

Writing the end

'The writer, in writing, seems no longer quite this or that personal self.' (van Manen, 2002, p. 3)

The writer writing is no longer quite the same self. Hmm. This is not a bad place to start to begin to wrap up. I sense I am reaching the end, and I must draw some conclusions. The net is nearly made.

Breathing out and breathing in and breathing out and...

Breathing – connection and disconnection

The last thread in the complex experience I have of being both 'in' and 'out', connected and disconnected has come to the surface while practicing yoga over the last two years. You could probably call it the first thread, as it is the stuff of life itself.

Breath has become something I hold in mind, and in practising and reading about yoga, the breath has offered revelatory insights. Reading Heinz Grill's *Harmony in Breathing* (1996), a seam of self-knowledge revealed itself to me.

On breathing in:

'one connects more intensively with one's surroundings; breathes oneself into one's environment. Inhaling leads to coming closer, to deeper connection with the environment.' (Grill, 1996, p. 17)

On breathing out:

'signifies letting go, withdrawing, rejection. With the shrinking of the ribcage man lets go of the outer and seeks distance. He withdraws from his environment, detaches himself from the sphere, just as with inhalation he actively connects himself with the sphere.' (ibid.)

I sense I have always been keener on the breathing out, the withdrawal, the disconnection, at least at the level of my body, than the breathing-in connection. I find myself not breathing freely, almost holding my breath for long periods. Then I have to take a big struggling breath in, and sigh it out. When in a state of tension I forget to breathe and have to be told. When I sleep people have said that they worry I am dead, as they cannot discern any breathing at all.

This morning in yoga, we did an exercise called yoga mudra, in which you breathe out as you bend in a bowing motion to place the forehead on the floor, and then wait in the pause between the out-breath and the in-breath, before rising again with the in-breath.

This pause in-between is something to do with leaving the old behind but pausing before moving into the new. It is a moment of consciousness, stillness. It is a familiar place physically for me to be in, as I say above, I regularly stop breathing. But in my normal state, that is a dead space. It is where nothing happens and I drift into a disconnected nowhere-land. When actively doing the exercise this morning I was struck with the

thought that I fill my life with breathlessness, and may therefore constantly be on the edge of panic. Panic is not a sensation that I necessarily recognise, I don't feel on the edge all the time. But something I've noticed since giving up my Colombia job is that when I now travel on the tube or ride the bike or set up a meeting, I have more space, and I see how little space is really allowed for most of us.

I think again about Fritjof Capra and the notion of 'equilibrium'. This does not, in scientific terms, mean **balance**. It means that there is effectively nothing happening, that there are no processes at work. It means dead, if we take life to mean a continual flow of resources, energy, feedback loops, production and creative transformation, as Capra does.

'a living organism is characterised by continual flow and change in its metabolism, involving thousands of chemical reactions. Chemical and thermal equilibrium exists when all these processes come to a halt. In other words, an organism in equilibrium is a dead organism. Living organisms continually maintain themselves in a state far from equilibrium, which is the state of life. Although very different from equilibrium, this state is nevertheless stable over long periods of time..' (Capra, 1996, p. 175-6)

This all feels rather contradictory, the words 'dead' and 'breathlessness' tend to give us very different meanings, one unmoving, the other fluttering and nervous and on the edge. Yet if breath is what keeps us living then breathlessness is indeed death. So here I am, dead between breaths, in a kind of stable state, of equilibrium. My yoga teacher says that for her that not-breathing state was and is a way of not allowing herself to feel, through sheer terror of what feelings might feel like.

Breathing out

If **breathing-in is a route to intensive connection**, to being in touch with one's environment, then it strikes me that I used to have that intensive connection, a connection so intense it was almost overwhelming. I think that smoking for me is a way of disconnecting from the breath of life, in this meaning of connection, and I am fairly sure that I started smoking to disconnect from the pain of overwhelming connection with my first real experience of betrayal. It is no accident that I smoke more heavily when in Colombia for instance, a place that is painful to be in and requires great strength to hang on to possibilities of love.

I have talked about this at length with my friend Alice who is more like me than anyone I know. We have both dedicated our lives to living in other people's pain and sorrow, to working for justice for the most violently abused, to working in the most extreme environments. She says someone recently asked her if she ever breathed at all, as he could not see it. It's as if we place ourselves in the most extreme places, and expose ourselves to the most hideous expressions of violence, as a way of forcing connection for ourselves. Only through closeness to such barbarity can we experience the world. This is indeed a terrifying thought. Breathing in would be easier, and maybe bring us closer to love.

Breathing In

Alice, James and I are drinking wine, swinging in hammocks on James' terrace in the countryside outside Bogotá. Alice talks about how the violence of Colombia is destroying

her soul. I talk about the fierce fiery knot that forms in my guts as I land in Bogotá airport, and that does not leave me till I return to my home. This knot is accompanied by other sensory circles. Of smells. Of palpable fear. Of body odours rank with lack of trust. We delve into each others' Colombia worlds. I make a vow to myself that I will send Alice poetry. Any poetry. At least once a week. We email each other a lot, for work purposes. I promise myself that I will love her through art. It feels like a gigantic art-full effort simply to think of it.

James talks about his neighbour. Oliveiros is a horse man, he loves horses and he keeps them. They are beautifully wild. Recently he offered water to some thirsty horses, horses carrying police in their duties. In the current climate, we despair, it wouldn't take much for someone to take that careful and loving action and construe it as collaboration with the enemy, action worthy of punishment. We are in a civil war, we say, which is not civil at all.

Our feelings in our little holiday encompass almost complete impotence and tiredness in the face of the cruelty, the hate and the wilful destructiveness we are witness to, something that clashes with the natural beauty of the place around us. Alice says she can't let the beauty in or it will pierce her, wound her, open the floodgates, expose the nerves and fray her bones. I am sick of the anger, the polarisation, the loss of anything touching.

When I return from Colombia two weeks later, I re-read bits of my notebook. Then I write this poem for Alice and James. It is an act of love.

Colombian Air

**On landing it rises, sweet fruit to dust
and metal. The smell spreads
upwards, inwards, near;
I feel the rush, the urgency of fear full-gutted.
Heart-song rusts.**

**This is a country full of pain,
diminished, desperate, in love again
with answers scarred in graves, on walls,
buzzing in the chains
of saws.**

**There is no ease
in offering to water the passing horses
of police, when care for beasts
makes you the enemy of other men.**

**We are the alchemists. Too few
too frail,
too spent to sweeten with smiles the scent
that trails on morning mists.**

Madeline Church
12th May 2000

Breathing out

'the etymological roots of 'soul' and 'spirit' mean breath in many antique languages. The words for 'soul' in Sanskrit (atman), Greek (psyche) and Latin (anima) all mean 'breath'. The same is true for the word for 'spirit' in Latin (spiritus), in Greek (pnuema), and in Hebrew (ruah). These too, mean 'breath'.' (Capra, 1996, p. 257)

What this means about soul or spirit in my particular case needs greater reflection. If I am resisting breathing- in, and relieved by breathing-out, what is going on? My soul-breath, my spirit-breath is distorted, hunched, defensive, rejecting, seeking greater distance. Again this feels like it is connected to that early experience, when connection was too painful and smoking released me from the pressure on my soul. It is also clear to me that giving up smoking for good will be a significant shift for me, and I feel it approaching with some fear. Which is why I am seeking the helping energy of breath, inching my way to embracing the positive connective possibilities of breathing in with relaxed vigour, instead of smoking.

Breathing In

My thought for myself is that maybe I cannot learn to love until I find a way to breathe-in freely.

There is a phrase that is working away within me, one again from Grill's Harmony in Breathing, which is

Love in the inner creates movement in the outer (1996, p. 11)

It is linked to my understanding of connection, and the relationship between my inner being and my presence in the world, or sphere.

'Through love we are inwardly connected with all beings.' (ibid., p. 11-12)

This is a route to working with the breath for me, to extending my capacity for breathing-in, one might call it the breath of love. If I can let the world in through my breath, and reconnect to it, then my capacity for love will be enhanced. This I sense will be transforming for me. Rayner, in his work with Aburrow, sees great possibilities for moving beyond conflictive relationships if we can only rethink our notions of our boundaries to our environment:

'When space and boundaries are seen ..as connective and coupling rather than distancing and dislocating, the tendency for conflict with objective other is superseded by acceptance of the necessary togetherness of inner with outer in complementary relationship, each 'breathing space' from and into the other. This relationship necessarily embodies light and dark, constructive and destructive processes as the source of creativity, renewal and diversity in our living space. It feeds life with death. But the conflict that arises from the inverted perspective of our human objective detachment from nature

feeds death with life. Perhaps if we can restore our sense of immersion in a space that permeates around through and within our complex selves, we can feel our way beyond the abstractive logic of conflict.' (Rayner & Aburrow, 2003)

Maturana & Varela (1998) have come to 'a biology of love' as an explanation of the way living systems conserve each other, and mould each other over time. In the Tree of Knowledge they conclude that 'biologically, without love, without acceptance of others, there is no social phenomenon.' (p. 247) There is a biological necessity for us, if we are to express our humanness, to 'see the other person and open up for him room for existence beside us' (p. 246) and 'accept the other person beside us in our daily living' (*ibid.*).

'This is the biological foundation of social phenomena: without love, there is no social process and, therefore, no humanness.' (p. 246)

This may well be written in our bones.

Breathing out

In the meantime, I use my voice to talk about love, as I have always used my voice as my centre. This voice is a powerful characteristic of mine; it is something that expresses an essence of me. My voice is unmistakable people say. They recognise me through my voice.

I have taken to saying the word LOVE out loud when in meetings about evaluation or about projects. Peoples eyes light up and they gasp as if I have just said I am a Martian. Then people start to flutter, and their hearts beat hard, their palms sweat a little and a little sensual rush flits round the room, and they begin to tell stories and uncover something that they had forgotten. LOVE. They talk about why they wanted to do this work, and their big dreams of making the world a better place burst from their pent up breasts, and they begin to gush and gust and garble and shudder nervously as if touched by a strange and affecting hand. LOVE.

I say I believe in the transforming power of LOVE.

Yet speaking is also part of the defence against breathing in and the world. My voice speaks and speaking is about breathing out. Making connection through withdrawal and rejection and defence? How strange and paradoxical. I breathe out all my energy, and all my energy is spent on withdrawal, so my struggle to stay connected is all the more intense.

Breathing in

Louise Bourgeois Exhibition, Louisiana Museum, Denmark, 19/6/03

I am in Copenhagen doing a job. I no longer work for the ABColumbia Group, I've gone freelance. I take a day extra and travel by train north along the coast a while to a seaside museum. I am determined to get some art in on this trip.

All I have seen of Louise Bourgeois in the past is her enormous spider in the Turbine Hall in the Tate Modern, the first commission to fill that space. I wasn't that taken with the spider. There is another in a square in Copenhagen.

Once inside the exhibition, I am suddenly overcome with connections. I walk round and round a piece called Cells. My mind is triggered, my thoughts come fast. I scrabble in my bag for a pen. I cannot believe I don't have one. Very unusual. I rush back out to the shop and buy a pink pen with Louisiana written down the side. Much classier than the usual museum pens. I approach Cells again and then I sit on the floor with my notebook.

'Cells' is a sculpture, a cage of sorts. A BIG cage. It is divided internally by poles, hung with disintegrating tapestries, shirts, dresses, the poles run through the armholes, the clothing a poor woman's attempt to curtain off herself and her space. As the viewer you peer through the metal mesh of the cage. There is a tiny chair, on which are just the hips and legs of a human form, in bare feet. In the top corner of the cage is a spider.

'Passage Dangereux' is a larger structure, shaped like a passage with rooms coming off on both sides, all of it caged in. You cannot enter, only speculate. There is an old bed-frame with broken springs. On top of it are four wooden legs. If you look down the passage you can see the four feet, two on top, two below, like dead-people having sex. They whisk up images of war-wounded, ancient prosthetics, mutilation. Another room shows an old wooden chair, a kind of throne, yet the straps that hang from its arms suggest an ancient electric chair. There are rooms with pieces of bone in display bowls. And there is a spider, hanging from the top.

'I find the past terribly painful though I am tied to it. It's unresolved. Yet I have no taste for re-visitation. It's a landscape you have gone through and explored and outgrown. Only tomorrow is interesting.' (Louise Bourgeois Louisiana Museum, Denmark, 2003)

'With Passage Dangereux Louise Bourgeois creates what one could call a transitional zone, a starting point for sub-conscious imagery, dream-like associations, and fragments of personal memory in the observer.' (Comment on the wall, alongside Passage Dangereux)

I am plunged into memories and associations with my work in Colombia, El Salvador. I suddenly see her pieces as a part of a stage set. I have a narrative to display on this stage, of a group of families driven from their homes by gunmen, who take up residence in an old cock-fighting gallery in the nearest town. Each family claims a small space, and divides it from the rest by hanging their clothes and belongings on lines, functioning as drapes between living areas. I recall the nun who helps them saying to me and my colleague – What can you do for these people? Don't come here to gawp, what can you DO?. I imagine a scene, in which do-gooding white northerners, with big jeeps and emblazoned shirts, arrive to help these people living in a Louise Bourgeois memory, only half-people with no dignity, reduced to commandeering a space reserved for animals. I recall them feeding us with part of their rations they receive occasionally from the Red Cross, and then saying, please stop sending us lentils, we don't eat lentils. I stand mutely thinking again, I have no control of this. I sit on the floor embodying a memory of a meeting with the newly elected indigenous Governor of Cauca, the first indigenous governor ever elected. I see him in his heavy black skirt as he tells me that the previous corrupt and venal incumbent sold all the furniture and office equipment so that when he took office, he and his team had to sit on the floor.

These Passages are indeed dangereux. I have just left this world behind, but the stories are just there under my skin.

I recall the stories told to me by bewildered women, of men with machetes or chain saws, who cut off arms and legs and make the women watch as they play football with the heads. I see the bones in jars and the strange wooden prostheses in their play of love, and the chair which invites us to try the throne of death, and am moved to shredded tears. Bearing witness.

In an earlier room Bourgeois has hung knitted and patchwork heads, stuffed, like the toys I made badly in my sewing class at school, upside-down, and torsos, and bodies without arms. I only catch these as I circle the exhibition round again. They are both innocent and terrible. I see them as part of my unresolved past in some unnameable way, and I am cheered by her thoughts that exploration is indeed a plunge into tomorrow.

Breathing out and breathing in

It seems that I have used my voice for years to speak out, yet have found the speaking out lacking in love, growing rigid and repetitive, and hard. The struggle is to find a way to speak out in defence of justice, and maintain my belief in forgiveness and love as a tempering, merciful and essential component. This of course is not just a personal struggle, it is one that many have faced with the techno-rational world we live in. It feels irresolvable and probably is. It is simply a dynamic tension of our lives.

So, as part of learning to breathe again, I am working with art as a source of inspiration (in-breath) and an expression of love. The thing I hold in mind is that inspiration, that in-breath, brings me closer to the world. And that connection is secured through love. For me that inspiration comes largely through engagement with the artistic endeavour of another - Antony Gormley, Louise Bourgeois, - and finds expression through my writing. For instance, the poem I wrote for Alice and James transforms our individual and collective experience. I write as a way of transforming our conversational experience into an aesthetic one. I sense Alice's pain, feel my own despair, and want to offer something up, something of beauty, something healing, something that takes us beyond.

Jointly and separately we created the conditions for the poem. It is an expression of love.

Ending the writing

There is of course no end to this, just an attempt to complete as far as possible this chapter in my life. To draw together this network of experience, way of being, way of acting, and knowing, and reflect on where I am now, in my ability to be better what I have always wanted to be: a force for change, acting as much as possible out of, rather than through my anger, channelled through my belief that love is powerful and transforming. This is tempered by an understanding that we cannot know what will happen when we act, but we can sense ways of affecting the webs of social relations and interacting that open up possibilities for change, and create the potential for love to arise. There is certainly knowledge that I think I have gained in this process, knots that I think I know better. By knowing them better, I can see how they can continue to be threaded together with other parts of the net, and sense how they might weave on outwards.

To go back to the beginning, when Maturana began to weave for us a history of his thinking in that Seminar on 6 September, he began a narrative of his life and work, woven around important moments of insight and reflection. This included wise words from his mother, challenging questions from his tutor, experiments he had done when he realised he was asking the wrong question. What this added up to was indeed a narrative of the development of his inquiring, thinking and reflection.

I look back over the writing of this thesis and I see how I have in some sense told and retold a narrative of this development of self throughout. I have been walking you through the way I inquire and make sense of what I find, and into the processes that occur when I work with others. The narratives are not simply stories of making sense, they are authentic sense-making in action. In a sense, this writing the end is ending the writing through another narrative of sense-making.

This resonates with Kushner's reflections on the nature of self. He places himself with Berger, sharing a belief in the idea that we are many selves held together by the 'thread of memory', selves that are present in different contexts. The authenticity and coherence of those many selves become apparent through the way they consistently search for meaning (2000, pp. 143-4).

To be consistent, and to honour Collingwood (1939), it might help if I tell you what the questions are now, to which this final narrative is a response:

What am I learning through this process, about that self, about what drives me, and how I work? What have I been doing with others, and how does that influence my work and the world I work in? What use might that be to you, what might you be able to do with the knowledge created through this process?

I'm always asking myself these kinds of questions. I keep asking them partly to make me think clearly about this thesis. What am I trying to communicate, explain, show you, when it comes to me and my ways of knowing, doing and being in the world? Can I get into the mood and mystery of my life and work, as Kushner quietly urges me to do, without bleeding it of all life, boring us, annotating it to death? And I keep asking them partly because as they come out and form on the page they take on the power of creation.

What am I learning through this process, about that self, about what drives me, and how I work?

It is with persistent questioning that this narrative starts. I cannot remember a time when I was not asking questions. I recall the frustration of my human biology teacher, faced with me asking 'why?' as I wanted to know more and more about the processes of what Maturana & Varela (1998) call 'living systems', asking why to the point where she had no answers. This is not a habit I acquired. I think this is written into who I am, inscribed in Madeline. Over five years of paying close attention, through writing-reflecting and asking myself, 'what is going on here, what process is this?', I sense that I have reached a place 'where insights occur, where words may acquire a depth of meaning' (van Manen, 2002, p. 3) that can only come through profound connection to the inquiry.

I am learning that my addiction to asking questions is questionable, should be questionable. I mean that I must ask questions of this too. I have come to see that I have distorted my capacity to be both compassionate and loving by holding on to the high-ground when it comes to asking questions. If I seek to control the territory of interaction in this way, by being in control of the inquiry agenda, I will never truly live in the interacting moment.

This is where that damp stain of bullying emerges for me again and again. I have internalised and embodied that experience in my practice of questioning. My determination to know, to be close to others finds expression, if I am not careful, in a bullying, nagging, berating, interrogating tendency. This comes out in my activism, in my anger, where I will demand that others act on the implications of my questions. They can be disguised demands, like those lawyer-like questions. I know what I want to hear. This is largely, I think, **a resistance to being seen**.

Time and again during this research period I have been asked to show myself. Others have needed to know what it is I am doing, and who I am when I am doing it. I have learned that it is not so hard to let people know, and it can be highly creative. This increasing willingness to be seen has shown me that real interacting networks of relation can only be built through the kind of trust generated by mutual exposure. In the world of work this mutual exposure comes through doing together, and creating together, and it is this that **forms the bonds that allow us to be our best selves**. This is what draws me to networks, the possibility of loving relation.

My attention to 'embodiment' has been rich and revealing. The way I experience the interaction I have with my environment and those around me, is subtle and strange and defiant when it comes to words. I have used my many and varied writings about what this connection feels like, how I sense it, what draws me and sucks me in, to show you what I mean by this because this is the only way I can. I have had to write this from myself, as I have not found expression in the words of other writers (including Varela) that helps to explain my experience. My knowledge of myself has come through writing about the subtle experience of response to Gormley's art, to Bourgeois, and the shape-changing I experience when I speak another language or play a part. It is a form of phenomenological attention to something that can only be revealed through my writing my self.

I have written my way round what it means to be both 'a part of' and 'apart from'. This finds expression in my work in Colombia, for instance, allowing me to be sufficiently touched to allow me to see an individual and be able to visualise the whole. What I call shape-changing is the embodiment of something akin to compassion, a way of offering to know another by being within my own skin and theirs.

I have been allowed to see by Rayner (1997, 2004), and Maturana & Varela (1998), that my framing of being 'a part and apart' has some connection to embodied biological processes. The 'living system' or entity that Maturana & Varela describe has process boundaries: the system is bounded by those things that participate in the processes of its living. That struggle for meaning Kushner writes about became less of a struggle for me when I spent time pondering on Rayner's notions of porous boundaries. I had already spent years writing about and telling people about my experience of strange connections with my environment, yet it was Rayner that asked me to think about the extent of individuality; not what is this individual, but how individual is this? This leads me to understand that I am a part of a network of relations that are essential for my survival. **I must be connected to others in order to be alive.**

This relation with my environment influences all the work that I am involved in. I tend not to think of my self in terms of what job I do. This is probably why I spend time in the first two sections of the thesis working to bring you to some understanding of important defining experiences that I feel I have embodied, and in this absorption have become. It is also why I find it tricky to respond to the 'What do you do?' question. The doing comes out of the being, and the being influences the doing. This thing I call bullying, for instance, is not something I consider myself to be a victim of, but something that gives this 'self' definition. It simply is there in everything I am and do.

This sense of my self operates powerfully when I work. It is this understanding of my self as someone in touch with their environment and keen to inquire that determines how I do my work. It allows me to do what I think Scharmer (2004) refers to when he talks of 'presencing': bringing into presence, and the present, what is called for. It gives me a kind of opening, an ability to connect with all perspectives and parties in a piece of work, such that I can see them operating as a network of relations. It doesn't change when the work changes. This occurs in my work with networks as much as in my evaluation work.

I have come to think of myself as someone who can determine what the good questions are to ask. My commitment as an evaluator is to **ask good questions**, reveal learning and encourage those who have to do the work to find ways to shift the sticky difficult bits. It is to place in full view of those involved what I see as the dynamics at work, and to provide a mediator's eye on the complexities of the many perspectives and relationships that make up a project. I don't presume to know. I **resist providing answers**, or claiming the kind of 'connoisseurship' that is characteristic of evaluation practice in which the evaluator is indeed placed high up in the 'hierarchy of judgement' (Kushner, 2002, p.118). I like to be seen as someone who is prepared to test others and her own assumptions about worth, and someone who can hold the complexity of context, people, ideas and practice in sight as well as see where movement forward might happen. I do this largely by engaging in conversation and creating relationship.

I have found my self reflected in Patricia Shaw's (2002) professional account of 'changing the conversation' as a way of being and doing. I can see myself here, as I move and shape-change my way in and out of webs of relation. I am at home in the

present of improvisation, at ease with the way human interaction works. I do not, I am relieved to say, see the present as a burden to be overcome (van Manen, 1997), but believe we make our world in the present. Maturana, in talking about democracy as a way of organising based on respect and love, says 'democracy is a work of art, you have to be creating it day by day, moment by moment.' (A day with Humberto Maturana, 6th Sept 2004) It is this that encourages me to do what I do.

What I have come to know is that without a commitment to knowing myself, coming to know myself, I cannot be a knowledgeable practitioner. What I like about Kushner, for instance is that he offers a vision of 'the evaluator juggling with competing identities and attendant feelings and responses in each present moment.' (2000, p. 124) and does not regard this as something to be overcome, but as something to be understood. He talks openly about the becoming, the bringing into being of his sense of self as an evaluator, and uses images which bring to mind movement and responsiveness, and a shifting, fluid view of the humanness of this work. He suggests that it is in our knowing of ourselves that we become knowledgeable practitioners.

What have I been doing with others, and how does that influence my work and the world I work in?

I started this inquiry process because I was concerned that the way I and we worked in networks was not visible in the kind of evaluation criteria routinely used to evaluate projects and programmes. The network-working that so characterised the work I and many others were doing could not be fully appreciated or understood through standard evaluation approaches. The work we did in the Action Research Group was profoundly influenced by this nagging doubt, this question, and the way it developed and found form owes a lot to this unease.

The real engagement that was created with the co-researching colleagues in the Action Research Project, and those that the project came into contact with, allowed us to put together some really influential ideas about what networks are, and how they can be imagined. We know the ideas are influential because others have said so. My belief is that we had the embodied knowing with and between us, knowing that the core of a network is to allow community to grow through respecting and valuing the potential of each individual, to give room for flourishing, while finding ways to work together on shared purpose. We worked with this pattern and process, and through doing so found our way to articulating what it looked like and how it could be communicated to others. The networked way we worked together embodied our knowing, and our knowing became revealed in the process.

Since completing that phase of my research, I have paid attention to my work as an evaluator, digging deeper into the **frameworks** we use and the **language** we have adopted.

Experience, my own and that of others, is that we are often keen and sharp when it comes to identifying the problem, we have after all learned 'problem-solving' as part of our mental models (Senge, 1995). We take refuge in this skill. We are then urged on constantly to specify what we will do to overcome these problems, to be clear about how we will solve what we have identified as needing fixing. Yet we are dealing with highly complex situations (war, poverty, structural inequality, discrimination). What Senge & Scharmer might call 'generative complexity' (2001, p. 247). We are faced with a tension

between current reality, knowing 'what the problem is', and those emerging futures, still emerging, largely unknown, non-determined, the not-yet-enacted, in which we require ourselves to act. This sense of emergence sits ill with a framework, a model of intervention that demands that we specify what we will do, as if we do, indeed, know how things will turn out.

This model, this 'logical framework' is where we derive the demand for evaluation from, and as such my work as an evaluator requires me to negotiate these two worlds. That of the unknown, intuitive, best-guess, idealistic maybe but certainly unknown, in which people are working 'to implement' plans and negotiate the distance between that and the reality they experience, and that of the logical model of 'if we do this, this will surely happen' inherent in project and programme planning, out of which evaluation is born. My skill, I think, is in being able to hold the shape of one, while asking pertinent questions of the other. Such questions include: why have we chosen to work with such inappropriate frameworks for our doing? Where might we find other, more appropriate ones?

At a metaphysical level, this is may well be an inevitable tension generated by the only certainty that we have, our own mortality. Kushner's thesis is that

'Social programs are vehicles for the cooption of people into ideal, even utopian, political states, that is, states which too often represent the denial of complexity and shortfall.'
(2000, p. 26)

He suggests that our desire to be perfect, to be effective, with perfect programs, is a way of avoiding the inevitability of death. This is somehow translated by all of us into a notion of protecting and engineering society, the place we have constructed in which to feel safe and protected from death. Or as he puts it

'The difficulty we have of confronting the reality that programs will most often fall short of their desired goals is partly conditioned by our reluctance to concede failure – which is itself a condition of a collective denial of mortality represented in that notion of 'social death' . (ibid.)

Matuarana contends that if we construct our societies as places where we cannot make mistakes, or change our opinions, we create a world in which we cultivate lying, a world in which there simply is no room for or meaning in reflection (A day with Humberto Maturana, 6 Sept 2004). I worry that our determination to plan and evaluate brings with it the dangers of erasing any space for real learning if it is tied to frameworks that are so results-oriented that they cannot but punish the failure to achieve. He encourages us to take our attention off results and pay attention to the processes of living. van Manen urges us to regain hope by 'dwelling' in the business of doing, rather than paying constant attention to where we might go and where we have been (1997).

Connected to this in complex ways is the language that we use to describe our work. The language of military victory infects all we do. We speak of targets, aims, strategies and allies as if our living is a battleground. Maybe this is not surprising, when we work in areas in which we must stand up and speak out against brutality and injustice and the violence of poverty and exclusion. We somehow lose sight of ourselves in our passionate determination to change things.

My experience working in Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, is that those of us involved in human rights and political activism find ourselves drawn into the lives and struggles of others. A consequence of this is the temptation to inhabit the role of victims, and speak on their behalf. Identification leads us to believe we are accountable only to them. We are then supremely challenged when faced with the question of whether or not to support armed struggle, armed struggle by those who see themselves as powerless to change things in other ways. Faced with dictatorships and the brutal violence of the powerful, we see how easy it is to argue for 'just war', find it hard to resist the logic of undermining military might with military subversion. Many of my working days have been spent wrestling with these ethical questions, and wrestling with people wrestling with them.

Maturana, with wise words, suggests that the language we use does not describe our doing, but constitutes it. Our doing is determined in some way by the language we put to it. If this is the case, then it is only by consciously changing the language we use that we can reconstitute our doing.

I have learned through this process, and through my relationship with the Alternatives to Violence Project, that violence, in any form, is a language of resistance that is reductionist, and one that is ultimately very poor at communicating, or contributing to, what is needed for change to occur. Guns or weapons substitute for real power, but they are temporary gains that over time damage the ability of those using them to see expansively. Guerrillas in Latin America, once popular heroes, have come to use the kinds of means that obscure their ends. Weapons reduce, not increase, one's capacity to find real power. They increase, not reduce, the fear of those using them, in apparent contradiction to the gun lobby and weapons manufacturers assertion. No amount of weaponry will ever provide the average insurgent with the power they need to run a country if they ever overthrow the regime, because such power comes with legitimacy, right action, and just decisions. No gun will ever encourage that capacity to grow. And legitimacy, right action and just governance include an understanding that we are all inter-dependent in the social contract, and that justice must be merciful and pain must be healed, if we are to build fair and forgiving societies.

Yet the language of compassion, healing, and love has little currency in the policy alternatives people create or are prepared to engage with. The security agenda these days has been defined on such narrow terms that the only response appears to be greater military hardware, or police surveillance, to deal with serious social problems. Similarly the language we use for our action in the world, these words like aims, targets, strategies, they disguise the humanness of what we are really about, and carry traces of war that undermine our capacity for love.

Similarly the language of 'need' we use currently keeps us in the dark. We focus our attention on the word 'need'. This word increasingly feels like a black hole of lacking, emptiness, a space to be filled. We create a world of failed potential in our minds, as we track across the 'needs' of those we work with, and drag ourselves into an expanding place of 'never enough'. I chip away at this in the many and varied places where I go. I resist asking or answering the question, 'what do you need from this?' when I attend a workshop or conference. My response is to talk about contribution, ideas and potential. The work we did on networks and evaluation influenced this, and I use the energy it gave me to continue to influence others. This emphasis on unique contributions is crucial to

my understanding of what makes or breaks working together. It taps into our energy and drive, and releases what is there.

Maturana holds one learning moment clear in his mind: the day his tutor told him that if he wanted to say something new, and bring forth a different world, he had to change the language he was using. My determination has become to speak a different language; a language of love and compassion and human potential. Balancing anger with love and compassion is a really hard road. It is so much easier in the fire of passion to be vengeful. Rigid. Unforgiving. And in the flexibility of love the arc of anger easily flops, becomes flaccid. Sappy. Routing anger into action that not only does no harm, but transforms and encourages life well-lived with integrity, in me and others, is an effort that requires constant attention, reflection, and questions. Here, too, I think I have a contribution to make, in changing the conversation, and looking for new words.

Transforming experience

Lastly, I have learned what it is to write my way into knowing. What makes me me is that I am writing about it. Here. Now. Pondering it and writing it. This is how I make meaning, and it is often wonderful fun, not just a struggle.

The process of the doctorate has been one of me getting to know the depth and complexity of my personal professional being, largely through attempting to account for myself to a reader. The act of writing, committing to paper, to text, has been an act of faith in the power of writing to reveal in some mysterious way a question, then a response, a further question and response, and through that process create space for a more detailed, nuanced, and complex picture of myself in practice to emerge. This is not writing up knowledge, this is knowing created by writing.

This is a process that includes much not knowing, desperation, creative flux, sensing, and tracing the very tied up and complex threaded nature of the connections that come to make up the whole. I have learned that it is a process that happens whenever I attempt any piece of sense-making. I have to write it around and around and around, and come in and out and stand and wait. If I follow the hyphens, I will be able to see it differently. And it is this 'seeing differently' that means I can emerge out of the spinning process. Many of Maturana's moments in his history of thinking were moments when he realised he was asking the wrong question. He needed to pose the question differently in order to see differently. He needed a new language to describe that new seeing. This is what happens when I write. The question clarifies, and the language rises to meet it.

It has taken me a long time working away at this thesis to get to something that, now its there, looks incredibly obvious. I could not connect in my mind the experience of being bullied, and the work I was doing in networks. The connection with working in places like Colombia, in AVP, and my responses to the horrors of Rwanda, urged on by that bruise on my skin, these things I knew at the start. I had already a certainty that I could never just stand around and watch while others brutalise their fellow beings. I had read enough Primo Levi and Rigoberta Menchu, and had written out enough testimonies and made enough submissions to UN institutions to know how they connected. Like I said in the introduction, 'person bullied resolves to fight injustice', an oft-told story.

I have written myself round and round the knots and threads of my experience of embodied connection with my environment, my curiosity, and my fight with the 'apart of

and apart from' question over five years. I could see certain things -standing up, being counted, creating communities, and acting against violence with love – but I couldn't get to the simplicity of the connecting idea.

It is writing, that mysterious process of getting inside the fabric by externalising, moulding, watching for words, that has brought me to myself.

Mainly what I have learned here is that I was bullied in part because I resisted the cosy, lazy, dangerous power of the gang, the group, the self-referencing community. I asked questions that upset the balance of things. I wanted to know why things were as they were. I didn't buy into 'accepted norms' of teaching people a lesson. I poked away at the things you were supposed to accept as fact. I have never felt a part of this way of knowing and being. **Being bullied simply made me less a part.**

Yet I have always been exuberant in my joy at finding ways of exploring things with other people. I have spent my life searching out good company, challenging people, interesting writers and inspiring ideas. This intensified search for connection has involved hard work. I have struggled with my instinct to resist being known by others, to resist exposing myself and revealing who I am. I have avoided joining, becoming a member, preferring instead to hover around the edges. As such I have ended up creating a community for myself, in the only way that makes any sense to me, both in my personal life and my professional life: through **forming networks of connection and relation.**

It is this that links my life, my work and my lived experience. **I find myself in networks.** I can be myself, and have just enough community to be at ease. Their self-organising nature, in flat structures of autonomous entities, releases me from the pain of dealing with hierarchies of judgement. The voluntary nature of the engagement, held together through the levels of trust created out of joint purpose, this makes sense to me as a reason for being together. Here I can be angry and forgiving, active and reflective. I can be in at times, and out at others. There are the seeds of love here. **Somehow here I find room to breathe.**

And then again.....

BELONGING

In the process of moving through to acceptance in the Academy, I am sent two pre-viva reports by my external and internal examiners. These constitute the substance of the areas that the examiners are intending to touch on in the viva voce examination.

In an attempt to understand ‘what is going on here?’ I start to write out some responses to the following questions from my external examiner. I know I must respond robustly in the viva.

1. What checks does Madeline have against self-deception?
2. On what grounds is the reader asked to believe this account?
3. In the world of meaning represented in this thesis, what stands for data and evidence?
4. What are the limits to critique that Madeline is inventing here?
5. How are the three principal themes finally resolved?

This writing of myself onto the page, again, constitutes not just a final learning curve in this inquiry, but illuminates more clearly what stands for data and evidence in this research, and how such research can be validated as knowledge. Holding the questions in mind, I work through a way to explain and not just describe what my thesis offers in terms of knowledge.

This sentence ‘holding the questions in mind’ and ‘working through’ doesn’t really do justice to the amount of thinking, processing, writing, speaking, thinking, dreaming, thinking, writing and again, goes on when I hold something in mind like this.

My external examiner asks, ‘What counts for data and what for evidence in this world of meaning here?’ I spend a long session reading the comments and pondering this issue of data and evidence. In working my way through, it seems that validity is the main issue for him. I realise that it would help to bridge the divide between worlds of meaning if I could explain this in more detail. It requires me to stand in his world, and speak from mine, creating a connection to the ‘other’ while retaining the individuality which finds expression in this thesis. It is another act of standing within and without, of shape-changing, and of resisting a community of conformity (all data and evidence are tested and agreed in the same way) in pursuit of a community of diversity (multiple ways of knowing validated by appropriate criteria). I sense that through this process I am creating an uncompromised place to belong.

The thesis

The starting premise is that the only thing I actually have any control over is myself, and the way I act. It is this that I can affect. This requires me to pay attention to ‘being’, to the being of Madeline. Ontology, therefore, is my entry point into a self-study account of my learning over time. In the field of self-study, much emphasis is laid on attention to practice, to doing, and to asking how that practice might improve by examination of that practice. My entry point is on paying attention to ‘being’, self, and the way that ‘being’ creates the ‘doing’ of practice. In turn, the very act of paying attention to ‘being’, and the effect that ‘being’ has on ‘doing’, transforms the nature of the ‘doing’ and the ‘being’.

As I pay attention to myself, I test that knowing by gradually revealing myself and what I know about myself to others, in conversation, pieces of writing, accounting for myself as I speak about what I am researching. This is an exercise not only of triangulation but has transformation integrated into it. As I test this out, I am overcoming the desire not to be known. It is hard, this revealing process, like peeling back and exposing. And in that act of accounting for myself I find more evidence of the way in which resisting being seen prevents me from being in connection with others, which is what I desire.

The lived experience, and its effect on my action in the world, begins to be transformed. I find that accounting for myself has power, generative effects, it creates the possibility of further connection and knowledge.

This way of working allows for closeness to the 'thing', and distance from it. The thesis here is that getting close to the interior qualities, the ineffableness of the 'thing', will allow me to see by what criteria I can value it, judge it. In the research project on networks and evaluation we quickly found that we needed to pay attention to the nature of the thing first, as lived and experienced by those involved in the action research group and those we connected with, if we were to understand and know about how to evaluate it. The knowledge we generated about the nature of the thing has been used and is being 'tested', let's say, by others, who work in networks, and as that happens, the criteria we use to evaluate this thing become better known.

So, knowing more about myself, through paying attention to this lived experience means that I begin to see how I judge myself, to clarify what I hold to be the standards I live by and which live in me as I choose my work, and do any work.

And as those standards become clearer to me, they affect me and what I do. As such they are alive and working. They become my negative feedback process, the way I stay alive to my practice. Am I acting here from my commitment to fairness, and my compassionate self? Am I connected enough to be able to stand on your ground, while at the same time able to stay standing on mine? Am I revealing enough of who I am and what I am doing here for you to be able to hold me to account? This is how bullying, self-knowledge, evaluation and networks are networked together.

So what counts for data and evidence in this world of meaning?

The data I use is what comes from that paying attention. I hold 'the thing' in mind in every context I am in. The 'object' of attention starts as, 'What effect has bullying had on Madeline?' and I carry it with me wherever I go. There is the 'object' of attention and there is Madeline, two constants in all contexts. As I hold this in my attention, as I write about it, think about it, and watch my practice through this lens, it begins to reveal different aspects. This is a first layer data-base. I read my writing, and talk about my thoughts and reflections to others. I see some obvious evidence here that one effect of this bullying, and it seems like the easiest to see, is that 'Madeline makes choices about where she works as a result of being bullied', (in defence of human rights, standing alongside others, determined to stand up for fairness and justice).

This is the first round. In holding the 'what effect?' question in mind, other less startling but more interesting evidence emerges from the data, and generates a deeper aspect to the object of attention. One deeper aspect, for instance, is the nature of Madeline's

question-forming. It appears that Madeline likes to ask questions, is good at asking questions, and is, maybe, rather unhealthily addicted to asking questions. Again, sustained attention to this, the way it manifests itself in every context (work, home, human interaction, writing) generates more data, another layer of data to be examined and understood.

Such examination reveals confusing evidence. The data-gathering process of sustained and maintaining attention has revealed something that surfaces as 'Madeline always asks the deeper question' and is felt by Madeline as an embodied understanding of what is itching to be asked. At the same time, there seems to be an embedded resistance to being seen, that leads to a sophisticated practice of deflecting attention by turning the question on the questioner. Lastly, there is evidence of an internalised practice of bullying which suggests that Madeline can be a bully, and this is revealed through her questioning practice.

So, paying attention generates evidence that Madeline has incorporated a practice of resistance to bullying that is personally protective – asking questions – has bullying tendencies built into it, and as an expression of curiosity is in itself questionable.

This evidence leads me to ask what such evidence might help me to see about what appears to be a lived paradox - a desire to know, and a desire not to be known – and to ask if one is possible if the other remains in place.

This, then, becomes a second object of attention, held in mind as contexts shift. It is also, in itself, evidence of Madeline being drawn to asking the deeper question.

This means Madeline is now holding the 'what effect?' question in mind, and the 'what is going on in Madeline's question-forming processes? in all contexts. This generates more data, about more mysterious embodied knowing, and the nature of connection across seemingly rigid boundaries of self and space. What presents itself here as evidence is more opaque. Yet it is present in the nature of the being of Madeline, and affects the way I work. As such it is worthy of my attention, and requires me to know it better, to attend to how it affects my work and interaction with others.

And so on. As I work with this notion of boundaries to self, I weave back into the experience of being bullied and begin to wonder if this boundary question isn't somehow related to the way others both fear, and are attracted to, Madeline. And I also weave outwards, and start to pay attention to what this means in terms of my responses to community and belonging. I begin to understand how my resistance to being known is a resistance to a community of conformity, and my desire for connection is an expression of my delight in communities of diversity. This is more evidence of being drawn to asking deeper questions, not simply persistently asking questions. My external examiner asks if persistent questioning is enough if we are not sure we are asking the right questions. I'm not sure in this territory I would use terms such as 'right'. However, it is clear to me that the questions that have depth and the energy to hold the attention over prolonged periods are worth asking, in this time, now. And they evolve as the inquiry progresses.

What, therefore counts as valid when it comes to being seen as knowledge, a claim to know? Is this simply an exercise in self-deception? What counts for data negotiation and triangulation in this world?

What brings rigour to this process is the dogged nature of attention. Of never quite letting go. In this thesis, the whole context of work and life, of practice in many jobs, and interaction with people, art and academic literature constitute data. Evidence is regularly culled from the data to give greater depth to the question, to bring another aspect or perspective to bear on the 'thing', to bring into attention other 'things' that might illuminate the nature of this self and its effect on doing. And such methodology, at least in this instance, provides evidence that transformation of practice (if in this case one aspect of my practice is question-forming) is at least possible through attention to the ontological, and not just the methodological, or the 'how do we do it better' question.

Triangulation in this world means entering the space from many places, walking around it like you would a sculpture, and watching it from many perspectives. It is also a bit like revealing a sculpture out of stone, paying attention to, and interacting with, its emergence. This requires me to be both a part of the question and a part from it. I must trace its relationship to other aspects, entering from different places. I watch from inside - what does it feel like, how does it affect my body, how does my body affect it, how does my body interact with the artwork of others – and I watch from outside - through writing myself out onto the page, paying attention to what is on the page and writing again, asking others what they see, watching how they react. The many voices in the text of Madeline seek to convey those places: writing / bodily sensing, the artwork of others, the holding of pertinent questions in mind, multiple conversations with others. Those places of connecting with the inquiry are also manifestations of the field of knowing. They are the matter arising as the inquiry takes form and shape.

In the sub-set of the thesis, in which the project to develop more appropriate network evaluation methodology sits, the published Working Paper 121 is a more standard example of data negotiation. All members of the group involved in the conversational practice we developed approved the data we generated, and all made inputs into the report and had a chance to suggest edits and changes. I take the example of participation. It was clear through the questionnaires and the action research group that the participation of network participants, how to increase it, sustain it, make it more 'productive' (in evaluation terms), was the central area that did not get covered in standard evaluation methodologies used in the field. This evidence of 'failure' of standard approaches led us to work on how to 'measure' participation, and what criteria we needed to pay attention to in that area. This is what led to thinking through alternative evaluation strategies, ones more appropriate to the nature of the thing, the network.

The project was intended to make evaluation useful for people working in and with networks. What counts as evidence here is that people are using the work.

What appears to be valid as knowledge in the context of international social change networks is that attention to their nature has created the possibility that those working within them can generate criteria appropriate to their nature. This is linked to the above, in that alternative evaluation methodology can be generated from the knowledge of the nature of this 'thing' called network, and based on criteria that fits the 'thing'. This inevitably is not complete, indeed feels like it has only just begun, especially when it comes to internalising a practice of paying attention to the nature of the network thing and encouraging the setting of criteria appropriate to same. What counts as evidence here is that people have responded to the work not as to a 'toolkit' but as an illumination of the nature of the thing that they wish to judge. This, in turn, is evidence that the inquiry

into the nature of a thing can create standards of judgement which more appropriately respond to our desire to know what is valid and what not.

Lastly, the text itself is evidence that I choose to hold myself to account in relation to clearly articulated values. In this text the evidence is there that I am noticing certain things and not others. The very fact that I am looking for evidence of this, rather than something else, in the data, indicates that I am holding myself to account in relation to these values and standards rather than other values and standards.

This can be seen in the standards I use for myself, and my action, when I evaluate (which are distinct from standards I might use to evaluate a thing that has its own appropriate criteria, such as a network) and which can be found on p122. I watch as I see how my values translate into living standards. These are summarized as appreciation, care, understanding and critical insight, what I call an act of 'valuation grounded in an ethical standpoint'. It involves acting with care, with an intention to be inspirational, not judgmental. I clearly state that 'I would feel that I had failed,' were people to consider I had acted otherwise. As such I am accountable to others, I can be called to account if I fail to meet these standards.

The text is evidence that paying attention in this way creates knowledge of my self which can then lead to transformation. I have come to know this. In this world of meaning, knowledge is created about the effect of bullying on Madeline, which can then be seen to be transformed. This is most noticeable by examining the 'accounting for' process. An example: through paying attention, I notice that I resist being seen, and this manifests itself in never quite telling anybody anything. As I notice this I notice that such resistance serves me ill in my search for connection, which is what I both desire and wish to control. As I begin to allow others to question me, and to connect to others, as I begin to account for my learning process through writing, I find that that the very 'accounting for' process transforms my creative connections, and allows me to understand better the criteria I use to judge myself, and what I wish to be accountable to. As such I am creating, through inquiry, standards of judgment for myself, which Whitehead would call living standards. This is knowledge that may be useful for the future purposes of testing validity in self-study accounts.

Creating an account that not just describes but shows a process of transformation over time, and is an example itself of the methodology of holding in mind and paying attention to an evolving 'thing' (which evolves and transforms as the account is created) contributes to the development of standards of judgment for self-study accounts, which Whitehead (2004) and Bullough and Pinnegar (2004, p. 319) suggest are needed in the field.

As I am turning the examiner's questions over and over in my mind on the morning of the viva, I begin to see something. I realize that what I am holding in mind are the vast array of question marks upon the page '?????' (there are no less than 18 questions in the five pages of pre-viva notes I have been asked to read and pay attention to) and the word **Madeline**, a word used 21 times throughout the text. I am also holding in mind a desire to stay connected to others in the room as I conduct myself in this very exposing viva process. I am sure that this is the first hurdle. If I can find myself here, in the academy, and create a place here in which I can feel like I belong, then this doctoral work will indeed have transformed my action and being in the world. To do this I must stay connected. I see I

have set myself a test. I chose these examiners. I wanted them to read and interrogate my accounting for myself. There will be three diverse ways of knowing in the room. Can we all find a place in which we both encounter one another and let the other arise? Can I hold what I experience as intrusive and difficult questions in the spirit in which I hope they were intended? Can I resist my habitual responses when faced with the questions of others? If I can then I will have internalized what I describe as transformation. I have paid real, dedicated attention to these questions and as such found multiple revelations in them. They have provided me with the opportunity to continue the process of transformation. I will have recovered myself, Madeline, and found myself here.

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APPENDICES

CONTENTS

Appendix I – Church, M., et al., (2003) Working Paper 121.

Appendix II – Church, M. & Bitel, M., (2001) Paper for UKES Conference.

Appendix III – Nuñez, M. & Wilson-Grau, R., (2003) Toward a conceptual framework for evaluating international social change networks.

Appendix IV – Church, M. & Joss, S., (2003) Introduction to Networks, Workshop.

Appendix V – Church, M., (2000) Colombia Forum, Issue 22.