriate levels of understanding, but *corresponding deeds and actions* as well’ (Walters, 2008, p.283, author’s emphasis).

Walters is writing of a single and particular child, Simon, who is suffering the deep pain of the loss of his father. He reminds us that Kierkegaard argues that ‘the child has chosen a relational mode of being, one signalled by anxiety and marked by personal faith’ and that ‘an adult possessing a good deal of spiritual know-how, one who has partaken of reflection and dialectical process’ (ibid, pp.285-6) living with the child may be able to nurture him through the process of grief without the intervention of professional psychotherapy. But he insists that a *therapeutic type of relationship is required*, ‘one where reflective dialogue, social sharing and dialectical movement come to assist the child in his or her adjustment and greater spiritual development’ (ibid, p.286).

If we are all suffering the deep pain of the loss of the connection and unity with all life, then to recover from that trauma we need *therapeutic types of relationships*. It is the witness of this thesis that children themselves, given the right nurturing context, often are, themselves, examples of such therapeutic relationships. Also my experience concludes that when children

lack such a context, adults (parents, carers and teachers), in a western culture of death-denying and grief-avoiding, can somehow take on the role of, as Kierkegaard asserts, ‘thieves’ and ‘bandits’ and steal the opportunities for recapturing, recovering and reconstructing self enough to re-engage with the natural world and the more-than-human-community.

Waterman with reference to Erikson (1963, 1968), Bourne, (1978) and Marcia (1980) suggests two metaphors as contrasting ways of understanding the nature of the ‘self’. Waterman’s article (1984) is written as a contribution towards the counselling of adolescents facing identity crisis in the transition from childhood to adulthood. The metaphor of *discovery* Waterman suggests is closely linked with the philosophical concept of daimon or “true self”. The Aristotelian concept ‘refers to those potentialities of each person, the realization of which represents the greatest fulfilment in living of which each is capable’ (Waterman, 1984, p.332). The metaphor of discovery implies that a search for what is already there as an identity, a self is required, in order to make the unknown known (ibid, p.340). On the other hand the metaphor of *creation* implies a process of selecting from an unlimited number of possibilities and bringing into existence something that has never before existed (Waterman, 1984, p.332). Waterman suggests that the philosophy of Satre best represents this notion. There is no daimon, ‘no true self’. ‘The self is seen as emerging from “nothingness” by an act of personal choice’ and the choice of one option over all the others becomes arbitrary (Waterman, 1984, p.333). In his conclusion Waterman tries to

overcome the contradictions between the two metaphors that he has previously set up.

If we could readily recognize our daimon there would not be so much confusion or concern over the forming of a sense of identity. I infer from this that the parameters of our potentials for self-realisation are relatively broad. Within the parameters set by the daimon, therefore, the process of identity formation may well be an act of creation. (Waterman, 1984, p.340)

My position is similar in that I find both metaphors useful; self-realisation is made up of *both* discovery and creation. However, I believe that the process is far, far more complex than Waterman implies. The process of existential ‘creation’ includes the discovery not only of the reverie of something like daimon, but also the traumas which limit and even prevent self-realisation itself. By way of illustration in my own search for identity and definition of self and to return to the need of overcoming such trauma with therapeutic relationships which in themselves constitute a part of our ‘true-selves’ I have told the story of my experience of re-birthing (see Chapter 5 p.162-165).

Levinas’ concept of radical alterity insists that finally self is Other and yet keeping me as stranger to myself (Kearney, 2003, p.80). However Kearney endorses the model of narrative memory, advanced by Ricoeur and Gadamer, which construes otherness as less in opposition to selfhood than as a partner engaged in the constitution of its intrinsic meaning. Kearney concludes his rejection of radical alterity by espousing, as he puts it,

‘a hermeneutic pluralism of otherness, a sort of polysemy of “alterity” – ranging from our experiences of conscience and the body to those of other persons, living or dead (our ancestors), or to a divine Other, living or absent’. (Kearney, 2003, p.81)

I believe that a dose of radical alterity<sup>77</sup> is required however. The lack of the sense of Otherness, may not be, as clear as in the holocaust, where, presumably, the motivation for Levinas' pronouncements comes from, but which make it difficult to regard the self **as nothing but** the Other. But we are experiencing a culture which finds it very difficult to see the Other as anything other than radically different, alien, a-not-to-be-trusted stranger. Kearney suggests not exactly a middle way – it is a metaxic way; it is to accept the significance of the 'and' between 'I' and 'Other', where the '[O]ther is 'inscribed within me as an uncontainable call from beyond' (ibid, p.81). He continues:

And it is precisely this summons of conscience which breaks the closed circle of the ergo-cogito and reminds us of our debts to others. Here the very ipseity of the self expresses itself, paradoxically and marvellously, as openness to otherness. Real hospitality. (ibid, p.81)

Magic Spots gives the opportunity for the children to give hospitality not only to Others, but the Otherness of the more-than-human community too.

The drawing on title page of this chapter was a 10 year-old's response to his second Magic Spot. One of his teachers criticised it by telling him that she thought he could do a lot better than that, 'the tree is far too big'.<sup>78</sup> Surprised and a little subdued by this attack, the boy quietly explained, 'Well, but I felt so small sitting there all alone'.

"...at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then," said Alice.

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<sup>77</sup> I repeat the footnote on page 186

*When I was in Borneo (see p 160f) 1964 I bought a Chinese powder to treat a bit of a cold. On the back of the packet, apart from suggesting that the powder would heal anything from a headache to cancer, there was the instruction, Dosage: Take every time until better. Whatever that means is what I mean here.*

<sup>78</sup> So much for the importance of keeping responses to Magic Spots private, and only showing it to those you can trust.

## Chapter 6

### Hermeneutics: an Interpretive Methodology

#### Part 3

#### Hearing Other Adults



But it is in the formation of that quality of being a clown, communities of clowns, that we find who we are (*Appendix 4, p.xxxv, from Lewin, 1987*).

## Chapter 6

### Hermeneutics: an Interpretive Methodology Part 3 Hearing Other Adults

You're so lucky, Mummy, you are probably living in the best time ever – you haven't lived through a war and climate change hasn't happened yet for you. But it will for me.

(Helen, aged 10 - daughter of Ruth, see p.205)

Now I will illustrate how my journey, my “world” (in Heidegger’s terms) is entangled with others’ worlds. By “world” Heidegger means our personal world – ‘not the whole of all beings but the whole in which the human being always finds himself already immersed, surrounded by its manifestness as revealed through an always pre-grasping, encompassing understanding’ (Palmer, 1969, p.132).

Mark, Jo, Laura, John, Ruth, Jon, and Paul are just a few of the many Others who are part of my personal world, part of my “pre-predicative meaningfulness”.

All pre-predicative simple seeing of the invisible world of the ready-to-hand is in itself already an ‘understanding-interpreting’ seeing.  
(Heidegger in Palmer 1969, p.135)

These are some of the people who form my life. I chose them not because they either agree with my understanding, or because they disagree. They form part of my sauntering bricolage (see Chapter 1, page 23) and were available because of the various ways I work with them. I was interested in these particular stories because they come from such different backgrounds and theological perspectives, with such different experiences and, as it turns out, most with some trauma to share. Because these stories are within my sauntering and spiritual spirals, they

form part of the ‘communion of fused horizons’ (Kearney, 2003, p.18) which, in turn makes up the creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990, p.31) from which I interpret and negotiate meaning. ‘Meanings are inherent in a particular world view, an individual life, and the connections between self, other and the world’ (ibid, p.32).

## **1. Connectedness**

Figure 3 on p.198 is the e-mail that I, along with all his other friends, received from Mark, an environmental educator some time after his second son’s birth in 2008. Mark is not a close friend, we have spent very little time indeed together, but he is a soul-friend. We share joy in and for the earth; we exchange stories of transformation in children and young people through our meeting place, the Institute for Earth Education. I had a Downs Syndrome cousin with whom I spent considerable time in our youth. I shared her joyous loving and twinkly eyes together with her parents’ struggles, grief and courage over the years until she died, aged 41 (23 years ago).

My experience of Mark is a part of the spiral. My understanding, one might even say my interpretation of him, operates from within the hermeneutic spiral. I interviewed Mark in November 2003.<sup>79</sup> Then forty, he had been an environmental educator for fifteen years. Mark is a quiet, unassuming man and most of the interview was softly spoken, without very much variation of tone. The most animated parts were the telling of his stories of his experience in the natural world and the story of Lucy, a 10 year old he had taught years before.

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<sup>79</sup> This was an interview that was not recorded, I took notes which are used in this section. Mark himself has endorsed the content and agreed to all the personal details being included in this thesis (see Appendix 2,p.xviii)

He related two powerful incidents which occurred in his early twenties in a park in Birmingham. First, on an autumn day he noticed a leaf falling; he remembered it as a ‘powerful’ moment, never to be forgotten. Hiding in some bushes, very still, a squirrel joined him and sat on his foot. It was ‘amazing’, never to be forgotten. He remembers, too, the ‘magical’ feeling of watching others go by who couldn’t see him. His reflection on these two experiences was ‘... amazing, first noticing just something like a falling leaf, then experiencing another species for the first time, and secondly the long-term effect that the experience had.’ For Mark it felt like a formative experience, influencing his life-journey over twenty years. It was what I would call a *metanoia* experience (an event, happening or decision which results in sustained and continual change within oneself towards Others and the Other).<sup>80</sup>

A few years later he was leading earth education programmes, where he found the most significant moments for the children were their ‘magic spots’. As he reflected on this experience he remembered the most frequent words of feedback from the children – ‘relaxed, peaceful, able to think’. Mark expressed his desire or need to do magic spots himself more regularly in terms of discovering another world of thoughts and feelings. He associated his sense of deep connection with the “natural world”, with the spirit, God “or whatever you like to call it”. He said he was always surprised how, during his times of solitude, ‘answers to questions pop up from nowhere, practical answers, or how to handle a person or situation’.

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<sup>80</sup> For *metanoia*, see Chapter 5, p.184, footnote 75.

## Welcome to the World



'Come my son,  
to see the reasons why you were conceived  
to know why you happened.  
we will show you the beauty of the breath  
breathed into you.  
we will show you the world.'

Come my son,  
hold your parents hands,  
and we will show you the beauty  
that lives in your brother's bright eyes.'



**Daniel Nikolas**  
arrived on earth in a beautiful home birth in Ivinghoe  
September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008  
Weighing 6lb 8oz / 2.96kg

Just to let you know that baby Daniel Nikolas arrived on September 22nd, weighing 6lbs 9oz; he took us by surprise in that he arrived 15 days early, and Natascha had had a 'feeling' he was a girl!

But the biggest surprise of all ... Daniel has been gifted with an extra chromosome 21 (Downs syndrome).

So, it's been a hectic 3 weeks, as he ended up in intensive care, due to jaundice. But he's out now, and doing really well, breastfeeding every 3 hours, so we're all pretty exhausted! Daniel has already brought us many beautiful gifts, and we know there will be many more (amongst all the challenges).  
(Personal e-mail, 15.10.08)

Figure 3: The birth of Daniel Nikolas

Lucy was ten years old when Mark first met her on a Sunship Earth<sup>81</sup> programme he was leading. That was over twenty years ago, and now she is an environmental educator herself and has been instrumental in producing a booklet called *Why Not?*<sup>82</sup> – a book of hope but starting from the position of requiring those who love the earth to take the initiative in redefining words like ‘sustainable development’ which have been hijacked by the multinationals and those in power. Mark was very proud that perhaps he had had a part to play in her developing awareness of the connection of all things.

Mark was the leader of the Sunship Earth programme with young teenagers when a tough, excluded lad, miserable at the prospect of magic spots, suddenly saw a deer. ‘Thrilled, he remained quiet and still, he felt the deer was so intently watching him that it walked into a tree!’ The boy exclaimed, ‘The deer noticed me!’

Mark is an individual whose life journey, since that moment of *metanoia* where he “experienced another species”, has reflected a choice that links him with others, with faith, with self and spirituality.

Hermeneutic interpretation takes place in the ‘in-between’ (see *Parentheses 1* and 2). Heidegger’s example of the in-between, which Palmer calls “breakdown” (Palmer, 1969, p.133) and Freeman calls “thrownness” or “being thrown” (Freeman, 2009, p.929) is given in *Being and Time*. A hammer that is just there can be viewed, used, weighed, catalogued and compared to other hammers; however a broken hammer immediately shows what a hammer is. The hermeneutical principle here is: the being of something is disclosed ‘not as the

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<sup>81</sup> A six-day earth education programme from which the shorter Earthkeepers is derived, Van Matre, 1979.

<sup>82</sup> *Why Not?*, written and designed by Lucy Hinton and Jonathan Robinson for Imago and the World Voices Foundation (no date on publication, but I think 2004).

result of analytical endeavours, but in that moment when it emerges from hiddenness in a context which is against the stream of our personal world' (Palmer, 1969, p.134). When some thing goes wrong, breaks down, or we are "thrown" into a vulnerable situation the understanding suddenly emerges. 'Likewise the character of understanding will best be grasped not through an analytical catalogue of its attributes, not in the full flush of its proper functioning, but when it breaks down, when it comes up against a wall, perhaps when some thing it must have is missing' (Palmer, 1969, p.134). Meaningfulness emerges through dialogue and relationship. Buber seems to be making the same point as Heidegger as he continually insists, for example, that 'Those who experience do not participate in the world. For the experience is "in them" and not between them and the world (Buber, 1970, p.55). The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation' (ibid, p.56). Meaning, hidden in the world, emerges in the relationship, between the 'I' and the 'You'. Hermeneutics takes place in metaxis (see *Parenthesis 1*). This is (in Heidegger's definition of "world") the personal world of each person which when entered by the Other (carefully and without judgement, see Rogers in Chapter 11, p.354) reveals the meaningfulness which was hidden.

For example Mark shares with his friends that his son is beautifully born, but there is something not quite right, a breakdown. There is an extra chromosome. In that moment Mark and his wife see in their world, a new unexplored world, 'Come my son, we will show you the beauty of the breath breathed into you'. This 'thrownness' reveals that the world is always dynamic and full of possibility. As I encounter this news I find a resonance with the situation. It is unexpected, it holds the potential for sadness and struggle, familiar in my personal world. 'This state of being-in, while also looking-in-on-being, is the basis for our ability to project

ourselves into the world and imagine ourselves in that world in different ways,<sup>83</sup> (Freeman, 2009 p.928). But there is another trigger<sup>84</sup> for me too. ‘We will show you the world and we will show you the beauty that lives in your brother’s bright eyes.’ The following picture may not need any commentary. However, I have told a number of stories which reflect on ‘bright eyes’, ‘wild eyes’ and ‘shining eyes’.<sup>85</sup>



My mother and one of her great-grand-daughters sharing wild eyes

In response to the birth of Mark’s baby a deluge of triggers, come to me to help interpret the “text”. I am immediately interpreting Mark’s “text” through the prejudices and presuppositions already within me from my happy experience of Katherine, my Downes syndrome cousin, as well as a catalogue of bright, wild-eyes experiences. Mark also provides Magic Spot “texts”<sup>86</sup> of children in his care. I receive them with a sense that, as well as any other influence, my experience of entering into Mark’s life and his experience will affect my reading of these “texts”.

<sup>83</sup> The ‘world’ being referred to here is the world of the Other. It is a way of entering into the perceptual world of another, however bizarre... Carl Rogers, 1975).

<sup>84</sup> For an explanation of ‘trigger’, see Chapter 8, pp.277ff.

<sup>85</sup> Eyes, wild eyes, bright eyes, act as a trigger in my life’s story. References are made on the following pages throughout the thesis: 96, 212, 129, 144, 147, 155, 171, 184, 197, 198, 202, 218, 233, 242, 243, 245, 251, 269, 276, 338, 355, 359, and xxxviii.

<sup>86</sup> See Magic Spot responses on p. 199 in this chapter, and responses on p. 333).

## Conversion

Jo is a mother of two (ages 12 and 15) living with her husband in an ‘inner city’ area of Coventry by choice. A Christian she has, since her ‘conversion’, been in process, more and more seeing her faith as a response to the gift of creation.

My starting point is **gift**. God has given us the planet to be responsible for, to care for. To do so is part of our worship and liturgy (till and keep)<sup>87</sup>. It is part of a response of love to a loving God to care for the gift he has given, in all its diversity.

(written response to first questionnaire, 2006)

I have interviewed Jo, twice. The following is part of an e-mail following the second interview. It was a response to a question I asked her concerning issues of justice: Can you identify when you moved from concern about issues of personal righteousness to concern about issues of justice?

When I moved up to Cov, I was in a home-group with a couple who were thinking about environmental issues (they were both landscape surveyors) and so we talked a lot about environment and social justice. I even remember doing an evening service about environmental stuff. After that, my thinking just continued to go in that direction: realising if we were to live as if people in developing countries mattered, and if the OT prophets were to be taken seriously, then actually that life would be a simple one, which is the sort of life we need to be living if we take the environment seriously.

Also, if you plug into that story, books and speakers at Greenbelt<sup>88</sup> who were emphasising just this kind of growing awareness, all of which confirmed the changes in my development... and to complement your story, I remember hearing John Bell<sup>89</sup> who similarly talked about his first conversion, and then the conversion of his pocket, and then the conversion of his awareness about feminist issues, and then the conversion about environmental things. I would say that my realisation was a gradual one, and that a number of different things fed into it, rather than being a sudden realisation. (personal e-mail, Sept. 2008)

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<sup>87</sup> This is a reference to the biblical text in Genesis 3.23 where it is understood that the responsibility of humankind is to care for the land, till and protect it.

<sup>88</sup> Greenbelt is an annual Christian festival over the August bank holiday. For over thirty years it has been attracting speakers and workshops from all over this country and the world. It combines music and worship, workshops and community.

<sup>89</sup> John Bell is a long time leader of the Iona Community, Christian Community located on the island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland. It also has a community house in the inner city of Glasgow.

Here Jo indentifies that she is in process. Her sense of being is a sense of becoming. For her conversion, like John Bell's, is a gradual process arising out of an original commitment to Christ (first conversion). This resonates with my own experience (see Parenthesis 2, p.156 and Appendix 4, p.xxvf) and emphasises the importance of Heidegger's insistence that the hermeneutic process should involve critical reflection on the *performance* of being. This is in addition to both Gadamer's analysis who insisted on critical reflection of one's own "prejudices" and Habermas's challenge to critique one's own dominant culture (see Chapter 4, p.116). This amounts to the undergirding principle of hermeneutics which is to both eliminate 'unproductive prejudices' and consider the influence of the current and historic traditions of our culture without encouraging 'being's forgetfulness of being' (Freeman, 2009, p.928). The interweaving of Others' experience with the story of my own journey, where Others come alongside my own life, to both challenge and confirm my own sense of being and becoming, is the process of the spiral of hermeneutics which I have described (Chapter 4, p.128ff). It is a way of being which is aware of the role that each of us play as we live out our understandings, and at the same time as being aware of the process, yet never being outside of that process.

Jo is one the group of Christians from Christian Ecology Link who I interviewed in order to seek out the hiddenness in my own self-understanding and to aid the process of critical reflection of interpretation which influences my interpretation of the children's "texts". My own story here is essentially a spiritual story. I asked all my interviewees in the pre-interview questionnaire: What does 'spirituality' mean to you? Jo's written answer was:

The opening up of our whole selves (body, mind, spirit, relationships, outlook, world view, values, principles, practical living) to the Spirit of

God as expressed in the life of Jesus, fulfilling ‘shalom’<sup>90</sup>. The working out of ‘shalom’; in every fibre of who I am, and what I do, and how I live.

## Spirituality

John, a gentle man, retired and also a member of Christian Ecology Link (CEL) has a scientific background in biology, which he taught as an Anglican missionary teacher. When he answered the questionnaire he was 70 (now he is 74 in 2010) and had just given up the job of CEL Treasurer (2007) because of the effects of Parkinson’s disease. John Davis speaks quietly, carefully and one might say cautiously. I was therefore surprised to receive, in his questionnaire his answer to the same question about spirituality.

Spirituality – a rubbish concept which isolates the individual from the liturgy, the Church and the Communion of Saints, and neglects the exercise of corporate virtues. Personal prayer, important though it is, is meaningful only as part of and united with the Church’s worship (John R. Davis, e-mail response, 21.4.06).

I am sure there is more in his ‘carefully passionate’ response than his sense of offence at the idea that ‘spirituality (presumably as he has experienced the concept used and practised over a number of years) neglects the exercise of corporate virtues’, but it is this part of his response which triggers a stream of thought in me about my self-understanding of my journey of spirituality (see Parenthesis 2, pp.155-163; Chapter 5, p.175-185; Chapter 8, p.283f).

Ruth is also member of Christian Ecology Link. She is an evangelical Christian with a young family. Not long after the birth of her youngest child, Thomas in 2005, reflecting on his future she wrote, ‘Thomas’ future is dire. If you look at the spiralling carbon dioxide emissions and compare the paltry efforts to contain them against what the scientists are saying needs to be done, the situation is hopeless’

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<sup>90</sup> Shalom, a Hebrew word for ‘peace’. It is one of those words which requires an essay to unpack it. It is about harmony, integrity, wholeness, not only for the individual but for humankind.

(Walton, 2005: *Green Christian* Issue 58, p.4). She found that CEL offered 'space, commitment and community to express despair and grief in the face of the most catastrophic crisis the planet has ever faced because of the betrayal of the creation by the rich quarter of humankind' (Walton, 2005, p.6). 'I went to my CEL friends with my despair, wanting to be told it was all going to be OK but I didn't get the platitudes I was hoping for. I got something better: honesty, understanding and a path through the mire' (ibid, p.4). I interviewed her in February 2010. Thomas was nearly five and can be heard in the interview!<sup>91</sup> During the interview we talked about what it was that had reduced her sense of fear and despair over the years. By this time she had participated in some seven or eight actions of protest, peaceful demonstrations and actions of civil disobedience.

We have to live out our faith it's just not just a belief system it's, it's maybe what I mean is that spirituality is to do with being and what you actually are and so you can't say you believe something and then not let it have any impact on how you live and what you do. (Ruth Interview, 2010, p.3)

Her first action was Climate Camp<sup>92</sup> she testifies to the power of the sense of community generated by many different people acting together having the same belief about 'how we should live on this earth'. She took her children, including Thomas.

I just remember walking there, there was all these planes flying over and Thomas saw one and he knew the planes were bad so he pretended to fire a gun at this plane, which is quite funny, I thought, with the police looking on. But then on the Saturday we sort of marched, and I was with John Davis. We were just going to sort of sit outside the BAA (British Airport Authority) headquarters, we all had to get there somehow and all the police were trying to stop us getting there so we marched across a field and through a fence and through another bean field and, you know, there were just lots of people trying to get there from different areas and lots of police around and John Davis especially was very inspiring because he just really wanted to do it even though he couldn't walk very

<sup>91</sup> The interview took place at a CEL conference, and towards the end all three of Ruth's children came into the room, Helen, Sophie and Thomas. After I had asked Thomas' sister, Helen, what she felt about her mother getting arrested during a protest action she told me that she wanted to go to prison too. Thomas ended the interview with, 'Night, night, computer!'

<sup>92</sup> Climate Camp is an annual protest against a third runway at Heathrow Airport and the use of fossil fuels.

fast or whatever and, and all the people around us we were all very encouraging to him which was lovely as well.

Even though he was making you know he was sometimes holding people up or whatever they all sort of stopped and said can you help or you know keep going or it was just lovely actually. It was just really nice to be again with a community of people who were doing something who feel motivated enough to do stuff. ( Ruth Interview, 2010, p4)

Here it seems spirituality for both John and Ruth means faith *and* action; in Wendell Berry's words, 'the dustier and breathier we are the better' (Chapter 5, p.180). For John and Ruth, a traditional Anglican and an evangelical spirituality is meaningful only if it has a prophetic hue ( for example, see *Parenthesis* 4, p.221). Ruth continues:

[The Climate Camp] was just so, so inspiring because they were living out - it was like a faith and you actually could see that they were living out with the, the belief in how we should live on this earth because they were, they were set apart. It's quite you know biblical isn't it ...they set themselves apart, they found this field and squatted there with tents and solar panels and on the way in there was this big sort of cardboard aeroplane and it said, 'Exit the System' so you walked in through into Climate Camp exiting the system and once you got there everything was run on renewable energy as much as they could. They were organised by consensus there was no hierarchy. If you saw that you needed something doing you didn't go to somewhere to tell them it needed doing you did it yourself. (Ruth Interview, 2010, p3)

Ruth, a scientist, finds that her wonder of creation and how it all fits together is 'almost an intellectual thing rather than a spiritual thing' (ibid, p.8), whereas for Jon Cree, a member of the Institute for Earth Education and not a Christian, spirituality is about connection – connection to 'something bigger than you' (Interview Jon, 2010, p.15).

[Spirituality} is something about connecting with what's supporting me. Whatever that is. I'm still trying to figure that out. It's about connecting on a deeper level with what nourishes me. (ibid)

Jon insists that the search for 'what nourishes me' requires time outdoors.

[Time in solitude in the natural world] is not just the chance to be, but it's connecting with something bigger than you. That's why you can't do that inside four walls because there's nothing bigger than those four ... I mean I could [say] well yes I've connected with the rain forest through that particular bookcase but that's not the same as being out there connecting with the living world. (Jon Interview, 2010, p.10)

Jon works with all ages (more with adults these days) and in every programme

includes a time of solitude (Magic Spots). He is passionate about the need for both adults and children to experience this connection. From the young adults, now teachers, for whom their most significant memories of childhood are about times *inside* - as opposed to an older generation whose most significant childhood memories are *outside* (ibid, pp.1-2), to the intuitive eight year old who found his own tree.

I'll never forget one of the first kids who found his tree and he came back and he said it's my 'b..' tree, and I thought he was talking about bees he said no it's my *B*-tree it's where I am me, my *B*-tree, it will always be my *B*-tree. And that was an eight year old. (ibid, p.17)

### **Trauma**

Laura is also a member of Christian Ecology Link. I have referred to her childhood in Chapter 4, p120. Laura also makes a statement about spirituality, agreeing with John Davis (see p.204).

Spirituality for me is about being embodied, you can't have a spirituality that is not embodied. It's about being a body with all that that entails, it's about being a body that's connected to the earth ... it's embodied, it isn't dualistic. (Laura Interview, 2006, p.10)

But Laura holds the tension between the material and spiritual in her body. After a 'healing experience' (recorded below), she relapsed and spent ten years in a state of 'deep freeze' sexually, physically, emotionally, but 'my spiritual life was fantastic'. There was a rigid daily routine of prayer, Bible study and solitude, 'but I didn't look after my body, my body didn't matter as far as I was concerned, what mattered was God, you know having a sense of God in my life – it was a completely dualistic experience' (Laura interview, p.12). But she came out of that period and has never returned, but sometimes 'I've stopped eating and I've gone back to this sort of longing for God without a body. So in a way that battle is always being fought out in my body ...' (ibid, p.12).

She remembers with exuberance her holidays in Mull (see again, Chapter 4, p120) which ended when she experienced trauma that has defined her life, and nearly brought an end to it.

Unfortunately, the wonder of those days did not last beyond my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, as I became a solitary and angry teenager at odds with my parents, and our holidays together came to an end (Laura interview, p3).<sup>93</sup>

She was not only an angry teenager but became anorexic. In response to the question: Are there any particular experiences or moments which have led you to your work in environmental education? She responded:

Probably too many to mention here! Perhaps one experience laid the foundation for all the ones that followed. I was eighteen, very ill, so ill that I was in danger of dying. (Many people with the illness that I had - and to a certain extent still have, do die).<sup>93</sup>

Then she goes on to describe a 'religious/spiritual experience' that changed her life. I understand it as, conversion to Christ, she was then within a tradition which called the experience 'being born again'.

Whatever did happen (today, I have many thoughts about what happened, the main one being that I was reconnected to the larger Whole of which I am a part), the world was now a very different place, and I was a different person. First and foremost, I no longer longed for death (although I was still in danger of dying due to my illness). Instead I began to delight in life. (I cannot do justice to the 'religious' experience here ... it would take many pages to write it all down). The day after the experience I went for a walk in a nearby park. I was in some emotional turmoil – crying, confused.. It was October and the trees were all colours – red, yellow, brown, green, gold. The sky was bright blue. The air was clear. I ran along a pathway through the trees. (This in itself was remarkable for I had not had the physical strength to be able to run for several years). I saw the living trees in a way that I have never seen trees since. They glowed and they had a presence, a substance, a spirit, which shone through them. I felt renewed. Perhaps it was this 'seeing' the trees in a way I had not been

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<sup>93</sup> During a later interview in 2006 Laura named her illness: 'it's almost like we're talking around it and not really saying what it is and, um, and I still find it hard to admit, I'd s ... this isn't a therapy session but I still find it hard to admit this, but it was anorexia and so I was about four and a half stone and that point nearly dying when I had this experience so, but, you know and, when I was healed, everyone thought that's it, you know, that's gone now but it never has, it is part of me, it is my identity ...' (Interview, Laura 2006).

able to see before which convinced me the natural world is alive, imbued with 'God', full of the sacred, and was and **is** to be cherished and loved and 'saved' as much as humans. The world became multi-dimensional, alive, and precious to me, and I felt 'connected' again. (Written response to questionnaire, 2006)

Her sense of 'connection' forms the basis of the interaction between her faith and care for the earth.

Perhaps central to my understanding now is my experience of the interconnectedness of all things: that we are all connected, and therefore, dependent upon one another, upon all species, upon the fruits of the Earth itself. This is the basis for an ethic of care and responsibility for others – **others** being all species, all humans, and the Earth itself. My care is based on my understanding that I am not autonomous. I depend upon the ecological and social networks in which I am embedded for my survival. This understanding of connectedness and interdependence goes against the ideology of our culture, which is one of individualism and competition. (ibid)

She makes it very clear that her care for the earth is not one simply based on reason.

I don't just reason about the damage being done to the Earth. I feel it! I cry about it! I get depressed about it! I lament it! All such feelings demonstrate my connectedness to the Earth. Our source of our compassion, suffering with, is the very ability to feel, to empathise, to resonate, not just with fellow humans but with all creatures and the very soil. (personal e-mail December, 2004)

It is as though her experience of personal trauma and suffering has entered into her experience of connectedness so that she feels, in her own body, the trauma and suffering of the planet. She enters into the perceptual world of the Other, (in this case, the more-than-human-community).

Laura's experience resonates with my own experience of trauma (though very different, see Chapter 5, pp.165-175) as a child, as well as with fighting the tension between disembodied spiritual experience and the embodied spirit. This tension weaves its place on the hermeneutic spiral. Laura, like me, has trained as a person-centred counsellor, so the following is particularly apposite.

Mearns suggests that empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence (three core conditions of person-centred therapy)<sup>94</sup> can be regarded as ‘facets of a single variable: relational depth’ (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p.36) in the therapeutic relationship. (The description ‘variable’ refers to the understanding that these three ‘core’ conditions will be present in different counsellors in varying degrees and therefore the outcomes would vary.) ‘We are not saying that “relational depth = empathy + involvement + etc.” but that “relational depth” = an empathic-involved-etc way of being’ (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p.37).

Relational depth is:

*A state of profound contact and engagement* between two people, in which each person is fully real with the Other, and able to understand and value the Other’s experiences at a high level. (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p.xii)

This well describes Laura’s experience, not with another person, but with the more than human community, the natural world (see above, p.209). I am, therefore, particularly impressed by the fact that Mearns uses an illustration to introduce the concept of relational depth, which involves trauma. Mearns tells the story of the day of Peter’s fourteenth birthday. Left alone in the young offenders unit when all the others had gone ‘home’ for the weekend, ‘Peter used to be invited but had always refused, so they stopped asking him. “I don’t like families – stuff their families,” he said. His view of families wasn’t surprising – his father was serving life for killing his mother’ (ibid, p.ix). Somehow, inherent in what starts as a therapeutic relationship there is a sense that what is required is some form of recovery or

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<sup>94</sup> The use of Rogers’ therapeutic conditions as a means of enabling the reconnection of human beings with the natural world in a reciprocal relationship is explored in Chapter 11. pp.345ff.

restoration. It might be from some hideous trauma like Peter's experience or from the devastation and abusive use of earth's non-human beings and materials to the point of fatal illness and extinction, or it might be Laura's experience of traumatic separation from her parents and consequential anorexia. However:

In order to understand ourselves and heal ourselves in this age of abstract horror, we must regain the sense of the *totality and immediacy of human experience*. (Diamond, in Fisher, 2005, p.51)

For Peter and Dave Mearns (above) '*the totality and immediacy of human experience*' was experienced during a mindful fourteenth birthday where both made themselves available to each other and both were vulnerable to one another. For Laura '*the state of profound contact and engagement*' was experienced through a dramatic 'conversion' experience and continuing intentional times of solitude, study and spirituality, when the reciprocal experience was each being available and vulnerable<sup>95</sup> to the Other. In both cases 'to recover a sense of connection and unity with all life is also to recover *from* the trauma of having been so utterly divorced from that experience (Fisher, 2005, p.52).

Mearns further describes this approach as 'a particularly *dialogical* approach'; it is *two-person-centred* therapy (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p.38). In the counselling room this is a two-person approach. In the daily task of hermeneutical interpretation this becomes a multi-person approach, or better a multi-Other approach. Both the similarity and the difference with my own experience resonate with the spiralling journey and the fusion of horizons which in turn encounters children's responses to their solitude.

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<sup>95</sup> Availability and Vulnerability as a way of being is explored and described in Chapter 11 p.361f.

## Faith and Uncertainty

Paul also experienced trauma – grief and loss. Paul is the Chair of Christian Ecology Link. He is a young inspirational leader<sup>96</sup>, a thinker, articulate in spoken and written word who has led the 25 year old CEL out of its institutionalised slumbers to become a contemporary, inclusive, participatory group for all Christians. He initiated a cycle of awareness which amounted to a way of being in the present ecological crisis. It was called, *See, Grieve, Hope, Act: an invitation to liberation* (Bodenham, 2008). In an interview in June 2008 I asked Paul to talk about his personal inspiration for producing this cycle of awareness and action. He spoke about the liberation theology's Pastoral Cycle<sup>97</sup>; about being challenged by the Gospel to explore grief and loss; then this:

I've personally always carried around with me a heavy sense, quite a strong sense of loss.....it's partly to do with a sense of growing up with a sense of my parents being indifferent to me....not a sense of something that was once had, but of never having received some thing that one was entitled to....a sort of fundamental to me in life experience is this sense of, but for the grace of God, of being sort of almost still born really... (Paul, Interview, p.2).

He goes on to talk movingly about this sense of being 'still born' compounded by being in denial about his sexuality until the age of 27 .

...being in the closet sort of thing, just puts the lid on everything producing a sense of loss, or rather, a sense of non-possession. (ibid, p.3)

Learning to live with the grief and 'loss' produced the ability to love, and 'since coming out a sense of flourishing and the wonderful value of what I have discovered ...through relationships, Stuart, for instance ...and the intensity of that

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<sup>96</sup> By young I mean 42. For instance he was the originator of Operation Noah, a Christian Climate Change group which started out under the auspices of Christian Ecology Link, but now has become an independent national campaign with Anne Pettifor as Director who previously led the *Make Poverty History* campaign.

<sup>97</sup> 'Back in the 1960s, liberation theologians pioneered the Pastoral Cycle, often summarised as "See, Judge Act". As a pastoral worker you'd immerse yourself in a pastoral situation, and analyse what was wrong with it; you'd search the word of the Gospel and judge where Christ's transforming potential was to be found; and you'd act with the community to bring in signs of the Kingdom' (Bodenham, 2008, p. 4).

experience only being made possible because of the absence that went before' (ibid, p.3). It is this experience that has led Paul to be reflective 'an agent in your own experience' (ibid, p.4) and to articulate an understanding that 'loss has to be counted, recognised as such, and that it has ontological complications'.

...if you like I am inseparable from everything around me, and everybody around me...so that talking of me makes no sense without also thinking of everything else that is around me, and therefore ecological damage is personally felt. It feels like a loss of personal capacity, like losing a part of your body. (ibid, p.5)

However, as the interview progressed Paul clearly wanted to state very clearly, that however much his own sense of loss led him to empathy for the planet, it also led him to 'wider dimensions'. For instance he used the notion of 'destiny'. 'Ecological damage is not just about hurting me, as I historically understand myself, but its about denying my right, my destiny, if you like ...because my destiny is inseparable from the destiny of everything' (ibid, pp.6-7). He identified his own struggles with his ability to see the destiny of a person is 'beyond themselves' which led him to expound the 'way of the cross' in his own faith. 'The only way to get beyond yourself is the way of the cross...to surrender, yourself, take up the cross and follow Jesus sort of thing. I'm now at the point where I'm realising that the more you lose, the more exciting things can be. It's about losing, not possessions, but an entire frame of reference'.

I've become convinced that, the true health of humanity is found in, giving up everything that you cling to and entering a much bigger vision of, humanity, in the cosmos and becoming a participant in it....That is our health, that is our true, destiny. Applying this to our ecological situation what I see is a world.... well I see politicians that simply have not got a clue about how to tame our desires...which is what these powers that have been unleashed by consumerism [require]. (ibid, p.10)

We reflected together on the vulnerability of living without certainties. Paul said, 'I believe more and more in less and less' (ibid, p.9).

## A Methodological Conclusion

I have decided to quote so much of my interviewees because their own words tell their own stories, their dreams, their thresholds and vulnerabilities. Kearney in expounding ‘diacritical hermeneutics’ comments, ‘the human self has a narrative identity based on the multiple stories it recounts to and receives from others’ and ‘to assume our intrinsically hermeneutic nature, as interpreting selves, is in turn to recall our fragility and fallibility’ (Kearney, 2003, p.231). This is very clearly illustrated in the interviews above.

The spirituality they all embrace ‘necessarily includes works that serve justice...a fiery , prophetic, unrelenting justice’ (Harris, 1996, p.76). It is the story of their lives which seems to produce a desire, an inspiration, a way of being which relates to Others, including the more-than-human community with acceptance, protection and fostering.

While the human cannot make a blade of grass, there is liable not to be a blade of grass unless it is accepted, protected and fostered. (Swimme, 1992, p.247).

The narrative of their spirituality is noisy, dusty and breathy but demands justice, kindness and humility. Kearney argues that ‘our very existence is narrative, for the task of every finite being is to make some sense of what surpasses its limits – that strange, transcendent otherness which haunts and obsesses us, from without and from within’ (ibid, p.231). An issue for any methodology of interpretation is the content of the ‘and’ between I and You, between I and the Other. Is the Other another I, with no difference at all? Or is that Other so alien that without becoming Other myself, I cannot relate to the Other in any way other than a stranger or enemy? It is the narratives and narrative imagination which enable Kearney to propose that diacritical hermeneutics is committed to a middle way

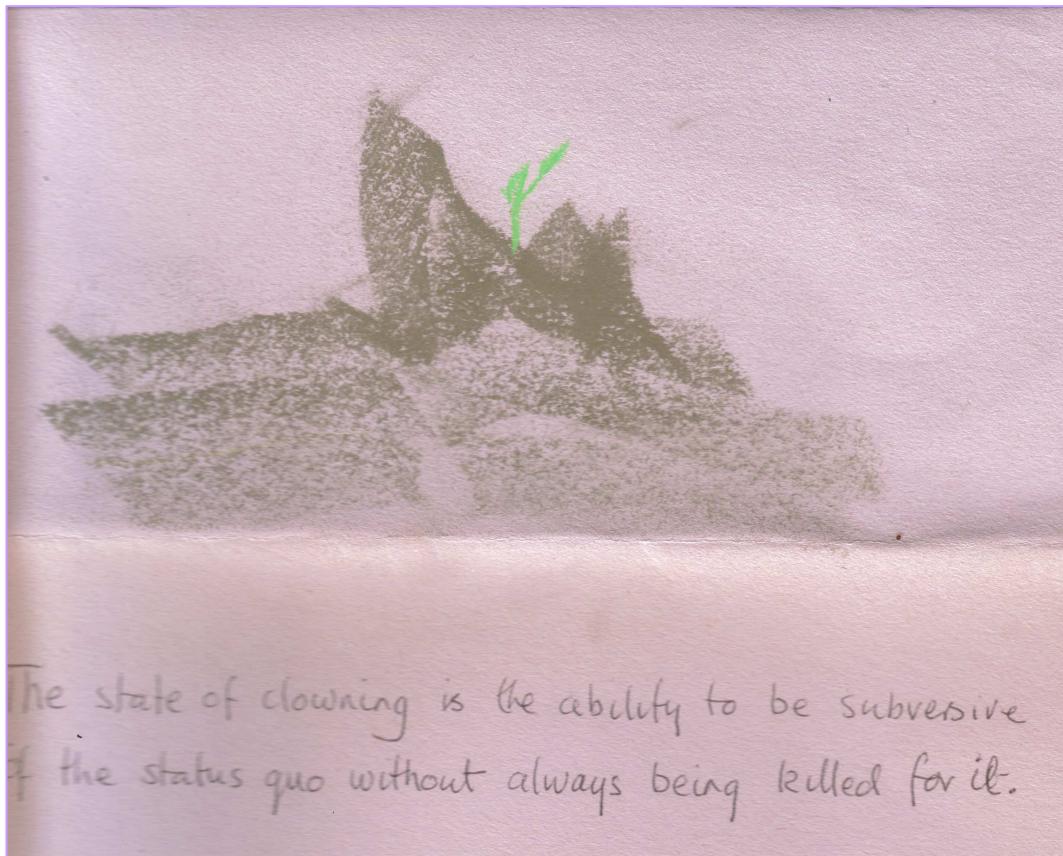
This is for me metaxic space (see *Parenthesis 1*) which obviates ‘both the congenial communion of fused horizons and the apocalyptic rupture of non-communion’ (Kearney, 2003, p.18). It is *in* that space that I attempt to interpret the children’s responses to their Magic Spots, by be-friending their difference, while at the same time entering into their narrative imaginations. It is my wager that by modelling this behaviour towards the children we will encourage them to interpret Others, both human and the more-than-human community with hospitality, mindful of who the Other is, and with less fear of uncertainty.

Just like Heidegger’s concept that being is always in process and draws on itself and the world around it in its continual manifestations, our understanding of self and the world are similarly being transformed. Freeman poses the question ‘If we are always in understanding, how do we know what to pay attention to in our conversations to enable the development of fresh understanding, and how will we know when fresh understanding has taken place?’ (Freeman, 2009, p.929). It is Gadamer’s notion of the ‘fusion of horizons’ (see Chapter 4, p.115). which is both context, where I am now, which includes the influence of culture, *and* the presence of a beyond. Interaction with Others can shift the present context and reveal a new possible beyond (Freeman, 2009, p.930). My own journey indicates continual interaction with Others.

But Gadamer suggests that a genuine hermeneutical experience takes place, not by our own thinking, but when we are questioned by the Other whose horizons are different and so not easily assimilated into our own.

This is my experience, particularly with the poet R.S. Thomas (see Chapter 7, p.239).

## *Parenthesis 4* Prophets and Clowns



The state of clowning is the ability to be subversive of the status quo without always being killed for it.

‘The state of clowning is the ability to be subversive of the status quo without always being killed for it.’

My own reflective drawing and caption from a Clowning Workshop which I attended in November 2008.

## *Parenthesis 4* Prophets and Clowns

### **Prophets**

*I remember with warmth and a sense of being encouraged and grounded, studying Scripture, as it was then known at school, under 'Old Man Grey'. This was the teacher, in his sixties (in 1962-4) who taught me A level Scripture. He was a well-known Christian leader in the city of Leicester. He was from the Church of Christ tradition and very much involved with the ecumenical movement and one of the delegates in the World Council of Church's discussion towards unity of the Christian Churches. He was a small man, with a ruddy round face, full of fun, jokes and passion and with shining twinkling eyes. I remember his careful tutelage, his obvious delight that I was choosing to go into the Christian ministry (by this time I had already sensed my vocation to become a Baptist minister). His careful dealing with the subjects of the authority and inspiration of Scripture meant that I was prepared very much more than many of my colleagues at theological college a few years later to cope with the literary and historical criticism approach to hermeneutics. Mr Grey showed me how such an approach not only did not undermine the truth of the Bible (as many of my conservative evangelical friends thought) but it also made it a powerful tool to critique and interpret the present age and proclaim the good, but shattering news of the gospel. Old Man Grey was passionate, he was wise, he was seriously playful and very well respected by the staff of the school, most of whom were not Christian. He used to introduce himself with great glee as named in the Bible. He would turn to the Old Testament, 1 Kings 2:9, and quote David's words to Solomon about 'old man grey'. (This is actually a gruesome story where*

*David, on his death bed, is instructing Solomon, his son, to be sure that Shimei, an old enemy, dies, ‘bring this [old man] grey head down with blood to Sheol’).*

My treasured ‘A’ at A-level Scripture was due to his careful preparation, his introduction of authors, concepts and perceptions well beyond the scope of the syllabus and to his playfulness. It was with his encouragement and help that I started to preach at age seventeen. It was here that I began to learn the process of addressing both what ‘the text meant, and what it means’ as Old Man Grey used to say (1962). It was those early beginnings where I came to believe that understanding the historical and cultural context of the biblical text was essential to being able to apply its relevance and truth in any particular context in the present day. In the words of what I would call a radical, evangelical scholar whose work I discovered after some ten years in the pastoral ministry – Walter Brueggemann – the process of interpretation is first: ‘to attempt to do biblical theology, to discern and articulate the main theological claims of a body of textual material, to listen to the text, and to speak echoes of it’. Then, secondly, it is ‘to seek to make a hermeneutical move to our own theological situation by drawing a “dynamic equivalent” between the context of the biblical history and that of the contemporary church’ (Brueggemann, 1986, p.ix). What delighted my teacher, Mr Grey, so much was that his little jest about his name in the Bible was the very opposite use of the Bible, discovering a verse say from the 4th century BC and using it without taking note of its context or even its meaning at the time, and quoting it in favour of some ‘truth’ in the contemporary situation.

It is Brueggemann who has coined the phrase ‘the royal consciousness’. This phrase comes from identifying how, through their history from the entry into the ‘promised land’, the people of Israel forsake the tradition of Moses which was to be an alternative community characterised by a continual critique of the present and energy produced by hope for the future, and instead gradually take on the characteristics of royal kingship, hierarchy, power and empire until it is complete in the reign of Solomon. Brueggemann summarises what he calls the dominant culture of royal consciousness as affluence. The Solomonic achievement was one of incredible well-being and affluence for some; oppressive social policy needed to maintain the affluence; and static religion where God is now “on call”, and access to him is controlled by the royal court. The royal consciousness is characterised by the power in the royal court, everything was already given, no more futures could be envisioned because everything was present a hundred fold. ‘The tension between a criticised present and an energizing future is overcome. There is only an uncriticised and unenergising present’ (Brueggemann, 2001, pp.25-31).

In the history of Israel it is the prophets who are the counterpoint to this numbing, inflexible, oppressive status quo of power. As Brueggemann comments, it takes little imagination to see ourselves in this same royal tradition. As we shall see in a moment it is *imagination* which is the key characteristic of the prophets. But first Brueggemann uses his own imagination to describe his American situation – but it is equally, in my view, representative of the western, consumerist world and my situation. We recognise:

- ▣ Ourselves in an economics of affluence in which we are so well off that pain is not noticed and we can eat our way round it.
- ▣ Ourselves in a politics of oppression in which the cries of the marginal are not heard or are dismissed as the noises of crooks and traitors.
- ▣ Ourselves in a religion of immanence and accessibility, which God is so present to us that his abrasiveness, his absence, his banishment are not noticed, and the problem is reduced to psychology. (ibid, p.36)

Solomon had set out to counter the world of Moses' community of liberation and had done so effectively. He had traded a vision of freedom for the reality of security. He had banished the neighbour for the sake of reducing everyone to servants. He had replaced covenanting with consuming, and all promises had been reduced to tradable commodities. Every such trade-off made real energy less likely. (ibid, p.33)

The 'prophetic consciousness' is the alternative to the 'false consciousness' or 'royal consciousness', an alternative to a social world void of criticism and energy for the future. In the introductory chapter of his book *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile*, Brueggemann sets down his pervading belief. Referring to the three Old Testament prophets of the exile, which took place after the reign of Solomon – Jeremiah, Ezekiel and 2 Isaiah, he writes.

Until this point in the faith and history of Israel, the poets and prophets had continually turned back to the old traditions and articulated their enduring relevance. Von Rad has seen that these three poets, more than any others, do not base their appeal on the continuing power of the old tradition but in fact enunciate new actions of God that are discontinuous with the old traditions. They proclaim a new beginning with fresh actions from God that are wrought in this moment of exile, in the crisis of dismantling. Two comments need to be made about that discernment. First, these new actions of God which they articulate are not new actions that were obvious on the face of it. That is why the poet asks with astonished impatience, 'Do you not perceive it?' (Isa.43.19). They were actions

that were discernible and spoken precisely by these persons with their enormous *prophetic imagination*. These poets not only discerned the new actions of God that others did not discern, but they wrought the new actions of God by the power of their imagination, their tongues, their words. New poetic imagination evoked new realties in the community. (Brueggemann, 1986, p.2)

Jeremiah lived through the time of disruption and chaos which ended the existence of Judah by exile into Babylon. Jeremiah had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of Solomon-like royal consciousness; he had warned and criticised, and suggested ways of a return to the alternative community. But he believed it was a time of dying. Like Jesus after him he wept over Jerusalem. It was a season of grief, a season of loss. Prophets grieve before they can hope.

Old Man Grey (p.218) set me on a journey which espoused the concept of preaching as imagining. It was for me the process of ‘theological reflection’ much talked about in theological colleges in the 1960s but alas not often taught or inspired. I developed the process of working from experience to the Bible, rather than the other way round. Understanding the contemporary context and offering that up to the story of the Bible produced a powerful hermeneutic, which opened up space for members of my churches to imagine-against-the-stream. My preaching did not provide a restful, inner sense of peace, a way of moving closer to God’s ‘still waters’ (Psalm 23:2), whatever is going on in the world or with neighbours, but rather, an honest assessment of a situation and the poetry to inspire ‘a shared willingness to engage in gestures of resistance and acts of deep hope’ (Brueggemann, 2001, p.xvii) and ...

*...In Birmingham my church was in the inner city district of Ladywood. Years before, much of the residential part of the area, streets and streets of small terraced housing, had been razed to the ground. Semi-rise and some high-rise blocks of flats were built in their place. Near to the church three semi-rise blocks, 139 flats in each block, were by 1980 experiencing distress. Lifts were often out of order, the heating systems continually broke down and there was damp. Many flats were soaking wet. The people living in them suffered respiratory problems, children were often ill and the elderly found themselves imprisoned on the upper floors. Constant requests to the council for repairs and emergency help fell on reluctant, or deaf, ears, supported by government-sponsored reports which claimed that housing conditions had nothing to do with bad health. 'Royal consciousness' decreed that all was well.*

*The church was in touch with very many of the tenants and we knew that some had succeeded in having their flats dry-lined only to discover that only months later their walls were damp again. Our response was not to pray for the tenants, for peace and well-being, but rather to act on their behalf.*

*Action began when I invited myself to a meeting between a tenant and the local council after a complaint that walls were wet in the flat. At first the council representative refused to continue the meeting with me present. After a morning in dispute I was allowed to stay. The man took out his damp meter and explained to the tenant, a young mother with coughing children, that the needle of the meter would need to indicate the red part of the dial in order for him to recommend that dry-lining should be installed. He pressed the three prongs of the meter on the wall. It was possible to see the water coming down the wall around each of the prongs; however, the needle indicated green. He did apologise. But he told the tenant that there was nothing he could do. I intervened, objecting to his*

*analysis of the situation and asking about what we had seen with our own eyes. At first he was embarrassed, but as I pressed the point with some passion, he became angry. He called me a few choice names including being an interfering do-gooder who had ‘no right to give people hope when there was none’.*

‘Royal consciousness’ cannot, must not, give any hope. It must not raise any imaginative expectations: for instance, in this case, that the future may hold, warm, dry, safe accommodation for young families in council property.

From the least to the greatest of them, every one is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, every one deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace’ when there is no peace. (Jeremiah 6:13-14)<sup>98</sup>

The prophetic, clown-like campaign began. We discovered more tricks of the royal consciousness of Birmingham City Council at the time.<sup>99</sup>

*The rest of the story is five years long, but it doesn’t take long to tell. The church decided to employ a young Marxist/Christian lawyer (now a very well-known and respected human rights lawyer, Phil Shiner) to take on the council or to resist the ‘royal consciousness’. Five years later, after many legal battles, public skirmishes, dirty washing campaigns against us, tensions and strains within the church and among tenants, we went to the House of Lords who ruled against the council. Four million pounds was spent on the three blocks of flats and finally, as a result, the housing policy of ‘cover-up and make-do’, revealed by our campaign, was changed. Across Birmingham the worst high-rise blocks were demolished, and most semi-rise blocks like those in Ladywood were*

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<sup>98</sup> This is the biblical text of my first serious sermon, preached when I was seventeen and written at the bureau desk, seen on the DVD to the sounds of Rachmaninov’s 2<sup>nd</sup> piano concerto, see Chapter 1, p.32.

<sup>99</sup> Missing detail from this story appears in Appendix 4, p.xxviii..

*refurbished, the flat roofs were replaced with gable roofs, and decent heating systems and new lifts were put in.*

The Church got little or no acknowledgement, but prophets never do. We had entered into the pain of our neighbours and found acts of deep hope. In character with any ‘gestures of resistance’ and in the words of the prayer of St. Ignatius ‘we ask for no reward, save that of knowing we do thy will’<sup>100</sup>.

I insisted that pain, grief and suffering had to be included in faith. I had seen too many ‘faithful Christians’ participate in ‘blessings faith’, and so suffer, at the very best, deep disappointment and confusion and, at worst, total disillusionment and guilt. It went like this: the real world, which harboured pain and suffering, was covered up. If you had faith in God, and believed in Jesus Christ, who died for you, then you would be blessed. This was, and is, a direct pathway to being taken hostage by the royal consciousness where faith in the God of the universe becomes defined as the mind-bending, numbing acceptance of consumerism and market forces backed up by militarism. If you truly believe, you will truly benefit<sup>101</sup>. Prophetic consciousness knows that there is no newness without grief. If we never shed a tear, it’s like saying there’s nothing wrong; we are in denial. ‘Weeping is a theologically grounded act of resistance’ (Brueggemann, 2001,

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<sup>100</sup> Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do thy will, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. - St. Ignatius 1491-1556.

<sup>101</sup> A disturbing example is found in the story of an interview with my bank manager in 1986. It is to be found in Appendix 4, p.xxix.

p.33). It is the act of resisting the royal consciousness that makes a new way to hope. Preaching was for me the attempt to articulate the ‘prophetic consciousness’ and at the same time live with tears as well as with joy. Together in the church we imagined what our neighbourhood would be like if the dominant powers did not have such a tight grip.

It was the Thatcher years, when minority reports were ignored, the ordering of society (not that such a thing existed, of course!<sup>102</sup>) consisted of ‘briefcases and limousines’, press conferences, quotas and new weaponry systems. And that is not the place ‘where much dancing happens and where no groaning is allowed’ (*ibid*, p.36). Brueggemann suggests that it is seldom that we realise that ‘minority reports’ may be found in the Bible, the vision of some fanatics who believe that the royal portrayal of history is not accurate because it does not do justice either to God or to our brothers and sisters. We became a church of vision and imagination. We found vision in the repeated image of the flowing, living river.

*In Ezekiel, the prophet sees a vision of a river flowing out from the temple (Ezekiel 47); in Revelation the river is flowing down the ‘middle of the city street’ (Revelation 22:2). There is an abundance of trees on the riverbanks ‘and the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations’. We saw the hope of the ‘river’ flowing down the city street where we were – Monument Road, Birmingham. As*

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<sup>102</sup> This is a reference to Margaret Thatcher’s “And, you know, there is no such thing as society”.

“I think we’ve been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it’s the government’s job to cope with it. ‘I have a problem, I’ll get a grant.’ ‘I’m homeless, the government must house me.’ They’re casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It’s our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There’s no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation.” (Prime minister Margaret Thatcher, talking to *Women’s Own* magazine, October 31 1987) from [briandeer.com/social/thatcher-society.htm](http://briandeer.com/social/thatcher-society.htm) 30.7.10

*members of the church moved one by one, or two by two, to live in the neighbourhood that community became known as the Riverbank Community. The ‘leaves’ – our actions with the neighbourhood – became a sign of healing and new life.*

We worked it out together, we preached to each other and I have found this all articulated again so accurately in another of Bruegemann’s books, *And Finally Comes the Poet*:

Broadly construed, the language of the biblical text is prophetic: it anticipates and summons realities that live beyond the conventions of our day-to-day, take-for-granted world. The Bible is our firm guarantee that in a world of technological naiveté and ideological reductionism, prophetic construals of another world are still possible, still worth doing, still longingly received by those who live at the edge of despair, resignation and conformity.

Our preferred language is to call such speech prophetic, but we might also term it poetic. Those whom the ancient Israelites called prophets, the equally ancient Greeks called poets. The poet/prophetic is a voice that shatters settled reality and evokes now possibility in the listening assembly. (Brueggemann, 1989, p.4)

The title of Brueggemann’s book comes from the poetry of Walt Whitman, which he uses because he considers ‘preaching as a poetic construal of an alternative world’ (ibid, p.6).

After the seas are all cross’d,  
(as they seem already cross’d,)  
After the great captains and engineers have  
accomplished their work,  
After the noble inventors, after the scientists,  
the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,  
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,  
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

After engineers, inventors, scientists, after all such control through knowledge, ‘finally comes the poet.’ Then perchance comes the power of poetry, shattering, evocative speech that breaks fixed

conclusions and presses us always toward new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities. (ibid, 8)

*During the eighties I made three trips to South Africa. I have a soul-brother, Graham Cyster, who now lives in America, but was a Baptist minister in South Africa during the apartheid years, who was expelled from the Baptist Union of Churches in South Africa for allowing black and coloured members in his church. He himself, under the categories of apartheid, is a coloured South African*

*Graham used to tell the story about a group of seminary students from the States who visited him as volunteers. They insisted that they were 'called' to do street evangelism in Kaileisha. Graham tried to persuade them that this might be unwise under the circumstances of the Reagan support for the apartheid regime at the time. However, he let them go and experience whatever they would experience. They met various groups of black suspicious youths, some heard them out, some hassled them, some passed by. Then one group listened with some intensity to the young evangelists, asking questions. The Americans knew that they were right to follow their 'call'. They spelt out in no time at all seven spiritual steps about the way to God through Christ. One young man in particular, who seemed to be the leader, asked the questions. The 'evangelists' were excited and sure that they were winning their prey (or even their prayer). The black youth said that he wanted to say something, but felt that he couldn't. The answer was clear, 'It's OK, say what's in your heart, the Lord knows and will help you.' They knew that a breakthrough was coming, this young man wanted to give his life to Christ. They cajoled and encouraged until the young man was ready. 'Just say it, as it is.' So he said, 'Alright. Do you know what I think about your God?' 'You just say what's in your heart, and He will come to you.' 'I think your God is shit!' 'Just look around you, who does He love, you perverts.' It was over; the black youths went*

*on their way, no violence, and no riot. The evangelists were devastated.*

*There was a breakthrough all right. They went back to Graham. What did we do wrong, they wanted to know. Why did we fail? Why such a response when he seemed to be so near to God. 'He was near to God,' was Graham's reply. 'Christ is a demonstration of God's activity. Where is yours? Earn the right. Do something about this place, look around, it's shit. And until those who believe in God, the Father of Jesus Christ, deal with the shit, how can you demonstrate God's love.' The students wept.*

It was a living demonstration of how the royal consciousness cannot afford hope; in fact it militates against hope. While the royal arrangement surely and properly evokes despair among those who are shut out, 'the prophet is to provide the wherewithal whereby hope becomes possible again ... After a time kings become illiterate in the language of hope' (Brueggemann, 2001, p.60).

I have often told the story. I told it when preaching in a Baptist Church in Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham once. I thought I told it rather well - though I say it myself - maximum impact, brought the point home. In the hymn after the sermon, two deacons of the church came and manhandled me out of the pulpit and outside and asked me to leave immediately. The reason? Well, the reason given was that they did not find swearing in church acceptable. Sutton Coldfield was perpetrating the royal consciousness, they did not weep. The students wept and saw their way through to articulate the compassion they said God had for Kailesa, with their own painful joy. Through their grief, their time of captive numbness to the royal consciousness was over.

## Clowns

Jesus was a man of prophetic consciousness. The prophetic imagination knows that the ‘real’ world of managed reality is false. And that the ‘task of prophetic imagination is to bring to public expression those very hopes and yearnings that have been denied so long and so deeply that we no longer know they are there’ (Brueggemann, 2001, p.65).

The language of the prophet is the language of amazement. It is a language that engages the community in new discernments and celebrations just when it had nearly given up and had nothing to celebrate. ‘The language of amazement is against despair just as the language of grief is against numbness’ (Brueggemann, 2001, p.68). The language of amazement creates ‘spaces of liberty where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future instead of waiting for it’ (Boal, 2002, p.5 - already quoted in *Parenthesis 1*, p.112). The royal consciousness sets itself the task of closing those spaces down until numbness sets in. There is no other way; there is no different future, for instance:

...in industrial growth society we have for centuries minimized, suppressed, or entirely ignored the nature task in the first three stages of human development, infancy through early adolescence. This results in an adolescence so out of sync with nature that many people never mature further. Arrested personal growth serves industrial ‘growth.’ By suppressing the nature dimension of human development (through educational systems, social values, advertising, nature-eclipsing concoctions and pastimes, city and suburb design, denatured medical and psychological practices, and other means) industrial growth society engenders an immature citizenry unable to imagine a life beyond consumerism and soul-suppressing jobs. (Plotkin, 2008, p.5,6)

It is into this situation, this particular place, this particular time with these particular people (see Chapter 1 p.28ff); in this moment, the preacher must speak.

She does not get to speak a new text. She must speak an old text – the one everybody knows ... It is an artistic movement in which the words are concrete but open, close to our life but moving out to new angles of reality. At the end, there is a breathless waiting: stunned, not sure we have reached the end. Then there is a powerful sense

that a world has been rendered in which I may live, a world that is truly home but from which I have been alienated. The speaker must truly be a poet. After the scientist and the engineer, ‘finally comes the poet’ (which Israel called prophet) – to evoke a different world, a new song, a fresh move, a new identity, a resolve about ethics, a being home. (Brueggemann, 1989, p.9)

The poet, the prophet cannot simply confront the king, the royal consciousness, the dominant power. He or she must find ways other than direct confrontation. ‘A confrontational approach model assumes that the “prophetic voice” has enough clout, either social or moral, to gain a hearing’; when that is not the case such a ‘confrontational approach is largely ineffectual posturing’ (Brueggemann, 2001, p.xii). This is reminiscent of the court jester, who must find imaginative ways to criticise the royal court – ways which amuse, enable change and yet do not shame the king publicly.

The approach to clowning we have developed over the last 15 years has important echoes both within in the field of personal growth (Discovering the Clown Within) and those of social mediation (Clownanalyse – the modern day Court Jester at conferences and within social and professional institutions such as businesses, schools and hospitals). (Bonange, 1996, p.1)

The resonances between the clown (of the court jester type) and the prophet are powerful and irresistible and for that reason the clown emerged in my life and ministry many years before I went on a course in clowning and for the same reason, ever since I went on my first course in 2001, I have kept a close association with clowning workshops. In his article *Clowning and the Imagination* Jean-Bernard Bonange continues:

Without doubt clowns are in vogue in our modern society, perhaps because their eternal optimism in the face of failure, or their naïve way of living life to the full counterbalances neatly the dominant value system of a society that praises efficiency, success, achievement and productivity. (ibid)

## **The Clown, the Prophet**

It is now time to explore the resonances between the prophetic consciousness and clowning. The sauntering story of my own developing articulation of these resonances between my interpretation of the prophets of the Bible and clowns and the emerging clown within my own life and ministry can be found in Appendix 5, p.xxxii.

In my own experience of clowning, under the tutelage of Vivian Gladwell of ‘Nose to Nose’,<sup>103</sup> and Angela Knowles<sup>104</sup> it was the radical change from experiencing the world through the mind to intentionally experiencing the world through the body, which enabled me to take notice of the extraordinary in the ordinary of everyday life. This offers ‘counter-memories of the silencings that tame and commercialise’ (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.131) and the identification of areas of the royal consciousness like education or care of the earth’s ecological systems.

## **Imagination**

‘To bring our clown to life requires we bring ourselves and our “imagination” into play. This defines our approach to the clown – it is the imagination in action. Or as Henry Miller says: The poet in action’ (Bonange, 1996, p.2), or finally comes the poet (Bruegemann).

This is the very same imagination, ‘with its roots deep in the human

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<sup>103</sup> see [www.nosetonose.info/index.htm](http://www.nosetonose.info/index.htm)

<sup>104</sup> see [www.thefoolstory.com](http://www.thefoolstory.com)

consciousness, that is the link between the depths of the self and the unseen reaches of the universe' (Asals, in Brueggemann, 2001, p.xiv) that is demanded by the prophetic consciousness. It is an imagination, according to Brueggemann, in which truth is told in a way and at an angle that assures 'it will not be co-opted or domesticated by hegemonic interpretive power' (ibid) and the same is true of the clown. 'The clown's way of looking at the world reveals a world beyond what we know of it and beyond what the "known" has hidden from us' (Bonange, 1996, p.5).

In a prophetically dangerous way the clown imagines that 'anything is possible', even new and different futures. Far from a hopeless, unchanging present conducive to the status quo, 'In clowning we need to be in a state of permanent instability' (ibid, p.5).

### **Listening and empathy through grief and joy**

Clowning is an invitation not to ignore the bad stuff, but to find even in that, lightness (Gladwell, in Seeley, 2006, p.346).

Clowning asks us not to prejudge or preconceive the world but to listen to it (Gladwell and Seeley, 2005, p.2).

The prophet too is an empathic listener. Jeremiah enters painfully into Judah's season of grief.

He has a deep sense of deep sickness because he sees the sickness of his people (Jeremiah 8 vv.18-22). And so he grieves. He grieves the loss.

He listens and he hears ancient mother Rachel crying also (31 v.15) The old mother must know something. What she knows is that the children are forfeited and the future is gone, thrown away in this mad pursuit of well-being which will not work. Jeremiah keeps listening. He dares to think that he hears God cry – with tears like

fountains, eyes that run like aqueducts (Jeremiah: 9 v.1).  
(Brueggemann, 1986, p.34)

The clown's exaggerated physical and emotional response means that we clearly and instantly perceive how the world is received and its effect ... The clown works with empathy and imagination in the present moment to sense the experience of the 'other', whether that be an object like a chair or a member of the 'more than human world.' (Gladwell and Seeley, 2005, p.2)

### **Vulnerability**

The clown reveals what he or she is feeling. Vivian Gladwell reminds workshop participants that the clown is different from the actor. When the actor walks across the stage and steps on a sharp nail in the boards, no one will know. He continues as if nothing has happened. When the clown steps on the nail, everyone knows that he is hurt, in pain and it's awful! The prophet is often overwhelmed with passion. It may be outrage at the corruption of the courts, it may be compassion for the people of Israel, it may be indignation and sorrow for his own plight. Jesus is both Prophet and Clown. Frequently, Jesus is recorded as showing his feelings, his anger in his support of children (Mark 10:13 and also see Parenthesis 5, pp.259ff); his compassion (Matthew 15:32, Luke 7:3); his grief weeping over Jerusalem in prophetic style (Luke 19:41); his rage in the temple. (Then, transforming empathic listening into an ultimate way of being, Jesus enters into the pain of not just humankind but also the whole creation: 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death' (Matthew 26:38).

God's fool, God's jester  
capering at his right hand  
in torment, proving the fallacy  
of the impossible, reminding

him of omnipotence's limits.

I have seen the figure  
on our human tree, burned  
into it by thought's lightning  
and it writhed as I looked.

A god has no alternative  
but himself. With what crown  
plurality but with thorns?  
whose is the mirthless laughter  
at the beloved irony  
at his side? The universe over,  
omniscience warns, the crosses  
are being erected from such  
material as is available  
to remorse. What are the stars  
but time's fires going out  
before ever the crucified  
can be taken down?

Today  
there is only this one option  
before me. Remembering,  
as one goes out into space,  
on the way to the sun,  
how dark it will grow,  
I stare into darkness  
of his countenance, knowing it  
a reflection of the three days and nights  
at the back of love's looking-glass  
even god must spend.

Not the empty tomb  
but the uninhabited  
cross. Look long enough  
and you will see the arms  
put on leaves. Not a crown  
of thorns, but a crown of flowers  
haloing it, with a bird singing  
as though perched on paradise's threshold.  
(R. S. Thomas, 1990)

In clowning you learn that nothing is more important than the accident and you are invited to remain sensitive to the unintended consequences of your actions ...

Clowns are totally vulnerable, things keep going embarrassingly wrong for them yet they get on with life. (Gladwell and Seeley, 2005, p.2)

The glimpses I have that bring me closer to the whole messy business of life – through clowning, through contact with privileged MSc learners, through moments with people in underprivileged parts of the world who lead very different lives from my own – are the spaces that hold the potential for change, spaces like those where a ‘shared carpet of breath is woven between the clown and the audience’ (story-teller Ashley Ramsden). But I can’t strive for those spaces. As in the clowning paradox, ‘You can transgress any of the rules as long as you’re funny. And one of the rules is you mustn’t try and be funny.’ There’s a game to be played with the nothingness of not trying: ‘... beyond the “nothing” we must stand in, the seeming emptiness of how little we offer, there is also the “something” we bring in our efforts to listen, to teach, to engage, and to change things. It is frightening, there is a nakedness in this kind of clownish contact’. (Seeley, 2006, p 405)

This is the experience of the-neither-here-nor-there-space, the in-between. This is the place of serious playfulness.

...[in play] no longer are we either introvert or extrovert. We experience life in an area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals.  
(Winnicott, 1974, p.64)

So through all my words and discussions and attempts to be aware of conversions, *metanoiaas*, encounters, investigations, reflections, connections, expressions, longings and desires, which seem to be articulated in similar ways, and in a great number of disparate subjects, encounters, investigations, reflections, connections, expressions, longings and desires which seem to be articulated in very different ways but all of which seem to be describing or revealing underlying ideas and principles intrinsic in both different or similar subjects, encounters, investigations,

reflections, connections, expressions, longings and desires I am faced with the need to play.

Our relationship with the world becomes tragic when we no longer have the space to play. That says something profoundly spiritual about who we are. Clowning demands this of us in an intense and short burst, whereas life demands it of us but in less forceful ways most of the time. (Seeley, 2006, p.359)

The same of is true of being a prophet. ‘Old man Moses insisted that prophecy should be the norm, not the exception’ (McIntyre, 2005, p.121). What better tutors than imaginative and vulnerable children to teach adults in the way of becoming which will subvert the status of the royal consciousness and rejoin the more-than-human community?

In his novel, *The Clowns of God*, Morris West, prolific story writer of the 1950s to 1980s, in a thriller-cum-politico-spiritual scenario has the Pope (Jean Marie Burette) abdicate, the earth faces annihilation as West and East both have their fingers on the red button to initiate M.A.D.<sup>105</sup> The story ends with a group of the characters from the rest of the story having been brought together. They have been ‘called’ to form a new community, a new way of being and becoming. It is the penultimate scene and there is a confrontation between the Jean Marie Burette and the erstwhile hospital porter, Mr Atha, revealed as a manifestation of Jesus in a meal of bread and wine. Jean Marie Burette has with him a Downs-syndrome child, from an orphanage which has figured in the story. Mr Atha asks to hold the child, as he holds her in the midst of them all he says:

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<sup>105</sup> During the escalation of nuclear weapons continued during the 1980s the policy of M.A.D. – Mutually Assured Destruction – was adopted.

I know what you are thinking. You need a sign. What better one could I give than to make this little one whole and new? I could do it; but I will not. I am the Lord and not a conjuror. I give this mite a gift I denied to all of you – eternal innocence. To you she looks imperfect – but to me she is flawless, like the bud that dies unopened or the fledgling that falls from the nest to be devoured by the ants. She will never offend me, as all of you have done. She will never pervert or destroy the world of my Father's hands. She is necessary to you. She will evoke the kindness that will keep you human. Her infirmity will prompt you to gratitude for your own fortune. More! She will remind you every day that I am who I am, that my ways are not yours, and that the smallest dust mote whirled in darkest space does not fall out of my hand. I have chosen you. You have not chosen me. This one is my sign to you. Treasure her!

(West, 1982, p.425)

Earlier in the story Jean Marie Barette chose to call this child, together with the others in the orphanage, one of the Clowns of God.



## Chapter 7

### Hermeneutics: an Interpretive Methodology Part 4 Hearing the voice of R.S. Thomas



R.S. Thomas lived right at the very end of Hell's Mouth, or as he would have insisted, Porth Neigwl, in the far distance just up from the beach.

God's fool, God's jester  
capering at his right hand  
in torment, proving the fallacy  
of the impossible, reminding  
him of omnipotence's limits.

(First stanza of Crucifixion in *Counterpoint*, R.S. Thomas, 1990, p.36).

## Chapter 7

### Hermeneutics: an Interpretive Methodology

#### Part 4

#### Hearing the voice of R.S. Thomas

In Hermeneutics: an Interpretive Methodology Parts 1-3 I have been describing the nature of the “texts” which I identify as layers of prejudices, horizons and influences which participate in my process of interpretation. I have been disciplined in that Part 1 is an introduction, Part 2 is about my own narrative, Part 3 is about other adults and in each section I have sought to keep focused on the appropriate “texts”. That discipline is now going to slip. While for clarification to separate and isolate these “texts” is useful, this fourth “text” is of a different nature. It acts as an introduction to the poetics of experience mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 4. The insistence of the hermeneutic spiral to include (at the same time) the many strands of self and Other experienced over time is illustrated by the fact that this chapter does not, indeed cannot, keep the influence of R. S Thomas isolated or separated from the other horizons I have previously identified.

#### **Hearing the voice of R.S. Thomas**

I now tell the story of my association with R.S. Thomas, his place and poetry. I became a minister of a Baptist Church in Magor, Gwent (the new name for Montgomeryshire) in 1971. It was my first ministry. By this time my parents had retired and moved to their house in Mynyddo in Gwynedd, N. Wales just twelve miles from Aberdaron at the end of the Llyn peninsula. Thomas’ first ministry was in Manafon, Montgomeryshire. Then he moved to a parish near Aberystwyth.

Later in 1972 he moved to Aberdaron. That is, a year after I started my first ministry, Thomas started his last. By the time he arrived, not only had I been on holiday on the Llyn peninsular every year since I was nine months old, (often twice a year) but because one of the family rituals was to go to Aberdaron and go into the church whenever we were on holiday, I had been in the twelfth century church at least 40 times before Thomas arrived as Rector there! I can imagine in the dim light of that space on the edge of the land, the early morning service; the pastoral care mixed with the questioning despair in the search for identity.

To the church on the hill  
three women came  
with the need to escape  
from the echo of their silence.

One had bent bones,  
One the hernia of  
The spirit. One looked up  
With turned eye at a half truth.

I listened to them singing  
grey hymns with the mould  
On them; doled them  
The hard crust of communion

And the tart wine, facing them  
At last with the answer  
Of the locked door to the question  
They were too late to ask.  
(Thomas, 1988, p.97)

I reflect:

Was I so preoccupied with my desire to make communion services modern, contemporary and go with a zing, that I neglected, in those first years of ministry, to consider the Other. Or is it legitimate to ask Thomas, “Why didn’t you do some thing for them?”

Meaning for my own selfhood comes from the challenge of the Other who addresses me: this Other, who is so entirely different from me, but with whom I have such a sense of affinity and resonance.

I did not know it then, but ever since the 1950s Thomas was a regular visitor both to Aberdaron and Bardsey Island (Ynys Enlli). Apparently he got to know the Keating sisters who lived in Plas-yn-Rhiw, (now owned by the National Trust and visited many times by my family and me). Rhiw is the village and mountain which overlooks Hell's Mouth<sup>107</sup> from the south and is one of my favourite places and views. Very many a time I have walked from the top of the Rhiw road to the cliff's edge where there is a cottage and thought, 'Now, this would be the place to live'. I discover that when Thomas retired in 1978 he and his wife moved to Sarn-y-Plas, this cottage (of mine!) with a tenancy from the Keating sisters. My first real encounter with Thomas' poetry began in around 1990; my knowledge of the details of his life only started after his death in 2000. How I wish I had met the man in one of my walks dreaming about Sarn-y-Plas. I hope I would have recognized him as:

Framed in the gap  
Between two hazels with his eyes sharp  
Bright as thorns, watching the sunrise  
Filling the valley with its pale yellow  
Light, where the sheep and the lambs went haloed  
With grey mist lifting from the dew.  
(Thomas, 1993, p.29)

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<sup>107</sup> Hell's Mouth is the English name given to a beach – Porth Neigwl- a magnificent four mile long beach, part of the most rugged coastline in North Wales on the Llyn peninsula. The view from these four miles of sand and rock is sea and sky, clear day or misty day – sea and sky. Bounded by two headlands each rising some hundred or so feet vertically, this permanently aghast open mouth gulps in the Atlantic, as it pounds in from the south-west. Two thousand miles or more of waves land here. One of my favourite views in the world is from the top of the south peninsula a coastline hill called Rhiw. As you approach the top of this craggy summit the land gives way to this staggering four mile beach with its headlands, rocks and sand drawn out like a map at a dizzy angle. Just as a camera view-finder your eyes can't quite take the whole picture in one go, suddenly everything else around it reduces and recedes, including the early warning station positioned right on the peak of Rhiw.

I never saw Thomas, or his eyes. His “texts” are wild and furious eyes which pierce my shabby understanding and interpretation and shine new possibilities through them.

Or would I have caught him in a moment of spiritual peace?

There were no prayers said. But stillness  
of the heart’s passions – that was praise  
enough: and the mind’s cession  
of its kingdom. I walked on  
simple and poor, while the air crumbled  
and broke on me generously as bread.  
(The Moor, in Brown 2006, p.39)

And would that have resonated with my own search?

He prayed for love, love that would share  
his rag’s secret; rising he broke  
like sun crumbling the gold air

The live bread for the starved folk.  
(Bread, in Thomas, 1993, p.93)

I discovered Thomas’ affection for Kierkegaard (I knew he had written a poem of that name, but not that he read and re-read the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (one of the texts back in my 1960s Bristol Theology degree), and that he discovered that the uncompromising uncertainty of the faith of the Christian according to Kierkegaard was helpful in his own seeking (Brown, 2006, p.96). I also discovered his favourite section of Wordsworth poetry:

...it appeared to me the type  
Of majestic intellect, its acts  
And its possessions, what it has and craves,  
What in itself it is and would become.  
There I beheld the emblem of a mind  
That feeds upon infinity, that broods,  
Over the dark abyss...

(Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Bk 14, ll. 66-73 – Penguin Classics, 1986)

Brown also reveals that Thomas also enjoyed Tillich's idea of the Ground of Being (another part of my Bristol nurturing) This is the notion that God is not **a being**. In my 20s I was much taken with Tillich's *Courage to Be and his Systematic Theology* and what do I find? Thomas' annotation of any book was apparently very 'sparse; yet the poet has firmly marked one short passage' (Brown, 2006, p107) of Tillich's Systematic Theology.

However, if the notion of God appears in systematic theology in correlation with the threat of non-being which is implied in existence, God must be called the infinite power of being which resists the threat of non-being. In classical theology this is being itself. If anxiety is defined as the awareness of being finite, God it must be called the infinite ground of courage.

(Tillich, 1951, p.64).

My own copy has the same annotation.

Then I discover that in 1943 three years before I was born Thomas wrote a poem called Frost. In 1965 I had a poem published in the Countryman. It was called Frost!<sup>108</sup>

### Frost

Thoughts in the mind's bare boughs sit dumb,  
Waiting for the spring to come:  
The green lisplings, the gold shower,  
The white cataract of song,  
Pent up behind the stony tongue  
In stiff tribute to the frost's power.

(R.S. Thomas, Wales, Issue 2, 1943).

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<sup>108</sup> A month after arriving in Sabah, Borneo for Voluntary Service Oversees I received the news that the poem had been accepted for publication. As it happened yesterday, 31.7.10, I found a bundle of letters from me to my parents which my mother saved. The one dated 22 October 1965 amongst tales of teaching 6B and asking about the due date of my sister's baby contains the following, "I am very excited to hear that you have received the proof of 'Frost' for the Countryman – you will send me a copy won't you? They did!"

## Frost

The mercury falls, the road is white  
With verges of single blades in cheap glitter  
And monotonous white. Trunks of white  
Lead to the common contrast of bitter  
Twigs, white against the brightness of winter sun.  
As the brightness fades the browning blades  
Mock the healthy green of high mercury season  
When colour produces subtle life shades.  
But now the contrast has gone:  
Blades and twigs wait no more for rising sap;  
The greyness, dead and brittle, has won.  
In the gale twigs, branches, whole bodies snap.  
It glitters now, the contrast bright, the monotonous revel –Our  
twentieth century at low mercury level.  
(C. Walton, *The Countryman*, Winter, 1965/66, p.281)

I might be slightly embarrassed by the eighteen-year-old moralising. However, it provides a joyful link with the poet!

### **The Spiral turns and the horizons begin to merge**

Together with my other adult “companions” R.S. Thomas is also woven into the hermeneutical spiral which represents my journey. The spiral continues to turn; it turns and digs deeper; it turns and pulls horizons together (Figure 8, Chapter7, p.254). My identification with Thomas is not only about place and time and poetry writing fantasies but about the struggle for identity, and his sense of dislocation of the self. In a strange prose piece Thomas refers to ‘a poet who lives away out over the bog’. They converse.

Then, ‘I looked up at him with the wide, blue air around him, and a strange emotion came over me. He was haloed with clear light and his face was alive, his eyes keen’. (Thomas in Anstey, 1995, p.21)

The rural poet seems to embody a state of being for which Thomas is seeking for himself: creatively alive and in assured possession of an identity that comes from feeling at home in his world’ (Brown, 2006, p.27). My resonance comes from a

similar struggle similarly resolved by coming to terms with the need not to become at home in the world as it is (see Chapter 11, p.359).

Early in the process of this research I puzzled as to how I could begin to write about the connections, my triggered streams of thought threw up at me.

I often get a stream of thought just 'come up'. It may be triggered by a book, serious or not, a comment made by any one, a memory, a scene, landscape, people, a report; some times by a combination of these. Often I get a 'long way down' the stream and most often it is made of a series of connections: a childhood memory with a university struggle with Kierkegaard, with an experience of counselling with an encounter with local government, with an interpretation of a poem, a Bible passage, some experience. Just as often there will be a wondering about how to make the comparison between one connection and another, between one person's experience or interpretation of it and another person's similar, or not, experience. In the stream of thought I wonder how you would begin to make valid comparison's between say, my own thoughts and the writing of the mystics; between a child's expression of spirituality and a known and accepted 'spiritual writer', between the wonderings of a farm worker and the poems of a renowned poet.

(Personal Journal, 2002)

For this thesis the answer lies in an espousal of a hermeneutic where 'a valid sense of selfhood and strangeness might coexist' (Kearney, 2003, p.11).

For instance what do I make of my own experience on the cliffs of Hell's Mouth<sup>109</sup> in comparison with this recorded experience of Thomas' (p.242) and its interpretation by Astley (p.248)? What is the connection? And where do the Magic Spot responses from the children fit in? Often just the odd comment, no mention of mists and haloed light, but exclamations :

Oh! It has now become clear.  
(Magic Spots, Imagination and Connection, p.1).

or more extended comments like:

When I was here at home in Holloway it felt like all my thoughts and feelings were in prison, but when I came to Ringsfield, in my magic spot, it felt, like they had all escaped and I had to jump up and run about and catch them.  
( Magic Spots, Year 5, 2004 p. 2, also quoted in Chapter 1 p.18).

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<sup>109</sup> This is recorded in Chapter 5, p.172

Can I reflect similarly about these two children as Astley reflects about Thomas below? If I can, and I believe I can, then I am exploring the development of an ecological identity, which I can search for in others. The following comparisons become part of exploring 'how to make the foreign more familiar and the familiar more foreign' which Kearney suggests is the goal of diacritical hermeneutics (Kearney, 2003, p.11).

What follows are some notes made following an interview with an Environmental Educator, Mark (see Chapter 6, p.197ff) and, separately, two 10 year old boys, Ashley and Dan, three months after Earthkeepers at the Centre.<sup>110</sup>

#### ***Special experience (observation)***

Mark's personal stories about watching a leaf falling off a tree in autumn and about having a squirrel sitting on his foot when hiding in a bush bear a remarkable similarity to Ashley's experience of an insect. Two things are 'amazing', first noticing something and experiencing another species for the first time, secondly the long term effect that experience had. For Mark (now 40) it felt like a formative experience affecting his life journey over twenty years; for Ashley, 10 years old, after three months he was still trying to recapture the experience.

#### ***Magic spots (reflection)***

Mark's story about the 13 year old who felt he was invading the space belonging to the flies is remarkably similar to Dan who felt the wildlife could have their space back when the children went back home. The sense of 'space' is very significant in all these responses. The word is used a lot, and it seems to signify a number of issues. Space is good - lots of physical space meaning freedom, but also space to think and feel, to reflect. There also appears to be an awareness of space occupied by the self and also of space occupied for the other. Others, (in this case being other species) have a right to space.

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<sup>110</sup> These two interviews were conducted before the Ethics Committee debacle (see Chapter 3, p.67ff). The 'interviews' (the recording failed) were made at the school in a room opposite the children's classroom with the doors of both rooms open, with the agreement of the head teacher, the class teacher and the children. It was during a visit three months after the end of the Earthkeepers programme.

In a radio interview in 1981 Thomas, speaking of his surroundings on the Llyn peninsula, said:

I became aware out on the peninsula of the wide seas, the starry sky at night, and the ocean around me, and this naturally led me into more contemplation of the universe (Thomas in Brown, 2006, p.78).

A ten year old wrote:

A large old oak tree cort my eye, i decided to draw it. as i drawed i wondered about that bird and why it made that noise maybe it was angry, sad? Who knows! I'm not sure what came into my thoughts next it was a mixture of anger, sadness and lonliness, i understand the anger, sadness but not the loneliness perhaps its to do with the amount of space there is around here.

(Magic Spots, 2003, Sad and Difficult, p.2)

The poet wrote:

All that brightness, he thinks,  
and nobody there! I am nothing  
religious. All I have is a piece  
of the universal mind that reflects  
infinite darkness between points of light.

(R.S.Thomas, The Possession in Brown, 2006, p.79)

Suffolk, or my part of it, is not renowned for its rugged, mountainous coastline, but it is on the edge of the sea and there are wide skies and I am often able to gaze into the unimaginable brightness of the galaxies. Whenever there is a starlit sky we encourage the children to come on a night walk and gaze too. In his essay *Somewhere between faith and doubt* Ben Astley comments on Thomas' ambivalence with faith.

The poet leaves us pondering the nature of man and the universe; he gives us a diction of despair...starkly juxtaposed with moments of hope ... His final image 'infinite darkness between points of light', allows us some understandings of the problem of being a man of faith ... how to possess (or be possessed by) a faith beyond sensible experience. (Astley, 1998, p.84)

*Three 17 years old young men, with next to no experience of poetry, let alone the ruminations of an old welsh poet, join the turning spiral.*

*It was during a period of shooting stars, this particular night was when it was expected there would be more evidence of the phenomena than any other night. It was the perfect cloudless, clear bright night. After being with a group of 10-year-olds for a night walk with the gleeful screams and ‘aahs’ of the experience still resounding, I came across the three teenage boys. They never saw me, or know to this day that I was there<sup>111</sup>. It was my colleague’s son and two friends who had chosen a grassy bank to lie on while they watched the ‘fireworks’ as I heard them call it earlier. I stayed quietly eavesdropping because I heard the words, ‘Yes, but it doesn’t prove anything.’ The ‘it’ turned out to be the awesome (their frequent word) sight above them. It was just as awesome to listen to their conversation, their contemplations. This was a conversation between friends; it was a shared experience among three young men who felt safe and comfortable with one another. The experience was mostly shared silence (filled with profound thoughts and wonderings). From time to time the shout would go up, ‘There’s one,’ ‘Look at that,’ ‘and another,’ ‘Where?’ ‘Oh, I missed it,’ ‘Wow, how about that!’ Then there was the waiting, the silence and some words.*

‘It makes you think.’

‘Yeah.’

‘What?’

‘Well all this. It makes you feel so small.’

‘Yes, but it doesn’t prove anything.’

‘What do you mean?’

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<sup>111</sup> This piece was written in 2002 and I have reproduced as it was written then. I have subsequently, albeit some years later, ‘confessed’ my presence and deliberate listening to their conversation. They have agreed to the script above, glad to be of assistance towards the hermeneutic!

*'Well, you know that that it was made by, you know, God or anything.'*

*'No, well I never said it did. But it makes you think, something must have.'*

*'Maybe.'*

*'It makes me feel, well, humble and scared at the same time.'*

*'I know what you mean. It's awesome, I can't believe it really. Shows that there must be more than we'll ever know about. That makes me feel OK.'*

*'OK?'*

*'Yeah, well it's all so big and we discover more and more, and it's sort of bigger and bigger and yet we're a part of it. Sort of like home, especially like tonight.'*

*'But what if we're not a part of it?'*

*'I dunno.'*

*'But maybe it's so big it's nothing to do with us.'*

*Then after a long, long silence, more shooting stars which appeared and disappeared without comment –*

*'Well, I can't stand anymore, I can't think straight.'*

*'Awesome.'*

*With some agreement they left their grassy couch to go for a smoke.*

*(Three teenagers overheard by C. Walton, personal journal, 2004).*

As I quietly left the scene without being seen I reflected on 'somewhere between faith and doubt' and felt I would approach these young men differently in the future. Then I begin to think of the 10 year olds so often living with us at the centre. The spiral turns and R.S. Thomas appears again:

Every night  
Is a rinsing myself of the darkness

That is in my veins. I let the stars inject me  
With fire, silent as it is far,  
But certain in its cauterising  
Of my despair.

(Night Sky in Thomas, 1993, p334).

And the spiral turns and Charlie steps into the movement.

*At the Centre Charlie had left his jumper on the playing field. We decided to go out to get it together because he expressed a fear of the dark. As we leapt out of the front door Charlie let out a yell and stopped with his head buried in his hands. I asked him what was wrong and he replied by pointing up at the sky, with his head still covered by his other hand. And up there was the most starry of nights, moon and stars together with the Milky Way, all visible in an awesome display on a coldish March night. I said, “Oh, they are the stars”.*

*“I’ve never seen the stars before”, came Charlie’s voice out of his covered head.*

*“Come on”, I said “let’s go and look at them”. So we ran onto the field, found the missing jumper and lay down in the mud and looked up and watched.*

*For some long time there was silence, then Charlie let out a series of long, loud, ‘wows, weeees, woooowwws’. Eventually Charlie turned his head towards mine, our ears in the mud. He looked at me with keen eyes and said, “There ain’t no stars in Kilburn!”*

The spiral continues to turn and in terms of contributing to the total body of meaning and understanding of ourselves, I can find no way to distinguish a hierarchy of value between the crafted poetry of an eminent poet and the exclamations of a young boy from Kilburn or the faltering articulations of young

men faced with ‘the darkness between points of light’. The poet, however, has

given me another horizon to continue the interpretation. And the spiral turns.

So Charlie, hitherto deprived, sees the universe beyond himself for the first time.

How he goes on to define his selfhood and his perception of himself by coming

into relationship with this ‘other’ I do not know, but I believe it has been altered.

Before this experience his ‘truth’ did not include the infinite lights and darkness

of space. Swimme affirms that something happens in the soul of a child when

gazing at the stars, ‘Something happens inside, a spaciousness opens up which is

in psychic congruence with galactic spaciousness’ (Swimme, 1996, p.60).

The teenagers at one and the same time feel connected and disconnected to that

which is way and beyond and outside of them. What will help them to become

engaged with these ambiguities, ‘to think straight’ in the midst of struggle rather

than to simplify every experience or to walk away from it? The capacity to feel

and to think and to encounter awesome wonder is certainly present, but what

about the influences which will allow space for the self, others and the earth?

Somehow these connections give me a great hope. A hope for the Charlies of this

world who given opportunity not only experience beyond themselves but also the

feel and think beyond themselves and will find truth not in itself but in

relationship with others: and a hope for the teenagers who given permission to

resist the threat of non-being, not by consumerism, not by doctrinal religion but

through robust reflection and the espousal of uncertainty will find the courage to

be.

This chapter cannot end until another horizon which turns in the spiral is outed.

It is the system which drives some teachers, for example, to refuse to let ‘their’

children out to gaze at the night sky, for health and safety reasons.<sup>112</sup> Strangely enough, campfires at night are most often not deemed as such a risk. So we can often sneak a gaze at the infinite universe on the way to a campfire.

In an education system which, along with the culture that spawned it, in denial about the destructive power of the social structures it upholds, there appears to be no place to allow the recipients of the system to ponder existential questions.

Reuben fell. A hard smack and a muffled grunt signalled Reuben's fall on the hard school linoleum floor as he moved with his kindergarten class in their silent, gender-based-double-lined trek to the restrooms at the end of the hall. As Reuben lay on the unforgiving floor, Julian - a spirited, full-of-verve, curious, 'ba'child – left his place in the back of the line to reach him where he had fallen near the front of the boy's line. Julian gently helped him to his feet, and asked, "Reuben, are you okay?" The other children steadfastly maintained their places in their straight, silent boy and girl lines. Their teacher, Mrs. Buttercup, shook her head, held up two fingers, and said, "That's two, Julian. You are out of line *and* you are talking. You're on the wall at recess". Going 'on the wall' is a common punishment in grade school. It means the child must spend all or part of the recess standing against the wall of the school building watching the other children play. (Leafgren, 2008, p. 331)

At this point I have deliberately chosen an example from another place than Ringsfield Hall. There are examples enough from my own experience in the text. It is this critique of the educational culture and tradition with its oppressive grip on many of those who live and teach in it that is one of the engines driving the drilling action of my hermeneutic spiral. That spiral is developed further as the search for meaning drills on.

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<sup>112</sup> *We of course deal with Health and Safety polices and risk assessments as part and parcel of our work. Our attitude is clear. To those who are always complaining that 'you can't do anything nowadays – play conkers, put a plaster on a child etc etc. we respond in two ways. 1. Go and look at the Health and Safety Executive website where you will find the myths of the month (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/myth/>) about health and safety regulations. Most regulations protested against are purely and simply myths. 2. We ask if the people concerned wish to look after safely and protect the children in their care. Then let us gladly do what we say we want to do, acknowledging that the law is involved because of the clear inattentiveness to these issues when there was no regulation.*

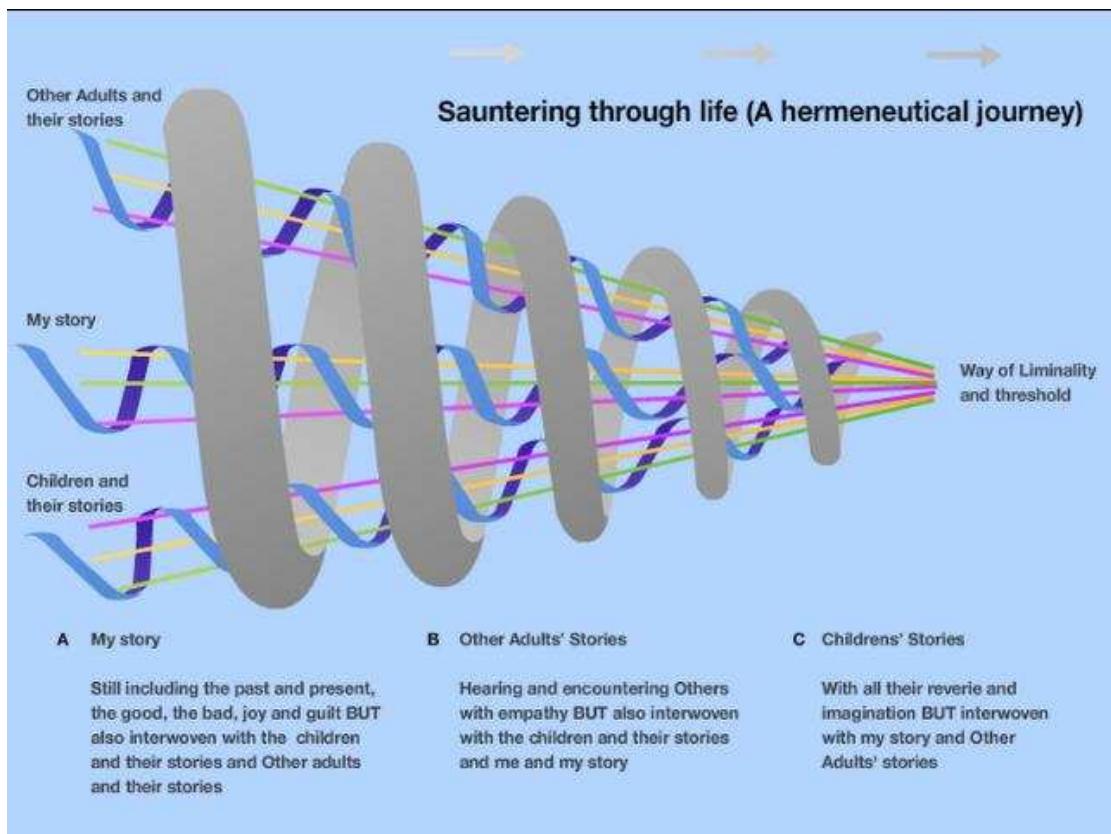


Figure 8: Spiral 3 Bringing the horizons together

Key: ————— My story, including my “text” see Chapter 5

————— Other Adults’ “texts” see Chapter 6 and this chapter above

————— The Children’s “texts”, see Chapters 9 and 10

This is an attempt to represent the increasingly complicated fusion of horizons.

Now within the hermeneutic spiral we encounter one another. The sauntering journey of life includes: dialogue with My own story with its many “texts” and both Other Adults and Other Children each with their many “texts”. There are spirals within spirals.

The planetary context in which children sit in their ‘magic spots’ is ecological crisis (see Chapter 3, p.79). The way of being generated by generations of reductionist dualism has contributed to that crisis. So are we to teach our children

a new way of being, and hope that the tragic violence which pervades the earth will go away?

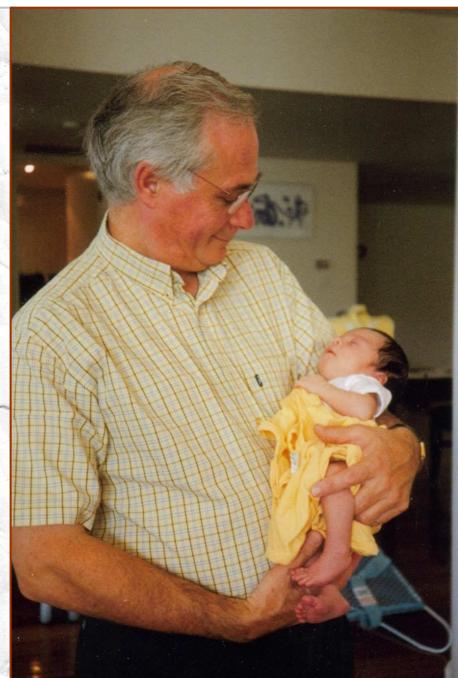
‘What would happiness be’, asks Adorno, ‘that was not measured by the immeasurable grief at what is?’ (Cited in Cornell, 1992, p.17, and in Salverson in Boal, p.146). Salverson asks, ‘Is there a relationship between happiness, suffering, and the capacity to bear witness, to be present to both the losses and the capabilities of others?’ Every teacher or leader of children needs to be a clown.



*Parenthesis 5*  
Childhood: The least of the least



Emma, my first child, 1971



Lauren, my first grandchild, 2001

## *Parenthesis 5*

### Childhood: The least of the least

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. (The Gospel of Luke 18:16, KJV)

A child's memories  
Are of the womb, the sleep  
By unearthly waters;  
His dreams are of a happiness  
Unfounded.

*Incarnations* (Thomas, 1995, p.35)

I have quoted from the King James Version of the Bible in this case because it introduces reflections from R. J. Campbell in, a now rather quaint book, *The Restored Innocence* (1898), even though I prefer a translation like: 'Let these children alone. Don't get between them and me. These children are the kingdom's pride and joy. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in' (Peterson, *The Message*, 2002). I possess the copy of Campbell's book given to Father Beddow<sup>113</sup> on 18 October 1901 (I assume by his wife, judging by the affectionate inscription). R. J. Campbell was to the Christian churches in the early years of the 20th century as John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich (of *Honest to God* fame) was to the 1960s. Minister of the City Temple, London he was the originator of the *New Theology* which became known as the *Social Gospel*. As with many names coined by critics it is the name which remains. It was a theology which played down transcendence and emphasised immanence; it placed central importance on the incarnation of God in Christ to draw out the essential understanding that God loved the world and was involved

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<sup>113</sup> Chapter 5, p.179.

in it. Thus followers of Jesus should be both socially and politically involved alongside their God. Seaward Beddow was in possession of all of Dr Campbell's books and the influence on his ministry is clear.

It was indeed a different era. Campbell introduces his subject, Jesus Christ, with comments like, 'No other religious master can be compared with Him; there cannot be comparison, there can only be contrast' (Campbell, 1898, p.3). He continues, 'In nothing, however, are His greatness and solitariness more remarkable than in the emphasis which He placed upon childhood and the child-like character. "Christ discovered child-life, He made it significant and sacred. He pointed out its nearness to the life of God, and found nothing better as a metaphor of Himself and His Spirit than the life of a little child"' (ibid, quoting, Speer, 1896, p.70).

Campbell names the four characteristics of childhood, which he believes are the marks of membership of the Kingdom of God. He starts with Faith. 'This is a 'natural quality'; the 'child and the saint are very near together'; 'the child has a natural faculty for spiritual truth; he is receptive, he moves in a world of wonders and beneficence' and a bias toward 'holy things' (Campbell, 1898, p.14). Then there is Love, 'a certain kindliness which in our after-contact with the world is likely to disappear'; 'it is said that little ones can distinguish between the good and the bad ... a more correct way of putting it would be to say, that if there be good in a character the child is apt to find it where his elders are prone to miss it' (ibid, p.16). Thirdly, Humility, 'the successful man can find no room for it – the unsuccessful replaces it by bitterness'; 'we sing about it in the church and drive it out of the counting house'; it is a quality 'distinctly present in our Lord Himself'; 'the child starts with it; we have to regain it' (ibid, pp.19-20). Finally, Simplicity, 'Jesus insisted upon simplicity of heart and singleness of aim, we can understand

why He should employ the nature of a little one as a metaphor of His own spirit' (ibid, pp.12-23).

What a bitter pill Campbell would have to swallow if he could now observe the contemporary condition and treatment of children throughout the world, let alone in his own society.

Jesus was born in a cruel age, an age which held child-life cheaply. He sanctified it, and places it in the forefront ... the condition of membership in His Kingdom ... was to be the heart of a little child. When the long, sad story of the suffering of child-life comes to be told [in the final days] the originality of Jesus action towards it will stand out with greater clearness than we can understand even today'. (ibid, p.24)

I want to put alongside this interpretation of Jesus' relationship with 'child-life' my own interpretation from the parallel passages (to Luke 18) in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew.

### **The Least of the Least**

*'Whoever does not receive the kingdom like a child, will not enter into it at all' (Mark 10:15).*

We all will have puzzled about the meaning of this saying, but in all our puzzling we will have agreed about the general interpretation, that is to say that Jesus is saying that you have to be like a child before you can enter into the Kingdom. Our puzzling has been about the characteristics of a child Jesus was referring to. We come up with various ideas, like innocence, vulnerability; we differentiate between being 'childish' and 'childlike'. In doing this we hardly ever ask ourselves about the character of the Kingdom. The assumption most often is that we would wish to enter the Kingdom, so to do so we must become like a child in some way.

It is not easy to receive a reinterpretation of a passage so well known to us, and interpreted with such universal agreement but Ched Myers in his commentary of Mark (Binding the Strong Man, A Political reading of Mark's Story of Jesus, Orbis, 1988) challenges us to just that.

The words of Jesus above come from the famous passage in Mark's gospel when the disciples prevent people bringing children to Jesus so that he could bless them (Mark 10:13-16). But how many of us realise that just twenty verses before this (Mark 9:37) Jesus has said the following words:

*'Whoever receives one such child (he had put a child in the middle of the group) in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me'?*

Before we look at these two statements closely together, it is helpful to understand their context.

In Mark 9:33-37 the words about the child are prompted by the fact that the disciples 'on the way' to Capernaum had 'discussed with one another who was the greatest'. Jesus takes the opportunity to once again teach them about what relationships are like in the new "way" (in the Kingdom). 'If anyone would be first, she/he must be last of all and servant of all' (v.35). Then come the words about receiving children. Jesus is clearly pronouncing that to follow him requires the acceptance of a social transformation. It is the transformation from an essentially violent social structure where it is assumed that status and worth is attached to those with power, influence and, often, domination, to the way of non-violence; reversing those assumptions about status and elevating the 'last' to the 'first'.

In Mark 10-13 the words about children are provoked by the disciples' rejection and dismissal of the children (the least of the least). Jesus continues to challenge the disciples. The Kingdom means the turning upside-down of the social structure which includes their own inner community and their own families. He has already (9:36) put the child at the centre, 'in the midst', now he makes them face the fact that it is their behaviour towards the 'least' which will determine their participation in God's rule.

So now it is time to put the two statements together:

*'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me? (Mark 9:37)*

*'Whoever does not receive the kingdom like a child, will not enter into it at all' (Mark 10:15).*

This is no symbolic idea that if you become like a child in some idealised way you will enter into the Kingdom of God. It is the strong revolutionary statement that you will only enter the Kingdom if you receive children. Unless you offer children (the least of the least) status, your unconditional acceptance, your love then you have no hope of offering the same to others who are oppressed and marginalised by the present social structure. It follows that you are barred from entering the Kingdom where the *last* are *first* and the *first* are *last*. In John's gospel it was the same kind of occasion, a time when Jesus offered only one way to the disciples that, 'many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him' (John 5:66).

### **A community for the "least of the least"**

I want to explore some of the ways in which Mark 9:30-10:52 is the cornerstone of the ministry of Ringsfield Hall. We have often very purposefully made a point of separating the place from the ministry. What we have meant by this is that the vision, character and the practice of the ministry is not confined to, or beholden to, the place of Ringsfield Hall. This is to say that it is not the place which defines and moulds the ministry, but the ministry which defines and moulds the place. In fact the ministry could be based any where, but we are in this particular place and this particular time and our task is to use this particular place, with all its wonderful characteristics of space, biodiversity and peace to engage in the ministry.

In the commentary referred to above this part of Mark's gospel is given the title: *Jesus' Construction of a new Social Order*, (p.257). Our vision is to make a contribution towards this new social order of the Kingdom of Christ. This part of Mark's gospel is not about confession but praxis. Running the place is not about finances but about ministry. So, we reject the easier timidity which goes like this: "It's all very well, but if there's not enough money we have to recognise reality and cut our cloth etc". Instead, we embrace the vision which is radically wild and foolish, but life-changing, which goes like this: "This ministry is so important, such a priority that we will find whatever it takes to follow the vision and accomplish our contribution to the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven". Now this is confessional with kick and bite!

(Walton, 2006, Paper for the Trustees of The Ringsfield Hall Trust)

I did not present the poem, which I wrote at the same time, to the Trustees meeting.

### On the way

a reflection on Mark 9:34

There are things more important than children  
He humiliated us, we said ‘No’  
He said ‘Yes’.  
Its all very well but we have all got to grow up.

Out of the mouth of babes  
is one thing  
But who decides the wisdom?

There has to be some limits  
If you don’t, say No  
Where will that get us?

They have too much freedom  
Put them in the centre? No.  
They are already too big for their boots.

But they’re only children, they  
Mustn’t over step the mark, damn it!  
Aren’t there more important issues?

He says, ‘No’.  
We say, ‘Yes’.  
Never was sure about this Kingdom.

Children in *our* kingdom are both loved and hated.

We spend many hours at the Centre receiving interested visitors wanting to know more about the work and explaining to those looking round the facilities what we are about and what we stand for. It has turned out to be a revealing experience in that so few people warm to the work and many seem in some way to be offended by it.

A local vicar had used the Centre for a residential weekend for the young people of his church. As they were leaving we made arrangements for him to visit when there were no visitors and learn more of what we stood for. We were able during

that visit to walk around the grounds, experience the Hermitage where I took the opportunity to tell him about earth education and our experience with children and solitude. He was uncomfortable with the term ‘magic spots’ and questioned me closely about what the children were doing during these times of ‘solitude in the natural world’. After he had talked about the need to spend more time expounding the gospel to children rather than letting them think for themselves I delivered a good paragraph or two about the fact, as I saw it, of society, including the church, having a love-hate relationship with children. The more we tried to talk after that the more agitated he became. He was insistent that parents, especially those in the church, did love their children, but that children need to understand the need for discipline. Children today, he insisted, have too much time to muck about and get up to no good; they get given too much; they are spoilt, selfish and badly behaved. They need to be told what’s what, what to be and what to think.

Needless to say, he did not return to bring a group, or even use the Hermitage for some ‘magic’ time alone!

It is not surprising, then, that Rebecca Nye reports, when making some concluding remarks in her account of shedding light on the character of children’s spirituality as a result of intensive interviews with primary school children, that:

... it seemed a sorry reflection on the religious institutions that none of the children who belonged to faith communities felt that these could provide a supportive comparison group for their spiritual ideas, feelings and experiences. (Hay and Nye, 2008, p.127).

The ‘final days’ (see above, p.259) are not here, but much of the ‘the long, sad story of the suffering of child-life’ (Campbell, 1898, p.6) can be told. When Jesus spoke to the disciples while holding the child and rebuking the disciples he was red with anger. The New Testament Greek word is *εγανακτεσαν* (eganaktesan – not upset, but passionate anger). R. D. Laing, that defender and advocate for

some more of ‘the least of the least’, those suffering with so-called schizophrenia, writes with the same anger.

In order to rationalize our industrial-military complex, we have to destroy our capacity both to see clearly any more what is in front of, and to imagine what is beyond, our noses. Long before a thermonuclear war can come about, we have had to lay waste our own sanity. We begin with the children. It is imperative to catch them in time. Without the most thorough and rapid brain-washing their dirty minds would see through our dirty tricks. Children are not yet fools, but we shall turn them into imbeciles like ourselves, with high I.Q.s if possible. (Laing, 1973, p.49)

Nearly seventy years later this twentieth century psychoanalyst, psychiatrist, prophet and clown agrees with the Edwardian theologian, Campbell, about child-life.

From the moment of birth, when the stone-age baby confronts the twentieth century mother, the baby is subjected to these forces of violence, called love, as its mother and father have been, and their parents and their parents before them. These forces are mainly concerned with destroying most of its potentialities. This enterprise is on the whole successful. By the time the new human being is fifteen or so, we are left with a being like ourselves. A half-crazed creature, more or less adjusted to a mad world. (ibid, p.50)

Laing’s depressing analysis of western society’s adaption to the economic, market-led norm describes human beings as having ‘become so self-brutalized, banalized, stultified, that they are unaware of their own debasement’ (ibid, p.52).

In the light of this strong language our ‘revolutionary’ non-conformist preacher seems a gentle romantic, but the point is the same.

There is also present in childhood a certain kindliness which in our after-contact with the world is likely to disappear...it is the quality we call love. (Campbell, 1898, p.15)

Love lets the other be, but with affection and concern. Violence attempts to constrain the other’s freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other’s own existence of destiny.

We are effectively destroying ourselves by violence masquerading as love. (Laing, 1973, p.50)

No romanticism here. Nor in many incidents and attitudes we have met at the Centre over the years. When we first arrived, on the door post just inside the front door a wooden plaque was screwed in place; it read:

Children certainly make a difference  
But it can normally be repaired.

The horror of this is more than just that such a notice should have welcomed people to a Centre which claims to be looking after the ‘physical, emotional and spiritual welfare of children’ (Ringsfield Hall Trust charity constitution, p.2), but that when we tell teachers and leaders about the notice there are often hoots of laughter. We can tell a good joke, we are clowns and know how to have fun, but we have learned that if you want to contribute to a paradigm change in the way people relate to each other, one key action is to discipline yourself never to use the language of the old paradigm and especially not in jest. So in our society we have a love-hate relationship with children, or, in R. D. Laing’s language we are destroying them with ‘violence masquerading as love’ (Laing, 1967, p.50). But as with the story above, we are in denial. We are masters at setting up ‘the little ones’. For instance, we fill our children with fizzy, sugary drinks (proven to cause hyperactivity and in later life a propensity for Alzheimer’s disease) and in numbers, one of the causes of hyperactivity (see *Toxic Childhood*, Palmer, 2006, p.21ff) then we blame them and punish them for bad behaviour, or name them as ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). If they respond to this punishing regime by retreating from it, then they often get named as autistic. Carers of children in the classroom, appointed by the state to do the job, can display profound disregard towards the children they teach.

*We visit every school that visits us. We have a little time with the children who are coming to introduce ourselves and the centre. We use our clowning skills and tell the history of Ringsfield Hall built in 1887 by Samuel Base who was formerly a spy for Lord Palmerstone – a good start, a Victorian 007! We tell the story with hats and improvisation and fun. We also try to spend a bit of time with the staff who will be coming with the children and the head teacher. Over ten years now we have got to know the schools, their head teachers and made good friends with many of the teachers; we know many well enough to discuss the issues I am now addressing. One school in south east London presents itself very well indeed. Orderly displays adorn the walls of corridors and classrooms, the quiet is daunting. Schools are different and in many schools someone has been appointed to welcome us and maybe offer a cup of tea (it has been a 3-hour drive); sometimes of course the day is a busy day, or has been disrupted in some way. However, one year we entered the school carrying our props and as we approached the reception desk the secretary (whom we had met before) barely looked up but pointed down the corridor and said, ‘You’re in the library.’ We duly went to the empty library, decided where we would ‘perform’, got our props organised and waited. Some time went by until a boy came in with his carer. He was a special needs child and we had met his carer before. She thought that she would bring him in early and settle him as he was particularly upset that morning. They chose a place for him to sit, in fact he laid down on his stomach with his chin in his hands, calm and happily chatting to us. Then a teacher walked in leading the rest of the 35 children. As they obediently sat down in lines in front of us she came over to Tim, and shouted, standing over him, ‘What are you doing there, get up and move over there!’ Tim said he didn’t want to move, she told him to move again, he started to shout back. She grabbed him and ‘man’handled him out of the room. We waited a little in the slightly traumatised silence, assuming that someone would introduce us. But the second teacher who had come in with the children was just walking out again, and a classroom assistant sat at the back looking*

*the other way. So we just started, introduced ourselves, did our stuff, had some fun, enjoyed the children, and finished. During this the two teachers walked back in at the back of the children, talking to one another. When we finished, they stopped talking and one of them said, 'Now all of you who are NOT going to Ringsfield; go back to your classrooms.' They did. We fielded some questions in the middle of which the same teacher said, 'OK, now it's time for all of you to go back to your classes' and walked out with them. We gathered up our props, left the library, down the corridor, said goodbye to the receptionist (who did not reply) and drove home, muttering and expressing disbelief. This was four years ago. The school trip did take place, completely independently of any input we might have to give. The school does not visit us anymore.*

When we tell the story, still with grief and anger (and no doubt εγανακτεçav too) and wonder how Tim and all the children have coped with their primary education. It is one of the despairs of the last ten years that experiences like this are so common that despite the good intentions, and the devoted and loving teachers we meet, we are forced to accept the view that 'education in practice has never been an instrument to free the mind and the spirit, but to bind them' (Henry, in Laing, 1967, p.59). It is despair and not disappointment because over four decades have passed since Henry made this assertion.

During our first year, 1999, at the Centre – when this particular school was in residence and we were new to receiving schools on their school trips and only beginning to sort out the relationship between the centre and the schools – during the first meal we heard a commotion in the dining room and a teacher shouting at the top of her voice, threatening to send the children to bed if they didn't stop making so much noise.

*We experienced the noise level like that of a full restaurant – a lot of animated chatter, laughing and talking. Incidents of shouting occurred throughout the visit. It was not only the very loud shouting which shocked us, but the fact that two seconds before an incident the teacher and everyone else, it seemed, were OK with no atmosphere building up to the ‘need’ for discipline. Out of the blue the level of shouting and anger were very high. We had no experience to know how we could address this behaviour (of the teacher). Maybe, we reasoned, it was not our business; on the other hand, we were trying to offer what we called ‘generous and gentle hospitality’, a place where ‘spirits could rise with wings’ as we bravely put it in our new brochure (1999). Why should that aim and purpose be so abused, let alone the children? We thought we would write to the head teacher about our concerns. This decision was confirmed on the last morning of the visit when everyone was getting all their luggage to the coach and tidying up was going on apace. It is often a little stressful; the aim is to leave by 10am. I had just come back to the front door with a group of children who had been feeding the animals. I stood back as the porch was full of activity and saw the following unfold as I watched. The ‘shouting teacher’ was in the porch dealing with bits and bobs – lost property. I saw a teacher inside the house tell a girl (9 years old they were) to go and ask the ‘shouting teacher’ something. The girl came through the porch and was waiting to speak to the teacher. She waited some considerable time, standing still, politely waiting. Suddenly, the teacher looked up, stepped closer and with her face inches away from the girl’s face shouted, shrieked, ‘What are you doing? Just go away, stop standing in front of me.’ The action was so sudden and so loud that I saw a physical shock wave go through the girl from head to toe. She burst out crying and went back to the teacher who had sent her on this disastrous errand.*

In her studies of why people do terrible things to each other, Alice Miller describes child-rearing based on fear and emotional absence as a ‘poisonous

pedagogy' resulting in 'soul murder'. 'A child responds to and learns both tenderness and cruelty from the very beginning' (Miller, 1987, p.144).

We set out to write to the head teacher, but it was then that we discovered that the 'shouting teacher' was the head teacher.

'There is a chance of securing a space not dominated by adults insisting on adaption, not only because adults can 'make community of human society ... learn empathy and respect for one another simply so that people get the love they need' (McIntosh, 2002, p.280), not only because we can make soul community; not only because we can do both of these by 'making community with the soil, learning how to revere the earth, walking more lightly and joyously on the planet' (ibid, p.281); but also because somewhere hidden in the in-between there are 'reveries so deep, reveries which help us descend so deeply within ourselves that they rid of our history' (Bachelard, 1969, p.99).

With Purton I reject the Cartesian conclusion that detaches us from the world and

... the view that life begins with a baby's subjective awareness out of which it constructs an external world of material objects and other people. It is, rather, the other way round: the baby starts a nexus in a network of personal relationships. There is, as it were, a place for the baby in the interpersonal network even before it is born. (Purton in Thorne and Dryden, eds, 1993, p.157)

Preaching to a congregation is a privilege. It is a risky business – it can become an opportunity to (try to) impose ideas, prejudices, petty scores on a captive audience. It is a privilege when it becomes a work of community where people learn and live together, sharing the journey of 'becoming, bit by bit, if not all at once'. This last phrase became something of an iconic mantra after some ten years in Birmingham, over a long period of ministry in the inner city. Groups involved in practical ministry engaged in an attempt to clearly identify and describe the

concepts of our religious faith and set about experimenting and discovering the sort of lifestyle, mind-set and action which followed from those concepts. We also sought to design the strategies which were needed to deal with the consequences of that lifestyle which resulted from the conflict between our chosen lifestyle and our context and culture. This was a long and shared life experience where we learned a new language, including some ‘shorthand’ to encapsulate new and challenging concepts. During one morning service we reflected on the use of silence and solitude in the practice of life and faith. One of the texts we were using was Psalm 139, where the poet expresses the awesome presence of the spirit in every time and space including:

When I was being made in secret,  
intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.  
Thy eyes held my unformed substance...  
Psalm 139:15-16 (RSV)

*In one morning sermon I shared my own experience of all three of my own children talking to me about pre-existence. That is to say, each one them when they reached the age of about four or five asked where they were before they had been born. I shared the fact that I had found it very difficult to answer their question with any real sense, except to talk about eggs and sperms which none of them found particularly interesting. A grandmother, marvellously called Marjorie Dawes, shared her endearing experience of the same question from her three year old grand-daughter, Marie. Marjorie had quickly replied, ‘You were in the mind of God.’ After a moment of thought Marie said casually, ‘Oh, yes. I remember.’*

While I do not offer this story as evidence I do offer it as a context for considering the notion of the ‘permanence of a nucleus of childhood’, outside history, hidden from the others, disguised in history when it is recounted, but which has real being only in ‘instants of illumination’ which is the same as saying in the ‘moments of its poetic existence’ (Bachelard, 1969, p.100). Bachelard’s insight is that

childhood reveries can be understood as, ‘for lack of a better term, “antecedent of being”’ (ibid, p.108). ‘To catch a glimpse of it, it is necessary to take advantage of the detemporalisation of the great states of reverie. Thus we believe that one can know states which are ontologically below being and above nothingness’ (ibid).

As we have seen in Chapter 4, p.132, ‘Walsh and Kesmaat (1980) argued that human awareness (hence identification) can expand and deepen beyond everyday cognitions. As a person’s awareness stretches beyond ego awareness, his or her identity transforms “beyond ego”. He or she becomes “nothing and everything” and experiences a complete relatedness to the universe’ (Cox and Lyddon, 1997, p.210). Without in any sense suggesting that the notion of ‘antecedent being’ defines our identity, our true self which through life we may discover (Cox and Lyddon, 1997, p.204), Bachelard suggests that ‘the child knows a natural reverie of solitude’ and that in ‘his happy solitudes, the dreaming child knows the cosmic reverie which unites us to the world’ (Bachelard, 1969, p.108). ‘The cosmicity of our childhood remains within us. In solitude, it reappears in our reveries’ (ibid). Bachelard warns us not to confuse reveries with the sulking child. I well remember the times when we had moved to Birmingham I was often wondering where my daughter, then aged seven, (now 39) had disappeared to. I would find her, probably on the second storey of our terraced house, just sitting. ‘Are you all right? Any thing wrong?’ The answer, which included a glance of slight indignation: ‘No, of course not. I’m just being by myself.’

What has surprised me over the last ten years, since we have been giving opportunity for solitude, introduced through earth education programmes (see Chapters 1 and 2) to 7-11-year-olds, is the relative ease with which the children

settle into the experience. They are also able quickly to articulate something of the experience.

*It's quiet here, it's the only place I can connect with nature. I chose this place because it is peaceful. Nature makes me feel at rest.*  
(Kal, 2003, *Magic Spots, Assorted*, p.7).

*A magic spot is a quiet place in nature where you can sit down and relaxe. At first i found it hard not to speak for a long time but after a while it came naturally. I liked writing what i saw or felt and it was very relaxing. I got to know nature a lot more and realized how important it is to save the earth. Magic spots are great!*

*(Magic Spots, Peace and feelings, p.1).*

Also surprising is the extent to which so many children develop the habit of solitude (and reverie). Visiting the schools some three months after their visit to the centre I have always found many children who are still finding time and space regularly for their 'magic spot'. This is happening after only four days in the Suffolk countryside and maybe two or three organised 'magic spot spaces'. Even if Laing is right that 2-year-olds have already been made to adapt to a dysfunctional society (Laing, 1967, p.51); and even if Bachelard is right that by the time a child reaches the 'age of reason' they have been taught to be 'objective', 'stuffed with sociability' and 'Childhood – that dough! – is pushed into the die so that the child will follow closely in the path of the lives of others' (Bachelard, 1969, p.107), nevertheless it would appear that there is still direct access to 'a nucleus of childhood', a place where imagination and memory are tied together, a place of rest, 'a great calm lake where time rests from its flowing. And this lake is within like a primitive water, the environment in which an immobile childhood continues to reside' (*ibid*, p.111).

In one of the workshops we have developed for 8-10-years-olds, *Hero's Journey*, where we explore emotions and how they can seem to control us, we facilitate the children in creating their own space of rest and calm. Exercises in imagination, sometimes with artwork and sometimes music, enable each child to discover their

own image of ease and balm. This may only be a technique for the management of distress or anger when there is a temporary escape from the disrupting emotion to a safe calming-down space ‘transcending one space to another’ (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.130), but it may also be providing an opportunity for a child to slip into the in-between space, the reverie of childhood.

Reverie towards our past then, reverie looking for childhood seems to bring to life lives which have never taken place, lives which have been imagined. Reverie is a mnemonics of the imagination. In reverie we re-enter into contact with possibilities which destiny has not been able to make use of. ... [Now] in us this dead past has a future, the future of its lived mages, the reverie future which opens before any rediscovered image. (Bachelard, 1969, p.112)

The painting was produced by a 10-year-old, three months after an Earthkeepers programme at our centre. The children were asked to reflect on their experience of ‘Magic Spots’ and express something of their reflection on paper, writing, or/and using a variety art materials (a further reference is made to this response in Chapter 9, p.308).



Within our aesthetic spaces we can dramatize our fears and practices our actions in spaces of relative safety. Children are wonderfully adept at this. In their play, they overlay material objects and places with highly imaginative and creative constructions. In their quest for defining boundaries, both physical and symbolic, and testing their permeability, children seek opportunities of expression. Trees become rocket ships, streets become ball fields, abandoned spaces become treasured sanctuaries. These aesthetic spaces make possible imaginative geographies, in which opportunities for transitive knowing are freed up, rather than over-determined by highly structured contexts and places. (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.126)

These spaces are in-between places where spirit and flesh are joined together (see *Parentheses 1 and 2*). They are easily by-passed in a culture ruled by all of us who are 'fallen Sons of Prophecy, who have learned to die in the Spirit and be reborn in the flesh' (Laing, 1969, p.57) and well trained in hiding the entry-points. Bachelard insists that poetry provides those fissures in the dominant culture (Bachelard, 1969, p.111). I am sure art and music can do the same. My experience is that reconnection with the natural world opens up the entry points.

We live in a secular world. To adapt to this world the child abdicates its ecstasy ... Having lost our experience of the spirit, we are expected to have faith. But this faith comes to be a faith in a reality which is not evident. There is a prophecy in Amos that there will be a time when there will be a famine in the land, 'not a famine for bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.' That time has now come to pass. It is the present age. (Laing, 1967, p.118)

Striated space is Euclidean space, walled and ordered. It is adult space from the perspective of the child, and it is dominant space from the perspective of the subaltern or oppressed. It is the 'straight' space the drag queen theatricalised and the carnival parodies. (Popen, in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.129)

But potential is hope. Even Laing believes there is some possibility of overcoming the dominant powers, the striated space, the royal consciousness (see *Parenthesis 4*, p.220).

Yet if nothing else, each time a new baby is born there is a possibility of reprieve. Each child is a new being, a potential prophet, a new spiritual

prince, a new spark of light, precipitated into the outer darkness. Who are we to decide that it is hopeless? (Laing, 1967, p.57)

In the work at the Centre we find it remarkable how articulate young children are concerning their inner feelings and their spirituality. Bachelard comments, 'The questioned child ... does not surrender his solitude' (Bachelard, 1967, p.107).

I would expect that it is later in life when a person can reflect on and 'use' the experience of childhood reverie. If this is the case then it is all the more important to help children to habitually seek solitude, to make slipping through into the in-between of an ordinary activity. Another Victorian writer, George Macdonald (1824-1905) suggested that childhood is a pattern that adults should aspire to. Macdonald derived his inspiration from the New Testament, from the concept that Jesus has 'never lost his childhood' (Macdonald, in Pridmore, p.55). Nor has Jesus lost the 'child's vision' (Pridmore, 2007, p.63). That vision is the child's intense awareness of the world around him. George Macdonald, also reflects on the consequences of the loss of imagination

The child who sees the stream 'in celestial light', Macdonald implies, sees truly. It is we grown-ups, deceived by familiar appearances, for whom that stream is unremarkable, who are misled. The loss diminishes our humanity and puts us at odds with our environment.

'To cease to wonder is the plumb-down from the childlike to the commonplace ... Our Nature cannot be at home among things that are not wonderful to us' (MacDonald, 1872, p.55)

Macdonald claims that Jesus retains this child-eye view and 'to turn and become a child is to recover that original vision, the primal capacity to see'. (Pridmore, 2007, p.72)

'The promotion of spiritual development requires the affirmation and sustaining of childhood' (MacDonald in Pridmore, 2007, p.73), because Macdonald identified the characteristics of childhood, that is Christ-like childhood, as follows:

First, there are the virtues of childhood, the child sees things as for the first time and so sees them as they always are. The child is attuned to

nature and instructed by nature, by her quiet presence and by her overpowering disclosures. The child's imagination reaches beyond what can be grasped and analysed.

Second, a point not articulated by Hay or Thomas (though the poetry and Thomas' own childlike search for meaning displays it), the child is vulnerable to suffering but that suffering can be turned to good.

Thirdly, like Hay and Thomas, Macdonald has no doubt that:

... these virtues are not transient characteristics, features of a passing phase of life. They are not condemned to fade but nor are they, if forfeited, beyond recovery. They belong to our fulfilled humanity, to our well-being at any age. Childhood is a continuing moral and spiritual goal. (Pridmore, 2007, p.72)



## Chapter 8

Hermeneutics: an interpretive methodology

Part 5

“Shame on your face”.



*“Shame on your face, Chris”*

## Chapter 8

### Hermeneutics: an interpretive methodology

#### Part 5

#### “Shame on your face”.

*Tyler came from the inner city. Right from the beginning of the visit he was up front, ‘in your face’. (We had been ‘warned’ about his behaviour). So the ‘presume a cause’<sup>114</sup> was high on the agenda. Intuitively I grieved for him - pale, quite sunken eyes with heavy bags underneath; looking round for affirmation; always getting very close. We developed a friendship, simply through his delight in the guinea pigs, especially one which he named Patch, and by my acceptance of his rather unusual catch phrase without judgement and with some amusement. We had a good time together. Whenever I stumbled over my words, or said I didn’t know an answer to a question, or told him to wait a minute for someone else to speak he would say, in my face, ‘Shame on your face, Chris’. What he meant I do not know, probably nothing much, it was just a way of being – Shame on your face.*

*On day three of his visit a teacher happened to witness one of these occasions, within seconds Tyler was hauled over away from me, told to shut up and ‘Never, ever, say that again to any one. What do you think you were doing? Who do you think you are? And there was more; much more shouting. I saw the physical changes, the pale whiteness returned, his eyes seemed to sink back, brow furrowed, shoulders dropped as he turned to look wistfully at me. I felt the emotional change, heart sinking fast, spirit retreating, well-being draining away. I experienced the social change. He responded less to his peers, he kept to himself. His head remained down for the rest of the day. I wept.*

What was the trigger? His teacher puts him down, casually, maybe roughly – this triggered memories of what? Past treatment at home as a baby, a younger child – just speculation? No matter, always presume a cause and go gently.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> This phrase, ‘presume a cause’ was coined at the Centre as part of the Way of Being we expect from ourselves and all our staff at all times. It is explained more fully in Chapter 9, p.308.

<sup>115</sup> *We did regain our relationship over the remaining time of the visit. I was glad to hear again, ‘Shame on your face, Chris,’ with a wry grin and less sunken, and bright, again, eyes. But I may never see him again. Four days and the children are gone. I did also speak to the teacher. It was a good conversation, but with no agreement. I still weep for Tyler.*

The ontological hermeneutic process has no conclusions. It includes restlessness, (Alexander, 1927, p.xiii), a creative evolution (Bergson, 1902), and a process of concrescence (Whitehead, 1978).<sup>116</sup> I have argued that a better metaphor for interpretation than the hermeneutic circle is a spiral, the hermeneutic spiral (see below pp. 283 and p.288). In my view the spiral metaphor better encapsulates Bergson's words about the hermeneutical *circle* which he claimed to be a description of the involvement of human beings as active agents, through a process of hermeneutics in 'recalcitrantly "negotiating" adjusting,... altering even the most pervasive and imperative patterns of existence' (Brougham,1993, p.41).

...it can be inferred that the "starting point" of the "circle" is open: the "intellectual effort" can begin anywhere on the circle. It may begin with the scheme (motivating initial "idea", anticipation, "prejudice"), or somewhere among the "pieces", or it may originate in the "interval" – anywhere *in between* the "buzzing confusion" and the tentative encapsulation. The mutual modification or reciprocal adjusting may be "sideways" or "up-and-down" or both. Once the "dynamism begins, an adjusting interplay between all components and the general pattern takes place, involving "concession", "negotiation", and "struggle". (ibid, p.39, my emphasis)

### **“Triggers”**

My hermeneutic *spiral* is continually active, excited, oscillating and it seems to me that these "adjustments", involving "concessions", "negotiations" and "struggles" are what causes the oscillations. I call them "triggers". I have come to believe that the process of making meaning for ourselves now – in this particular place, with these particular people and at this particular time (see Chapter 1 p.28ff) – is, at least in part, informed by "triggers" This is why I started this chapter with the story of Tyler. Here is an example of a child being constantly named and shamed in the present, because no one has stopped to 'presume a cause'. It will be a cause unseen in the present but constantly ready to re-emerge

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<sup>116</sup> See Chapter 8, p. 288 and Chapter 12, p.367. *Concrecence* is a word used by Whitehead to describe a satisfactory integration of the turbulence of many meanings.

for good or ill. A sound, a voice a look or glance, a smell, a landscape triggers some times a fleeting memory, a feeling, a mood; some times presents half a life time of memories, or a complicated web of interactions and responses.

For example at my mother's funeral party, held in the house in which she lived since her retirement for 31 years (25 years with my father before he died) I said goodbye to one of my nephews, Richard and his new wife. As he was leaving, I heard a very familiar and heart-warming sound repeated again and again. I went to the back door of the house and there was Richard walking out of the door and as he did so stepping on the metal grill/mat (as everyone did and had done for 30 years), listening to the sound it made as his foot left it; then repeating the action again and again. Though in an instant I thought I knew why he was doing this, I asked him what he was doing. He simply said, 'This is the sound of granny's place. I wanted to hear it again, I may never be back here again'. Physically he probably won't, but emotionally he will. That sound for him, as for me, triggered a whole range of memories and reflections, layers of delight and joy and loss and "...and...".



During the weekend of November 28-30 2008 I experienced another trigger: a curved door at Hawkeswood College where I was participating in a Clowning course.<sup>117</sup> It was not the door, but the edge of the door that did it! As soon as I saw

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<sup>117</sup> A Nose to Nose course conducted by Vivian Gladwell see *Parenthesis 4* p.232.

the angle of the edge of the door, the angle needed for the door to open and close in the curved wall I was triggered into memories and emotions of my 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> years - working on the furniture I was making to furnish the 4 feet high scale model of an eighteenth century terraced house I was building. I remembered and felt the emotions of that three year project, every brick, (25,000 of them) and tiles hand cut / the Sir Jonathon North Competition run by the Leicester LEA for all of school age / categories which included every possible subject and skill / winning the bronze medal for my model ships, at my first attempt / the 20'x20' shed built for my sister and brother and I to use for our hobbies / the escapades, the shadow theatre we had built eight years before.....all this and more triggered by the fact that when I was making a model of a regency sideboard with curved doors, I shaped the doors out of solid mahogany which came from my grandfather...further triggers... He had been a master cabinet maker in Coventry, when he retired he had a large workshop and I used to spend hours with him, 'helping', learning the trade, looking after the tools / I did love my granddad (he paid me so much attention, (see Chapter 9 p.300) / and tried to fit them to the curved opening in the model they wouldn't fit because I had got the wrong angle on the edge.....



The model made in 1960, now with the right angle on the door, it closes perfectly



The original sideboard



More pictures of the models

And even as I write about the ‘process of moving from place to person, from person to place, from idea to action, from action to realization, from connection to connection thrown up by different triggers, different from one year to the next, from one day to the next, from one hour to the next, with constant movement through the restless space of the in-between’ I am ‘triggered’ into my first experience of the wonders and mysteries of Chaos Theory, the intricate and beautiful patterns of the Mandlebrot fractal patterns. So I re-find Gleick’s book and discover again this:

antennas.

**Image gallery of a zoom sequence**

The Mandelbrot set shows more intricate detail the closer one looks or magnifies the image, usually called “zooming in”. The following example of an image sequence zooming to a selected  $c$  value gives an impression of the infinite richness of different geometrical structures, and explains some of their typical rules.

The magnification of the last image relative to the first one is about 10,000,000,000 to 1. Relating to an ordinary monitor, it represents a section of a Mandelbrot set with a diameter of 4 million kilometres. Its border would show an inconceivable number of different fractal structures.

the complex plane, the overall structure, in terms of which Julia sets are connected, resembles a Mandelbrot set

Start: Mandelbrot set with continuously coloured environment.

1. Gap between the “head” and the “body” also called the “seahorse valley”.
2. On the left double-spirals, on the right “seahorses”.
3. “Seahorse” upside down, its “body” is composed by 25 “spokes” consisting of 2 groups of 12 “spokes” each and one “spoke” connecting to the main cardioid; these 2 groups can be attributed by some kind of metamorphosis to the 2 “fingers” of the “upper hand” of the Mandelbrot set, therefore, the number of “spokes” increases from one “seahorse” to the next by 2; the “hub” is a so-called Misiurewicz point; between the “upper part of the body” and the “tail” a distorted small copy of the Mandelbrot set called satellite may be recognized.
4. The central endpoint of the “seahorse tail” is also a Misiurewicz point.
5. Part of the “tail” — there is only one path consisting of the thin structures that leads through the whole “tail”, this zigzag path passes the “hubs” of the large objects with 25 “spokes” at the inner and outer border of the “tail”; it makes sure that the Mandelbrot set is a so-called simply connected set, which means there are no islands and no loop roads around a hole.
6. Satellite. The two “seahorse tails” are the beginning of a series of concentric crowns with the satellite in the center.
7. Each of these crowns consists of similar “seahorse tails”; their number increases with powers of 2, a typical phenomenon in the environment of satellites, the unique path to the spiral center mentioned in zoom step 5 passes the satellite from the groove of the cardioid to the top of the “antenna” on the “head”.
8. “Antenna” of the satellite. Several satellites of second order may be recognized.
9. The “seahorse valley” of the satellite. All the structures from the image of zoom step 1 reappear.
10. Double-spirals and “seahorses” - unlike the image of zoom step 2 they have appendices consisting of structures like “seahorse tails”; this demonstrates the typical linking of  $n+1$  different structures in the environment of satellites of the order  $n$ , here for the simplest case  $n=1$ .
11. Double-spirals with satellites of second order - analog to the “seahorses” the double-spirals may be interpreted as a metamorphosis of the “antenna”.
12. In the outer part of the appendages islands of structures may be recognized; they have a shape like Julia sets  $J_c$ ; the largest of them may be found in the center of the “double-hook” on the right side.
13. Part of the “double-hook”.
14. At first sight, these islands seem to consist of infinitely many parts like Cantor sets, as is actually the case for the corresponding Julia set  $J_c$ . Here they are connected by tiny structures so that the whole represents a simply connected set. These tiny structures meet each other at a satellite in the center that is too small to be recognized at this magnification. The value of  $c$  for the corresponding  $J_c$  is not that of the image center but, relative to the main body of the Mandelbrot set, has the same position as the center of this image relative to the satellite shown in zoom step 7.

### Generalizations

For general families of holomorphic functions, the *boundary* of the Mandelbrot set generalizes to the bifurcation locus, which is a natural object to study even when the connectedness locus is not useful.

Other bounded sets are found in the complex plane for members of the general monic univariate polynomial family of recursions

$$z \mapsto z^d + c$$

Each of the examples of various powers  $d$  shown below is plotted to the same scale. Values of  $c$  belonging to the set are black. Values of  $c$  that have unbounded value under recursion, and thus do not belong in the set, are plotted in different colours, that show as contours, depending on the number of recursions that caused a value to exceed a fixed magnitude.

### Positive powers

The example  $d = 2$  is the original Mandelbrot set. The examples for  $d > 2$  are often called *Multibrot sets*. These sets include the origin and have fractal perimeters.

Turbulence was a problem with pedigree. The great physicists all thought about it, formally or informally. A smooth flow breaks up into whorls and eddies. Wild patterns disrupt the boundary between fluid and solid. Energy drains rapidly from large-scale motions to small. Why? His best ideas came from mathematics; for most physicists, turbulence was too dangerous to waste time on. It seemed almost unknowable. There was a story about the quantum theorist Werner Heisenberg, on his death bed, declaring that he will have two questions for God: why relativity, and why turbulence. Heisenberg says, “I really think He may well have an answer to the first question”. (Gleick, 1998, p.121)

Big whorls have little whorls  
Which feed on their velocity,  
And little whorls have lesser whorls  
And so on to viscosity. (Lewis F. Richardson in Gleick, 1998, p.119)

Wild patterns, whorls and eddies - they all make up turbulence. The physicists may not know why turbulence exists in the physical world, but in the journey of life and spirituality it is turbulence that provides the materials and energy to make meanings. I regard the oscillations of the spiral to be caused by the turbulence of the constant triggers. I have tried to represent this movement by adding ‘trigger-lines’ to the spiral of Figure 9, Spiral 4, p.283. The criss-crossing, apparently chaotic, lines are indications of the triggers from one moment of time, indicated by the vertical arrow. The chaotic mess of lines in the diagram represent continual triggers, up and down, from side to side, backwards and forwards in time and emotion (see Bergson, p.277) from present to past, past to present and even from present and past to future and back. (This is better illustrated on the DVD, Tracks 2 and 3).

All the ‘mess’ of lines emanate from that one moment - triggering, detecting, discovering memories, feelings, fear, joy, doubts and certainties, people, friends and enemies, ideas, wonderings, feelings after, break-throughs. The mess is more likely to be as beautiful as the mandelbrot patterns, than this rudimentary diagram suggests. But importantly the triggers are active, they are moving, the spiral is

spinning and oscillating and weaving, spider-like out of our own life's journey, a negotiated meaning for this moment.

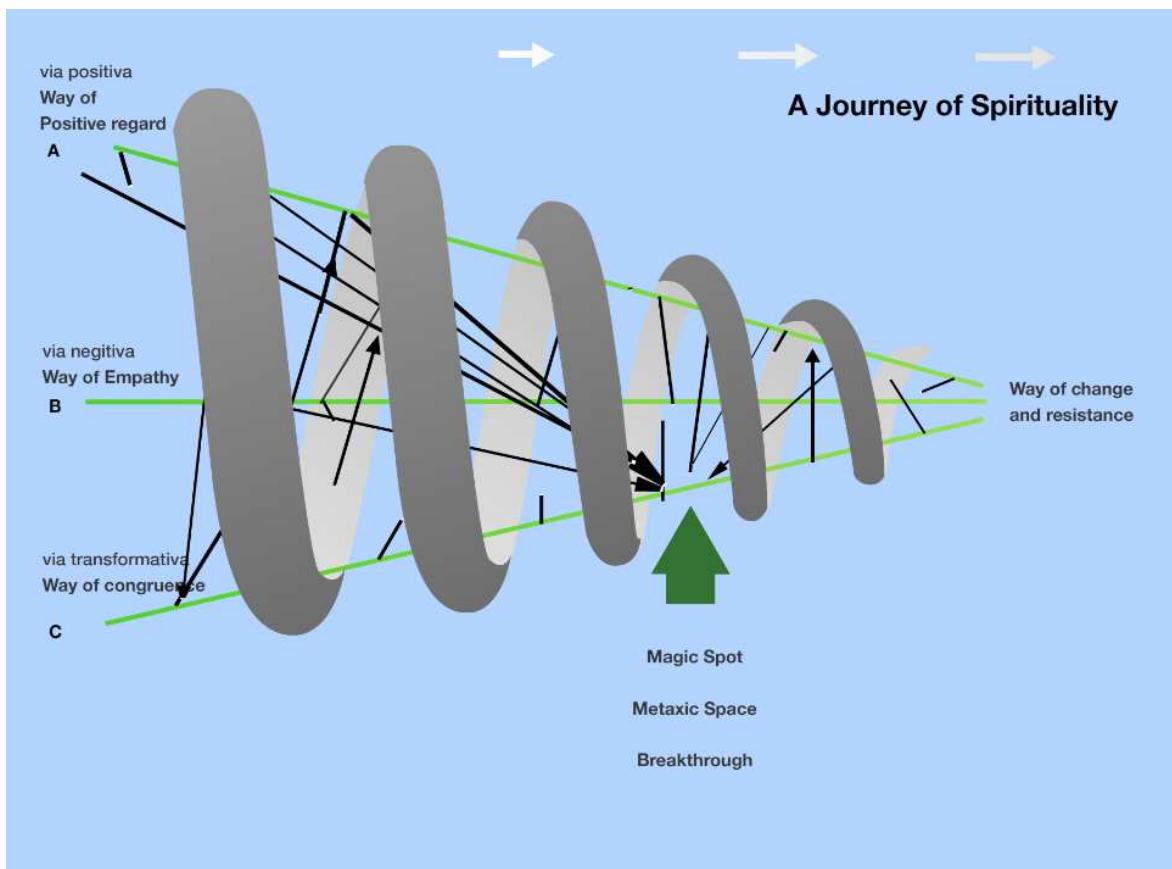


Figure 9 Spiral 4 Magic Spot triggers

In this thesis I am using the notion of a particular moment on the spiral which I label '**Magic Spot**' because of its association with earth education, and **metaxic space** because of my sense of the in-between being the place of the working of the Spirit, and **break-through** because of my working belief in the incarnation, as a vantage point from which to interpret children's voices. This vantage point is the consideration of:

our work at the Centre with children in earth education

the nature of children and their needs

and so a reflection on:

■ a journey of spirituality which may provide a new way of being outside the Cartesian dualism which is now marked by the ‘catastrophe of economic and ecological exploitation’? (Soelle, 2001, p.89, see also Chapter 5, p.185).

I have used this vantage point - my work of solitude with children - to reflect on their experience using my own story. It is a spiritual story. It is an ordinary story. Like every ordinary life, it is also extraordinary. This story alongside this moment in the children’s stories weaves an awareness, in an ordinary life, that becomes involved in a great number of disparate subjects, encounters, investigations, reflections, connections, expressions, longings, desires all of which seem to be articulated in similar ways and in a great number of disparate subjects, encounters, investigations, reflections, connections, expressions longings, desires all of which seem to be articulated in very different ways, but all of which seem to be describing or revealing underlying ideas and principles intrinsic in both different or similar subjects, encounters, investigations, reflections, connections, expressions longings, desires. I am describing here ‘epiphanies of connection’ (Grey, 1993, p.61). As Grey argues ‘the challenge to rediscover interconnectedness with the natural world is now embraced as an ethical task’ (ibid).<sup>118</sup> When interpreting the children’s responses in their magic spots ‘where a moment of experience takes on ultimate and transcendent’ (ibid), I am incessantly asking questions:

What if my sense of the meaning of things in my life is in some way also true for them?

If it is, how should adults whether family, friends, teachers or leaders relate to them, Others, the more-than-human life, and the planet?

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<sup>118</sup> See also Parenthesis 3, p.188 - in Levinas the tragic self is challenged to become the ethical self.

A teacher, in the context of the Mantle of the Expert approach to teaching and learning,<sup>119</sup> reflects on his use of language:

The words we use have enormous potential as tools for empowerment, unity and inclusion; or as weapons of restriction, isolation and diktat.

As teachers, the nature of the questions we ask signal to our children what we value. Personally speaking, I want every word, every gesture, every glance to convey my belief that they matter as individuals; their opinions matter; their home experiences matter...

I found that traditional questioning approaches immediately distanced me from the children; I was structuring my classroom environment to create a feeling of community and respect, but my questioning style was practically Gestapo-esque!

(Bunting, 2006, unpublished booklet)

Language used, in this case just in the way of asking questions, can close up, ignore, reject the child's process of development and so diminish the creative triggers and oscillations of the spiral. I argue that adults' relationships with children need to be designed to keep the triggered oscillations of their spirals restless, energetic, continuing, and tender.

Triggering and oscillation associated with metaxic space is exemplified in Tavener's *Tears of the Angels* where paragraphs of continual 'oscillation' are separated by moments of smooth notes. Death has often provided Tavener with the impetus or the trigger to compose. Usually this has been the death of friends or relations but in the case of *Tears of the Angels* it was the death and suffering of the people of the Balkans that occupied his mind ( Avis, 1998, Notes CD, Linn Records). In the score the composer has requested that the piece should be played:

At the extreme breaking point of tenderness – in other words, totally beyond our compassion and beyond our comprehension, wrapped in a depth of inner silence of which we have no idea, a state of being, not an emotion, a tender light piercing the agonising darkness of the world and also, a humility of which we have no idea, because it is not rooted in a

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<sup>119</sup> Mantle of the Expert (MoE) is a scheme of teaching originated by Dorothy Heathcote and developed by Luke Abbot which is currently gaining attention in the UK. The Ringsfield EcoCentre is used regularly for MoE workshops.

hypocritical or contrived depreciation of self, but in the blinding vision of God himself. (Avis, 1998, Tavener, CD Notes).

But Tavener still clings to the *I-Thou* divide, as if there is no possibility of incarnation<sup>120</sup>, or breakthrough.

‘..since we are human, and not angels, the music can only be imagined by us’. (ibid).

My point here is that the ‘openings in striated space for dodging into smooth space’ that is, ‘the opportunities for emotional and spiritual development, keep appearing, however narrow and occluded’ (Popen in Ed. Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p.130) but they are delicate and need a tender and empathic touch. Avis goes on to say:

In this work the solo violin represents the chief amongst the angels while the other violins are often asked to play “like tear drops” (Avis, 1998).

If Bergson is right that human beings are ‘active agents, through a process of hermeneutics in ‘recalcitrantly “negotiating” adjusting’ of making meaning (see p.277) then children too are active agents in their own process. Just like the developing children themselves the process, the opportunities and the space for the process is fragile and precious.

Fostering the Spirit of the Child involves asking the question posed by Mary Moore: How do we walk with children towards hope? Moore (2006, p93). She suggests an answer to her own question in four steps:

■ The first step is lament ‘in which we recognise and critically analyse the ambivalence and vulnerability that surround children and childhood. We protest the forces that tear at children and bring us to fiery anger or bitter tears’ (ibid, p.94)

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<sup>120</sup> I use the word ‘incarnation’ here and through out the thesis in the narrow sense of the incarnation of God in Christ. There is not meant to be any hint of previous lives in this sentence.

- ▣ The second step is celebration in which we celebrate the creative marvel of their births, and the promise of the future that they hold, the delight of their presence, ....the uniqueness of each child' (ibid, p94)
- ▣ The third step is blessing. Here we bless children with care and guidance, ritual inclusion, and opportunity and empowerment' (ibid)
- ▣ The fourth step is receiving blessings from children. 'Here we receive the delight of children, but also their marginality. We receive all that children have to give which includes interruptions, receptivity and wondering' (ibid, p.95).

We can use hermeneutic circles and dialectical hermeneutic spirals to clarify the process of negotiating and creating meaning and I am insisting that I need the time and space to reflect on my own “texts” in order to understand and interpret the children’s “texts”. This insistence is inappropriate unless I also insist that the children have the same time and space to reflect on their own “texts” and find a way of being, or becoming, in the world or to use Grey’s phrase, ‘a different way of coming to know the world’ (Grey, 1993, p.80).



Once again we return to the spiral which brings the many horizons together (see Chapter 7 p.253), but now add the triggers which are energised in metaxic space. This demonstrates Whitehead's category of explanation (of the process of becoming) which he called "concrescence", that is 'a process in which prehensions (in my text, 'horizons') are integrated into a fully determinate feeling or satisfaction' (Whitehead, 1978, p22).

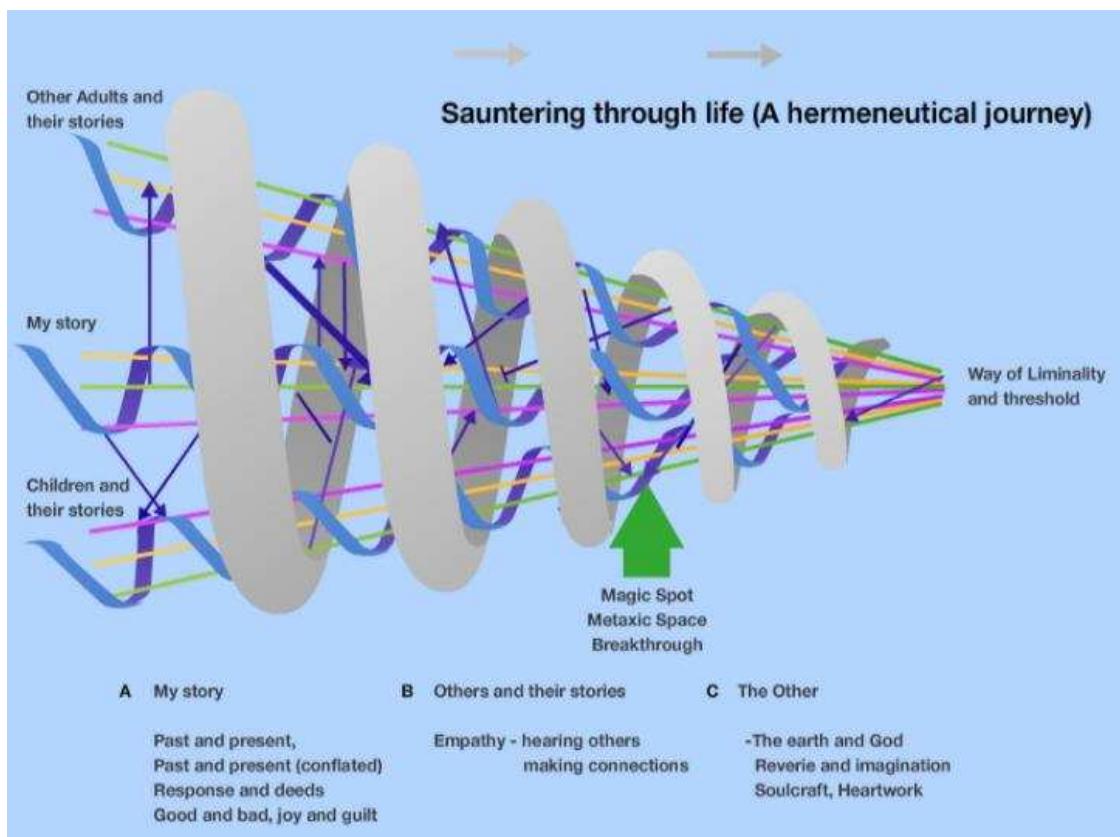


Figure 10: Spiral 5 Bringing the horizons together in metaxic space

Key:

- My text
- Other Adults' texts
- Children's texts

This research therefore necessarily means staying firmly inside the hermeneutic spirals, both mine and theirs. This means while the research has been going on I have been in lament: cried with the children, shed tear-drops for the children,

prayed<sup>121</sup> with grief for them. I have celebrated with them: danced for the earth with them, and celebrated their wonderment, prayed for their potential. I have blessed the children: in my case with grandfatherly care and stories, and prayed my God's blessing on them. I have received numerous blessing from the children: their interruptions, receptivity and wondering and musings. I have laughed with them, made mistakes with them enjoyed their friendship. I have prayed with thanksgiving for them.



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<sup>121</sup> Here, I do not mean making the children pray with me, but simply remembering them in my prayers. Of course with my own grand-children, and those of faith groups I can and do pray with the children present when they are happy to do so.

## SECTION 3: The Children

### Chapter 9 Hearing children's voices

#### Part I A Way of Being



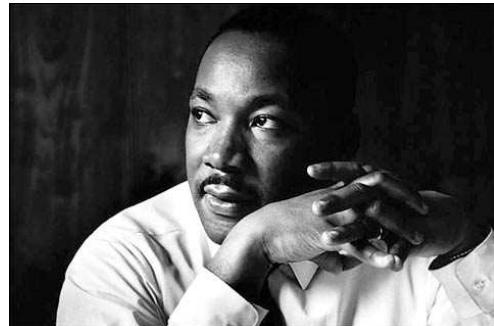
Children displaying their Earthkeeper badges. They leave the Centre as Apprentice Earthkeepers. They have just made promises to change their lifestyles.

# Chapter 9

## Hearing children's voices

*He looked down and held my gaze...his words were spoken quietly, with at first a serious, a so serious face, and then a broad smile. 'OK, you'll do, you'll do. But, remember: listen'.*

Spoken to me by Martin Luther King,  
I was 17. (see Appendix 5, p.xxxxviii)



### Part I

#### A way of being

The children's responses to their Magic Spots which I have chosen (see Chapter 3, p.71), that is from about 80 children, are representative of the many hundreds of responses I have collected. I first divided all the responses into three categories: responses about:

- ▣ the whole experience of the residential visit at Ringsfield EcoCentre (p.301f)
- ▣ the Earthkeepers' Programme as a whole (p.303f)
- ▣ Magic Spots specifically (p.306f)

I divided the Magic Spot responses into a further eight categories. These categories are simply the gathering together of responses of a similar kind for the sake of some sort of order when reading the responses. When the children's words about Magic Spots are used I use these categories to reference them, for instance, **Sad and Difficult**, p.2. The references refer to the typed pages of responses I have produced from their original writing. It has not been my intention either to include or not to include negative experiences of Magic Spots. Sad and difficult times in Magic Spots are documented and reflected on. However, the method I used to

collect this data – to collect written responses, either those asked for, or offered, with no attempt to force or influence – necessarily means that I have not collected responses from any children who found Magic Spots to be such a negative experience that they did not write any response. The purpose of the thesis was not to research why one child found the experience positive, and another found it negative but rather to interpret the responses from those who provided them. Some indications of why children might find the experience difficult or negative are addressed as part of the discussion about availability and vulnerability (see Parenthesis 4, p.234, and Chapter 11, p362) and adults treating children with empathy (see p.308 and Chapter 11, p.354).

### **The Ringsfield Experience**

One of the creators of the earth education programmes, Bruce Johnson, emphasises the importance of personal experiences in the natural world in the development of ecological understandings (Johnson, 2003, p.11). He points out that many barriers and restraints prevent people being able to experience anything, even when they are in the natural world. ‘They don’t hear its sounds, breathe in its smells, feel its textures, and they don’t even see the place very well. They remain outside the place, looking in, instead of being in’ (ibid). At our Centre we have discovered that it is not only ‘creating experiences that will help tear down the barriers and build new skills’ (ibid) as part of an educational programme which helps to restore connections.<sup>122</sup> In our context it is the ethos, atmosphere and safety of the whole experience of a visit away from home which contribute to the reawakening of feelings and understandings which in turn, prepares the children to realise, in their own lives, the central aim of earth education: to enable people to ‘live more harmoniously and joyously with the natural world’ (Quinn, 1992,

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<sup>122</sup> Restoring the connection with self, others and the earth is the Ringsfield EcoCentre’s logo strap line.

p.10). I will use two illustrations which demonstrate the vital importance of giving close attention to our overall relationship with the children we meet.

The first is from Rebecca Nye's research with children in 'The Spirit of the Child' (Hay and Nye, 2006). While describing some of the consequences of her analytical framework she records the following lament.

...it seemed a sorry reflection on the religious institutions that none of the children who belonged to faith communities felt that these could provide a supportive comparison group for their spiritual ideas, feelings and experiences. (Hay and Nye, 2006, p.127)

Unless the children feel they are being held within an atmosphere of acceptance and congruence they are unlikely to articulate their genuine feelings about the natural world (or anything else) either to adults or indeed to their peers.

The second illustration is provided by Rosalind Pearmain in an article comparing two young people's summer events: one a Quaker camp for 15-18 year olds, the other a Sahaj Marg residential seminar for 15-28 year olds. Both events involved silent worship and meditation as well as other activities. In both events 'participants were invited to participate in a programme that did not aim to explicitly proselytise or convert' (Pearmain, 2005, p.278). Participants from both events were interviewed and an analysis made producing two central themes: safe haven and transforming processes. For the purposes of this illustration I will concentrate on Pearmain's summary of the significant aspects that contributed to the experience of safe haven.

#### *Significant threshold aspects*

- Profound experience of welcome and inclusion
- Sustained experience of acceptance
- No judgements

#### *Significant opportunities for feeling free and safe*

- Opportunities for sharing in small groups
- Fun and games
- Spiritual space for reflection, integration, depth of being, connection
- Sense of freedom and spontaneous expression encouraged

*Significant community structures*

- Firm ground rules
- Shared values
- Consistency of structure over several years
- Sense of belonging in a group/community

(Pearmain, 2005, p.283)

The principles put forward in this analysis are consistent with our attempts to create a safe haven for the children who visit the Centre. Many of the children who come for school trips are away from home for the first time. Thus our task is to make them feel at home, in a safe haven.

*Significant threshold aspects*

Our offering of welcome starts with the visit we make to the schools before they come to us. It is our opportunity to meet the children on their own ground. The visit is not to tell them about what they will and will not do; it is not about telling them about the rules (apart from the first rule: 'To have fun' (see Chapter 3, p72 and footnote). It is about making a relationship with them, getting to know them, helping them to see that their hosts are OK, full of fun and that we are going to enjoy having them at our place. They get to know our names, Chris and Ross. When they arrive a few weeks later, they are already waving excitedly at us from the coach as it comes down the drive. We start the visit as friends.

It is our aim to offer unconditional positive regard through our attitude, and that of all our staff; through the physical warmth, the colour and interior design of the house; through the natural beauty of our 14 acre grounds and how they are cared for; through the back-ground attention to health and safety throughout the grounds and all the activities we do; through the freedom offered in the house and grounds.

We try and work with teachers to move them (where necessary) from a control hierarchy to ‘an “engaged” pedagogy’, where ‘we must de-authorize ourselves as teachers’ (Freire, 1993 in Miller, 2007, p. 21). In every way possible we aim to offer, for the children and their teachers, a sustained sense of acceptance, without judgement. While we do not at any time (apart from Christian groups who ask us to teach and preach) promulgate our faith, this goal to love without judgement is at the centre of our understanding of our faith.

#### *Significant opportunities for feeling free and safe*

When we run sessions and programmes we try always to work in small groups. Difficult as it is to afford enough sessional staff, we normally work with enough of our own staff for a ratio of between 1:5 and 1:10 adults to children, in addition to the school staff which, as often as not, will be at least two, if not four, participating fully. Our programmes are full of fun and ‘magic’ (see Chapter 2, p45ff); built into all activities is the opportunity for sensing, feeling and being at one in the natural world, including, of course, Magic Spots. Finally the grounds are small enough to be totally available, safely to the children and it is made clear that during their free time which we encourage (not always successfully) they are free to go where ever they like. Our project *freerange childhood* characterises the

sense of freedom and reconnection with the earth which we aim to nurture.<sup>123</sup> We recognise with Echlin ‘the battery reared children’ (Echlin, 1999, p.123), who, being ‘driven to and from school hermetically sealed from the outdoors, escorted from home computer to “information technology” and back, taken on tarmac holidays’ (ibid, p.157) will not experience spring catkins or breathe clean air (ibid, p.123).

#### *Significant community structures*

We co-operate with the teachers of each school to follow their key values, and we keep firm ground rules based on respect for each other, the animals and the natural world. While one of our consistent disappointments is that we do not see the children apart from one four, or even two, day visit. We do work with many schools which have been coming for many years and book from year to year. This means that, often, knowledge of Ringsfield is a whole-school experience, and stories follow each group from year to year. For instance in one school for some years we worked on a day’s Emotional Intelligence workshop with each of the three Year 4 classes at the school in London and hosted the three Year 5 classes

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<sup>123</sup> By freerange childhood we mean: Opportunities for creative play; the chance to socialise as children have always done, to roam freely in the enchanting grounds, where quiet corners, wild meadows, woodland, long grass and animals, combine to create a valuable respite from the pressures of 21<sup>st</sup> century childhood.

They can experience outdoor cooking, festivals, games, good food, storytelling, art, music, the natural world, and learn how the earth works. They can get in touch with their own body through the freedom of movement, and discover their balance, their relationship to the world and the other.

Our project is to promote freerange childhood by:  
Being for and believing in children  
Fostering the spirit of the child, rediscovering their connection with the earth  
Promoting Emotional Intelligence in adults and children  
Changing negative attitudes towards children  
Encouraging people to act on behalf of children in their community - Nurturing Communities learning in a nurturing way  
Supporting relationship with, and learning about, the natural world  
Health and well being - physical, social and emotional  
Research campaigning, education.

for a week each for an experience of Earthkeepers. This meant that when we went back for visits to Year 4 and Year 5 the next year, we met again the now Year 5s and Year 6s children we had been with the previous year. It is always a joyous experience to visit, walk through the playground and be greeted by children from almost the whole school.

The point of describing this is because this whole experience is the context of the children in their Magic Spots, where each participant spends time each day in her or his own magic spot, sitting quietly, alone, 'in touch with the flow of life' (Johnson, 2003, p.12). What I have just described is, in our view, part of 'the flow of life'. No amount of well worked out Immersing Experiences, Discovery Parties, Solitude Enhancing Experiences, Programmes, Vehicles or Activities<sup>124</sup> will facilitate good feelings for the earth, or experiencing nature from the inside and seeing oneself as a member, just a part of the natural world *if there is no safe haven.*

The following incident suggests why.

*I saw Robert sitting head in hands with a plate of Shepherd's Pie in front of him, with two adults sitting either side. He was supposed to eat his meal. It was the first night of his residential visit, the first time he had been away from home. His mother had sent a list of what he would eat, together with a bag of frozen 'junk food' for him to eat.*

*His teachers felt he should eat the healthy food provided by the Centre even though we had previously explained our policy. Simply put it is as follows: for most of our school groups it is the first time that the children have been away from home. We provide good food, but no choice. Therefore when a child cannot or will not eat what is offered on one day, we insist that this is NOT the time or place to re-educate the child in the eating habits of a life time. So discreetly, we will always provide an alternative, say fish fingers. The children need to eat, be warm, feel nurtured (even at the risk of us being gullible). We say a definite, 'NO', to the attitude, 'OK, if you don't eat this, then you won't eat at all. We name it clearly as abuse.*

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<sup>124</sup> Names given to the various activities created by earth education.

*The next day at lunch time, the same Robert is sitting (after every one else has finished and tidying up after the meal) by himself, with a egg mayonnaise sandwich in front of him sobbing his heart out. Just as I go to see what is wrong, another boy, goes over to him, leans over and teases him, 'What's the matter Robert, just eat some thing, can't you even manage that, you are a sissy'. I tell this boy to go away, sit next to Robert and ask what is wrong, sobbing he tries to tell me that he doesn't want the sandwich but that if he doesn't eat it, he can't do the afternoon activities. I go to his teacher and ask what is going on. I am told, that they have insisted that he eats at least one mouthful of the sandwich. The threat of no activities wasn't really meant, they say. I return to Robert and tell him that he does not have to eat the sandwich and that he can participate in the afternoon's activities. By this time he cannot eat anything, but is glad the afternoon will be OK.*

*Later I ask to see the list of food provided by his mother, it tells me that Robert eats bread and butter (nothing else) for lunch.*

*I get an agreement from the teaching staff that we will take over the management of Robert's food for the rest of the week. When it comes to the evening meal, we prepare some of the food his mother has sent (potato 'smilies' and chicken nuggets, cheap fast food nasties, OK) but first Robert is asked if he would like to try the pasta meal being offered. As soon as he (politely) refuses, he is given the food his mother has sent. No other children complain (they 'know' about Robert). Robert enjoys the rest of the week, he is free from threat, he blossoms and participates 'more fully than normally' (his teacher's words).*

*Robert's mother is reportedly known to be 'weird'. She 'molly-coddles Robert'. The teaching staff knew that she had sent the written list and the bag of food. Both were withheld from our Centre's staff. Obviously there has been a decision to 'do something about' this situation. Robert was now in their control. The result: abuse.*

*Robert had no power; he had been set up. His mother had fed him all his life on convenience, junk food. He had a set pattern of what he ate every day. He knew his mother had sent his food for the week; he both expected to eat it, and no doubt was expected to eat it. He had no access to it. He was denied it. He was denied what he was 'supposed to eat'. He was categorised as a child with 'special needs' and was treated as a child with special behavioural problems. Once the food issue was cleared up, he became, 'a different child'. No doubt there is an issue to be dealt with one day, about healthy eating, about independency from an over-bearing mother, but an empathic heart can understand that his first residential of his life was not the place to punish him for his mother's behaviour.*

*When the group left EM's Lab (see Chapter 2 p.52) for the last time, I asked Robert to carry the 'S' Box to the coach and a little cheer went up for Robert. As we were saying goodbye, one of the support staff, whispered in my ear, 'Thank you for sorting out the situation with Robert'.*

Without the attention of empathic hearts surrounding them it is unlikely that the magic spot will be a soulful experience for any child.

Fortunately, we have evidence that Robert's experience has not been the experience of the majority of children visiting Ringsfield Hall. The following are illustrative Facebook messages. Wendy experienced the Earthkeepers' programme in May 2006 and is now at secondary school; Lauryn came to Ringsfield in 2005; Ashley could well have been 10 in 1979 and, like many people we hear about, still remembers her experience after 30 years.

hi

i miss ringfields it was so much fun and i loved it this is wendy from st marys and its wendy in year 7 now bye - eeeeeeeeeeee.

(Wendy, 18 September 2009)

i went to ringsfield 4 years ago wow it seems like a long time i miss it sooooooooooooooo much.

(Lauryn, October 2009)

Hi, it's amazing.

I remember coming to Ringsfield Hall when I was in primary school in 1979. I always remembered the tree house and how it looked so far up the tree. But the two things I'll always remember the most, are the bats that flew around and the secret passages throughout the house, and feeling really scared and then suddenly someone touching my head.

I remember it being a fantastic time, and the fact that I can still remember it 30 years on just shows that it has stuck in my memory for all these years. Well done to Ringsfield Hall, I hope you carry on and bring joy and calm to other school children.

(Ashley, after discovering Ringsfield on the internet, 10 September, 2009)

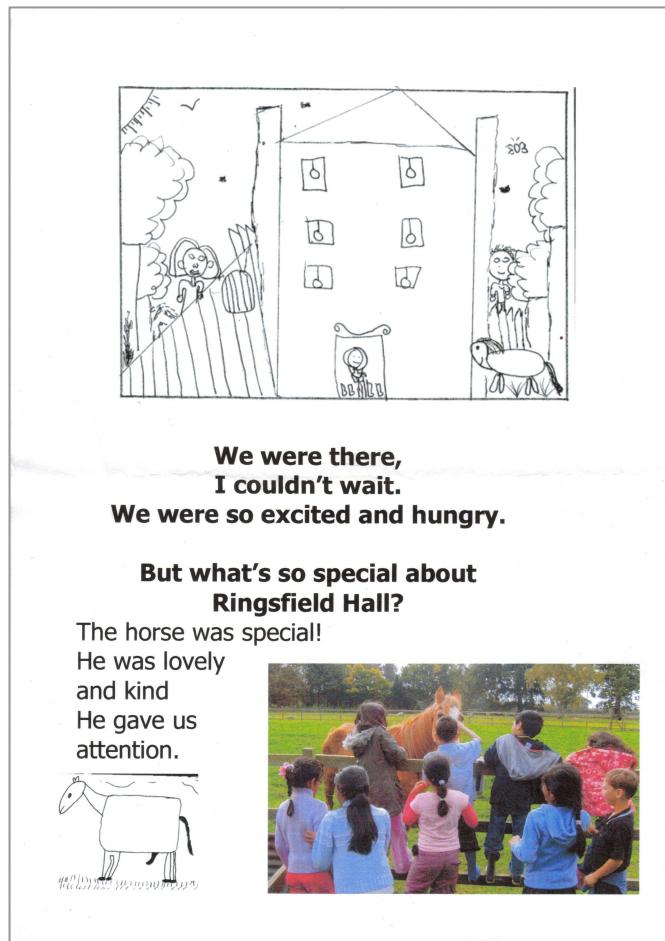
A father rang up to ask if there was any way his family could come and stay for a weekend. He was asking because ever since his daughter, Chloe, had come back from her trip here in May, she had been badgering him to see if they could return.<sup>125</sup>

Below there is a copy of the front cover of a magazine put together by a class of children from a school in White Chapel, London. Their trip was a mere 24 hours,

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<sup>125</sup> This happened at the end of September, 2010. We found a way for them to come in November, it was a surprise for Chloe's birthday.

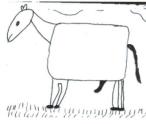
yet the magazine is full of excitement and joy. Significantly this “text” shows their delight at being given attention (see p.300) – in this instance it was Royston, our old horse who (which) gives the attention. It does seem as if the children noticed something else about the horse too! We aim to offer friendship with a congruent relationship; unconditional positive regard; and empathy. These three core conditions for a therapeutic relationship described by Carl Rogers are the characteristics of the ‘way of being’ with which we strive to surround the children who visit us (see Chapter 11).



**We were there,  
I couldn't wait.  
We were so excited and hungry.**

**But what's so special about  
Ringsfield Hall?**

The horse was special!  
He was lovely  
and kind  
He gave us  
attention.




These last nine pages describe elements of what we call the “*Ringsfield Experience*”.

I will now add the voices of the children themselves. First, about coming to Ringsfield; secondly about the Earthkeepers' Programme; and finally about the experience of Magic Spots.

### **1. Children's own words about Ringsfield**

I have decided to leave the names of the children whose written texts I use as their real names, however, I do not name their school or the name of the city, town or village they come from. On the other hand, whenever I tell a story the names of all those involved are changed. The originals of the written texts are stored at Ringsfield EcoCentre. The digital versions of these texts, the written up stories told about children and their teachers at the Centre are all held on a memory stick also stored at Ringsfield EcoCentre.

First I will mention but eliminate the kind letters of thanks which we frequently receive from a whole class. Such letters are an exercise managed normally by the teacher. We hope that they demonstrate genuine feelings, but it is not possible to describe them as authentically children's voices. For instance we received an A2 folded card with a beautiful hand-crafted sunflower on the front with the words, 'Thank you from 5S'. Open the card and greetings from each child are written all over it, and all but one starts with, 'Thank you for letting us stay at Ringsfield Hall'. Similarly, many bundles of letters bear the marks of a classroom activity which produces different versions of a standard letter. On the other hand other letters which come, say 30 at a time in one envelope, bear the marks of individuality, no letter has the same phrases as another, some are finished others are not, some are more formal with an address and a formal signing off, others are informal notes, some are poems or rhymes and so on. The children have been

asked to write but then left to say what they wanted to warts and all! Here are two examples.<sup>126</sup>

Dear Ross & Chris,

Thank you very much for having us at Ringsfield, i think i speck for everyone when i say we enjoyed very much..

I'm missing the food alot. It feels really weird to be back in the city, theres no space to run around.

(Dani, 9 years 2002 Ringsfield Experience p.19)

Thankyou for letting us stay at Ringsfield Hall, it was amazing, and a place where we could enjoy the worlds outdoor wildlife. Though it was quite cold, it was still fab, and a great way to become closer with our classmates and teachers. So thank-you so much for an amazing week.

I really enjoyed earthkeeping, and i also loved climbing the "thinking tree" and the "swinging trees" were good fun too, there was so much space. I had hours of fun on the "swing" and i collected 97 conkers! The "treehouse" was pretty scary the first time i went on it, but then it was fun.

(Sarah 9 years, 2002 RHT 1, p.1)

Another two examples come from children some time after their trip to Ringsfield. These are found in the Newsletters of the school, in the Leavers' Diary section among all sorts of memories of their time at the school. In the first contribution Terry has obviously matured in his writing power!

Ringsfield Hall week were some of the best days of my life. Continuous fun and activities, amusements at night and games. The week gave me knowledge, and experience in 5 days that some people wouldn't get in a lifetime and ultimately fantastically good! I really enjoyed sitting round the campfire in pitch-black eating rain-drenched chocolate cake..... And on the last day we were even allowed to name a guinea pig as it had been born just hours before! (Terry, aged 11, 2007, Ringsfield Experience, p.19).

The same school, but the next year's Newsletter asked:

Which Trip do you remember?

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<sup>126</sup> Throughout the thesis all the children's words are reproduced with unaltered spellings, grammar and sentence construction. Occasionally brackets are used to make the meaning clear. All these written accounts are reproduced in Comic Sans MS font. The references refer to the categories and page numbers in which I have arranged these responses for my easy access, see Chapter 1, p.37.

Ringsfield Hall, when we went into a woodland area and made dens out of sticks and cooked bread on a fire. Then we sat around the fire and told scary stories, and a scary joke that made me giggle.  
(Kathryn, aged 11, 2008, Ringsfield Experience, p.18).

Not all children who visit our Centre participate in an earth education programme, Earthkeepers. Participation in the programmes involves enjoyment of a fully rounded week of outdoor activities, working together co-operatively in groups and with their teachers, in discovery of new concepts, and close experiences of the natural world only one of which is Magic Spots. The examples of the children's responses to the programme show that their appreciation of Magic Spots is enhanced and nurtured by the whole experience.

## **2. Children's words about the Earthkeepers' Programme**

The experience of the programme for many children is entirely woven into the experience of the visit, the place, including the food and the house.

Dear Ross and Chris,  
Thankyoooooooo! Ringsfield hall was brilliant. I loved the food, the rooms, Earthkeepes magic spot , the animals, the nature...ect...! it was so different in the city. It was a great experience! And what a place to do earthkeepers! I felt so at home and comfy. I enjoyed it. I loved going to the valleys and forests and just basicaly being in nature. Again thankyou  
(Louis, aged 10, Earthkeepers, 2003 p.6).

Getting taught without really knowing it, being free and connecting the activities together are features of many responses to the programme.

I am wrighting to thank you for every thing that you did for us.  
I realy liked Earthkeeping because it was fun and at the same time we were geting taught but you dont realy notice.  
I dont think that i will forget going to Ringsfield Hall and all the things i did.  
Thanks a lot.  
(Lilly, aged 10, 2002, Earthkeepers, p.2).

Thank you for having us to stay, i enjoyed it alot and really liked the earthkeeping.

I really enjoyed receiving my keys. It made me feel as if I had achieved something very special. I liked the earthwalks and seeing the skylarks. I loved working in the manuals and especially liked the web of life.  
I liked being able to be free and not in the classroom. Fresh air is very nice and is very refreshing, when I am older I would like to live in the country.  
(Olivia, aged 10, 2002, Earthkeepers, p.3)

The new decisions about doing environmental tasks are endorsed by a good feeling about mud.

To help improve the environment I will not be a litter bug and will look for a bin to dispose my rubbish and recycle.  
I will always turn off lights if nobody is in the room or they've left the room.  
Will only turn lights on if necessary.  
I will not leave the computer on over night and turn it off when we've finished playing on it or doing homework.  
(Jenna, aged 10, 2004, Earthkeepers, p.1)

Thanks so much for a fab week. I have been saving the earth by reusing plastic bags. My fav fab moment was getting completely covered in mud, when I got home my mum said I must have been a mini mud monster!  
I really enjoyed the food. Hope Storm is getting better.<sup>127</sup>  
(Olivia, aged 9, 2005, Earthkeepers, p.6)

The combination of being outside, experiencing the fields, playing in the hay and learning amazing new facts are regularly expressed in children's feedback.

Overall the programme generates good feelings and enjoyment while learning and the magic of obtaining real keys for participating in each part of the conceptual programme enhancing a sense of achievement which many children remember for years.

I really enjoyed the week and loved the Earth keeping especially the walk through the Fields and the Hey stacks. I also liked the time capsule treasure hunt, and I was amazed how little time humans have been around.  
I hope to come back some time.  
(Benedict, Apprentice Earthkeeper, aged 10, 2003, Earthkeepers, p. 3)

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<sup>127</sup> Storm was an old mare, companion to Royston. Storm collapsed and died in 2006 (she was very old and it was revealed that she had stomach cancer). Royston, himself very old, was present when she died, and since then until he died in 2008, apart from being with and attending to the children, he hardly lifted his head.

The things i enjoyed most were the senses ,the colour chart things. The book things about soil, water and air, the time capsule thing and getting my keys.

The reason i liked the senses was because it was fun and i liked the colour chart thing because it wasnt quick and it a long time to do so other people (if they were finished) wouldnt just be standing around, and i liked the book things because you learnt alot about water air and soil. I also liked the time capsule because it was a hunt and i really liked it. The thing that was one of my favourites was getting my keys because it made me think that i had achieved doing the first part of Earth keeping.

(Eleasha, aged 11, 2003, Earthkeepers, p.4)

These letters and memories uncover significant themes which suggest a sense of well-being. Most children talk about the food<sup>128</sup>; they enjoy the homeliness of the house which is not institutionalised in any sense whatsoever; they are enthralled by the animals; they are fascinated by the outdoor activities, camp fires and shelter building; and many of them talk about the *space*. I talked to two children, Dan and Tabitha, at a school in Holloway three months after their visit. They were full of wonder about the 14 acres of the Centre's site, and had enjoyed the open spaces, the woods and the animals; they both wished that they could live here! They used the words, 'freedom', 'space'. The sense of 'space' is very significant in all these responses. The word is used a lot, and it seems to signify a number of issues. Space is good - lots of physical space meaning freedom, but also space to think and feel, to reflect. There also appears to be an awareness of the space occupied by the self and also of the space occupied by Others. Others, in this case Other species, as well as each Other, have a right to space (see Chapter 11).

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<sup>128</sup> We regard the food we serve as a highly important contribution to all visits. We serve home cooked, fresh and local produce with as little processed food as possible. There is always enough (always second helpings when required). We use well tried recipes and menus which seem to be universally accepted.

### 3. Children's own words about Magic Spots

It would be very easy to quote the children driven by the motivation of clear structure. Already I have imposed such a structure on this chapter by categorizing the children's responses into the three areas, the visit to Ringsfield as a whole, the earth education programme and magic spots. My chosen hermeneutic methodology requires me to interrogate this motivation. I say I want to clarify what I am interpreting when the children are responding to their magic spot experiences. There are many responses which appear through the text of this thesis where children have been asked to write about magic spots. I have said elsewhere that most of these responses are unguided, they are "raw" (see Chapter 3, p.72), however as the following example demonstrates the intermingling, or to keep to my metaphor, the weaving together of all three categories. Thus, when I seek to interpret the "You moments" (Buber, 1970, p.84) in this "text" (below) I need also to be aware not only of the different experiences woven together here, but also of the nature of the spiral weaving.

I am writing this letter to day thank you for a lovely time at Ringsfield hall with you.

I really enjoyed earthkeepers especiaaly the Senses<sup>129</sup> and web of life. I think it was really good where we had our special spot so we can just sit there and enjoy the????.

Also i enjoyed all the animals And the food is lovely espesuly the deserts the best one was chocolate corce. I really hope i can come back and see you again for another week, hope you are well Thanks again  
(Mary, aged 10, 2004, Ringsfield Experience, p.5).

Here chocolate sauce, friendship with adults, the programme's activities, smelling, and touching and interconnectedness are all woven together in an appreciation of enjoying the '????' – just too much to express with words. The complexity of the weave is all the more demonstrated when the further hidden

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<sup>129</sup> See Chapter 2, p.46.

horizons from or through which children will be experiencing their magic spots are sometimes revealed.

For example we were fore-warned about John, he was described by his teacher, no less, as ‘half autistic’ whatever that means.<sup>130</sup>

*One day during free time, there was an outcry in the guinea pig run. Sebastian, our peacock was in there picking guinea pigs up by the scruff of the neck and shaking them about until they fell out of his beak. Horrified, children tried to shoo Sebastian away but this day he wouldn’t stop. As children ran across to the front of the house, where I happened to be with a couple of teachers, shouting about it all, there was one who was crying as he was running; it was John. One of our staff went to deal, successfully with Sebastian, but John was still crying. His teacher told him to stop being silly and to stop crying now. It was all over. As John started all the more to sob, she walked away, apparently exasperated. His sobbing became deeper, with other children surprised crowded round I simply engulfed John in as big a hug as I could muster. I could feel the sobbing, shudders shaking him from head to toe, punctuated with that long drag of taking in breath that we all know from holding hurt three and four year olds, before another deep, deep sob. Gradually, John became quieter and calmer. I had said nothing, the children around had respectfully moved away but stayed, obviously concerned and fascinated. Suddenly the teacher appeared behind me and in a very flustered and agitated manner whispered very loudly into my ear. It went something like this: “Oh God, I’ve just remembered, it’s John, John his mother, his mother when he was two his mother, she hung him up by his neck over the banisters, his mother, she went to prison for it, oh God...”, and then she ran off again. I have no idea whether John heard or not. He hung on to me for a long time. Finally, he wanted to go and see if the guinea pigs were all right. They were. John instructed me to make sure that Sebastian could not get to them again. Three days later, as they were getting on the coach to go home, John came over to me, there were no words. He just hugged me.*

I tell this story primarily to make the point that in this spiral weave of meaning both the warp and weft are complex strands (Chapter 8, p.288f). The children’s words come from a complicated mix of different experiences and contexts spun together spiral-like into a thread. Most of these “horizons” or “fore-conceptions” I

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<sup>130</sup> This was the phrase used by the teacher who, unfortunately, each year she visits proudly tells us how many special needs or statemented children she has in her class. This raises an issue which is not my purpose to research: the apparent dearth of appropriate understanding, skill and training possessed by many ‘ordinary’ primary school class teachers when looking after ‘special needs’ children. We host some special schools, the difference in the skills of empathy and awareness in the staff is astounding.

might discover, or reasonably be able to work out or I will not know about at all, are also being spun together. Add the weft and the task of interpretation becomes a fusion of all these horizons, seen through my own spiral-like<sup>131</sup> spun life. The incident with John, and there are many more like it, (for example, Roger, see p.297) encourages me to use an injunction, while in the process of interpreting children's voices, which we use at the Centre. It is: "whenever with the children, whether you are teaching, playing, in magic spots, whatever, **always presume a cause**". It is akin to Rogers' description of empathy, entering into another person's life, however bizarre, without judgement (Rogers, 1975, also see Chapter 11, p.354). It is not a surprise, therefore, to find within the children's response to their experience of magic spots a mixture of opposing emotions.

*As i sat on the floor, with my back leaning on the tree imaging what my family would be doing in that moment. Looking around to see when that five minute would finish. Wind blowing on my face. Hearing the birds twittering softly. Slowly the clouds drift across the sky. The big tall trees up in the air swished and swashed. The old dried leaves made little ratels as they turned around on the floor. Little animals and big animals walked around the place. Few more seconds where left till we go and open the curtains, wanting those seconds go past quickly. Finally the bell rang. I got up very quickly and opened my curtains. Finally i got to talk.*

(Unnamed 9 year old girl, 2003, *Magic Spots, Sad and Difficult*, p.1)

Three months after her visit this girl, remembering the magic spot, produced a picture of a beach, a boat on the sea with words placed at particular places on the picture (the image is reproduced in *Parenthesis 5*, p.272).

In the sky - CALM  
On the horizon - HELPLESSNESS  
In the sea - NOTHINGNESS and IMPACTLESS  
Nearer the shore - FLOATING  
On the edge of the beach - WILD  
Middle of the beach - FEELINGS  
Further on to the beach (right of picture) - TEARS  
Further on to the beach (left of picture) EVENTUAL HAPPINESS  
(Girl aged 11, 2002 *Magic Spots Peace and Feelings* p.2)

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<sup>131</sup> See Chapter 8, Figure 9, p.288 and the DVD, Track 2)

It has proven to be unusual to have such a fulsome reflection as this but here is a child's inner world. It includes peacefulness, a sense of powerlessness, fantasy, sadness, happiness. Eventual happiness may be aspirational, but that kind of inspiration is found in other responses.

In my magic spot i felt calm and warm inside. I watched a squirrel come so close to me once. It had a breeze blowing my hair and i heard the birds sing. I saw a spider in my magic spot. It was hanging from a single thred attached to the tree branch. My magic spot was beside a tree. From my magic spot i heard the trees rustle from the breeze.

(Unnamed 9 year old, *Magic Spots, Peace and Feelings*, p.3)

As i listening to the birds singing in my magic spot, i could see birds flying to one tree to another. I was wondering things such as how do birds sing? However i could smell the air blowing through my hair. I look at the trees. Then i looked at the pretty flowers in the green grass, and i was looking at the red flower it was red as blood. Moreover i was thinking about if we came back to Ringsfield in two year time would it look like. Although i could smell the natural smell of oxgen coming from the trees. The sky.

(Unnamed, 10 year old, 2004, *Magic Spots, Observation*, p.1)

Nine and ten year olds just articulating their feelings? What significance are we to give their responses. David Abram's acclaimed book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*<sup>132</sup>, uses Merleau-Ponty's work 'demonstrating that the event of perception unfolds as a reciprocal exchange between the living body and the animate world that surrounds it' (Abram, 1996, p.73) to recover the meaning and significance of our language when we try to articulate our experience of the world around us. He quotes John Fire Lame Deer concerning the wind and the air:

Listen to the air. You can hear it, feel it, smell it, taste it. *Woniya wakan* – the holy air – which renews all by its breath. *Woniya, woniya wakan* – spirit life, life, breath, renewal – it means all that. *Woniya* – we sit together, don't touch, but something is there; we feel it between us, as a presence. (John Fire Lame Deer, in Lame Deer and Erdoes, p.119)

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<sup>132</sup> 'I know of no work more valuable for shifting our thinking and feeling about the place of humans in the world' (James Hillman – a quote on the cover of the book).

In my magic spot I have noticed some really amazing things. I noticed a colourful ladybird and bugs. My favourite is hearing the wonderful trees going 'Wisha wisha wisha', it sounds as if they were really enjoying their selves. And the fresh air makes me think of a new world.

(Unnamed 10 year old, 2005, *Magic Spots, Observation*, p.2)

Compare these two quotations above:

Woniya, woniya wakan /Wisha wisha wisha

renewal - we sit together, don't touch, but something is there, we feel it between us, as a presence /it sounds as if they were really enjoying their selves. And the fresh air makes me think of a new world

The difference is that one observation is recorded by a renowned author, the other by an unnamed 10 year old.

It is time to articulate a sense of caution. I am producing an argument to suggest that it is possible to interpret the children's words as if in some way to understand them and even produce some, if not conclusions, anticipations (see Chapter 12) about the significance of that interpretation. But there are some warnings. First from R. Thomas, his poem entitled *Children's Song*.

We live in our world,  
A world that is too small  
For you to stoop and enter  
Even on hands and knees,  
The adult subterfuge.  
And though you probe and pry  
And with analytic eye,  
And eavesdrop all our talk  
With an amused look,  
You cannot enter and find the centre  
Where we dance, where we play,  
Where life is still asleep  
Under the closed flower,  
Under the smooth shell  
Of eggs in the cupped nest  
That mock the faded blue  
Of your remoter heaven.  
(Thomas, 1986, p.34)

It is a powerful warning. Metaxic space is not to be interfered with or intruded upon. It is my grief-burdened belief that in our target motivated education system we have begun to so oppress our children that we often do not even allow them to enter the ‘centre where children can dance and play’. My exploration does not have as its goal to measure the children against some form of criteria, but rather to help the children enter the in-between to experience that space for themselves. Thomas is right to warn us. Parents, teachers, adults do not have to regard children as to be so different that they become either incompetent babies or uncontrollable monsters.

A second warning: in her research into children’s spirituality Rebecca Nye quotes Wordsworth’s cautionary lines:

Our meddling intellect  
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things  
We murder to dissect.  
(in Hay and Nye, 2006, p.128).

My understanding of the methodology of diacritical hermeneutics is that it eschews dissection and fragmentation in favour of re-collection, interanimation,<sup>133</sup> confluence and interconnection ‘... a new hermeneutics of understanding might help us to learn to knit together again the weaves of transcendent and incarnate existence’ (Kearney, 2003, p.12). The reference to Donne’s *The Extasie* is Kearney’s, however, here is a trigger<sup>134</sup> to a part of my ‘narrative self’ (Kearney, 2003, p.188).

*Having completed my A-level exams one year early, I spent the 1963/4 academic year as School Captain and a crash course in Latin together with more leisurely academic pursuits such as joining with another student and an English Literature teacher in a commitment to produce a poem a*

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<sup>133</sup> John Donne’s *The Extasie* includes the following lines: ‘When love, with one another so/Interanimates two soules,/That abler soul which thence doth flow,/Defects of loneliness controules’ (The Metaphysical Poets, 1995 p.30. ll 29-32).

<sup>134</sup> See Chapter 8, p.277ff

week with a view to publication. My one published poem was Frost (see Chapter 7, p.244). Another poem, a love poem, of that year I revisited in November of 1966 (the original version was lost, though the girl was still the same, the one I married in 1971):

*Mists roll over sticks and blocks clinging  
To the distant city; while the moisture  
Hangs and crawls over a void winding  
Under an open sky infinity.  
The distance sends a solitary bell ringing  
To disclose a new horizon.  
Mists cover the curving river and gape, revealing  
The beauty of reflected yellow lights.  
Then the suspended silence, yielding,  
Begins a response which pulls two minds  
To feeling, the ears to seeing, the eyes to hearing,  
And sucks two souls together.  
Two were together, were drawn in learning  
Experience; seen and heard together.  
But now, but now, a new horizon lightening.  
No longer two together but in communion one.  
Before: intelligent discussion involving  
The rights the wrongs, and needs, desires.  
Till now: a bond is rising,  
The mists gape to reveal the beauty:  
Here a covenant through coloured happiness in-growing  
To wider vision of infinite union.  
The bell resounding, the lights portraying  
The yellow times of joy,  
From far and known to far unknowing,  
Yet those mists will fall away and give  
No longer an energetic fidelity,  
But interanimated souls in calm security.*

So I have on record the twenty year old self already recognizing ‘horizons’ (see *Parenthesis 2*, p.141 and p.163) but beginning the search to resolve the self-and-other conundrum. This poem with all its sap-rising passion, and nevertheless, still imprisoned in an ego-saving state, misinterprets Donne’s ‘interanimation’ as a oneness ‘in communion one’, ‘infinite union’ where otherness becomes indistinguishable from our own totalizing selves (Kearney, 2003, p.11). Here there is no ‘and’ between I–You. Metaxic space is missed, or avoided. However, ‘a diacritical hermeneutics of discernment, committed to the dialogue of self-and-

other, wagers that it is still possible for us to struggle for a greater philosophical understanding of Others and, in doing so, do them more justice (Kearney, 2003, p.232).

I justify the intrusion of a reflection on my own journey within the chapters entitled *Hearing children's voices* because my experience and conviction is that the art of hearing the children is to stretch metaxic space enough for them to slip through the fissures of striated space (*Parenthesis 1*, p.104f) and *then*, when they return, to treat them as Other *people*, not as strangers or as exactly the same as us, but getting into dialogue with them, receiving their experience, and their articulation of it, by empathically joining them in their new world.

Sitting on my sit-a-pon under the branches of a big tree I looked out into the distastse and saw on the horizon a long row of trees. The trees were in a big lushus green field of wheat. Right in front of me was a huge puddle above it was a rope swing. It was swinging gently in the calm freezing wind. The birds were singing a peaceful song as the wind was rustling the leaves on the trees. I could hear the plip-plop cling-clang as the horse moved in his field. As I breathed in the morning air, I could smell the newly cut grass out in the fields. It felt liked the whole world was as still as I felt. In my head I felt like I was about to float up in the air. As my mind wandered off in another world. I could hear the whole world waking up.  
(Magic Spots, Peace and Feelings, p.2).

*Parenthesis 6*  
**WOW!**



A moment to remember: Wow!<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> This little girl is now 14 years old (in 2010).

## *Parenthesis 6*

### WOW!

Romanyshyn, sitting in his garden one morning, describes a moment which he introduces with a quote from Bachelard, ‘Reverie helps us inhabit … the happiness of the world’ because it has the power to ‘rid us of our history … to liberate us from our name’ (Bachelard, 1969, p.181). He is describing with soulfulness his experience of a moment of reverie which is both liberating and ‘taps into a pool of longing and fills me with a sense of something lost and left behind … a moment of reverie attracts to itself all those other moments in time when the boundary between myself and the world dissolved’ (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.312).

And so, in this garden reverie a child who once was is now present again, not as an act of memory, but as a presence haunting in the garden, in the smells and sounds and the textures of the cool, morning breeze. In this moment of reverie, I sense that it is not I who remembers him. Rather it is he of long ago who visits me, who arises in this garden because he belongs here, because he has been waiting here for this moment, for my return. And for a moment I wonder if he is dreaming me, if I am a temporary condensation of these morning garden mists, these cool breezes from the ocean, the songs of the birds becoming conscious of themselves in time. (ibid)

Now we are listening in to a conversation. I am talking with a church member.

*The Child is the bunch of emotions, feelings and urges which are full of play. There is wonder, and joy in the bunch, like walking on the grass with bare feet and feeling all tickle-ly and lovely … also in this bunch of feelings is the feeling free to do anything, no responsibilities; fascinating investigations and discoveries, energetic shouting and singing, like banging on the piano and*

*singing at the top of your voice, no particular tune; using your body, climbing trees, and jumping; like running through deep piles of autumn leaves and kicking them everywhere and over granny and everyone; like stamping in all the puddles and getting covered in mud; like being happy, so happy absorbed when you're all alone, but feel not alone. In fact The Child is the WOW factor. Anything that makes you feel WOW! is from The Child ...*

It was counselling, in the context of pastoral care. It was in 1982. My clients were all associated with the church. I had a supervisor. He was a neighbouring minister with a different background and theology but similar 'training'.

My eclectic experience: clinical theology, listening skills, guided by person-centred principles and a person-centred theology, experience of re-birthing, Transactional Analysis (TA), Carl Rogers, healing services, prayer ministry and renewal of the mind, led me to a conversational, person-centred-cum-Christo-centric approach.

It went like this, for this example I have made a composite case study.<sup>136</sup>

*Have you heard of Transaction Analysis?*

*Is that this idea that we all have a Child within us and we ought to find it and let it out?*

*Well, yes something like that, but I'm not so sure about what anyone ought to do. It's a name given to a way of looking at and describing the way we relate to others and I find it provides a way of talking about some of the frustrations and the stuck feelings we have been talking about. It might provide us with a language to help understand what's going on. Would you be happy to learn a bit about this, as I understand it anyway?*

*Well, anything really. I feel like there is a volcano about to erupt, so if you think it will help, OK.*

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<sup>136</sup> I saw this put into practise in Purton, 1993.

*You mentioned the Child, TA suggests that we can describe three main 'bunches' of emotions within us. The Parent, The Child and The Adult. We're not talking about real people and having three personalities or anything. Just, so we can sort out the mixture of emotions and feelings we keep on encountering we can attribute different feelings to each of these bunches of emotions. Let's start with The Parent.*

*First of all we are not necessarily describing your parents. The Parent is made up of all the authority statements, the rules and regulations, the responsible 'oughts' and 'shoulds' that we have learned and stored up. Many will be very good and useful, like for instance 'Don't touch the hot radiator' and all those things which protect you when you're small and you don't know those things yet. Or ...*

*Oh Yes, there's lots of those.*

*There's lots of those?*

*(Angrily) Yes, all the time, I remember I used to be always being told what's right, what's wrong, do this, don't do that. I was never free of it.*

*So thinking about all that makes you angry?*

*I suppose so, but then I guess I'm a bit like that with mine. It's so difficult isn't it; you want to keep them safe.*

*Yes, you want to keep them safe, so bunches of emotions and messages in what we are calling The Parent contain all those injunctions intended to keep you safe; some of them are positive, but some may be less so. Some suggest being responsible and serious like always helping others before yourself, some may be negative like sort of threats. If you don't do as you're told, the bogey man will come and take you away.*

*Or hurt you ... or hurt you.*

*Oh, is that something you remember?*

*No, I'm not sure why I said that.*

*But you feel it.*

*Yes.*

*Very much?*

*Yes I do ...*

*OK?*

*Yes, fine.*

*So The Parent is all those commands, feelings, responsibilities, sensible attitudes and responses whether you remember where they come from or not. So let's leave The Parent there for the moment. The Child is very different.*

*The Child is the bunch of emotions, feelings and urges which are full of play. There is wonder, and joy in the bunch, like walking on the grass with bare feet and feeling all tickle-ly and lovely....*

*But you have to watch you don't step on a wasp or a thistle!*

*Do you remember doing that?*

*No, but you have to keep them safe.*

*It sound's you're in The Parent mode.*

*Oh, sorry (smiles) I suppose I am.*

*No need to be sorry, that's absolutely fine, in fact it helps see exactly what we are talking about. We're talking about a way we can sort out our moods and emotions, joys and fears a bit. So we can talk about them with a bit more clarity without getting stuck all the time.*

*So back to The Child: also in this bunch of feelings is feeling free to do anything, no responsibilities; fascinating investigations and discoveries, energetic shouting and singing, like banging on the piano and singing at the top of your voice no particular tune... (see p. 322 above)... The Child is the WOW factor. Anything that makes you feel WOW! is from The Child.....*

*You're making me feel sad, so sad.*

*You're feeling very sad.*

*It's like ... I know what you mean, but I don't at the same time.*

*You know about all that, but you don't know...*

*Hmm...*

*You feel that, but you don't.*

*It's hazy ... and I don't want to feel it.*

*It's there, but you can't get there.*

*I'm not allowed.*

*You are told you must not feel like that.*

*Yes, and I won't.*

*What will happen if you do?*

*I won't.*

In subsequent sessions we revisited the notion of categorising various feelings as The Parent or The Child. We added The Adult. That bunch of feelings and emotions which seemed to be able to choose from either Child or Parent and integrate into a person being in charge of what is going on in the present. We examined the idea that any of us can 'go into' Parent, Child or Adult mode and use emotions of the past to make transactions in the present. We were able to agree that an Adult-Adult transaction was good to aim for, but that at any time we might be engaging as Child-Parent, as Parent-Child, as Adult-Child, or Adult-Parent and began to feel our way to watching how dislocated transactions might be transformed into Adult-Adult, or 'by agreement' Child-Child (real fun!).

Between sessions we played an 'observation game' of watching how all relationships could be seen from this point of view. Back in the session we laughed and cried through our exchanges of how the people we knew moved from Parent-Child to Adult-Child to Adult-Adult, or how transactions could deteriorate from Parent to Adult to Parent-Child and sometimes to Child-Child, ending up sometimes in joy, sometimes in enrage, sometimes worse, sometimes better.

During this period we would share some of our own transactions with those we loved or worked with. The process of using this analysis as a way of talking about and 'seeing' relationship and the emotions and feelings associated with them developed until we were familiar with using the language and accepting that it was describing not different personalities within us, but that the designations represented past perceptions of our experience, often indelibly marked as scripts

which could rise to the surface of the present and control our thinking, feeling and actions in the present, sometimes imperceptibly and sometimes volcano-like.

*The story of the intervening sessions can be found in Appendix 4, p.xxviii.*

It was (in this Christian pastoral context) my practice to pray at the end of a session, if the client asked for that. The prayer included the petition that memories would return safely. The following week I started the session simply asking if any memories had come up. 'No' was the reply, and while I was taking a breath in to start afresh, Sue said, 'Well, nothing of particular significance, anyway.' So I suggested that she should just tell me whatever it was and however insignificant it was. So she started, 'It was just that ...' In a quiet, calm monotone voice she told me that she had remembered that from the age of about 5 until she was about 9 or so her brother played a game with her every single week. He was about ten years older than her. The game in the park always ended 'when he raped me' she said simply. This little girl had been raped at least 400 times by her brother. Her mother did find out. She did nothing. I remembered Sue's phrase from so many months before, 'I feel like there is a volcano about to erupt.' I assumed that its time had come. It had not. Not that day, nor for some time. But the volcano did erupt with much force and drama, anger, murderous intent, deep pain, and such prolonged weeping. But we held The Child, we never told her off, we believed that before that 'game' started there was a little girl who experienced WOW!

The Child was found and she was loved and nurtured and eventually she 'beckoned' Sue to join her. And Sue changed. Led by the Child, her straight-laced

clothes changed to colour, style and fun; her whole personality flowered. I am sure her husband was pleased! Maybe the church members found it difficult to take – Sue and her husband moved on to another church soon afterwards and I have now lost touch with them. I have chosen to tell a story of joyful transformation from among many stories that do not have such a beautiful ending.

However, I am convinced that embedded in each human being there is the potential of actualisation, of learning a way of becoming.

Back in the early 1980s I began to learn about those in the secular counselling field who held views which for me had come directly from a consideration of the Bible text, in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus renames his disciple Simon.

‘Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. So now I say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church’ (Matthew 16:17).<sup>137</sup> This was the notion of the actualising tendency (Rogers, 1980, p.118ff) and the notion of ‘ontogenesis’ – the whole universe in a process of ‘becoming’ (Teilhard de Chardin, 1969, p.29). Combined here was a notion of a *way of being*, which was also *way of becoming* for the individual and the whole earth. I was fascinated by the same, but seemingly, opposite progression of Rogers and de Chardin. Rogers seemed to move from the individual to the cosmos, de Chardin seemed to move from consideration of the cosmos to the development of a philosophy of the person. In the process there are obstacles or “knots” (Laing, 1967, Purton, 1993), disease for the body, traumas for the person, the destruction of the earth (and the cosmos) through economic models of progress and the refusal to espouse the go-between spirit.

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<sup>137</sup> The purpose of mentioning this text is not to ponder the controversial issues of papacy and what Jesus really meant when he talked about building his church on Peter, the Rock, but rather that as Jesus re-names Simon he gives him a name ‘Petrā’ which is a symbol of his potential, like a rock.

Given the process and the obstacles there is the opportunity for healing. Medical interventions, psychiatric care, retelling the story of the earth (Berry, 2002, p.59ff) and the idea of potential by looking backwards (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.132ff) combined with a biblical belief in the Creator Spirit present in the womb and before birth and conception (see *Parenthesis 5*, p.268).

For de Chardin ‘the world now became for him a vast whole making its way towards a supreme personality … a vision of a universe in process of self-creation’ (Leroy in de Chardin, 1972, p.21). The whole universe is a genesis (an evolution) and so ‘every genesis presupposes interconnections, mutual or reciprocal dependence, with no breach’ (ibid, p.21). Thus Matter and Spirit … ‘are not two separate substances, set side by side and differing in nature’ (ibid, p.22). And a key consequence of all this for my own development: ‘Salvation was no longer to be sought in “abandoning the world” but in active participation in building it up’ (ibid, p22).

Rogers claimed early on (1978) that his approach was revolutionary: ‘it challenged traditional approaches to therapy and relating based on hierarchies; instead promoting an egalitarian ideal of humans relating as equal persons, whatever their roles, status or position’ (Proctor, in Proctor et al, 2006, p.1).

Proctor describes the frustration and disappointment of many people involved with the person-centred approach: that politics and issues of social action are ignored or sidelined, resisted or even frowned on in the PCA<sup>138</sup> networks. Those many frustrated people have included me. I had always assumed that such a radically person-centred approach was *therefore* also about ‘the need to change the conditions that give rise to the mental distress and estrangement whilst at the

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<sup>138</sup> PCA refers to the Person Centred Approach (to Counselling).

same time offering the relationship to clients that we see as so powerful, with the person-centred approach' (Boyd, in Proctor et al, 2006, p.297).

In recent developments in the world movement of person-centred counselling the political consequences of Rogers' original approach are returning as illustrated by the publication of the book of articles and essays entitled *Politicizing the person-centred approach – an agenda for social change* (Proctor et al, 2006); and the conference in Scotland in 2005, An Invitation to Explore the Person-Centred Approach and Political Processes, together with the formation of a new network, Person-Centred Practitioners for Social Change (PCPSC).

Successful therapy does not 'abandon the world' either but seeks active participation in global justice and social change. Boyd concludes her article with the quote from Paulo Freire, which advertised the conference just mentioned:

I heard Paul Freire, late in his life, describe the conversation he repeatedly had with friends. This is my memory of his words. He said. 'They say to me, "Paulo, you know the corruption in the government, you've been exiled, why are you so naïve as to think you can do anything?" He replied, 'To me, it is a matter of fact. It is an ontological reality that the next moment has yet to occur. I am in the present. I have the possibility of co-creating that next moment. Hope is not foolish; it is foolish not to use my subjectivity to shape events'. (Carol Wolter-Gustafson, 2005, personal communication, in Proctor et al, 2006, p.301)

Children in their Magic Spots experience a new way of being and becoming related to the world which needs changing.

*My magic spot taught me how to listen to nature as well as see it. when i was in my magic spot, it was amazing because when you take time for nature, you see and hear so many wonderful things.*  
(Tristan, Magic Spot, 2006, Observation, p.4)

*I am going to carry this on at home and at school and help the broken connections on earth. When I get home I am going to change the way we live of electrisaty.*  
(Unnamed, aged 8, 2010, Decisions, p.1)

I am going to tell mum what I have learnt. I hope she will save the planet a bit more.

(Finley, aged 8, 2010, Decisions, p.1)

I am in my magic spot again and what has inspired me to protect the earth was the animal court<sup>139</sup> because I learnt that if I cut down trees or marshes I will pay the consequences.

(Ned, aged 9, 2010, Decisions, p.1)



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<sup>139</sup> The animal court is a part of an earth education activity called *Home Sweet Home*.

## Chapter 10

### Hearing Children's Voices

Part 2: Breath: catching the power of the wind<sup>140</sup>



*My Magic Spot, well that's what it was. Pure Magic.  
I could feel the wind flying in my face. (see p.349)*

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<sup>140</sup> 'Catching the power of the wind' is a phrase borrowed from Thomas Berry. It was the title of his address at the United Nations Spiritual Summit Conference, October 1975 (Berry, 2006, p.127).

# Chapter 10

## Hearing Children's Voices

### Part 2

#### Breath: catching the power of the wind

Breathe on me, Breath of God  
Fill me with life anew,  
That I may love what thou dost love,  
And do what thou wouldst do.  
(Edwin Hatch, 1835-89)

As I listened to the birds singing in my magic spot, I could see birds flying from one tree to another. I was wondering things such as, How do birds sing? However I could smell the air blowing through my hair. I could smell the natural smell of oxygen coming from the trees.  
(Shalanda, Descriptive writing (set by class teacher) 2007, Magic Spot, Smell p.2)

'Breath is life; it is soul, the anima mundi. When we breathe we exchange ourselves with the world around us. On the in-breath, in the moment of inspiration, we not only take in the world, we are also nourished by it, in-spired by it. And then at the pause, so slight and so subtle, in that briefest of moments before the expiration, when we give back to the world what it has given to us, an alchemy occurs'. (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.65)

It was next to a baby tree growing. It was damp and soothing. I heard trees breath rustling and I also smelt plants and weeds. I felt joyful, happy and peaceful. I was happy because I saw a lady bird and a spider enjoying their lives.  
(Magic Spot, Smell, p.1)

In the Earthkeepers programme the third ecological concept presented after Energy Flow and The Cycling of Materials (Air, Soil and Water) is the Inter-connection of all Things.

A large web, the Web of Life, is strung between large trees representing air, soil and water cycling powered by the energy of the sun. The facilitator suddenly dons an inspector's cap and becomes the Inspector of Connections.



The web is used to illustrate how all things are connected through the breathing in and the exchange of air. We often use the children's knowledge about CO<sub>2</sub> and oxygen.

'What do we breathe in?'

'Oxygen,' comes the reply.

'What do we breathe out?'

'Carbon dioxide,' is the cry.

'So what about this tree, what does it give out?'

'Oxygen.'

'What does it take in?' It is not unusual to hear some children's surprised, or it is resolved 'Oh, I see' s' amid the shout of 'Carbon dioxide'.

So the Inspector of Connections says, 'Look at the tree, you know what it is giving to us, so all breathe in.' Everyone takes a big gulp of air.

'Wait, wait ... now all breathe out, towards the tree.'

Everyone produces a great gush of CO<sub>2</sub>!

This is the right time for the Inspector of Connections to go and hug the tree, and encourage hugging of trees, to thank them for our oxygen and maybe to reflect on the madness of burning down the rainforests.

On the one hand, this activity is simply an interactive, outdoor exercise enabling the ‘apprentice’ Earthkeepers to learn a fundamental ecological concept, in this case, the inter-relationship of all things. In the presentation which starts the programme the children are promised new adventures. It may be that the adventures are greater than the children expect or realise. It may be the adventure of a lifetime – the first stones of the foundations of a journey of the soul may well be being laid.

This may be a basic ecological concept, but what does it mean - All things are connected? In what way are we, human beings, in what way are ‘humanlings’ connected to ‘all things’? Thomas Berry puts it this way: ‘Nothing is itself without everything else’ (personal communication to Plotkin, in Plotkin, 2008, p.470) and goes on: ‘The universe is like a giant web, and what we call things can be conceived as nodes (places) in that web. When the relationship between any two things changes, everything changes’ (Plotkin, 2008, p.470). In what way can these children, often so immeasurably disconnected from the natural world, begin to understand what their elders have forgotten or rejected – our membership of the more-than-human community?

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. The earth is precious, for all of us share the same breath. This we know, the earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. This we know, all things are connected; like the blood that unites one family. We did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it.

Whatever we do to the web of life, we do to ourselves. For every part of the earth is sacred, for all belongs to our creator.

Attributed to Chief Seattle. Part of one version of the speech made by Chief Seattle in 1854 or 1852.

(<http://www.kyphiom.com/www/seattle.html> - accessed 5.11.10)

In an essay, 'Ecological Groundedness in Gestalt Therapy', William Cahalan describes a scenario where he is working with a client giving 'grounding or support work'.

In doing this I often talk about these activities in more explicitly ecological language than I used in the past. For example I invite clients, as they let their breathing regulate itself, to know that they, I, and all the rest of the animal kingdom are now taking in oxygen produced by the plant kingdom, and are releasing carbon dioxide back to the plants. Also, as I explore with the client the movement and blocking of emotion, I may call this an aspect of the 'life-force' in her, which is also in the grass and trees. I may say that this energy came to her from the sun through her food, and is being released in her with each breath of oxygen and beat of the heart. (Cahalan, in Rosak, Gomes and Kanner, 1995, p.219)

At the Centre our experience of this web-of-life activity is that it is enjoyed very much by the children. Why? It is odd – wearing belts with four ropes 3 metres long, connecting together 20 children with padlocks; it is different and active and, not only informative but also presents a space for disclosure, or realisation – 'Oh, I get it, things *really are* connected.' However, the danger is that facilitators can get so bound up with the procedures (getting the belts on the right way, connecting up to the right posts, keeping enough calm to enable the children to be connected without feeling stuck or even frightened) that too much time is spent getting the lesson taught and the job done. When we relax and accept that this slightly strange but fun activity may give time and space for the children to open windows into what I would identify as *spirituality* and Romanyshyn calls *heartwork*, (Romanyshyn, 2002, p.65), Plotkin names the *soul's journey* or the *soul's pathway* (Plotkin, 2008, p.113) and Bachelard calls *breathing cosmically* (Bachelard, 1994, p.181) it becomes a profound experience. Without a poetry lesson, without a lesson on metaphor and without studying religion, the

transformative possibilities of ‘speaking the world’, that is articulating our sense of being a part of and being at one with the planet, are immanently available.

Each time we settle into our breathing, feeling our biological presence, sensing the changes in the weather and the wildflowers, we experience in our bones the immense creativity of the web of life. (Shapiro, in Rosak, Gomes and Kanner, 1995, p.238)

In her essay, ‘Restoring Habitats, Communities, and Souls’, Elan Shapiro describes her way of cultivating the ‘connected self’. ‘Such a self expands beyond our human-centred conditioning and sense of being split off and separate, in order to engage intimately with other species’ (ibid, p.235).

### **The activity, The Interconnection of all Things**

*The activity, The Interconnection of all Things continues after the Connection Inspector has left, with each child acting out the part of either a plant or an animal. Each of them has an ‘ID’ card, pond weed, oak tree, rabbit, fish etc. Then we create our own web of life. Each person wears a belt with four coloured ropes attached to it, yellow, light blue, brown and dark blue – energy (from the sun), air, soil and water. In the woods there is a circle of posts marked either as rain water, or lake water, or soil. A centre post is marked as the sun. All the posts have padlocks attached to them and all the ropes have rings at the end. The children have already received their keys from the previous day of the programme. All those who are plants enter the circle and because they received their energy directly from the sun they unlock the sun’s padlock and attach their yellow ropes to the sun; they will receive their water either from the rain or the lake, so they unlock the padlocks on one of the appropriate posts and attach their dark blue ropes, and lock the padlock again. Then it is the animals’ turn. None of them connect directly to the sun because they receive their energy from what they eat. They need to find what they eat. It will be one of the other children, either another animal or a plant, so they connect themselves to what they eat by attaching their brown (nutrients,*

*soil) and yellow energy ropes to hooks on the belts. At the same time, both the animals and the plants receive their air from each other, so animals connect their light blue ropes to a plant, the plants connect their light blue ropes to an animal. All this takes place with up to twenty children trying to connect to their sources of sun, water, air and soil in a chaos of discovery, pushing and yelping, confusion, realisation, shouting, amazement and joy! Finally, the web is complete, one small eco-habitat, all plants and animals are connected in a chaotic, untidy mess of connections – a web of life. Then the Inspector of Connections pretends to use weed killer on the nearby nettles and describes how the poison will make its way through the nettles to the water courses and the lake represented by one of the posts. That padlock is undone, the connections are broken and those plants and animals now poisoned through the contaminated water sit down dead! But of course those plants and animals attached to the dead plants and animals also have to sit down as their sources of air, soil or energy are no longer available. Sometimes there are one or two plants and animals left. But it is seen that one small action caused devastation to a small eco-habitat.*

*‘You can’t do just one thing. Everything is connected,’ intones the Inspector of Connections.*

My own theological understanding of incarnation undergirds what I am suggesting; that this immersion in the natural world with the companionship of those who are aware of the interconnection of all things (to a greater or lesser degree) will serve to make space in young lives for reverie. Bachelard suggests that reverie, and its articulation which is poetry, ‘makes breathing easier’. My religious metaphors tell this story: the Creator breathed his ‘*ruach*’ into humankind, because flesh and spirit belong together. That spirit does not belong uniquely to me but is part of me only in that I am in relationship with Others. She

lives between the one and the Other generating ‘a certain charged intensity’ (Taylor, 1972, p.8). It is this ‘charged intensity’, this reverie, which offers to children the space to discover a flower, a tree or the idea that all things are connected, that commands their attention. The ordinary becomes spectacular, the commonplace a moment of wonder. Giving expression to this together with others is heartwork: giving voice to the world. Paul van Buren describes the sort of ‘disclosure’ as a foundation for a life-journey which includes ‘spirituality’:

Speech about God, or silence about God, for that matter, but in any case, the sort of speech and the sort of silence ... appears within the context of a sense of wonder, awe and joy before what is there for all to behold; the fact that we are alive, and that there is anything at all. The mystical, as Wittgenstein put it ... is not *how* the world is, but *that* it is. This sense of awe and wonder occurs when one is *struck* by the fact that I am, and that I am I, that a tree is itself, and that there is anything at all. (van Buren, 1968, p.170)

Leaning against the rough bark of a gnarled oak tree I could hear the birds go twit. At the opposite end of the field there was an enormous spiky bush. The smell of the flower is beautiful. The flowers were as bright red as a red ruby which is really bright. The thing I thought was that I never knew it could be like this, it is amazing.

(Sayo, 10 years Descriptive writing [set by class teacher] 2007. Magic Spot, Wonder, p.1)

As soon as i closed the curtains of silence, i knew that peacefulness had began. Silently i sat down trying not to rassuel the leaves. Suddenly i found myself surrounded by stunning plant and flowers. I started to wonder how long i could keep this quiet.

(Magic Spots, Observation, p.5)

Through a different-to-the-classroom yet ‘ordinary’ encounter with, in this case, the web of life, children can begin to hear another language when trees and animals, that is to say, the natural world, communicate. They are learning for the first time, maybe, a language that they had not known existed. Here is a seed for

the growth of understanding that otherness does not mean separateness and discontinuity but rather togetherness and continuity.

*In the magic spot I wrote in my diary about what I felt. I thought about lots of things, like what would be like to be another animal.*  
(Unnamed, aged 9, 2005, *Magic Spot, Imagination and Connection*, p.1)

*Waves patter as sit there and relaxe. When i look around i birds flying free in the sky and rocks seem to be talking to each other in a kind way. Although people talk to me i take no notice. I am too involved in watching and listening to the earth speak. After listening to the earth i try to listen to my friends, but all i can hear is nature calling me to listen.*

*Then i am distracted from magic moment and spot...*

*My magic spot is the remarkable, and their name suits the.*  
(Boy, in Australia, p.10, 1997, *Magic Spot, Observation*, p.4)

Here is the beginning of reflecting that breathing in and out involves me in the awesome interconnection of all things, so that to articulate that experience thus: ‘On a bit of moving air, on this fragile, slender, invisible thread depends the continuing act of creation’ (Romayshyn, 2002, p.65) is not a quaint dream, but a subversive act of reverie.

*Magic Spots made my spirit fly free and see the plant at [in] its natural [state] would go free.*  
(E G, age 10, *Magic Spots, Freedom*, 2005)

*My spot was in the long grass and was quite near the woods. I could hear wind in the trees rustle and I could see dew on the blade of grass. It was nice to be part of the world in my magic spot.* (Jasmine, 10, 2005, *Magic Spots, Imagination and Connection*, p.2)

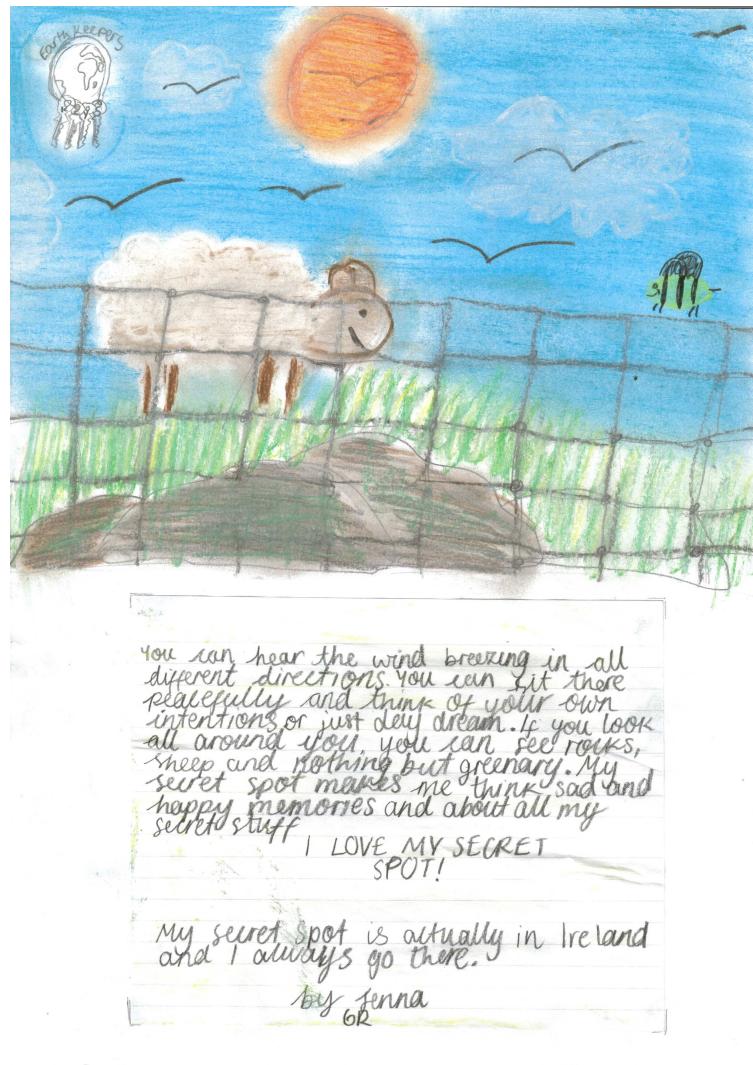
This is reverie, which is the beginning of an ecological literacy where ‘The selfhood of the tree, the music, the girl, the mountain, confronts me in its absolute otherness, and also demands that I meet it in my own integrity ... I am seeing “with new eyes”. For now this other being meets me in its own authenticity, and I am face to face with the truth *of* it, not merely the truth *about* it’ (Taylor, 1972, p.12-13). This is neither Levinas’ radical alterity, nor Heidegger’s Dasein - otherness as a horizon of selfhood (Kearney, 2003, p.16). The children are

discovering something between the transcendence of the Other and the immanence of the Other. They are discovering that what is ‘foreign’ is more ‘familiar’, and the ‘familiar’ is more ‘foreign’ (ibid, p.11). They are entering metaxic space (*see Parenthesis 1*); slipping into the smooth space of the ‘*and*’ between the I and the Other, I and You.

This is a space of mystery. Merleau-Ponty refers to it as ‘a spatiality of orientation towards a possible world’ (Merleau Ponty, 1996, p.285). For the children in their Magic Spots this is likely to be a new world. ‘The opportunity for children to be able to enter other spaces in which they can *be* what they *are* has been shown to be frequently sought after, for example in retreating to a favourite place to be alone and to contemplate (Erricker et al, 1997, and Hyde 2005, p.38). Our experience certainly endorses this as Magic Spots is frequently mentioned as their favourite activity. This is true even when the experience is a mixture of good and difficult emotions.

A large old oak tree cort my eye, i decided to draw it. as i drawed i wondered about that bird and why it made that noise maybe it was angry, sad? Who knows! I'm not sure what came into my thoughts next it was a mixture of anger, sadness and lonliness, i understand the anger, sadness but not the lonliness perhaps its to do with the amount of space there is around here. Suddenly the big bell rang to tell us to stop pondereing over our thoughts and head back to open the curtains of silence  
(Magic Spots, Sad and Difficult, p.2).

Here the mysterious in-between space itself enables this boy of 9 years to ‘ponder’ the feeling of loneliness, then a girl (10 years) experiences being ‘made’ to think sad and happy memories, but she loves it. She is learning, without angst that both emotions are present – ‘its secret stuff’ (see next page).



You can hear the wind breezing in all different directions. You can sit there peacefully and think of your own intentions or just day dream. If [you] look all around you, you can see rocks, sheep and nothing but greenery. My secret spot makes me think sad and happy memories and all about my secret stuff  
 I LOVE MY SECRET SPOT!

(Jenna, Magic Spots, Back at home, p. 1).

Another girl (10 years) experiences a dream-like sequence but does not express surprise; it is a part of her experience, her 'inner temperature' the in-between space grows and reduces.

Silently the wind delicately rustle the trees while I was calmly in my magic spot smelling the beautiful smells of mother nature. ....Dreaming that I was dancing with the flower fairy. As I leaned back I became aware of all my surrounding. I didn't feel too hot nor did I feel too cold. I found my inner

temperature. The magic spot grew larger and larger but suddenly it started to shrink. And also I woke up from this beautiful dream. The bell was so loud but so slow. I saw all of my friends walking in slow motion. I thought I did I wake up from that dream. And we all came to our meeting point and told our experience.

(Magic Spots, Imagination and Connection, p.1)

My experience of the short feed-back time immediately after Magic Spots and also of conversations with children about their magic spots and being outdoors is how accepting they are of each others' stories. Kelly, an Australian (in Hyde 2005, p.41) reflects on her experience of 'the land' and talks of 'new imagining' about the land as 'our place' where 'our lives are earthed and grounded'. Perhaps the beginnings of 'new imaginings' are evident in the readiness with which the children here allow their horizons to be enlarged.

From discovering that being alone can be OK:

*It was peaceful. I really like being alone for a bit.*  
(Antonio, Magic Spots, Assorted, p. 3)

or that you can articulate your experience:

Words to describe my magic spot  
Bumpy  
Soil  
Twigs  
Stinging nettles  
Bugs  
Trees  
Quiets  
(Magic Spots: Observation, p.3)<sup>141</sup>

to sensing empathy for another species:

*I felt relaxed and calm when i was in my magic spot because it was nice and quiet with the wind blowing through me ear and out the other. My magic spot was beside a small tree but the thing i didn't like about it was because*

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<sup>141</sup> This girl was at the time categorised as 'special needs' with particular difficulty with words.

the small tree was behind plastic<sup>142</sup> which made it seem trapped. I liked it because there were blades of grass with drops of water which i pulled of. I saw trees behind me which swayed in the wind which i felt like doing as well. I also heard a small squeak of a bird behind me.

(Magic Spots, Observation, p.2)

or empathy with other species and the sense of being a part of the natural world.

I lie on a rock, as peaceful as can be. I hear birds chirping. Everyone has put their veil of silence on, so all i can hear are flies and trees...rustling, buzzing and chirping.

All of a sudden the trees seem to have the veil of silence on as well, (but not for long.)

As i sit here, i wonder what the birds are saying? The sky looks s grey as anything. It almost feels as if i'm in a bucket and some grey paint is going to tip on my head.

Soon we unveil our veils and i tell my friends about my experience.<sup>143</sup>

(Australia, 1997, Magic Spots, Observation, p.4).

During the Earthkeepers programme on the second day (after one experience of Magic spots on the first day) a before-breakfast-Magic-Spot is offered as an optional activity. The number of children who participate varies normally dependent on the encouragement or otherwise of teachers. It is disappointing that there is more discouragement than encouragement especially when the weather is cold or wet. On one occasion the lead teacher told the children that it was too wet and so they could not go (I was ready and waiting outside). It was a wonderful sight, nevertheless, to see a dozen children, Earthkeepers badges and bags over their rainwear come out to do their Magic Spots.<sup>144</sup> One response from that time was the following:

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<sup>142</sup> This boy's Magic Spot was in a newly planted section of woodland and the young trees were protected by plastic sheaths.

<sup>143</sup> In the original versions of the Earthkeepers programme it is suggested that before magic spots a *veil* of silence is pulled down over us. We have found that shutting the curtains of silence is immediately understandable whereas veil needed to be explained, and even then is not always understood.

<sup>144</sup> In case this should be interpreted as an act of subversion, I did talk to the teacher (deputy head, actually) concerned before continuing with the activity. That teacher is now one of our Trustees!

At Ringsfield hall i had a magic spot. I could stay there for hours and not get bored. I felt sleepy and heard the rain. I sat by a tree, in the quietest place in the world. I see birds and feel water running down my face.  
(Magic Spot, Peace and Feelings, p.1)

It is noticeable that the children during their visits are not put off by the weather, whatever it is like, even though very often at the beginning of their stay they may protest about rain or cold or wind. They very quickly enjoy being a part of their environment. On another early morning Magic Spot, just ten boys (out of a class of twenty-five girls and boys) opted to take part. It was a beautiful day I remember. There was an early morning chill, blue sky, early sun rays. We closed the curtains of silence, the boys were settled and about five minutes later, as if from nowhere, there was a prolonged hail storm, so fast and heavy you could hardly see through it. It was the sort that hurts as it hits you. To my astonishment none of the boys moved (some were right in the open). The storm finished as suddenly as it started, I did not ring the bell for another five minutes (The Magic spot lasted about twenty minutes altogether). The boys returned, silently though with very big grins and very bright eyes; we opened the curtains of silence. I did not need to ask for feedback! The excited chatter was a chaotic sharing of their experience of the hail. '*It was so thick, it hurt, it was amazing, where did it come from? I've still got some of it in my jumper...*' When I asked why no one came back to go in the house, they all looked at one another, said that they had not even thought about that and then continued on the joyous expression of their shared experience. '*Cool, wicked, best ever*'. When we ended the activity and they went in for breakfast with the rest of the waiting class they became proud heros. Later in the day in conversation with one of them, he told me that actually he had

thought of escaping from the hail, but then he had thought, 'No I want to stay and be right in it'.<sup>145</sup>

I really liked my magic spots. It is a really nice experience. I liked hearing all the sounds and being connected to the earth.  
(Adam, 2005, *Magic Spots described*, p.6)

Thankyoooooo! Ringsfield Hall was brilliant. ...It was so different to the city. It was a great experience! And what a place to do earthkeepers! I also learned how to put up with some one. I enjoyed the Mud! I loved going to the valleys and forests and just basically being in nature.

(Louis, 2006, *Thank you Letter, Magic Spots described*, p.6)

This experience in earth education jargon is called Immersion – 'just basically being in nature' as Louis says (see Chapter 9, p.303).

Plotkin sets about describing a model of human development which is both ecocentric and soul-centric, 'a nature based model that fully honours the deeply imaginative potentials of the human psyche' (Plotkin, 2008, p.5). My experience is that such a model, while described in what to many may seem extreme and mystical terms, is quietly demonstrable in an ordinary Suffolk flat place with ordinary children from a cross-section of ordinary homes.

This eight-stage model shows us how we can take root in a childhood of innocence and wonder; sprout into an adolescence of creative fire and mystery probing adventures; blossom into an authentic adulthood of cultural artistry and visionary leadership; and finally ripen into a seed-scattering elderhood of wisdom, grace and holistic tending of what the cultural ecologist David Abram calls the more-than-human world.(Plotkin, 2008, p.5)

This model of human development insists on the need for a nature-orientated dimension in each stage, albeit a balance of nature and culture influences.

In industrial growth society we have for centuries minimized, suppressed, or entirely ignored the nature task in the first three stages of human development, infancy through early adolescence ...

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<sup>145</sup> This is one of those experiences where there is no record, I can find no response in the written work that I have. I believe they will never forget the experience. The following responses from Adam and Louis are therefore not about that hail storm.

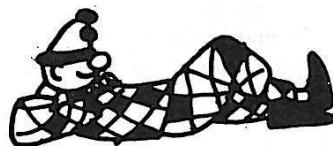
Arrested personal growth serves industrial 'growth'. By suppressing the nature dimension of human development ... industrial growth society engenders an immature citizenry unable to imagine a life beyond consumerism and soul-suppressing jobs. (ibid, p.6)

Quiet, calm, peaceful, strange, wet, hot, a bit scary.  
(Unnamed, *Magic Spots*, 2002)

The best part of Earthkeeping, I think, was the web of life because it was really fun and it was so tangled I thought we would never get out of it, and I suppose we won't.  
(Kate, 2002, *Earthkeepers* p, 16)

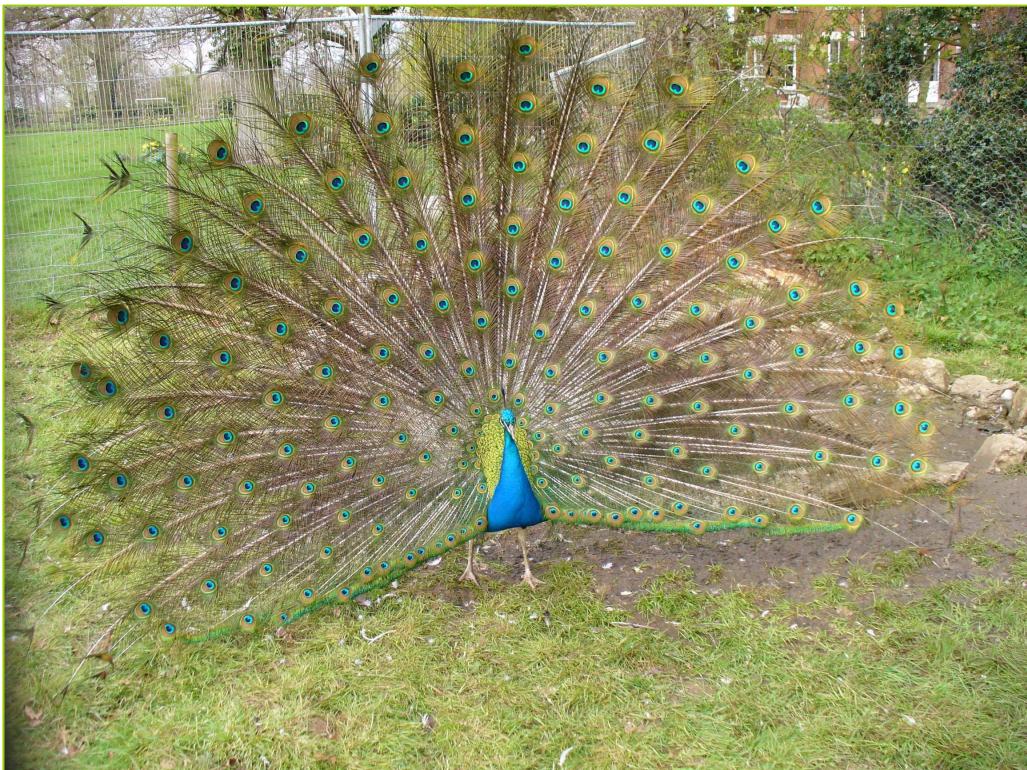
Here Kate makes a '*metanoia*' statement (see Chapter 5, p.184). Flesh and spirit are joined together (see e.g. *Parenthesis* 2, p.146). Now nothing will be the same. She has emerged from the experienced changed. No-one, no life can ever be outside the tangle of the web of life.

My magic spot, well that's what it was. Pure magic. I could feel the wind flying by my face. A symphony of different birds rang in my eardrums! Something that really caught my eye was a bed of daffodils. Until I did magic spots I could never find silence like that before. It really was a life changing experience for me. It was like being in heaven. But like all good things come to own end. But luckily for ma I can do It anywhere! Even at night! I never wanted it to come to an end. The wind brought a little chill with it. I felt relaxed! I also felt calm and problem free . I forgot all of my troubles. A sapling in front of me caught my eye so I drew it in my diary.  
(*Magic Spots, Peace and Feelings*, p.2)



## SECTION 4: Towards making meaning

### Chapter 11 The Dance of the shaping Earth<sup>146</sup>



Dance, then, wherever you may be;  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,  
and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,  
and I'll lead you all  
in the dance, said he.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> This is a phrase borrowed from Rosemary Haughton (Houghton, 1982, p.22), see *Parenthesis 2*, p152.

<sup>147</sup> Sydney Carter, 1963, Stainer and Bell Ltd. This Christian hymn, of which this is the refrain, sings the story of the Passion of Christ, but uses Hindu the idea of the dance of the earth to do so. 'Sydney described it as a carol - 'a dancing kind of song, the life of which is in the dance as much as in the verbal statement'. Carter wrote, 'I see Christ as the incarnation of the piper who is calling us. He dances that shape and pattern which is at the heart of our reality. By Christ I mean not only Jesus; in other times and places, other planets, there may be other Lords of the Dance. But Jesus is the one I know of first and best. I sing of the dancing pattern in the life and words of Jesus' (<http://www.stainer.co.uk/lotd.html>, 1.8.10).

## Chapter 11

### The Dance of the shaping Earth

This chapter explores the use of Rogers' therapeutic conditions as a means of enabling the reconnection of human beings with the natural world in a reciprocal relationship, in the light of listening to and for the children's voices. Is the life-affirmative way of being which emerges from Rogers' person-centred approach an appropriate means to 'come out' as human beings? 'To come out is to say: "Yes, this is what I am: no apologies." A human being is a servant of nature, a plain member in the community of all life' (Fisher, 2002, p193).

The chapter is in many ways a conclusion. I could not have been written it without the preceding experience, analysis, reflection and reverie. It certainly would not have been possible for me to write it without the turning spiral spinning metaxic space. Here the words of the children appear throughout, I tried to write this chapter as a *parenthesis* without the children's voices, but they insisted. The children's voices must be heard. I have decided that there is enough, exploration, analysis, reflection and explanation everywhere else for there to be any need to explain why each and every sound of a child's voice is heard when it is heard. Indeed, some times a child will be heard repeating what she said in another place. Sometimes a child insists that he must say it again.

What happens here is integration, not fragmentation. This is one possible re-weaving of the hermeneutic spiral turning and drilling, as Rory puts it, 'drilling deeper and deeper until you see the light' (Chapter 4 p.130f and Chapter 12, p.370f). My life's horizons, my faith and theology, my ecological commitment, my pastoral and counselling care, my own triggers and grieving for children are joined with Others' horizons and

particularly the children's fore-conceptions. This is not my hermeneutic spiral in *action*, but a reflection of its turning at the vantage point (Chapter 8, pp.254 and 283) of one particular place, with a particular these people and this particular time (Chapter 1, pp.28-30).

Just as Wyatt and Sanders wanted to avoid repeating 'a recent pattern of emphasising the significance of what have become "the three core conditions" i.e. congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard' (Wyatt and Sanders, Eds., 2002, p.2). I too feel that I cannot work only with the core conditions but must also include all six of Rogers' original six therapeutic conditions in his theoretical statement of the Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change in 1957 (Rogers, 1957). Not only does my exploration demand the consideration of both the client's way of being as well as the counsellor's, but also an understanding of the interaction between the two, their contact, vulnerability and perceptions. The demand is made because relationship between humans and the more-than-human community (Fisher, 2002) is a reciprocal one, like the person-centred therapeutic relationship. The demand is made just as importantly because the three additional therapeutic conditions are necessary to facilitate the 'presence' or 'spirit' flowing in-between the two participants, which brings about therapeutic change.

There is significance, I believe, in the order of Rogers' six conditions:

■ The list begins not with the counsellor, not with the client but with them both and their relationship:

1. That two persons are in contact.

■ Next is not the counsellor but the client:

2. That the first person, whom we term the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable, or anxious.

■ Then follows the three core conditions related to the counsellor:

3. That the second person, whom we shall term the therapist, is congruent in the relationship
4. That the therapist is experiencing unconditional positive regard toward the client
5. That the therapist is experiencing an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference

■ Finally the list ends with the client's perception and reception of the counsellor's offering of life and love; the essential exchange during the therapeutic relationship

6. That the client perceives, at least to a minimal degree, conditions 4 and 5.

The inclusion of the six conditions in this particular order not only models the essential exchange of life which takes place between human beings but also the same exchange through the interconnections of all things including the relationships with what have sometimes been characterised as non-sentient beings and non-living things (the more than human community). There is a common movement which is perceivable and communicable to and from the participants. It is the 'soul' in-between them. I shall call it 'relational consciousness' (Hay and Nye, 2006, p.131f).

The dance of the shaping earth is echoed by the dance of exchanged life in the cells of living bodies. In them life is exchanged and finds new ways to love. (Haughton, 1981, p.22)

Brian Swimme, the mathematical cosmologist takes a further step. Not only does he remind us that we, the human race, exist inside the cosmic process, 'even our thoughts about this process are simply yet another interesting current of micro-events taking place inside the great macro-event of the fifteen-billion-year

development' (Swimme, 1996, p.87) and he eloquently describes how all things are part of one another, and even might have been one another.

For we know that this body of ours could have been a giant sequoia. We know in a simple and direct way that we share the essence of and could so easily could have been a migrating pelican. ....we are home again in the cosmos as we reach the conviction that we could have been an asteroid, or molten lava, or a man, or a woman, or taller or shorter, or angrier, or more certain, or more hesitant, or more right or wrong. (Swimme, 1996, p.111)

### **1. Core conditions**

In the interests of clarity I will begin with some reflection of the core conditions, relating as they do to the counsellor side of the therapeutic relationship. It is the counsellor whom we expect to be the human being, so let us start there. In his unravelling of philosophies and theories to seek a way of being which, as he puts it, 'will serve the cause of environmental sanity' Mountford suggests that Carl Rogers' core therapeutic conditions 'can be read as a recipe for a way of being with the non-human world' (Mountford, in Moore and Purton, 2006, p.110).

When I first read Mountford's descriptions of unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence offered within relationships to cats, trees and mountains I felt that the core conditions were being used merely as *attitudes* towards the client now being transferred to *attitudes* towards the non-human and 'non-living' earth community. I do not believe this is his intention, particularly in view of his very clear challenge to the counselling community of the danger of the core conditions becoming 'an article of faith', and his re-visioning process in which he emphatically places the 'way of being' as primary to the core conditions. The core conditions simply characterise the person/client centred 'way of being'. Once the theory is put in its place, 'it becomes possible and reasonable to ask whether the way of being is *necessarily* anthropocentric in its focus. Client-centred and person-centred therapies are anthropocentric because they seek to help wounded

human beings, but *What about the way of being itself?*” (Mountford, in Moore and Purton, 2006, p.108, the author’s emphasis). I think this is why Mountford’s description of offering the core conditions to the non-human community is so disappointing. After the promise of re-visioning we seem to fall back into an established understanding that knows the certainty of human pre-eminence in the earth community, or as my religious tradition still puts it, human beings are the ‘crown of creation’. What follows is an attempt at that re-visioning process in a way which rather than taking each core condition and imposing it on, say, a mountain, in a very anthropomorphic way, asks questions about the nature of the relationship between humans and the more-than-human community.

I offer two preliminary considerations. The first is about the ‘counsellor’, the person offering the core conditions to, or within, the whole earth community; and the second is about the nature of the non-human earth community.

First, then, I want to explore the life position of the ‘counsellor’. Mountford emphasises how in counselling a consistent offer of the core conditions not only affects the client but also changes the counsellor as well (Moore and Purton, 2006, p.108f). That is to say, continual deliberate offering of the core conditions brings the challenge of a *metanoia*<sup>148</sup> in the one who is offering the therapeutic relationship. Understanding and acknowledging attitudes, prejudices, sadness and the effects these have on other people, as well as the client, presents the opportunity for change by the counsellor, not only in the counselling role but in other parts of life as well. The core conditions characterise a way of being in which change is an integral part. However, to make those changes in the different departments of living requires a deliberate choice, *another metanoia*. Counsellors

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<sup>148</sup> See footnote on p.184

will have all surely experienced in themselves and Others, when, no matter how well the therapeutic relationship may be going in the counselling role, it is difficult to see that same empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard in, for instance, the family home or in the political debate. Not only is life change difficult, but the context changes not the way of being but the manner by which we manifest the core conditions. Continual and gentle reflecting back may well not be the way to be available to your partner or children! Thus also in our relationship with the natural world, with animals, with trees and rocks, the manner in which we manifest this way of being requires its own *metanoia*.

Secondly, what is the non-human locus of attention and how does this particular context alter the way in which we manifest this client/person-centred-way-of-being? Let's start with Thomas Berry, as representative of so many (Carson, in Burnside and Riordan, 2004, 1965; Muir, in Teale, 1954; Van Matre, 1984; Susuki, 1998; Grey, 2006; Thomashow, 2002) who have all defined the ecological crisis and its causes with devastating clarity and also identified 'ways back to environmental sanity'.

Of indigenous peoples Berry writes:

... we began to appreciate the profound sense of realism they manifested in their ritual communion of the human soul with the deeper powers of the universe. In these earlier cultures, the universe was experienced primarily as a presence *to be communed with and instructed by*, not a collection of natural resources *to be used* for utilitarian purposes. The winds, the mountains, the soaring birds, and the wildlife roaming the forests, the stars splashed across the heavens in the dark of night: these were all communicating the deepest experiences that humans would ever know. The inner life of humans, the joy and exaltation we experience in celebrating our place in the great community of existence, these depended on our experience of a universe that provides us with both our physical and our spiritual nourishment. All this was recognised as the world of the soul. (Berry in Plotkin, 2003, p.xv)

The words 'soul' or 'spirit' may need identifying and defining (Berry, 2006, p.40) but for our purposes at the moment the word which fits our context is 'presence'.

Berry suggests that we cannot truly be ourselves without ‘all our companion beings throughout the Earth’ (ibid, 2006, p.45), and ‘This larger community constitutes our greater self’ (ibid, p.34), and ‘Our intimacy with the universe demands an alternative presence to the smallest particles, as well as to the vast range of stars ...’ (ibid, 2006 p.34). For those who have learned a way of being in relationship to other humans characterised by the core conditions it is not an incongruent step to understand the more-than-human world, not any more as materials to use, but rather as a place of ‘mutual sharing of existence in the grand venture of the universe itself’ (Berry, 2006, p.118). It is an expression of unconditional positive regard to approach the non-human universe as ‘a single gorgeous celebration, a cosmic liturgy that humans enter through their own ritual dances at those moments of daily and seasonal change, at dawn and sunset, and at the equinox and solstice moments’ (ibid, 2006, p.113).

I entirely accept Mountford’s assertion, once he has deposed of their ‘absolute sovereignty’, that the practice of the therapeutic conditions is a useful way to begin to acquire the client/person-centred way of being. Thus, if we begin to explore the concept of the interconnectedness of all things together with the idea that ‘the entire universe is shaped and sustained in all its vast interwoven pattern by the mysterious powers of soul’ (Berry, 2006, p.41) before offering the core conditions to the non-human earth community, then we are less likely to experience our relationship as anthropocentric and hierarchical (Mountford in Moore and Purton, 2006, p.111).

Perhaps now we have some guiding principles to consider what it might mean to offer core conditions (non-anthropocentrically) within the whole earth community. The first is that offering the way of being characterised by the core conditions necessarily requires *metanoia* - deliberate, continual and sustained

change within oneself. The second is that, while for three hundred years humans (in the West, at least) have considered themselves separate from and superior to the rest of the earth community, we offer a way of being which accepts that we are *just* part, albeit a significant part, of the whole earth community; a plain member of the community of life (Fisher, 2002).

To accept that humans are part of the earth, belong to the earth, depend on the earth and that the earth depends on humans is to accept there is mutual relationship between humans and the more-than-human community. All things can be present to and for one another. Whether or not we find it mysterious, whether we call it numinous presence or soul or spirit, it is presence in which both self and Other receive and give and which results in relationship where we can both know and be known.

Offering unconditional positive regard to the rest of the earth community starts then with the acknowledgement that the natural world, from cats and dogs to wild animals and birds, trees, plants and rocks and soil, all have a right to exist. All parts of the earth community have identity, a role and powerful presence within the whole earth community.

What begins the ‘change’ or *metanoia* in the counselling relationship is an intentional contract between counsellor and client. (Notice how Condition 1 – contact – is coming into play.) There will be an agreement to meet regularly and attend to those encounters. In that relationship we will expect to experience emotions: delight, exhilaration, disturbance, anger, fear, joy, sadness, grief; we will expect to receive and give, listen and respond; we will expect opportunities to know and be known, love and be loved. We will decide, even though we do not

know what is going to happen, or how we will actually respond, to seek a way to give ourselves to the Other.

In the earth education programme Earthkeepers, the children make a contract through us, as facilitators, with the natural world. They will spend time alone in a special place, their Magic Spot. It will be, ideally, of their own choosing and where they will pay attention to the earth community. It is deliberate, it is intentional, and for the majority it is an entirely new experience and often difficult.

The second time though i didn't like it because i didn't have my diary and the chickens weren't out. It was freezing and the birds had stopped their songs. All i could find to do was throw a conker up into the air. Also a spider was crawling slowly and carefully on my arm.

(Magic Spots, 2003, Sad and Difficult, p.3)

My magic spot was under a tree i really liked it because it was near two peacocks. I heard a cockrall and smallest horse. It made me sad because i was thinking about my family and i missed them. when i saw the peacock it was blue, red, black, green and a little bit of pink. On my first time on my magic spot it was lovely but my second time i was sad (i missed my family).

(Magic Spots, 2003, Sad and Difficult, p.1)

But not always

Sitting against a rough bark of gnarled tree i was listening to the birds singing and thinking about all the silence around me. while the birds sang and the trees swayed i was imagining all of the world was peaceful and quit, the breeze of the wind was blowing gently onto my face as i was looking at the long fresh green grass as it swayed swiftly. All the tiny insects were crawling round looking for fresh food to eat and ants hiding under sticks and leafs! Beautiful flowers were shining in the shiny bright yellow SUN as if they were really happy and cheerful. I could feel the grass tickling my face with its sharp ends, the smell of breeze was passing my nose as i smelt it. all the cherry bushes looked so delicious to it on a lovly summers day it felt so nice to feel the heat shining on to my face it felt like heaven!!!

(Magic Spots, Observation, p.4)

The way of being which offers the 'counsellor' conditions in the therapeutic relationship includes the discipline of reflection on the giving and receiving of, for instance, unconditional positive regard. In the light of that reflection, decisions will be made about how to respond, what to initiate, and ways to be present the

next time the opportunity to participate in the relationship occurs. An environmental educator, Mark (see Chapter 6, p.197f), also using the earth education programmes, describes the effect of magic spots on a 13-year-old, who on the first day wanted to have nothing to do with it and spent the time swatting the flies which annoyed him.

*On the second day, he went reluctantly to his appointed place, and then he saw a deer. He had never seen an animal so close before, he was thrilled and he remained quiet and still, he felt the deer was so intently watching him that it walked into a tree! 'The deer noticed me!' was his comment.*

*On the third day, he willingly went to his magic spot. He commented afterwards that he was concerned about the flies: 'I felt I was invading their place, so I waited for them to go away'.*

*(Magic Spot, Observation, 2004 p.2)*

Empathy in a relationship with another person is to stand in their place, to feel what they are feeling without judgement. The consequence of this is to be alongside, to be with, not opposed to, to be an advocate for, not oppose this other self, not because it will result in good things for me but for the sake of the other person, their well-being and flourishing. Thus empathy offered towards any constituent part, or member of the earth community will be to understand their place, feel glad when they are in good health, feel ill at ease when they are under stress from adverse conditions, or under threat from danger. We will acknowledge our connection physically, for instance with a tree, the symbiotic relationship of giving and receiving carbon dioxide and oxygen; the aesthetic connection with our sense of the glory of the diversity of colour and shape and texture of leaves and bark; the exhilaration of thousands of trees together in woodland and rainforests; the sense of beauty and restfulness under the canopy of the spreading chestnut may bring the experience of mutual appreciation. Finally, the acknowledging of the spiritual connection will dissolve that sense of separateness between the human and non-human and enable us to experience 'Each atomic

element is immediately influencing and being influenced by every other atom of the universe. Nothing can be separated from anything else. The Earth is a single if highly differentiated community' (Berry, 2006, p.57). Thus empathy toward trees will mean that we are not opposed to them, we will not hurt or destroy them; we will be advocates for them. If empathy is genuine it will blossom in ways that the other can receive, feel and trust. Thus empathy towards the trees learned and experienced in the deliberate relationship or contract will issue in some lifestyle change. For instance, a commitment to join campaigning against the destruction of rainforests by logging becomes not a cold moral ought, but a result of a new eutectic relationship with trees<sup>149</sup>.

Mountford suggests, 'Even if one cannot easily be said to be in a congruent relationship with a mountain, one can be congruently oneself upon the mountain and act towards the mountain from a place of personal congruence' (Mountford, in Moore and Purton, 2006, p.109). While I agree, at the same time I want to go further. Later, when discussing psychological contact, Mountford does not want us to be 'soft headed' (ibid, p.109). If he means getting sentimental without any change in behaviour, enjoying the mountain or hugging the trees while depending on shares in super-mines and logging, then I agree. However, if our appreciation of the more-than-human community includes understandings like 'Thought itself and the highest of human spiritual achievements are attained through the activation of the inner capacities of carbon in its alliance with the other elements of the universe' (Berry, 2006, p.55, see also *Parenthesis 2*, p.152f) then our authenticity and genuineness once offered can be received by the soil and rock of the mountain. This may be no more than Mountford implies in his phrase 'act

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<sup>149</sup> This is not to say that using wood for making heat or furniture in a sustainable way would be hypercritical, but not to be somehow involved in a campaign against the destruction of the rain forests is not consistent with congruence towards trees. 'Each week 500,000 acres of tropical forests disappear' (Earth Facts in Earth from the Air Diary, Yann Arthus-Bertrand, 2010).

toward the mountain from a place of congruence'. But isn't this the same when relating to other humans? How do we act toward another person from a place of congruence? We will not express any congruence without it issuing forth in particular, intentional acts towards them and for them.

## **2. The Therapeutic Conditions**

It is now time to extend our exploration beyond the three core conditions and consider the other three therapeutic conditions. Just as therapists need to work at psychological contact with their clients so we need to work at contact with the whole earth community. It could be said that without contact, or connection, there is no context for the core conditions to have any expression. Thus without the first of Rogers' six therapeutic conditions – 'that two persons are in contact' – there is no chance of relationship. While this may well be very obvious when considering a human counselling relationship, when it comes to relationship and contact with the natural world where the more-than-human natural community is the client, human beings do need to work very hard. The evidence of disconnection from the more-than-human community in itself shows the depth of the sickness or, as we shall see later, the trauma experienced by, in this case the 'counsellor'. While expeditions to the countryside, experiencing the odd sunset and our enjoyment of gardening are all a part of this, a therapeutic relationship does require the discipline of regular encounters over time. Those encounters will be joyful, but maybe painful, frustrating and inspiring, even a struggle to the point of wanting to give up. Through the ongoing nature of the commitment or contract, with reflection, new experience and change can take place. Nothing less than this will suffice when considering our relationship to the earth community. Contact and presence with the earth community means immersing oneself in the natural world

to hear not only the wind, but the voice in the wind; to stand under the stars and touch the awe; and to experience the joy and grief of animals, plants and soil.

I don't just reason about the damage being done to the Earth. I feel it! I cry about it! I get depressed about it! I lament it! All such feelings demonstrate my connectedness to the Earth. Our source of our compassion, suffering with, is the very ability to feel, to empathise, to resonate, not just with fellow humans but with all creatures and the very soil. (Laura, 2007, personal correspondence, also quoted in Chapter 6, p.209)

Contact means 'entering into the private, soul world of the other' (Rogers, 1980, p.142). Admittedly in the quotation which follows, Rogers was describing what it means to be empathic, but in as much as all six conditions are constituent parts of the same way of being; I am taking this description as being characteristic of each condition as well as the whole. So I have taken the liberty of changing a few words so that the description is more congruent with a relationship with the whole earth community. It is as if you are:

entering the private, *soul* world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow from this other *community*, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever *the earth* is experiencing. It means temporarily living in the other's life, moving about in it delicately without making judgements ... and so being with *more-than-human others* in this way means that, for the time being, you lay aside your own values in order to enter another's world without prejudice'. (ibid, p.142 *my changes indicated by italics*)

Maria Montessori, way back in 1936, expresses just this initiation in congruency for six year olds. '...let us give the child a vision of the whole universe....We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe, and are connected to each other to form one whole unity. [The child] is satisfied, having found the universal centre of himself with all things' (Montessori, 1936, p.8). Seventy years later with the development of quantum cosmology Brian Swimme advises that we direct our children's gaze to the Andromeda Galaxy to be seen in the middle of the Milk Way where they will see ' a faint blur of light

unlike any of the other stars...coming to our eyes from 2.5 million light-years away' (Swimme, 1996, p.60).<sup>150</sup> He goes on:

Something happens deep in the soul of a child gazing at a blur of light while knowing this blur is a galaxy with hundreds of billions of stars. Something happens inside, a spaciousness opens up in psychic congruence with galactic spaciousness. (ibid, p61)

I have so far avoided discussing the difference between human relationship with the more highly sentient animals and our relationship with vegetation and soil by trying not to regard sentient animals as the halfway house between human-to-human contact and communication between humans and the non-human or even bio-relationships. Generally speaking, as humans we feel there is a distinction between our relationships with horses, cats and dogs and our relationships with flowers, trees and rocks but I have a hunch that our role as human beings is precisely to learn, or relearn, the skills of being in communion, community and relationship with all life, all being. So to ask the questions of the more-than-human earth community that we asked above becomes neither soft-headed nor incongruent, but essential.

There is much narrative evidence of ordinary modern human beings experiencing the power, the being, the presence of the non-human and the non-living world.

Loren Eiseley woke up after sleeping a night on a beach to find a fox who had wandered from its den. He tells the story, here was 'a wide-eyed innocent fox inviting me to play, with the innate courtesy of its two forepaws placed appealingly together, along with a mock shake of the head. Gravely I arranged my forepaws while the puppy whimpered with ill-conceived excitement. I drew a breath of the fox's den into my nostrils ... Round and round we tumbled for one ecstatic moment'. (Eisley, 1969, p.210)

While hunting in Arizona, the forester Aldo Leopold shot a female wolf with a pup. He tells us that he reached the wolf in time to watch 'a fierce green fire dying in her eyes'. 'I realised then, and have known ever since that there was something new to me in those

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<sup>150</sup> Swimme explains that even with only an average pair of binoculars you can see a spiral structure in the blur of light!

eyes – something known only to her and to the mountain.’ From then on, his perspective on human relations with the natural world was utterly changed. (Leopold, 1968, from Berry, 2006, p.x)

John Seed was standing in front of a hostile crowd of loggers with bulldozers in an Australian forest, determined to prevent logging. Suddenly, he had an epiphany. He realized that he was not just one small individual protester. He was the rainforest. He was the Lifeforce of this beautiful, bio-diverse and irreplaceable sanctuary and he was the intimate web of life that flowed through the landscape. The rainforest took the shape of his body; it flowed through him, within him, throughout him. There was no question of not standing there and facing the angry crowds and the bulldozers and he did it with equanimity, in a state of peace, realization and love. And he was literally immovable. He could ‘think like a mountain’ and that force transformed his physical body as well as the power of his intentions. He later wrote, ‘There and then I was no longer acting on behalf of myself or my human ideas, but on behalf of the Earth … on behalf of my larger self, that I was literally a part of the rainforest defending herself.’ (Harland, *Permaculture* No. 42, 2004, editorial, p.2)

Thus, while there may be degrees of difference in the way humans perceive relationships with the more sentient animals and the non-living earth community, and while there is most certainly a difference in the way we have interpreted those relationships, I do not believe there is a separation, or an essential difference in the communion of beings. ‘Intimacy exists only in terms of wonder, admiration, and emotional sympathy when beings give themselves to each other in a single psychic embrace, an embrace in which each mode of being experiences its fulfilment’ (Berry, 2006, p.39).

The following is extracts from a report by a visitor to the Hermitage<sup>151</sup> in our Centre’s grounds.

I gradually became aware of an intrusive noise, above the general ‘hum’ of the wood outside. It sounded like a low pitched ‘squeak’ every now and then. It sounded like a conversation between Sooty and Sweep, going on just to the left of the door. The ‘squeaks’ were at all different pitches, and each seemed to come from a different bit of the wall. I put my ear to the wall and was astounded. The whole wall was quietly singing, humming in

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<sup>151</sup> The Hermitage in the woods is available to anyone who wishes to spend some time alone for a few hours or a few days.

polyphonic harmony, and these squeaks were different voices that kept speaking above the constant, low level hum. Outside bumble bees, like little woolly balls, bumbled in or out of a small hole in the wall. I was amazed, and a bit concerned.

In the evening I read the story of a man who wanted to become a monk and went to the desert where he entered his cell and noticed how the door and the roof needed repair. He became frightened a lion might get in. His Abba told him that he had come to pray not to repair cells. I thought that my sharing with bumble bees was a bit like that. Discovering that you are vulnerable, open to other creatures is an essential part of praying, So thank you little bumble bees.

During the night the hum got louder and the ‘conversations’ seemed more animated. I went off to sleep alright, but woke up around 1.30am each night. I thought of the Abba who would say that the bees were waking me up to pray. So I did.

The bees became a most wonderful part of my retreat. They were amazingly polite and never actually entered the room at all. Their constant background hum, in subtly changing harmonies, and their conversations they let me eves drop on, had become a delightful companionship. As I left I thanked them, placed my hands over their nest, and said a blessing, speaking over them in the name of Jesus, through Whom and for Whom all things are made. I think I miss them.

(William Booker, personal e-mail July, 2010)

As I see it this is where the counsellor/client analogy I am using to engage the therapeutic conditions in relation to the earth community fails. For the therapeutic relationship to be effective the way of being under-girding the therapeutic conditions requires the counsellor to ‘enter into the perceived world of the client, strange and bizarre as it may be, *in such a way as to return comfortably to their own world*’ (Rogers, 1975, p.143, my emphasis). If, in the analogy, the human is the counsellor and the earth is the client then the way of being requires the human to enter into the world of the non-human earth community, ‘in some sense it means that you lay aside yourself; this can only be done by persons who are secure enough in themselves that they know they will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange and bizarre world of the other (the earth community), *and that they can return comfortably to their own world when they wish*’ (Rogers,

1975, p.143, my emphasis). The therapeutic relationship is a deliberate construct, for a limited time. It lasts for the time it takes for the client to feel healed, secure, changed enough to continue without the support of that particular therapeutic relationship. On the other hand, the relationship with the earth community, for which the way of being (characterised by the six therapeutic conditions) is suggested as a means of dissolving the destructive separation between humans and more-than-human community, is not just for a particular length of time, it is for *all* time. It is a means to re-establish the ‘proper role’ for humans within the larger purposes of the universe ‘Humans are now involved in an effort at self-understanding of the entire universe, of the Earth, and of all living creatures’ (Berry, 2006, p.34). This is not a role from which any human can ‘return comfortably home’.

Condition 2 (p.343) describes the state of the client rather than the counsellor. Can the more-than-human earth community be perceived to be anxious, vulnerable and incongruent? Condition 6 describes the exchange – the perception of what is being offered and received – between the client, in this case the more-than-human community, and the human counsellor. In what way can we understand the more-than-human world’s ability to perceive our unconditional positive regard and empathy? While I do not want to push the analogy of the counsellor/client relationship in terms of human/earth community relationships too far (I am, after all, exploring the way of being, rather than its characteristic conditions, in relationship to the earth community) I want to ask, ‘Who is the client?’ We have assumed that the ‘client’ is the more-than-human earth community and that the counsellor is the human, but Conditions 2 and 6 begin to suggest that we might better consider the relationship the other way round. Can

we conceptualise the earth community becoming the counsellor and humankind becoming the client?

For the moment just working with Conditions 2 and 6, we first need to ask if the client, now humankind, is ready to enter into this therapeutic relationship. Are we anxious, vulnerable and incongruent? It seems to me that these characterisations are an accurate description of the human race (and of individuals) addicted to a scientific-technological-industrial-economic-driven-consumeristic culture but discovering how their lifestyle is destroying the planet which is their life.

Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos. Because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional “unconscious identity” with natural phenomena. These have slowly lost their symbolic implications...No voices now speak to man from stones, plants, and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied'. (Jung in Fisher, 2002, p.52)

Thomas' future is dire. If you look at the spiralling carbon dioxide emissions and compare the paltry efforts to contain them against what the scientists are saying needs to be done, the situation is hopeless. (Young mother reflecting about her 7-month-old baby, *Green Christian*, 2003)<sup>152</sup>

Secondly, responding to Condition 6: Can we, the client, perceive and receive the unconditional positive regard and the empathic understanding of the counsellor, now the earth? Bill Plotkin in *Soulcraft* describes the communication of the wild with a person.

Miguel was a Peruvian flute player participating in a soulcraft journey. Early each morning I would hear Miguel somewhere near camp, on a ridge or in a hollow, playing the most serene and delicious song to greet the dawn. For several days, it was more or less the same haunting tune. But later in the week, after we had moved camp, the tune changed ... I asked Miguel about the source of his melodies, suspecting they were traditional Incan songs. But he said he was playing *the songs of the canyon*. Each place has its own song, he said. He followed the canyon walls with his eyes and heart and played

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<sup>152</sup> This has been previously quoted in Chapter 6, p.205.

what he saw and felt there ... in the high country Miguel played the songs of the mountain ridges, letting his flute sing the notes flowing up and down the horizon like a musical score, inviting nature to offer itself to his imagination ... It is an interaction, a conversation between Miguel and the wild. (Plotkin, 2003, p.236)

And a child in Magic Spots:

*The ground was still, the clouds were moving and I felt like the trees were taking care of me. (Magic Spot, Feelings, p.3, 2007)*

My own experience:

*During a summer in a particularly hot period one day I suddenly realised that the guinea pigs had run out of water. Simply I filled their bowls and bottles put them in place and I watched them lapping up the water, queuing up for the bottle and pushing each other away to get at it. I was overwhelmed by this sense of gratitude, compassion, thankfulness and connection; their 'gratitude' and their joy when receiving this clean, clear water made me weep. I was humbled by the connection between us. I experience the same when giving water to all the animals, just recently to some ducklings: they rush to the new bowl of water and peck it, lift their heads up, waggle their necks and go in for another tiny droplet; the hens are the same. The horses and goats are different. The new bucket comes, they come with a smile and a grateful look, put their head in and with long slow sucking they drink the lot. They lick their lips as they look at you with thanks.*

*I have never really acknowledged to other people the intensity, the sense of significance this experience and these feelings have. It's an opposite wonder to seeing the stars in a clear still sky. This is just some water. We all need water. No water, no life. Essentially, the feeling is of one belonging to another one, belonging together; sensing the humility of being a part of the whole earth, but only a part; maybe an important part, but just a part. (Personal Journal, 2003)*

Another Magic Spot:

*I really liked magic spots. It is a really nice experience i liked hearing all the sounds and being connected to the earth, it has now become clear.*  
*(Magic Spots, Imagination and Connection, p.1)*

So much for our perceptions as clients, but can the earth-counsellor exhibit the core conditions? Can the earth community offer to humankind genuineness, realness, or congruence? Can land and air and water offer unconditional positive regard? Can other species offer empathy?

Now the analogy of counsellor and client is becoming strained and restricting. The concept of the earth as counsellor with humankind as client and that of the human counsellor with the planet as client is testing the definition of the *person*-centred approach. If this is therapy, it is reciprocal therapy. If this is not therapy, it is earth community healing; re-establishing connections between the human and the more-than-human in a mutual continuing dynamic relationship; a new way of being. The way of being which emerges in the person-centred approach is about integration rather than fragmentation, it is a way of being to replace ‘the downward reduction of wholes to their parts’ with an upward integration in which we understand parts by their function in the larger configuration’ (Berry, 2006, p.55). I suggest that this way of being characterises the way in which the more-than-human-world offers itself to human beings and also the way humankind can offer itself to the more-than-human-community. Both need to enter into each Other’s perceived world, strange and bizarre as it may be.

### **3. Availability and vulnerability**

Implicit in the six conditions we have been considering are two characteristics which are required for the therapeutic relationship to begin. The first is ‘availability’; both sides of the relationship need to be present for one another, intentionally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The second is ‘vulnerability’. It would be accepted that the ‘client’ is in a state of incongruence, both vulnerable and anxious. It may not be so widely held that the counsellor will also be vulnerable, but congruence and empathy with a vulnerable client, entering into their world and experiencing it without judgement, must presuppose that just as with availability, vulnerability will be reciprocal. Meaningful relationship with the natural world participates in this reciprocity.

The Northumbria Community is a Christian network of those who believe they are called to ‘risky living’, exploring a new monasticism, and embracing the ‘responsibility of taking the heretical imperative: by speaking out when necessary or asking awkward questions that will often upset the status quo; by making relationships the priority, and not reputation’ (Northumbria Community website).

In an introduction to their Rule of Life, Trevor Miller points out that monastic stability is based on accountability to the Rule of Life; it serves as a framework for freedom – not as a set of rules that restrict or deny life, but as a way of living out our vocation alone and together. He uses the words of St Benedict of the 6th century to describe the Rule: it is ‘simply a handbook to make the very radical demands of the gospel a practical reality in daily life’. The summary of their Rule of Life continues.

This is the rule we embrace. This is the Rule we will keep; we say Yes to **Availability**; we say Yes to **Vulnerability**.

We are called to be **AVAILABLE** to God and others:

Firstly to be available to God in the cell of our own heart when we can be turned towards Him and seek his face;

Then to be available to others in a call to exercise **hospitality**, recognising that in welcoming others we honour and welcome Christ himself;

Then to be available to others through participation in His care and concern for them, by praying and **interceding** for their situations in the power of the Holy Spirit;

Then to be available for participation in mission of various kinds according to the calling and initiatives of the Spirit.

We are called to intentional, deliberate **VULNERABILITY**:

We embrace the vulnerability of being **teachable** expressed in: a discipline of prayer; exposure to Scripture; a willingness to be accountable to others in ordering our ways and our heart in order to effect change.

This is a helpful way of characterising the reciprocal relationship between humans and the more-than-human natural world: availability and vulnerability. The Northumbria Community makes it plain that, ‘our Rule developed out of this life already being lived. In effect it was a written response to the many people who

were asking what is central to our hopes and dreams, and what are the values and emphases that reflected the character and ethos of our way for living'.<sup>153</sup> This is parallel to the way of being that we are exploring. It is not dictated by rules and directions, rather it emerges from an intentional and disciplined person/earth-centred approach. The way of living, or way of being, is relational, 'in my relationship with others I invent and discover the meanings by which I both grow and adjust to the world in which I find myself. Aside from this interacting, there is no "me"' (Fisher, 2002, p.65).

Fisher goes on to summarise his first descriptions of the process of interacting as 'contact'. The Northumbria Community would call it availability-in-relationship. 'Contact, then, denotes the activity of ex-change, transaction, meeting, fusion-across-difference, transmission, encounter, or engagement with the world – without which no life or experiencing would be possible' (ibid). Availability is essential for the reciprocal relationship between humans and the more-than-human natural world. Mearns and Cooper describe this 'contact'/'availability' as 'relational depth' (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p. xii and p.37; see also Chapter 6, p.207) in the context of effective, life-changing counselling and psychotherapy. In their introduction they quote Judith Jordan (whom they describe as 'the feminist psychotherapist').

[O]ne is both affecting the other and being affected by the other; one extends oneself out to the other and is also receptive to the impact of the other. There is openness to influence, emotional availability, and a constantly changing pattern of responding to and affecting the other's state. There is both receptivity and active initiative toward the other (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p.x).<sup>154</sup>

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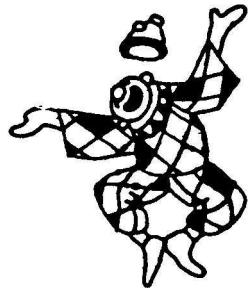
<sup>153</sup> See <http://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/the-rule-deeper>. Last accessed 1.8.10.

<sup>154</sup> Interestingly, when describing the concept of 'Rule', introducing availability and vulnerability, the Northumbria Community indicate that 'Esther de Vaal has pointed out that "regula" is a feminine noun which carried gentle connotations rather than the harsh negatives that we often associate with the phrase "rules and regulations" today'.

Both subjects in the relationship will enter into each Other's being with attitudinal qualities (the core conditions) that are demonstrably effective in releasing constructive and growthful changes in the personality or soul and behaviour of the individual or the natural world. Both client and counsellor are available to one another. Thus the Rogerian way of being underpins an earth/person /soul presence centred approach. 'The human is the model for understanding the universe, as the universe is the model for understanding the human. For certainly humans have nothing but what they received from the universe' (Berry, 2006, p.121). Fisher articulates my reason for exploring the extension of the Rogerian therapeutic conditions and the Way of Being which they characterise towards a therapy for the whole of the earth community. 'Livingstone's work essentially invites the development of a more concrete detailed understanding of the nature of this trauma and of the specific processes necessary for some genuine recovery' (Fisher, 2005, p.52). This is our experience in our work with children at the Ringsfield EcoCentre. Our desire is to be a part of the process of reconnection with the natural world. But this involves restoring the connections with self, others, the earth and the Other as our logo tries to summarise (Chapter 1, p.28). Ecology reveals itself to be about relational depth. This relational consciousness may enable us to 'listen for a new story' which is needed because our 'current story dictates that we ravage the planet like some global locust' (Evernden, in Fisher, 2005, p52). My contention is that a new story, where we recognise the more-than-human world as a community of friendly subjects rather than a collection of objects to be exploited, is most likely to appear if we, as plain members of the community of life, take seriously, intentionally and continuously the therapeutic Way of Being as a means of planetary healing – 'the dance of the

shaping earth echoing the dance of exchanged life in the cells of all things where life is exchanged, and new ways to love are found (Haughton, 1986, p.22).

They cut me down  
and I leapt up high;  
I am the life  
that'll never, never die;  
I'll live in you  
if you live in me:  
I am the Lord  
of the Dance, said he.<sup>155</sup>



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<sup>155</sup> Sydney Carter (1915-2009). The last verse of the hymn, *Lord of the Dance*, see footnote 147, p.341.

## Chapter 12 Last Words

### Restless Anticipations



Each child is situated in that very place and is rooted in that very power that brought forth all the matter and energy of the universe (Swimme, 1996, p.104).

The pinkish cluster in the middle of the Milky Way, is the spiral Andromeda Galaxy.

# Chapter 12

## Last Words

### Restless Anticipations

Finally, I do not present conclusions but anticipations. I, hesitatingly, define ‘restless anticipations’, as recalcitrant<sup>156</sup> negotiations towards ways of reconnection with self, others, the earth and God (see Chapter 1, p.28).

So what follows are restless and recalcitrant anticipations, spun by my hermeneutic spiral, concerning children’s responses to Magic Spots.

These restless anticipations are a contribution to the articulation of metaxic space in which to negotiate some meanings which have an “adequate fit” for a new way of being or becoming.

Before that, however, I suggest some areas of investigation and research which the thesis has contributed towards unearthing, unravelling and examining.

- ▣ An exploration of the interface between giving opportunities for metaxic space and the education system which seems to shut down those opportunities in favour of the system.
- ▣ An investigation into the backgrounds, culture and education of teachers and facilitators who talk and chat to one another while children are participating in Magic Spots, in order to explore ways to re-introduce them to metaxic space.
- ▣ To explore what a system of education based on empathy, compassion and justice would look like and how to replace systems based on targets and outputs, using the alternative consciousness demonstrated in this thesis which both serves to *criticise* in dismantling the dominant system, as well as to *energise* teachers and local communities to imagine, evoke, and form an alternative system.

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<sup>156</sup> See Chapter 8, p.288.

## **Restless and recalcitrant anticipations**

### **1. The Hermeneutic Spiral**

The ontological hermeneutic process has no conclusions. It includes restlessness, (Alexander, 1927, p.xiii), a creative evolution (Bergson, 1902), and a process of concrescence, (Whitehead, 1978).<sup>157</sup> We can use hermeneutic circles and dialectical hermeneutic spirals to clarify the process of negotiating and creating meaning. My preferred metaphor is the oscillating spiral (see DVD Tracks 2 and 3). My hermeneutic spiral is continually active, excited, oscillating and it seems to me that “the triggers” in our journeys, at least in part, cause the oscillations of the spiral as the “adjustments”, involving “concessions”, “negotiations” and “struggles”.

My anticipation is that if human beings (adults) can be active agents in searching for their own meaning, through a process of discovering a hermeneutic of relational consciousness, ‘recalcitrantly “negotiating” adjusting, ... altering even the most pervasive and imperative patterns of existence’ (Broughton, 1993, p.41), then so can children. Children can be nurtured, their spirits fostered if adults, together with the natural world and the more-than-human community, would enter into relationship with them, as ‘available’ and ‘vulnerable’ and enter into their world without judgement, understanding that they may be understood, not only as spirals but embryonic spirals in the process of concrescence, just as in the early formation of an embryo in the womb (see Chart 2).

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<sup>157</sup> See Chapter 8, p277. Important here is that according to Whitehead the becoming of an actual entity occurs through a concrescence of prehensions, or in my text ‘of horizons’. Identity is found through relationship.

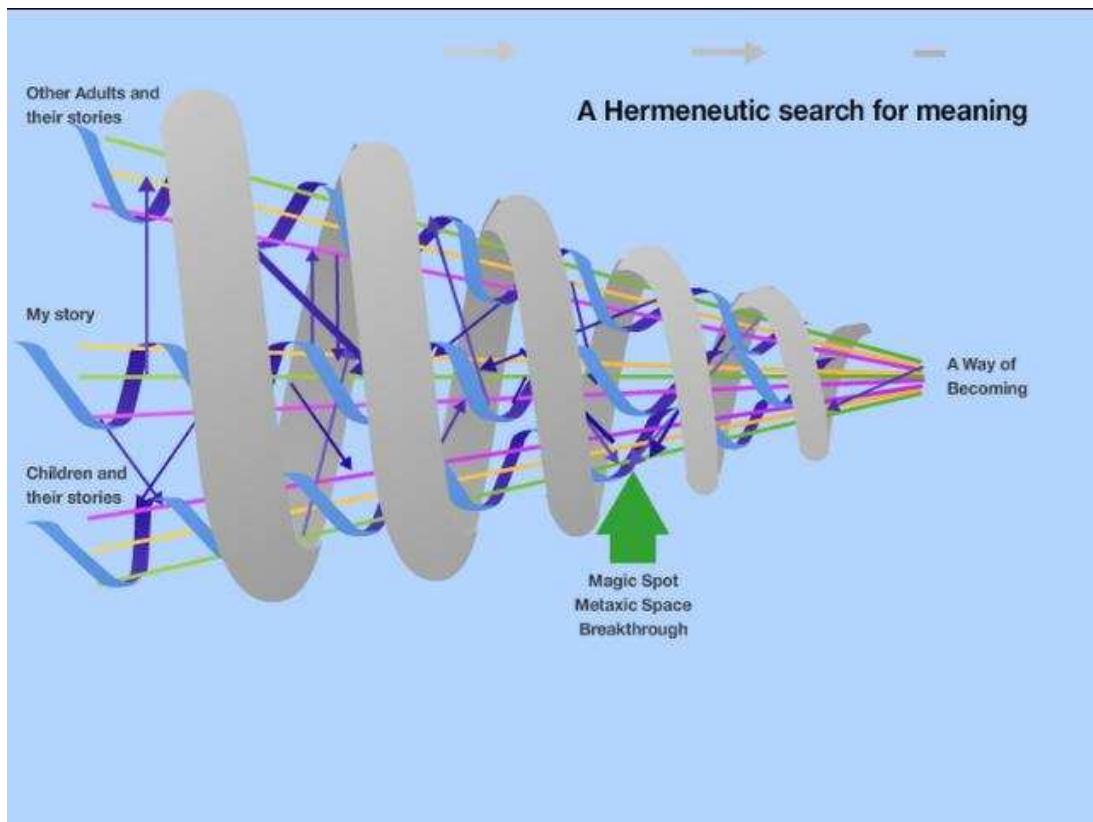


Figure 11: Spiral 6 Bringing all horizons together in metaxic space

Here the spiral turns recollecting horizons not only from my story, but from children and their stories, and from Other adults and their stories. The process produces meaning from the inside. The process, the opportunities and the space for the process are fragile and precious, but essential for the development of children in order that they participate in the awakening of a new era of greater identity with the natural world and its generative character.

The animated spiral is a way of representing the process of negotiating meaning. The many and different horizons are represented on the diagrams as converging lines inside the spiral. “What happens”, it may be asked, “when the lines finally converge?” While this is not the focus of the thesis which concentrates rather on the drilling movement and the oscillation of the spiral caused by the triggers of the

many horizons, weaving a negotiated meaning *at any one moment* along the sauntering of life (p.128, p.254 and p.288) or on the journey of spirituality (p.183 and p.283), nevertheless the question deserves some reflection.

I have represented the point of convergence of the lines, as the spiral weaves down to what one might imagine is nothingness, in two ways. On the diagrams I have labelled *Sauntering through life*, Fig. 1, p.128, Fig. 3, p.254 and Fig. 10, p.288, the point of the convergence is named as the *Way of Liminality and Threshold*; on those I have labelled *A Journey of Spirituality*, Fig. 7, p.183, Fig. 9, p.283, that point is named a *Way of Change and Resistance*. These points of convergence represent a congruence, that is, a way of becoming (Fig. 11, p.368) which clown-like, having let go of self enough to include Others, the Earth and God in the negotiation of meaning, is empowered to imagine new ways of being, resist the status quo, or the royal consciousness, and continually change. This point of convergence is the edge of meaning, a liminality. Nothing is absolute, or set forever in the royal consciousness. It is a threshold, a new way of being. The spiral spins in a downward motion It is the downward way towards nothingness. At this point of emptiness, new life begins. It is an expression of that fecund emptiness (Swimme, 1996, p.91) which exists in the nothingness of the cosmos where everything is spontaneously created. What looks like a reduction, from the open spiral welcoming many horizons to a drilled point of nothingness is, in fact, an enlargement, a growth, a journey to infinite meaning. At the point of convergence, the spiral opens out into infinity.

## 2. The Tragic Context

All is not well. The planetary context in which children sit in their Magic Spots is ecological crisis. The way of being promulgated by generations of reductionist dualism and recent globalised consumerism has contributed to that crisis. So how

are we to teach to our children a new way of becoming, which turns the tragic violence, which pervades the earth, into *shalom*<sup>158</sup>? In an education system which, along with the culture that spawned it, is in denial about the destructive power of the social structures it upholds, there appears to be very little space to allow the recipients of the system to ponder existential questions.

My anticipation is that giving opportunity for children to slip into metaxic space may provide a new way of being outside the Cartesian dualism which is now marked by the ‘catastrophe of economic and ecological exploitation’ (Soelle, 2001, p.89). For it would seem to me that to join the self-creating universe by ‘making my own soul’ and so contribute to the ‘vast becoming of the world’ (de Chardin, 1972, p.61); to launch a prayer so as to disturb God’s composure (Thomas, 2002, p.61); to live as but one of the passengers on planet earth (Van Matre, 1990, p.vii), to journey ‘holding firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know it might conceivably be false’ (Kierkegaard, 2004, p.12), or to saunter prophetically on the ‘raw edges’, ‘relinquishing the royal consciousness’ (Bruegemann, 2001, p.21) requires a journey which strengthens the ‘weak infantile ego which we have spent our lives trying to disown in our struggle to feel adult’ (Guntrip, 1961, p.427) and enables it to flourish. I suspect that those who embrace the uncertainties of interconnectedness and liminality are those whose inner child is at least recognized and nurtured. These are the people who give birth and life to eco-justice.

### **3. and, the in-Between**

I have described what we are doing with Magic Spots as: stretching metaxic space enough to give children a chance to re-engage in relational consciousness without

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<sup>158</sup> See footnote 90 regarding *shalom* in Chapter 6, p.204.

fear or boredom. Exploring silence and aloneness facilitates a form of spiral learning and so provides opportunities to engage in a way of becoming which enables future explorations of new ways of being which will befriend the more than human community and not destroy it.

When I talked to Rory<sup>159</sup> about his spiral of learning (see Chapter 4, p.130f) it was some time before we realised that we were talking at cross purposes. This was why. In my scenario the spiral represents the journey of life (see Figure 3, Chapter 4, p.128 and Figure 8, Chapter 7, p254), but for Rory he *is* a spiral, ‘working very hard going deeper and deeper’ (Figure 4, Chapter 4, p.130). He was fascinated with my way of thinking about it, but found it difficult to understand how my spiral facilitated getting to know more. In the end we agreed (and Harry too) that both ways of thinking had their merits and were helpful, but Rory decided that his was more helpful to him. ‘You see,’ he said, ‘I keep going down like drilling deeper and deeper and it gets darker and darker, until eventually I see the light’. As for me, I, too, have decided that my way of representing learning or interpretation is more help for me. As I travel along the spiral oscillating, side to side, up and down, from now to past and back again I find meaning that fits adequately. Or, as Rory would say: I see the light.

My anticipation is that a way of being with children which respects, celebrates and fosters their capacity to develop their own interpretation and exploration of meaning is a safe haven which is necessary for the development of all children of humans and the more-than-human-community.

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<sup>159</sup> This took place at Rory’s school in the presence of his head teacher, Julie Winstanley. Rory’s friend Harry was with us and we spent a good half an hour exploring what they felt about the process of learning. The conversation was not recorded, but Julie took notes.

#### **4. Break-through**

At our Centre we are involved with transitive learning, creating ‘spaces of liberty where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future instead of waiting for it’ (Boal, 2002, p.5). We see the need to model a new way of being outside Cartesian dualism and disquieted globalisation. It is a way of being which discards Descartes’ vision of the material world as a great machine, asserting a fundamental distinction between matter and mind.

In essence, Descartes declared that the material world we see and sense around us was devoid of soul, and that it was nothing more than a dead, unfeeling machine which we could master and control through the exercise of our rational intellect (Harding, 2006, p.27).

This post-Cartesian a way of being also rejects the postmodern fear of certainty, while at the same time accepts a new meta narrative of the interconnection of all things in the web of life (see Chapter 4, p.137ff).

My anticipation is that further research is needed to include an exploration as to how a transitive, ‘holistic way of being which bears witness to our deep connection to the intelligence of the cosmos’ (Harding, 2006, p.28) and accepts the ‘need to make peace with nature by rediscovering and embodying a world-view that reconnects us with a deep sense of participating in a cosmos suffused with intelligence, beauty, intrinsic value and profound meaning’ (ibid, p.19) can be an ordinary part of education. I suggest the concept of ‘break-through’ as a means of communicating the interconnection of all things, but far more seriously and joyously the interchange, or better, the generous exchange of life and love from all things to all things.

## 5. Experiencing the Other

Children need to experience an environment in which to flourish, a safe place where adults are assuming not *guilt*, but *a cause, a reason*, for any disruptive behaviour or any pain, or fear, or confusion. Children need empathic adults who will make themselves vulnerable and available, work with them as if they are peers and, who will try to see them from within their hearts.

Levinas defines ethics as the calling into question of the self through its infinite obligation to the other and by that Other's absolute alterity. In other words, whatever I think I understand, there remains something beyond my ability to know, to sense, to imagine, something that will surprise me and which comes from outside myself. It is my ethical obligation to remain vigilant, ready to receive that *something* and put myself at its service (Salverson, in Cohan-Cruz, 2006, p.147).

My anticipation here is that while I have rejected philosophically the notion of absolute alterity (*Parenthesis 3*, p.189f), I recommend a dose of the same in order to counter the dominant culture of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) of the Self and the Other. Then those working with children may begin to sense the 'Other' within themselves and eventually, without fear, experience the creative excitement of the Other in children.

## 6. Trauma as a part of Life

I have suggested that ecology reveals itself to be about relational depth (Chapter 11, p.364). The whole ethos of our Centre is to be 'a way of being' which nurtures a paradigm shift for the people who come. But this involves restoring the connections with self, Others, the earth and *the Other* as our logo tries to summarise. Both humans and the more-than-human community experience trauma. Even when it is deemed that any part of the earth community has not experienced trauma 'within' then there remains the influence of the trauma of the divorce, the alienation, of the human from the more-than-human communities.

My anticipation here is that if we seek, in our relationship with children, a way of becoming which understands a person to be not only a self, not only a self-in-relation-with-others, nor a self-in-relation-with-others-and-society, or even a self-in-relation-with-others-society-and-the earth but rather a *self-in-relation-with-others-society-the earth-and-the Other (God)* then we will make a contribution towards telling the new story of the cosmos and celebrating the dance of the earth.

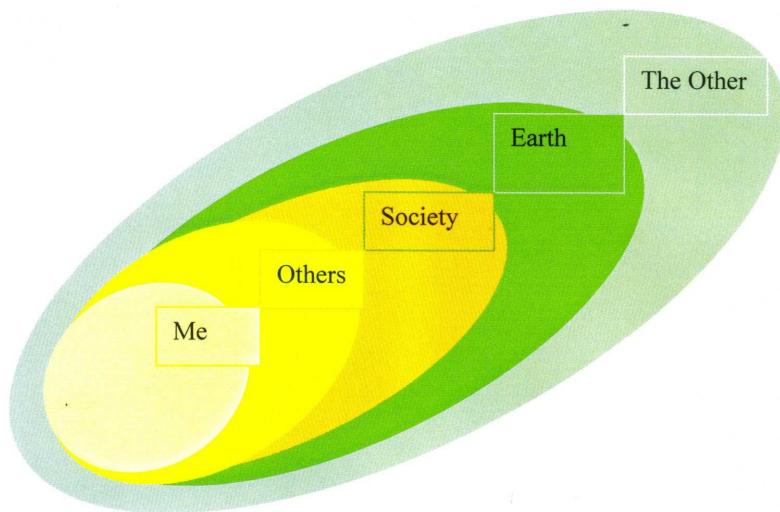


Figure 12: The Self-in-relation-with-Others-society-earth-in-the-Other (God)

Restlessness is a form of turbulence. Recalcitrant describes persistently and stubbornly resisting the royal consciousness. Anticipations are eager hopes. I offer these restless, recalcitrant anticipations as part of a Way of Becoming for the sake of my grandchildren.

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## Appendix 1: Ethics Committee

### **Submission to the Research Ethics Committee School of Education and Professional Development University of East Anglia**

1. Introduction – The research
2. Ethical Issues and interviews with children
3. Proposed Plans and Procedures
4. Conclusion - Balance
  
5. Appendices: Letter to Schools  
Letter to parents  
Information

Christopher Walton

Registered for Ph.D with the School of Education and Professional Development  
as a Part-time Student

Course Code: X300R2 Registration Date: 01/01/02

Supervisor: Dr. Judith Moore

February 2003

Revised May 2003

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 The focus of the research**

The area of my research, the relationship between environmental education (Earth Education) and the development of spirituality and social and emotional learning in children and young people has developed some focus. 'Magic Spots' is the name given to times of solitude in special chosen places within the three-day residential Earth Education programme, Earthkeepers™ (from the Institute for Earth Education). The Programme teaches, through outdoor adventures and activities, basic ecological concepts, gives experience of the natural world and encourages an eco-friendly lifestyle. Times of solitude are understood to be an essential part of the programme.

My research is focusing on investigating the nature of the contribution made by solitude in the natural world and the skills of reflection encouraged by it to the formation of ecological literacy.

Some of my data will be collected from conversations with environmental educators and children who participate in the Earthkeepers™ Programme.

### **1.2 Submission to the Research Ethics Committee**

The decision to submit this plan for research to the EDU Research Ethics Committee for consideration was not made about the subject matter of the proposed interviews but rather because of the possible personal disclosures, which might be made.

All the children will have taken part in an environmental programme called Earthkeepers™ at the Eco-Study Centre where I work.

The subject of the conversations with the children will be about their experience of the natural world and in particular their reflections concerning the experience of solitude and how it affects their perceptions, thinking and behaviour. I will talk only to those children who expressed enjoyment of the experience. My purpose is not to investigate the extent to which this experience contributes to environmental education but rather when solitude is a positive experience what is the nature of that experience.

I wish to see each child at least twice in the year of their Earthkeepers™ programme and, when possible, follow them through for up to three years, even if this means they will have changed from primary to secondary school.

I expect to talk to between 25 and 50 children per year, following up to 10-20 children through a three-year period.

## **2. Ethical Issues and interviews with children**

### **2.1 The vulnerability of all children**

A. Note 1.1(a) in "*Some issues to consider in 'doing' and 'writing up' a thesis*" p.21 lists vulnerable people who may have difficulty giving informed consent. In terms of my research the following factors need to be taken into account:

(a) None of the children talked with will be less than 9 years old, and the subject of the research is not the focus of their vulnerability, for instance their abuse, or the fact that they are recently bereaved.

- (b) The subject of the conversations will be their experience of the Earthkeepers™ Programme and the natural world.
- (c) The children will be familiar with me from a preliminary visit to school and their residential programme at the centre before the first interview.
- (d) The children's parents and school will also be asked for their consent. (See Appendix 1 and 2)

All children are vulnerable and in the information given to them before deciding to participate the style and place of the conversations will be clearly described. While conversation will be between the child and myself only, it will be informal, the subject will be the Earthkeepers Programme and particularly 'Magic Spots', and it will take place in a room, for example the Centre's common room or a school's library while others are present. In other words the conversations will take place in a place apart, but visible ensuring both the safety of the children and the protection of their confidentiality. [see 3.1(3)]

## **2.2 Issues arising from possible personal disclosure**

Note 1.1(c) in "*Some issues to consider in 'doing' and 'writing up' a thesis*" refers to work with children where they are asked to reveal intimate personal information.

While the children will not be asked to reveal information about family relationships, or sexual behaviour or drugs etc. it is of course possible that they might offer such information. This is especially possible, as part of the aims of the earth education programme in which the children participate is to encourage reflection and to facilitate reflective learning. THIS IS THE ONLY REASON A SUBMISSION TO THE ETHICS COMMITTEE IS BEING MADE.

It is in this circumstance of unsolicited disclosure where clear procedures need to be followed. [See 3.2 below]

## **2.3 Safety, confidentiality, respect and fairness**

As a worker in a residential educational centre I have enhanced CRB clearance.

All material from the conversations will be kept confidential (however see 3.3) The tapes and transcripts of the interviews will eventually all be destroyed, that is 6 months after the successful completion of the PhD.

All reference to material from the conversations will be made anonymous.

All participants, parents and teachers will be clearly informed about the Complaints Procedure.

(see Appendix 3)

# **3 Proposed Plans and Procedures**

## **3.1 The Interviews**

1. All children spoken to will have a pre-existing relationship with me through the pre-school journey visit to the school normally made by my colleague and I, and through their participation in the residential Earthkeepers™ Programme.
2. All conversations will be either at the Eco-Study Centre where I work or the child's school.
3. Conversations will take place in a confidential setting in a quiet space where others may be present, apart, but visible. At the child's school this might be the school library, at the centre this might be in the guests' common room. This makes the

conversations personal, but informal safe and protects each child's confidentiality. Each interview will last no longer than 10-15 minutes.

4. Parents and teachers will be sent information about what will be involved in taking part in the research. They will be asked to consent to child's participation in the conversations. Otherwise, they can withdraw from the research at any time in the future with no reasons needed to be given. Children will be asked if they wish to take part in the research and given the information about the conversations informally and verbally during the Earthkeepers™ Programme. (See Appendices 1- 3)
5. All children, parents and teachers will be notified of how they may make a complaint against me, if they feel that at any time I am behaving unethically.
6. The aim during all the conversations will be that the research participants should suffer no harm, will be treated with respect and with total fairness.

### **3.2 Procedures in the case of possible personal disclosure**

These procedures are suggested with reference to the **Children Act 1989** and follow best practise guidance as detailed in "**Working Together to Safeguard Children – a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children**" (1999)

This possible circumstance would be discussed with the school before the interviews were set up and a procedure agreed. It might be as follows:

If a child begins to make personal disclosures –

- while the conversation would not be stopped, the original purpose of the interview would have come to an end. Thus the disclosure would be heard, but then -
- the child would be carefully and gently told that if they continued with these disclosures then I might be obligated to tell the Head Teacher (or the teacher designated by the school – in Primary Schools is usually the Head teacher).
- the child would be given the Child Line telephone number and information about local children's counselling services together with the name of someone to contact -

or alternatively the child would be referred to their teacher in order that the schools own procedures could be followed.

### **3.3 Confidentiality**

The conversations will take place in a confidential setting [see 3.1(3)].

The conversations will be recorded, transcribed and analysed. The transcripts and the recordings will be kept in a secure place in a locked cabinet. They will be destroyed 6 months after the successful completion of the PhD.

All material used from the transcripts will be made anonymous.

### **3.4 Complaints procedure**

All Teachers and Parents and children will be made aware of the Complaints Procedure if at any time they feel I have behaved unethically.

If at any time some one considers that I have acted unethically they can initiate a complaints procedure to:

The Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the School of Education and Professional development, UEA (Tel 01603 456161) or  
The Head Teacher of their school

#### **4. Conclusion**

While due attention must be paid to the safety, security and well-being of the children the interviews focus on what for most of the children is an enjoyable experience, full of excitement, wonder, mystery and joy. I will only follow up those children for whom the solitude experience was a good one. I feel I wish to get the correct balance between making proper provision for circumstances where protection is needed and not being so serious and foreboding in the preparation for the conversations that the cutting edge of the research is lost.

## Appendix 2: Initial Request for co-researchers

First letter requesting Co-researchers from environmental education

Ringsfield EcoCentre  
Beccles  
NR34 8JR

January 2004

As you may know I am engaged in research for a PhD degree at the School of Education at the University of East Anglia. This is a part-time degree started in January 2000. Last year (2005) was a year's sabbatical from the research (allowed by the rules!). I am now starting a further four years before being required to submit my work in 2009.

The original subject of research was an exploration of the relationship between environmental education and spirituality. Now, however the focus has both narrowed and widened! I am exploring the origins of the driving forces behind a desire to care for the earth. One entry in my research journal reads:

*I am fighting to find the cause of passion for justice, and truth, equality and peace. Is it faith commitment? Apparently not, or rather sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't. Is it freedom from religious illusion? Apparently not, or rather, sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't. So what is it which powers an eco-justice mindset?*

My own beliefs as a Christian and a teacher of Christian theology will obviously play a part in my exploration but my understanding of spirituality is certainly not about allegiance to a particular religious faith, though of course it may include and be influenced by such commitment.

Original data will come from two main sources:

i) my own life and ministry experience, and ii) interviews.

I have been interviewing children from the various schools which participate in our earth education programmes; I am now beginning a programme of interviewing environmental educators.

I may wish to ask you for an interview which in turn may be followed up with a second interview within a couple of years. The interviews will take the form of an informal discussion where we spend, say an hour (possibly more) exploring together experiences, journeys, and issues in a very open ended way. The interviews will be recorded. The transcripts and the recordings will form the 'evidence' of the data.

My supervisor has suggested that I first write to potential co-researchers and ask for a few brief written reflections. So I am writing now to ask if you would be willing to become a co-researcher in this research project. You may wish to indicate your willingness by writing some responses to my 'Request for written responses' and signing the 'Participation Agreement'.

As you see above there is no tight time deadline for this, however a reply within the next six months would be helpful. Please accept my thanks in anticipation of your willingness to join me in my research.

Yours very sincerely,

First letter of request for co-researchers of faith

Ringsfield EcoCentre  
Ringsfield Hall  
Beccles  
NR34 8JR

January 2006

Dear

As you may know I am engaged in research for a PhD degree at the School of Education at the University of East Anglia. This is a part-time degree started in January 2000. Last year (2005) was a year's sabbatical from the research (allowed by the rules!). I am now starting a further four years before being required to submit my work in 2009.

The original subject of research was an exploration of the relationship between environmental education and spirituality. Now, however the focus has both narrowed and widened! I am exploring the origins of the driving forces behind a desire to care for the earth. One entry in my research journal reads:

*I am fighting to find the cause of passion for justice, and truth, equality and peace. Is it faith commitment? Apparently not, or rather sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't. Is it freedom from religious illusion? Apparently not, or rather, sometimes it is some times it isn't. So what is it which powers an eco-justice mindset?*

Original data will come from three main sources:

i) my own life and ministry experience, and ii) interviews, iii) children's responses to solitude

I have been gathering data from children from the various schools which participate in our earth education programmes since 2000. I am interviewing environmental educators. Now I am beginning a programme of interviewing people of faith.

I may wish to ask you for an interview which in turn may be followed up with a second interview within a couple of years. The interviews will take the form of an informal discussion where we spend, say an hour (possibly more) exploring together experiences, journeys, and issues in a very open ended way. The interviews will be recorded. The transcripts and the recordings will form the 'evidence' of the data.

My supervisor has suggested that I first write to potential co-researchers and ask for a few brief written reflections. So I am writing now to ask if you would be willing to become a co-researcher in this research project. You may wish to indicate your willingness by writing some responses to my 'Request for written responses' and signing the 'Participation Agreement'.

As you see above there is no tight time deadline for this, however a reply within the next six months would be helpful. Please accept my thanks in anticipation of your willingness to join me in my research.

Yours very sincerely,

C. Walton  
PhD Research  
Request for written response/f-b/Jan 2006

### **A request for written responses**

I would be grateful if you would write briefly in response to any or all of the following. Please send them to me by e-mail or by post (see below).

Are there any particular experiences or moments which have led you to your work in environmental education?

How would you describe your understanding of the interaction of your faith and caring for the natural world?

Indicate any particular/significant experience of yours in the natural world?  
Describe any special moments?

What is your affiliation or allegiance to a church or a particular faith?

What does 'spirituality' mean to you?

Do you have any reflections about the connection between attitudes about ecological/justice/ peace issues and experience of the natural world?

*C. Walton*  
PhD Research  
Participation Agreement for Co-researchers  
Jan 2006

## **Participation Agreement for co-researchers**

**Research project: An exploration of the relationship between Environmental Education and spiritual intelligence and the origins of the driving forces behind a desire to care for the earth.**

I agree to participate in the research project as described in the attached letter. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and am participating voluntarily.

I grant permission for the data from my own writing or from interviews to be used in the process of completing a PhD degree, including a dissertation and any other publication. I understand that my name and other demographic information which might identify me will not be used. I also grant permission for the interviews to be recorded.

I agree to respond initially with some written material and to an initial interview (if required), and to be available for an additional interviews at mutually agreed times and places.

### **Co-researcher**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Researcher**      **CHRIS WALTON**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Permissions

C. Walton  
PhD Research  
June 2010

Title of Thesis:

*...and...*

between I *and* Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

### **Permission to use material from written and interview material**

#### **Co-researcher**

Name LAURA ELISABETH DEACON

I give permission for the material from my written and/or interview to be included in the above thesis as on pages

Signature Laura E. Deacon

Date 22/06/10

#### **Primary Researcher CHRIS WALTON**

Signature Christopher Walton

Date 28/6/10

Title of Thesis:

*...and...*

between I *and* Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

**Permission to use material from written and interview material**

**Co-researcher**

Name Jo RATHBONE

I give permission for the material from my written and/or interview to be included in the above thesis as on pages

Signature Jo Rathbone

Date 30 June '10

**Primary Researcher CHRIS WALTON**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Thesis:

*...and...*

between I *and* Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

**Permission to use material from written and interview material**

**Co-researcher**

Name John R. Davis

I give permission for the material from my written and/or interview to be included in the above thesis as on pages \* \*

Signature J.R. Davis

Date 1/7/10

**Primary Researcher CHRIS WALTON**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\* NB (1) "I guess he is around 70" needs amending. You could have asked! I was 70 on Aug. 17th 2004.

(2) The ~~xx~~ pages (will eventually) ~~will~~ need numbering.

(3) There is no address on the covering letter & you may need to chase up non-respondents who have mislaid, lost or just did not know it in the first place.

Title of Thesis:

*...and...*

between I *and* Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

**Permission to use material from written and interview material**

**Co-researcher**

Name PAUL BODENHAM

I give permission for the material from my written and/or interview to be included in the above thesis as on pages

Signature 

Date 26 June 2010

**Primary Researcher CHRIS WALTON**

Signature 

Date 1/7/10

Title of Thesis:

*...and...*

between I *and* Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

**Permission to use material from written and interview material**

**Co-researcher**

Name Ruth Jarman

I give permission for the material from my written and/or interview to be included in the above thesis as on pages

Signature Ruth

Date 22/6/10

**Primary Researcher CHRIS WALTON**

Signature Christine Walton

Date 26/6/10

Title of Thesis:

*...and...*

between I *and* Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

**Permission to use material from written and interview material**

**Co-researcher**

Name MARK JEFFERYS

I give permission for the material from my written and/or interview to be included in the above thesis as on pages 197-200.

Signature M.W. Jefferys

Date 30/11/2010

**Primary Researcher CHRIS WALTON**

Signature Christopher Walton

Date 1/12/10

Title of Thesis:

*...and...*

between I *and* Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

**Permission to use photographs**

**School**

Name: Lydia Hope

I give permission for the photographs overleaf to be included in the above thesis

Signature Lydia Hope

Position mother

Date 1st August 2010

**Primary Researcher CHRIS WALTON**

Signature Christopher Walton

Date 1/8/2010

## Appendix 4: Permissions (photographs)

Title of Thesis:

*...and...*

between I *and* Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

### Permission to use photographs

**School**

Name: Yerbury Primary School

Yerbury Primary School  
Foxham Road London N19 4RR  
Tel 0207 272 6580  
Fax 0207 281 3482  
Email [admin@yerbury.islington.sch.uk](mailto:admin@yerbury.islington.sch.uk)  
[www.yerbury.islington.sch.uk](http://www.yerbury.islington.sch.uk)

I give permission for the photographs overleaf to be included in the above thesis

Signature May C

Position Head Teacher

Date 5/7/10

**Primary Researcher CHRIS WALTON**

Signature Christopher Walton

Date 10/7/10

Title of Thesis:

*...and...*

between I *and* Thou: stretching metaxic space for children  
as seen from the perspective of my own spiritual journey

**Permission to use photographs**

**School**

Name PAKEMAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

I give permission for the photographs overleaf to be included in the above thesis

Signature Z Gawn

Position Headteacher

Date 18/11/10

**Primary Researcher** CHRIS WALTON

Signature Christopher Walton

Date 20/4/10

## Appendix 4: Stories

### First Words, p.20: Dr Kent and Parenthesis

*Dr John Kent was one of my lecturers when I was studying Theology at University in Bristol (1966-1969). He was lecturer in 19th- and 20th-century theology. He was also, looking back, the caricature of a university professor – sports jacket, worn-out leather pads on the elbows, baggy trousers, not straight spotty bow tie, not that old but balding; apparently absent minded; and brilliant at his subject. That is to say, he held us enthralled. His lectures were exactly an hour; he would start with a very short introduction, and then begin a sentence, which would suddenly stop. There would be a fifty-minute parenthesis. Then, just before the end of the hour, he would return without comment and finish the sentence, and that was the end of the lecture. What could have been the lecture we could find elsewhere, the parenthesis we would not find anywhere else. It was a man's reflections, new perspectives, ways of understanding, and views of looking at things, life and people.*

*(Walton, 2006, personal journal)*

### First Words: Water and the animals, p.21

*I experienced the 'corner of the field' feeling when giving water to all the animals, just recently. First, some ducklings, they rush to the new bowl of water and, peck it lift their heads up waggle their necks and go in for another tiny droplet, the hens are the same. The horses and goats are different. The new bucket comes, they come with a smile and a grateful look put their head in and with long slow sucking they drink the lot. They lick their lips as they look at you with thanks.*

*I have never really acknowledged to other people the intensity, the sense of significance this experience and these feelings are. It's an opposite wonder to seeing the stars in a clear still sky. Just some water. We all need water. No water, no life. It is essentially the feeling of one belonging to another one, belonging*

*together; sensing the humility of being a part of the whole earth, but only a part; an important part, but just a part.*  
*(Walton, 2007, Personal Journal).*

### **First Words: A Bricolage, p.23, footnote 12**

*John Kent was the tutor who introduced me to Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Bultmann, Tillich, Heidegger and other 19th- and 20th-century theologians and philosophers. There was never any apparently planned attempt to discover what might be the result of releasing all this angst, seeking, questioning, and uncertainty on fresh, young faith, minds and bodies. On reflection, maybe that is what Kent's parentheses were all about – an ongoing attempt to reframe the cynicism and the struggles of us these thinkers in a way to make them not only relevant and accessible but to enable us (those young wishful doers) to identify that we were struggling (or may needed to be) in the same way.*

*Kierkegaard took me by storm (I have had to question since my then understanding). 'True objectivity is subjectivity' I used to continually say, so much so that I believed it to be a direct quote. It has taken me years to identify that this was the point when I decided that meaning is relational. It is the **how**, not the **what**, of the 'Who am I?' question which drives me on. This existentialist subjectivity is not inward looking but rather an inwardness that is founded on its relations with that which also exists in the world as it is. After my first acquaintance with Wittgenstein, at the age of nineteen, I had come to the conclusion that it was impossible for human beings to communicate with any accuracy – ever – and that the resultant human mess-ups were due to this fact. Surprisingly, it was a morose Kierkegaard who saved me from complete isolation. However, my discovery of Kierkegaard's notion of subjective truth – referring not to the truth criteria of a particular belief or meaning, but to the way that an individual relates – has set me apart from many of my evangelical Christian friends for whom certainty and proof are the key criteria for genuine Christian belief. Forty-five years later, my resonating journey with the existentialists, but with Kierkegaard rather than Sartre, led me to*

cheer when I read the following footnote from an eco-psychologist:

As a popular movement in mid-twentieth-century Europe, existentialism became associated with the idea that existence precedes essence, that is, that our nature is purely what we choose it to be through our free actions. I oppose that idea, so do not want the term *existentialism* to be limited to it. I am using the term more broadly, to indicate an emphasis both on the primacy of experience and on a confrontation with the ultimate concerns in life ... My specific goal is to develop a kind of 'ecological existentialism' wherein the ultimate concerns of life are worked out in the context of our membership with the community of all life (Fisher, 2002, p.213).

#### **Parenthesis 1: Mother Theresa from p.96**

*In 1981 I met Mother Teresa, along with four thousand other people! I was in Detroit visiting an inner city Christian community, not unlike my church in Birmingham. Mother Teresa was coming to town so we went to see her. We were in the last seats available in the cathedral, high up in the second or third gallery. There were hundreds outside. The noise was overwhelming; not people who are used to church here, I thought! Suddenly a fanfare of trumpets and the long procession of worthies began. They were all clothed in their habits and hats and finery with crosses and staffs and crowns. The procession went on for a very long time and finally, following on right at the end, a little bent-over woman hobbled to keep up. When she got to her place and sat down her feet didn't reach the floor.*

*The service took its course, big hymns, big organ, long readings and prayers throughout all of which the noise we began with continued. At last it was time. Mother Teresa was helped down from her chair; she stood in front of a microphone which seemed to be about a foot too high for her; while some dignitary came to lower it the audience noise was reducing. So there she was, this tiny bent-over figure before this vast audience who quietened down into silence. When she started speaking the silence became deeper, much deeper. Mother Teresa was suffering from a cold so the voice was softer than usual. When the silence became absolute, it got even quieter. She welcomed us; she appreciated the trouble we had taken to come. I was on the edge of my seat to hear something significant, this was Mother Teresa and I was here. Then, almost before you could start to hear, it was over. She told us that if we wished to live in this disturbed*

*world in truth, with effect and with dignity then we should, ‘Love God, and love our neighbour.’ Then she went and climbed up on to her chair (and her legs still didn’t reach the floor).*

*I was stunned – is that all, I thought (to my shame ever since). As I ‘woke up’ from my shock or disappointment I realised that the silence was still as perfect. I looked up and saw what I had not been able to see when she was standing, Mother Teresa’s eyes. Even from the huge distance of the length of Detroit Cathedral they shone out with a speech that seemed to engulf us all. The still silence remained for 35 minutes. I saw no movement, I heard no movement; it was simply silent. I have often wondered about all the children and babies who were there, why did they not stir, how could they keep so still so long? And what about all those outside? After 35 minutes the silence dissolved. The trumpets started again, the procession went out. But all of us who were there in the in-between didn’t need the trumpets; we just went home, now changed. (Walton, personal journal, 1981)*

#### ***Parenthesis 1: The plot buying story, from p.108***

*In the middle of my ministry in Birmingham we were in the process of acquiring a number of plots of land around the church building in order to build an extension. In 1979 a new building was opened on the old site of a cinema. The building was the result of the ministry of the church and consisted of 52 flats for the elderly, managed by a Housing Association, together with a Day Centre for the elderly and the rooms and worship space for the church. At the time it was an innovative project funded by the demolition of the old church building and the selling of the land for more social housing. Now in order to continue with the regeneration of the neighbourhood we needed to assemble about five small plots of land. The risk was that we might buy one or two and not be able to negotiate the sale of the others. By the time of the following incident we had bought, with awkward negotiation, a plot from the electricity board, a further plot with derelict garages on it from the council and were in the middle of negotiation on a third plot owned by a landlord who let a small workshop on the land to a self-employed carpenter.*

*The meeting consisted of members of the church and me, their minister, officials from the West Midland Baptist Association, the Deed holders of the church buildings and the body who provided legal and other advice to the church. Among the officials there was the Association’s property adviser. The issue before the meeting was compensation for the carpenter. The property adviser informed us that the minimum compensation we could pay would be seven times the rateable value of the workshop. But he went on to say that he had done some investigations and discovered, much to his delight, that the rateable value had not been reviewed since*

1920 and so we would only have to pay £70! A big smile went round the table and the chairman said, 'So, no more discussion needed, all those in favour?'

*I leapt up in an instant rage. Red in the face, I asked them who they thought they were, what were their beliefs and why were they being such hypocrites? I read them passages from the prophets, Amos and Jeremiah and the rest, and a few words from Jesus too. I ranted and raved. Finally I proposed that we should do nothing now, but investigate what in fact the rateable value would be now if it had been reviewed, times that by 7 then decide how much more we should pay the carpenter and that we should commit ourselves to helping him find new and suitable premises. There was silence. The meeting was closed by the chairman who, as he went, suggested that we should all calm down and we would discuss the matter at the next meeting.*

*But there is more! That evening back at the Manse with the family there was a loud commotion on the street outside. I rushed out, to find the carpenter, brick in hand, leaning on the front wall weeping and shouting to me about the church and its evil ways seeking to ruin him. Eventually he told me what had happened.*

*The property adviser had obviously gone straight from the closed-down meeting to visit the workshop. He told the carpenter that the meeting had decided to give him the compensation due to him; he had explained the facts and told him that it was £70 and he could do nothing about it. It was time for my rage again. We sorted it after a long hard battle of egos, of losing friends and making a couple of enemies, of persuading good Christians what we should be doing. The carpenter did have considerable thousands in compensation; we helped find him new premises not too far away and helped set him up to continue his business. And I used the story in my sermons for years!*

*Just a little footnote:*

*The following year was the year when Clare Short for the first time entered parliament. During the election we held a neighbourhood/Ladywood, Birmingham constituency meeting with all the candidates. I don't remember the others but there was Clare for Labour and, yes, the above property adviser for the Conservatives. I am glad to say he made mincemeat of himself and Clare didn't have to do much, but she did make the most of his call to the members of the meeting to buy British, particularly cars (very relevant at the time in Birmingham). Someone in the audience called out, 'So, what car have you got?' He was told a Rolls Royce. (This was true, too.) 'No, what car are you driving today? Without a hair turning our property developer calmly told us that it was a BMW. The jeers went up, as they did when he heckled Clare Short with 'Charity begins at home' when she was speaking about aid to developing countries. That meeting ended in uproar too.*

## **Parenthesis 2: Autobiographical spiritual journey, from p.158**

*The journey started when I was very young. I went to Sunday School as a toddler. The struggle of the journey started young too. It was a lovely day I remember and I didn't want to go with my brother and sister (guess I was about six or seven) strangely as I always wanted to be and do what they did. Anyway I was dragged by my sister crying all the way to the church. Kind motherly sorts took over from Anne once we got there, but it took them some time to get me from winding myself round one of the pillars of the covered way into the Sunday School room. There I continued to cry while I was allowed not to take part but to play in the sandpit. This I did for weeks. I have been told that the adults used to joke that it probably meant that I was going to be a minister! The learning of the Bible was paramount. I knew the Bible stories, for years and years we used to take the Scripture Exams every year. We learnt passages of the Old and New Testaments, we would attend the evening examinations (just like O- levels for 7-14s) answering demanding questions about the passages under scrutiny. We got our marks, certificates and awards.*

*When I was thirteen I decided that I would not go to church any more. My parents wanted to know why but there was no question about opposing my decision. For two years I stayed at home on Sundays, sometimes going but glad afterwards that I decided not to go. It all seemed like so many words. I continued going to the church youth club and to scouts and to any events that did not mean church.*

*This was a time when I used to wonder about the universe and how it could have been created and who I was and what I was for and what it all meant. By the time I was fifteen I was back and made a confession of faith in Jesus Christ. So started my struggle of faith, and the beginnings of my development of a notion of conversion.*

*The first 'conversion' brought about by Dennis Potter (!) has been described, so too has the near encounter with death in Borneo.*

*In 1971 I arrived with my wife and baby girl in Magor, Newport, Gwent to become the minister of the Baptist Church at the age of twenty-three. It was during the next few years that I encountered suicide, births, deaths, marital conflict (not my own at this time), financial disasters, great joy, awful tragedies and the sharing of life with the young, the old, the mad, sad and glad. In response I sought help and training in pastoral care and counselling. I experienced a parallel time to the conversion 'experience'; in fact I would call it a second conversion. This conversion was about*

*personal encounter, individuals and their needs. I began to struggle through what it meant to be with people, rather than to do things for them. Just like the ‘call’ to the ministry I felt the call, not only to preach, but to heal. Another identity crisis: who am I, if called to heal? The acceptance of that call was another conversion, now to the personal: individuals matter.*

*At Oxford (I moved on to Oxford after my first degree at Bristol) I had expressed my belief that I should be the minister of a church in the inner city. So my arrival at Magor, a semi-rural neighbourhood, was a surprise, though, as it turned out, a good preparation for the move to Birmingham. In 1975 I participated in the course of my life – a course on Urban Mission. Most of the course was made up of residential to help you reflect on yourself, your ministry and your sense of being. The centrepiece of the course was a long residential in Manchester, led by, among others, David Jenkins (well before he became the Bishop of Durham).*

*Participants arrived at the venue and met David and his colleague for an introductory session. Unusually we were not allowed to find rooms and dump luggage until after the first session. The message was clear: the ‘tutors’ were not experts but co-learners; we participants were not de-skilled practitioners but co-learners. We all had skills and expertise and needed to contract to engage in a serious encounter of sharing. Not only that, there would be differences of theological and biblical understanding, but all must respect one another and take seriously each other’s understanding as the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Anyone who was not prepared to engage with such a contract should leave immediately. Three did. Not before or since have I experienced the wonder of such a radical practice of co-learning and equality in sharing on a course though it has often been promised. This course led me into my third conversion experience. This conversion was about the corporate understanding of being. Individuals and community, institutions, organisations, systems are living beings and require care, attention, nurture and love.*

*David Jenkins presided at a communion service at the end of the course. The bread was broken and he came round to each of us, broke off a piece of bread and stood directly in front of us in turn and looked at us. He would not give us the bread until we returned his look directly. His eyes were wild, deep and smiling, ‘The body of Christ for you,’ he said I couldn’t but reply, ‘Amen’ with wild and deeply smiling eyes.*

*Many years later I was the Secretary of the Birmingham branch of the Institute of Religion and Medicine and David Jenkins for some years was the National Chairman. By this time he was the Bishop of Durham. Over a few years I met him quite often and heard him speak in his unique, rushing, non-stop staccato sort of way. The particular weekend when I first heard him present the following, in an aside to his main lecture about the NHS for which he was doing some investigation and reflection, was in fact the weekend when Durham Cathedral was struck by lightning, which triggered the Christian right into vitriolic hate against David himself. His autobiography (The Calling of a Cuckoo, Jenkins, 2002) revealed to me this fact, otherwise I would have had no idea what he had personally been going through during the weekend.*

*This is how he put the issue about us becoming ourselves: I cannot be me, if you are not you, and you cannot be you unless I am me; we cannot be we unless they are they and they cannot be they unless we are we (tape).*

*During my ministry in Birmingham (1976-1995), I was developing and preaching a theology of incarnational ‘downward mobility’. In 1985 I wrote: ‘Adherence to theological doctrine is insufficient reason to celebrate the Incarnation. We miss the point of God’s love if we leave the mystery of divine/human oneness with Jesus Christ. For the purpose of God enfleshing his Spirit in Jesus was to fulfil his promise to integrate our flesh and his spirit’ (Walton, 1985).*

*In 1991 I wrote: ‘It is not only in Thatcher’s Britain that value and work are measured in terms of achievement, success and economics. Israel, too, at the time of Jesus, was in bondage to ‘holiness achievement’. In general our society is structured around climbing the ladder of success and making it to the top. Our sense of value and work comes from the joy provided by the rewards given to us on the way up, so life is presented as a series of battles to win or lose. When we win we have lived up to standard, when we lose it is clearly because of our shortcomings, our faults and maybe even our sin. Growing-up means becoming healthier, stronger, more intelligent, more mature and more productive. Of course, there are many individuals who live differently, but upward mobility is espoused by most as a virtue. As a result our society hides, finds an embarrassing burden, or condemns the elderly, the blind, the disabled, the prisoners and the mentally ill. These are the ones who can’t keep up with*

*the upward way: regarded as sad mysteries, people who have deviated from the normal line of progress.*

*'In stark and fundamental contrast Jesus Christ displayed the vigour of the love of God by giving up heaven and was crucified on a cross. He moved from greatness to smallness, from success to failure, from strength to weakness. Downward mobility is the divine way, the way of the cross, the way of Christ. Far from the words of Jesus about taking up the cross being the formula for "successful living" they are the seeds of a radical departure from the disobedience of even assuming that the upward way is characteristic of God. The downward way is God's way. He reveals himself as God in that he is the only one who can empty himself of his divine privileges and become as we are' (Walton 1991).*

#### **Parenthesis 4. The semi-rise flats from p. 224**

*Each of the semi-rise blocks built by Wimpey, had been actually been built by separate companies, each set up for the duration of the build, then liquidised after completion. Technically there was no one responsible for the shoddy and dangerous work, the 'cancer' of the concrete, the leaking roofs, the inadequate heating boilers, the faulty lifts and so on. The Council was sorry, but ... A bye-law made it impossible for any individual tenant to complain about any overall structural fault, like a leaking roof. It required 75% of the tenants of a block to submit a petition with common cause. When I started to recruit signatories for such a petition I discovered the power of intimidation. I needed 105 signatures. It didn't take long for the council to discover what the interfering do-gooder was up to. Two days in and five signatures and one of the tenants who had signed up, one of the very few members of the church in the whole block, told me that she would have to withdraw; she had a history of being behind with her rent and who knew what would happen if she signed the petition. It was time for a far more imaginative vision; 'to engage in gestures of resistance and acts of deep hope' (Brueggemann, 2001, p.xvii)*

*The rest of the story is five years long, but it doesn't take long to tell. The church decided to employ a young Marxist/Christian lawyer (now a very well-known and respected human rights lawyer, Phil Shiner) to take on the council or to resist the 'royal consciousness'. Five years later, after many legal battles, public skirmishes, dirty washing campaigns against us, tensions and strains within the church and among tenants, we went to the*

*House of Lords who ruled against the council. Four million pounds was spent on the three blocks of flats and finally, as a result, the housing policy of ‘cover-up and make-do’, revealed by our campaign, was changed. Across Birmingham the worst high-rise blocks were demolished, and most semi-rise blocks like those in Ladywood were refurbished, the flat roofs were replaced with gable roofs, and decent heating systems and new lifts were put in.*

#### **Parenthesis 6: p.319**

We (the client and I) found, in Sue's case, that The Child was missing, or rather, hiding, too frightened to show herself and so angry, fearing the volcanic eruption, keeping a wistful silence, if only she could play ... Sue's life was uneventful, and very responsible. As a minister's wife she played the part very well, exceeding everyone's expectations for the helping hand. She was the steady, stable pillar of the church – full of faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these was serious.

(She presented much anxiety and fear about the influence of the charismatic movement, and was terrified that she was in dispute with her husband who wanted to be released into more spontaneity and freedom of the spirit.) I was at the time acting as his ‘Senior Friend’ or mentor in his early years of ministry. I remember he used to comment on my untidy desk when he came into my study for meetings. One day I decided to show him that I could be tidy. I filed many papers, put many books back on the shelves until there was an almost empty desk. Mark walked in that day, I remember it well, and without comment at the radical change to the room, as he passed the desk, he adjusted the ruler laying on the desk so that was parallel to the edge of the desk, and then he sat down!

I will continue, albeit in a rather truncated fashion, the story of this particular counselling encounter, not so much because of the remarkable outcome but because it illustrates with so much clarity another of the influences on my approach to counselling.

So here was a woman, her Child hiding behind a barricade, damaged so much that she believed that if she came out from behind that barricade she would die (Script). She knew the Child (WOW!) was there but could no longer experience her. Further sessions enabled us: to not only speak about being in Child mode, but about being the then-Child now; not only to speak about The Child, but speak to The Child, to listen to and for The Child; to become counsellor and mother (Parent) to that Child, but now with an Adult response to the fear and the sense of betrayal; to be with The Child then, now, with an Adult mother, rather than the Child-in-Adult mother of then. We became used to talking the language, speaking to The Child, the little girl, while at the same time understanding this was a way of sorting out the one person, Sue, who had a past, a present and a future:

*How has she been?*

*She seems to want me to be with her, but sometimes she is very quiet, timid you might say, she seems to be frightened but I tell her off and then she won't talk anymore.*

*Well, how about you don't tell her off. You are now alright and safe, but for some reason she wasn't then. Perhaps it would be better to say something like, 'Now I know you are frightened, and you have every reason to be, anyone would be frightened if they had been through what you have been through. But things are different now, I am here and I will keep you safe. If you stay with me, you will be all right.'*

*Yes, I suppose she always used be told off for something she wasn't responsible for. I feel silly talking like this.*

*No need to feel silly is there? This seems to make sense doesn't it? It resonates somewhere deep down. Let me tell you a story about myself.*

*This was only a few years ago. I go each week to the local primary school to take Assembly. I love going, I love telling stories but every so often I used to forget I was going and wake up that morning and suddenly remember I was taking the Assembly but had not a clue in my head about what I would do. I used to feel awful; so bad in fact that I went into Child and felt that I simply couldn't do it. What! Couldn't do it? I've been preaching for decades, preaching and telling stories in many places and*

*many countries, yet I felt I simply couldn't do it. Once or twice I even rang up the head teacher and made an excuse, said I was very sorry but right at the last I was needed elsewhere. She always understood, after all I was a minister in pastoral care ... but because I felt I just couldn't tell a story I lied!*

*Anyway I realised that I had to do something about this and the next time I went into Child about taking Assembly I spoke to the little boy. I said, 'I know you are frightened, and there's a good reason for that, but it's different now. I tell you what, why don't you come with me, I'll tell the story, in fact I'll tell the same one as last time, children love to hear the same story again and again. You just come and be with me and enjoy the story. Of course, all this time I knew it was me. When I walked round the corner, you know to St George's, I even held his hand. Yes, I don't know if anyone saw me or heard me, but down the street I held out my hand as though I was holding a little boy's hand and said, things like, 'I bet you'll enjoy it, see if you can tell which bit is different in the story this time.' I took the Assembly, the children were great and on the way home I thanked my little boy for being with me, he'd helped me a lot. Maybe it seems silly, but it's called love.*

*(Sue is crying now.)*

*You are doing so well. You get it, don't you? Your little one, that's you, needs caring for, she needs hugging tight, she needs to know you understand and won't betray her.*

*Why do you say betray (out of the tears)?*

*I think it was just a word that came to mind. Is it the wrong word?*

*No, that's the trouble, it's the right word, I know it's the right word, but I don't know why.*

That was more or less the end of the session. See p.320

## Appendix 5: The emerging clown within my own life

### Parenthesis 4 p.231

Before I attempt to articulate the resonances between my interpretation of the prophets of the Bible and clowns, I will describe the emerging clown within my own life and ministry over the years.

*I was a hyperactive child, ‘Oh yes, he is a handful.’ I was often called a ‘show-off’; I ‘fooled around’ a lot.*

*When I first went on holiday, nine months old in August 1947, of course to the Lleyn peninsular (where today I am writing, 12.11.08) on Abersoch beach (very near Hell’s Mouth) the main tourist beach of the area. Apparently I was crawling, nearly walking and always on the go. On the beach I was straight down to the water’s edge and crawling and splashing about in the very safe, warm shallows. It was when my mother had to take me out of the water to go back home that I cried and bawled and made much commotion. It was so bad that it became an object of attention for everyone else on the beach and the loud words were heard, ‘Oh, the poor soul, why did she put him in then!'*

This story used to be told with glee, but also indignation. A clowning moment – this time ‘but they don’t understand me’! It was a very early preparation for taking the role of the clown deliberately and facing the numb faces of royal consciousness.

At school and church and scouts and youth club I was a leader, always involved, always acting, singing – whether ‘on stage’ or not, always starting clubs, movements, ideas, different ways of doing what had been done before. I was a visioner, a dreamer with attitude, always making a moment more significant.

*I remember a teacher, his name, Mr Axon, a young, energetic man but I always ‘had’ to go one better. All I had been asked to do was give out some papers. I clowned my way round the desks, as far as I remember everyone enjoyed the ‘moment’ except Mr Axon, who,*

*though usually very nice to me, suddenly said, ‘Walton, why can’t you ever be serious?’ (it was a boys’ grammar school). Why do I remember this incident? My response to this put-down was disappointment, then shame, then remorse and finally I cried – I was fourteen.*

This was another clowning moment, this time of pain, also preparation for the future. It was during this period that I took part in a lot of drama at school, first in the annual school play. One year it was *Murder in the Cathedral*.

*My brother (older by 2 years) played the Archbishop. I played the 1st Knight. I was the one to first plunge a sword into the Archbishop, my brother.*

Yet another clowning moment appeared, this one accompanied by a confusing delight! At Scouts we had an annual ‘Gang Show’ in which I took part and, when a bit older, I directed a show called ‘Who Nose’ during which there was some hilarious improvisation.

Clowning as we practise it consists of improvisations on a stage and as such is a form of theatrical expression. Drama games, mask work, psychodrama or drama-therapy are all various forms of theatrical expression. For us however, the clown is more than a character or a convention within the theatre. The clown represents a vehicle or catalyst that facilitates the theatrical expression of the imagination (Bonange, 1996, p.1).

My debut in church was to do a children’s talk. Here the clown, in terms of imagination, began to flourish. Talking wasn’t enough. I wanted to encourage everyone in church to take their commitment to help refugees seriously.

*There was an appeal from Oxfam to send blankets, and to knit 6inch woollen squares to make the blankets. So I learnt to knit and during the talk showed everyone, and got some to come out and try it too, how to cast on and knit.*

Clowning indeed – we cried about the plight of the refugees and laughed our way through knitting their blankets. I was fifteen.

Then I began to preach. I used to go with my father, to help and do a reading.

Later I started to have my own appointments in small churches in the county. I have always understood the preaching task to be the clown's task. As the years went by I used props, from live chickens and chicks to puppets, and silence, enactments of incidents, dialogue sermons, drama sermons and improvisations, alone and with others. In my Birmingham church I used a stool rather than a pulpit. Some called it a breath of fresh air; others wished they had a 'normal' minister.

The clown is both comedian and critic, at once jester and prophet. The clown's role is to provide comic relief and critical commentary. What begins as laughter at the clown's antics often leads to laughter at the human condition itself, with all its absurdity and ambiguity. Still more, a good clown helps us laugh at ourselves. We laugh when the clown falls, trips, receives a cream pie in the face, only to realize that our lives are full of falls, unhappy surprises and totally unexpected moments. We laugh in order not to cry. The clown is oppressed, incoherent, silly, an object on whom others vent their fury. The clown laughs, as we do, and at the very best the clown cries, as we do (Stockwell, in Lewin, 1987, p.ix).

Preaching was clowning in performance, but I was engaged in the inner journey too, not at that time through clowning workshops, but through the re-birthing experience (Chapter 4, p.165f), through counselling and counselling courses, through action-reflection, through worship, through leading and training others and visioning. It was all about vulnerability and availability; about being emotionally aware and prepared to show emotions; it was about dreaming and living the 'as if'; about memory, pain, hope and imagination, and thus prophetic 'because it is urgently out beyond the ordinary and the reasonable'

(Brueggemann, 2001, p.xv).

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (The New Testament, Philippians 2:5-8).

This is the role of the clown. Jesus was made into a clown.

The organizer [URM organiser, or community action organiser] is a clown. You make yourself a nobody, empty yourself, to be filled by the people's agenda ... We are a community of clowns – anonymous but not defeated; stateless but not hopeless; despised but not yet destroyed; resilient but not yet dogmatic; open-minded as a community, but not giving in so easily. We empty ourselves, but we are full of joy ... Are we evangelists? Missionaries? Development project officers? What are we? Oftentimes we are puzzled about who we are. But it is in the formation of that quality of being a clown, communities of clowns, that we find who we are. We cannot stand separately, for the process is too cruel for any individual to take. Mutuality of testimony is crucial to form a sense of forum that we always come back to and start from (Oh Jae-shik, 1982, quoted in Lewin, 1987).

Then, in 1985 a group in the church determined to start a magazine. It was starting from the position of the prophetic consciousness. It grew out of our participation and leadership with an organisation called *Evangelical Peacemakers*. This group was targeting particularly evangelical churches with the challenge that Christian discipleship by definition required commitment to waging peace, not war. We should be preparing for peace, not preparing for war with the escalation of both conventional and nuclear weapons. The magazine was designed to make the same challenge across the whole spectrum of personal, social and global issues, providing an alternative imagination about how the world could be if only disciples of Jesus would wrest themselves free from the royal consciousness. We needed a name; we used a name from the last stanza of a poem by Daniel Berrigan, a peace activist in America.

Christ, alpha, omega  
avatar of hope  
whose heart in spite of all  
hopes on in spite of us –  
rain, rain on us  
untamed, unconstrained  
your wildfire storm of hope.

Berrigan, That Intransitive Being  
(see Appendix 6, p.xxxxix for the full poem).

How delighted we were when we received a positive and encouraging reply to our letter asking permission to use this stanza as a sort of logo together with the name *Wildfire*. The reply came from Daniel Berrigan, from prison where he was serving a sentence for spilling his blood on the nose cones of armed nuclear missiles! We needed an image; we chose the clown.



When some of us formed a community we called it the *Wildfire Community* and joined, as it were, the community of clowns to which Eugene Stockwell, Director of the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, refers in his preface to the book of that name.

What has impressed me over the last quarter century about URM (Urban Rural Mission) is that its clown-participants have risked their lives in a steady effort of Christian faithfulness to be alongside the kind of person, despised clowns themselves, with whom Jesus walked day by day in his earthly life. This written account ... is designed not to praise clowns – much as many may merit praise – but to call upon all of us who claim to be Christians yet fail to recognize our clownish nature, towards a life commitment that might identify a bit more with the ‘saintly clowns’ who walk these pages (Stockwell, in Lewin, 1987, p.x).

We discovered a way of being which we did not name but might well be called ‘serious play’ (Seeley, 2006) so that being a clown ‘is more than a state, it is a movement, a dynamic process – it is even a two way movement: feet on the ground and head in the clouds’ (Bonange, 1996, p.4). We embarked on a prophetic way of living.

It is by opening ourselves to feelings, by listening to the body, to others, to the physical world that we begin to hear what ‘screams out its will to exist’. This playful receptivity (or receptive playfulness) allows the imagination to emerge. (Tournier, in Bonange, 1996, p.4)

Clowning moments happen. Here is a note in my journal, written while reading a book.

Thoreau, Berrigan, Sojourners and King all mentioned within three pages – what a joy! (personal journal, 2001).

The book was *The Silent Cry, Mysticism and Resistance* by Dorothee Soelle (Soelle, 2001, p.262f). Berrigan, mentioned above, figures in her chapter ‘Violence and Non-violence’ which is subtitled ‘The unity of all living things’ and a few pages on there is another heading: ‘The Duty of Civil Disobedience: David Henry Thoreau’. The significant joy is this: we all know that Thoreau lived alone in the forest at Walden, that he developed what might be called a mystical relationship to the woods and animals, to light and water, and wrote extensively about these experiences. But have any of us heard about his anti-slavery

campaigns, about his writing *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, a leaflet which Gandhi later distributed as a ‘text book’ among his pupils (Soelle, 2001, p.264)? ‘Sojourners’ refers to the Sojourners Community, the Christian Community in Washington DC led by Jim Wallis. The community lives in downtown Washington, where poverty is dominant, but it is within sight of the White House. Jim Wallis returned to his evangelical roots while leading anti-war protests in the 1960s. He inspired ‘radical discipleship’ and ‘prophetic consciousness’. For many, the Sojourners Community became genuine evangelical Christian faith: strong in faith in Christ and powerfully radical in resisting the dominant culture. Jim made and makes many visits to the UK and it was during his visits that I got to know him through Evangelical Peacemakers<sup>160</sup>.

‘King’ is of course Martin Luther King Jr. When I was only in my late teens, getting ready to prepare for the Christian ministry at theological college, I had the privilege of meeting Martin Luther King. I don’t remember too much of the sermon; he showed us the toilet paper on which he wrote his Letters from prison! But afterwards, I was introduced to him on the steps of my church in Leicester; ‘This is Christopher, who will be training for the ministry at Bristol Baptist College,’ said my minister. I remember the look or rather the gaze Martin Luther King gave me from on high (he seemed a very big man). He looked down and held my gaze. I’ll never know what exactly he meant, but his words were spoken quietly, with at first a serious, a so serious face, and then a broad smile. ‘OK, you’ll do, you’ll do. But, remember, listen.’(see Chapter 9,291). I have read his books since his death, since his, ‘I have a dream’; and I have followed his journey linking peaceful resistance with ecology and global citizenship.

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<sup>160</sup> Evangelical Peacemakers was an organisation set up to challenge evangelical churches that peacemaking, including opposition to nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

Where did Thoreau's inspiration for campaigning social justice come from? Was it the awareness of belonging to the earth or did his awareness of the need for justice inspire a relationship with the earth? What pushed Berrigan to blood-letting on the loaded nuclear warheads? Is Sojourners a one-issue campaigning community or is eco-theology more a description of its cause? What drew Martin Luther King to equate ecological justice with human rights?

So, Thoreau, Berrigan, Sojourners and King bring a clowning moment, the moment when I slipped through a fissure in striated space and communed with others in the in-between (see *Parenthesis 1* p.107).

But this was not the first time.

*One misty day (in 1981) I went to Porth Neigwl (see Chapter...). Of course I knew it well, so I knew that when I looked out and saw a wall of swirling sea mist that there was more to it than that. It was right under the cliffs of the southern peninsula of the beach that I played midwife to the birthing of a concept. It was in the autumn, having returned from a three-month sabbatical journey. I spent eight weeks in America: four weeks in Detroit with the Church of the Saviour, two weeks in Houston, Texas, with the Church of the Redeemer, then two weeks in Washington DC with Jim Wallis and the Sojourner Community. I then left for Brazil, and spent a month with a soul-friend, Moises Amorim, a Baptist pastor who had spent time with me in Birmingham. We were now on his territory, Curitiba, a city of 8 million. We spent most of the time in the favelas around the city. My family joined me there. One day, we went to see a family in the shanty town. Their house was made of corrugated iron and cardboard. There with six children, two 'rooms', one table and one chair. The family welcomed us and stood around the table to watch us eat. I had to sit down - I was the man. Gradually, my children, my wife and I ate through the bedecked table, encouraged many times by Moises to keep going. It turned out we had eaten through two weeks' rations for that family. I said to Moises, 'But what will they do now?' 'Oh,' he said, 'they'll share with those*

*around them until they are back to normal.' He smiled at my pain and said quietly, 'But, Chris, I have heard you preach about God's generosity, haven't I?' In South Africa they call it, according to my friend Graham, 'oobuntoo' – welcoming, without reservation and with gentle and generous hospitality, friend and stranger alike*  
*(Personal Journal, 1981).*

This represents the journey of the birth of the way of life which I called 'Becoming'; becoming truly human; in my terms becoming more like God. Becoming, bit by bit, if not all at once, reconnected to all living things.

Under that same peninsular, nine years later (1990) I wrote a poem.

Like a friendly intruder,  
I have tiptoed into an awesome scene,  
To witness the universal interplay  
Of water and earth, wind and thunder.  
The heaving expanse of turbulent sea –  
Magnificent in scent and power  
With blue-greens of the incandescent rainbow  
Dashed with whites of the fourth dimension –  
Is pushed by the roll of the earth  
Spilling out its infinite colour incessantly,  
As it moves the day further round  
The galactic declension.

On the boundary between water and earth,  
Forged by history's heats, granite masses stand  
Tilted and bent, tiled in cool pastels of ancient ancestry  
And etched with caverns and crevices  
Where chaos lurks and life creeps.  
Just as on the precipice the mistral comforts  
The single shivering flowers with hopeful expectancy,  
So, as this exterior design grips my fascination,  
An interior whispering awakens my dreams  
And nurtures that hope of becoming.  
(Walton, 1986)

## Appendix 6

# That Intransitive Being

by Daniel Berrigan

Wildfire was inspired by Hope to encourage Hope.  
Here, reproduced in full, is the poem from which  
the name Wildfire was taken.

Reproduced with permission.

This occurred to me  
that faith is prose  
and love is music  
but hope is poetry.  
When I ask: What is faith? I turn to monumental minds-  
Karl Barth, Thomas Aquinas  
And when I seek after agape, I hear in my spirit  
both Beethoven and Corinthians 13.  
But hope? something evades the net of logic,  
something no one has set to music.  
Hope: ourselves, incomplete, wayward, dependent,  
children on holiday, on whom are kept 'a watchful eye'  
while providential hands are busy about graver matters...

What do we hope for?  
(Let me keep the poem in mind, hope as poetry)  
Some would say with a worn look  
shifting for a moment the burden of life  
like a sack of stones borne uphill-  
Oh to get through the day without catastrophe!  
Another looks skyward with a grimace-  
I hope to hell it doesn't fall on us!  
(There is much of this, as though the only weather we knew  
were a storm warning)  
Subsistence people. No firm ground, who is on firm ground today?  
we huddle on a creaking ice floe, on the volcano's edge;  
only consolation is: everyone's there, willy-nilly  
a tight knot of survivors:  
barely making it, for all the sophistries,  
snooty language, military puffing, religious hype,  
foderol, tin can toys-we're scraping bottom.

Still we say: we can dream, can't we?  
Suppose our hope went like this (the hope of many goes like this)  
TO LIVE, LOVE & MAKE MERRY  
IN THE 50TH FLOOR TRUMP TOWER FIFTH AVENUE TRIPLEX!  
perpetual guaranteed income! 4-way view of 5 boroughs!  
Now, if that were sum & substance of hope-  
And more, if this dreamy demesne  
could by technological sleight of hand  
minutes before doomsday  
plunge underground-presto!!  
yr. very own unassailable unrockable unbombable  
anti-blast anti-freeze anti-death SHELTER-  
Moreover, if this miasmic fantasy  
(which I hereby misname American Hope)  
were signed, sealed, delivered,  
a very testament of God almighty  
a penny-dreadful covenant, stating in effect:  
I namely, THE NAME, do hereby give, bequeath, transfer  
in addition to ye above Tower  
all providential, acquisitional, creational  
power & honor & riches & glory &  
the credit of the above-mentioned NAME-  
so that in consequence  
whatsoever was once old-fashionedly referred to as  
divinity, holiness, omnipotence, etcetera  
shall now & for all time be yclept simply  
AMERICAN HOPE!-

Well  
this phantasmagoric scenario  
is a clumsy attempt

to describe, ascribe, something commonly referred to  
by acquisitive eyeballs and larcenous hearts and itching palms  
-our own, that is, to say, and our own, and our own-  
referred to-as, God help us, HOPE! (hope?)  
Which same, by the way, under scrutiny  
is revealed as something else again-  
to wit, a noisome brew-  
equal parts acedia-despair-wilfulness-discontent-greed  
a condition recognizable  
by the intestinal racket it raises  
gear upon gear spinning madly  
ill-meshed, incendiary, explosive

In contrast to which  
HOPE  
steps softly, elusively  
as a mouse in swiss cheese  
tunneling as it goes feeding as it needs  
gently, elusively, I like that!

Let me venture also-  
Hope is an intransitive being, i.e.,  
we are not required to hope for anything!  
(Hope as poetry, the poem neither  
explaining itself, justifying itself  
looking beyond itself.) Hope  
stands there, noiseless as a mouse  
in a cheese made of moonlight  
that infinitesimal eye all mindful  
like a diamond chip or a catch of moon  
when the wind stirs a single leaf alarmingly.

Let me hasten to say  
(consistent only here & there, now & then)  
of course I hope for something!  
that the sky doesn't fall in or the waveswhelm us utterly or  
the volcano light us like fire brands.  
And yet, and yet  
if there were to occur & befall us  
any or all of these-I dare say  
I hope we would hope on! I hope we would live on!

Catastrophe, luxury  
beside the point. The fine eye of hope  
gazes upon, judges  
luxury, catastrophe  
the corrupt forms of transitive hope  
(lust of one, dread of the other)  
the mark of the aeon, mark of the beast  
fixation on tunnel and tower,  
on clock and sword  
on countdown and finis.

Christ, alpha, omega  
avatar of hope  
whose heart in spite of all  
hopes on in spite of us  
hopes on for us, inspite of us -  
rain, rain on us  
untamed, unconstrained  
your wildfire storm of hope.

## ENDNOTE

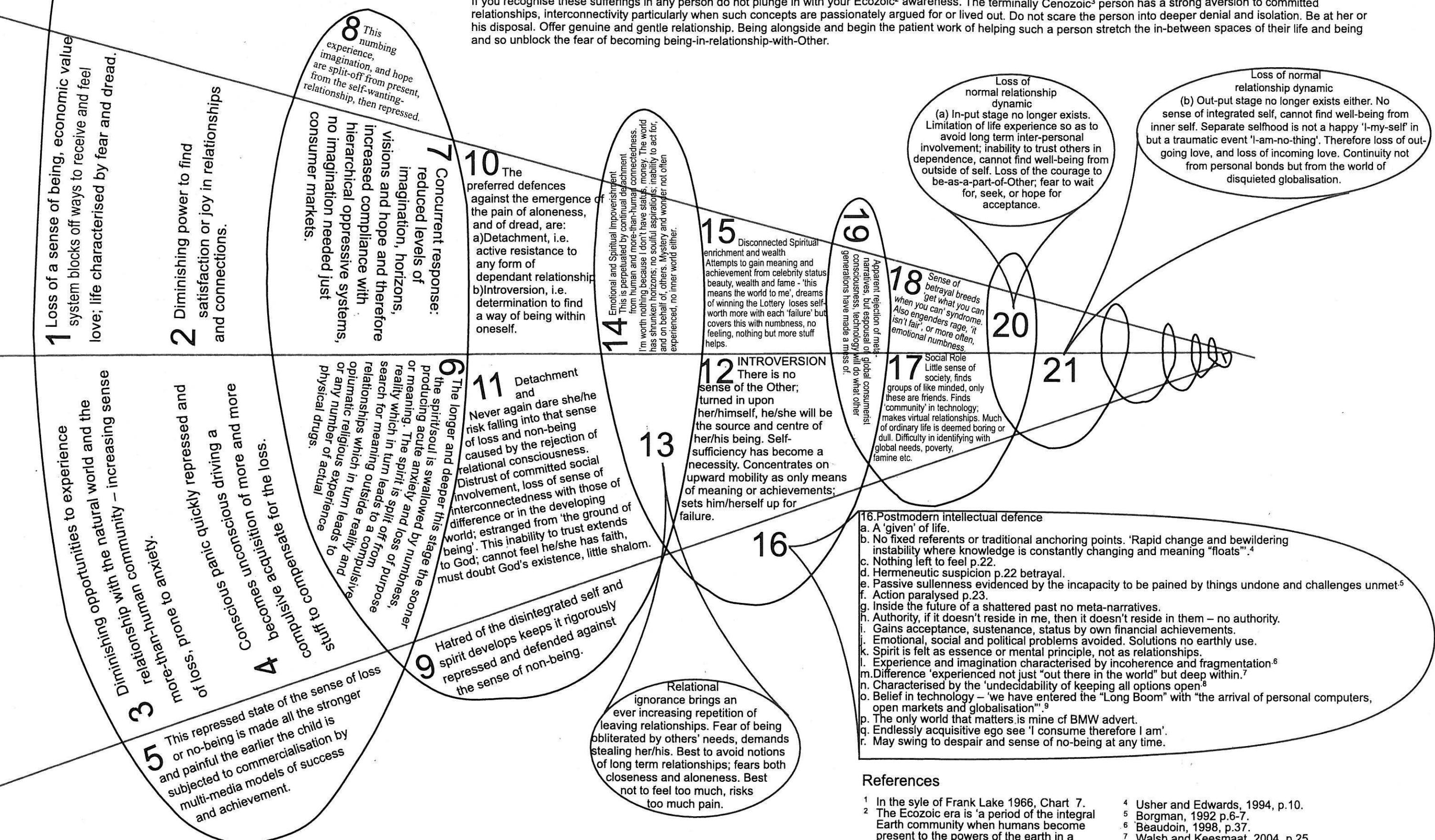
When I'm older  
I'm going to take  
my child to ~~Ringfield~~  
Ringfield. I Love  
the feeling of being  
free and alone by  
yourself. Ringsfield  
Rocks.  
Lots of Love  
Ringfield ~~Lettie~~ Lettie



# Consumerism Disorder

POSTMODERN DISQUIETED GLOBILIZATION DISORDER Radical disassociation from inter-connective relational consciousness, with soul-less introversion; noting in detail the postmodern intellectualistic defence against Dread of Certainty<sup>1</sup>.

If you recognise these sufferings in any person do not plunge in with your Ecozoic<sup>2</sup> awareness. The terminally Cenozoic<sup>3</sup> person has a strong aversion to committed relationships, interconnectivity particularly when such concepts are passionately argued for or lived out. Do not scare the person into deeper denial and isolation. Be at her or his disposal. Offer genuine and gentle relationship. Being alongside and begin the patient work of helping such a person stretch the in-between spaces of their life and being and so unblock the fear of becoming being-in-relationship-with-Other.

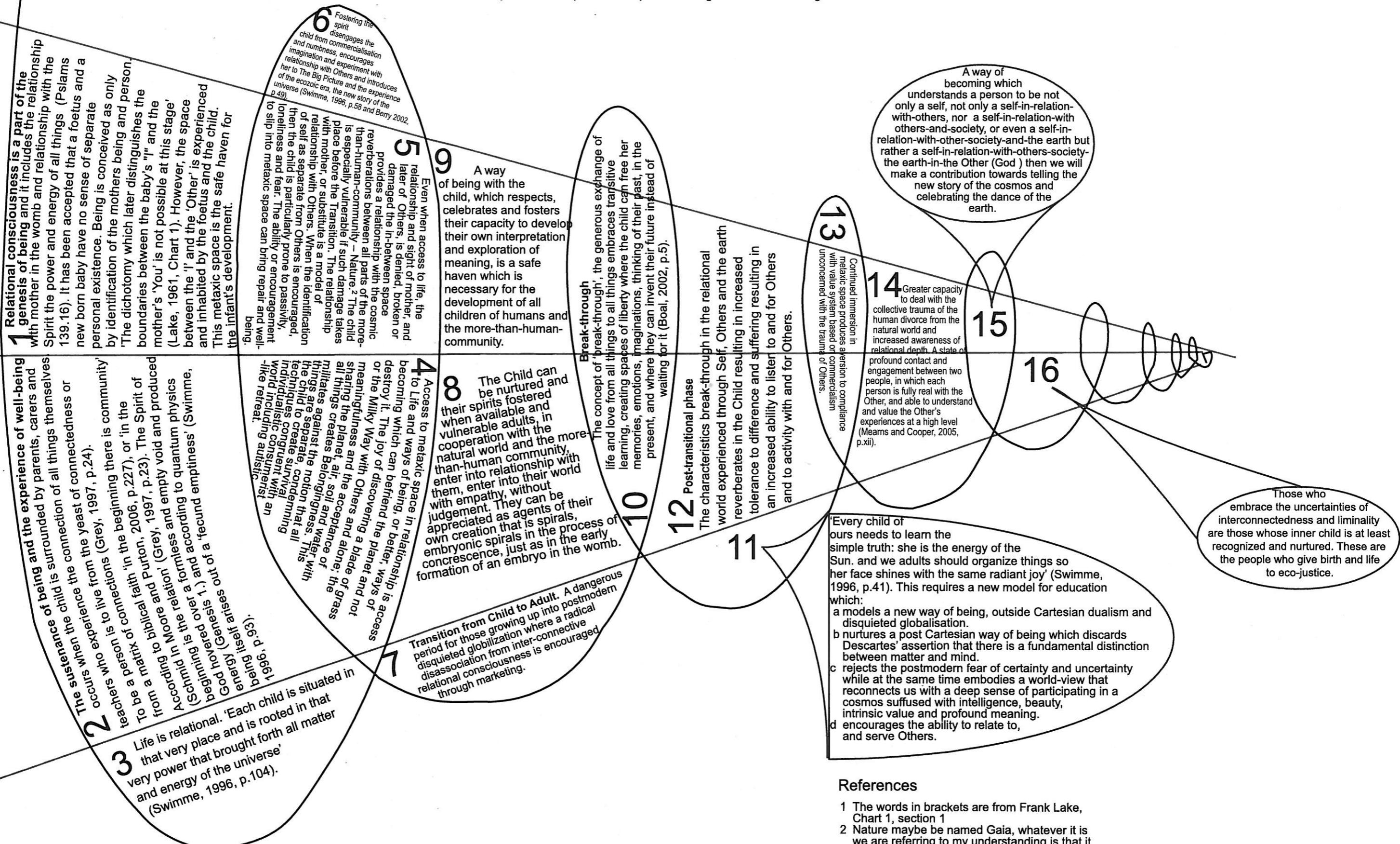


## References

- 1 In the style of Frank Lake 1966, Chart 7.
- 2 The Ecozoic era is 'a period of the integral Earth community when humans become present to the powers of the earth in a mutually enhancing manner' (Berry, 2006, p.97).
- 3 The Cenozoic era is the period of the earth into which humans emerged and started the destruction of the planet (Berry, 2006, p.97).
- 4 Usher and Edwards, 1994, p.10.
- 5 Borgman, 1992 p.6-7.
- 6 Beaudoin, 1998, p.37.
- 7 Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004, p.25.
- 8 Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004, p.25.
- 9 Wired Magazine, in Walsh and Keesmaat, 2004, p.27.

# The Womb Of Metaxic Space

This model is suggestive that the normal (i.e. 'unspoiled', rather than 'average')<sup>1</sup> child-nature relationship is dependent on a good very early relationship with mother, but that, even when this relationship and other human relationships are lacking, congruence with the More-than-Human-Community can 'make up for' and 'repair' what might have been damaged.



## References

- 1 The words in brackets are from Frank Lake, Chart 1, section 1
- 2 Nature maybe be named Gaia, whatever it is we are referring to my understanding is that it is the Holy Spirit, the cause of all reverberations of relationship between all beings.