

Chapter 2

**EXPRESSIONS OF ENERGY: AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF
PRESENTATIONAL KNOWING**

Chris Seeley & Peter Reason

SITUATING THE KNOWERS: THE WRITING STORY

Chris Seeley started life with drawing, painting, making – a childhood informed by creating – before studying graphic design, moving into a corporate identity and then industrial market research and new business development. She broadened her horizons at the turn of the century to encompass wider global issues and seeks to re-integrate her expressive creative life into her work as a response to sustainability and the current world situation. Now, Chris is a consultant and Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) at the University of Bath, working with public, private and educational organisations incorporating many different ways of knowing ranging from poetry to image theatre to collective art-making. Her own learning takes her outside the boundaries of intellect into an exploration of the clown archetype – an improvised, unmediated way of receiving the world – which encourages the brain to rest and allows spontaneous, emotional responses to emerge.

Peter Reason is Professor of Action Research/Practice and Director of the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP), which has pioneered graduate education based on collaborative, experiential and action oriented forms of inquiry through the Postgraduate Programme in Action Research and the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice. Peter's major concern is with the devastating and unsustainable impact of human activities on the biosphere which, he believes, is grounded in our failure to recognize the participatory nature of our relationship with the planet and the cosmos. He is interested in the disciplines we need to develop in order to live in the participatory worldview he believes we need to address these issues. Peter's presentational knowing practices include "freefall" writing and wood carving.

This exploration is grounded in Chris Seeley's doctoral work (Seeley, 2006), which is an extended exploration of experiential knowing. Peter takes credit for this solely as the co-founder, Director and maybe sometimes inspirational teacher on the Postgraduate Programme

in Action Research in which Chris's inquiries took place. We came to write this chapter together after a series of exploratory conversations to deepen our understanding of the potential for presentational knowing in our work. To honour the primary origin of this work, from this point on the reflections in this chapter are expressed primarily, but not exclusively in Chris's first-person voice.



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

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

20 years pass, and I am facilitating a group of mid-career managers. We sit in a circle, eyes shut. Some of them peek and fidget. "Remember a time when you were completely

engrossed in what you were making,” I say, leading them through a short visualisation. Many of the stories we discuss afterwards are of childhood memories, of a time before anyone had thought to say “I can’t draw,” or knew that scribbling wasn’t a valuable way to spend your time.

You may not find yourself scribbling with wild abandon too often and you may not consider yourself an artist, but, as Goethean scientist, Margaret Colquhoun (1996: 20) suggests:

the arrangement of furniture in our living room, the daily choice of our garment, our handwriting or even just the scribbles which we make on a notepad while telephoning are outer expressions of inner qualities.

There is nothing out of the ordinary in presentational knowing. As you read this chapter, let go of any “it’s not of value” or “I can’t do arty-things”-type thoughts that creep in. It is and you do, all the time.

A Doodle at the Edge

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

(William Ayot)

MANY WAYS OF KNOWING

How do we (Chris and Peter) do presentational knowing in this chapter, and not have it swallowed up by abstracted propositions and theories about it? How can this chapter be both a good enough fit with the conventions of academic writing and at the same time a living example of presentational knowing, reflecting the very issues it is seeking to illuminate? How might we allow our presentational knowing to take messy, stuttering forms, if it needs to? Will we resist the temptation to strive for a glossy “performance” of smoothly flowing text? Or will this presentation of our knowing only pass muster if we perform in the “right” way?

We come to know the world holistically in many different ways, but only some of them are recognised as valuable in modernist society. The myth of utility-maximising, rational homo economicus strongly informs wealthy, Western, patriarchal culture. On the surface of things, people tend to get rewarded most highly for working in their heads with ideas, concepts, money and numbers.

In our work at (CARPP) at the University of Bath, we emphasise that action research “draws on many ways of knowing, both in the evidence that is generated in inquiry and its expression in diverse forms of presentation as we share learning with wider audiences” (Reason & Bradbury, in press 2008). Action research, in common with contemporary qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), seeks to go beyond orthodox empirical and

rational Western views of knowing, and assert a multiplicity of ways of knowing that start from a relationship between self and other, through participation and intuition. They assert the importance of sensitivity and attunement in the moment of relationship, and of knowing not just as an academic pursuit but as the everyday of acting in relationship and creating meaning in our lives. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:9).

Philosopher Suzanne Langer (1942, cited in Taylor 2004: 73) saw how fundamentally different ways of knowing were needed to come to know more holistically when she wrote:

There are presentational/aesthetic forms of representation and discursive/propositional forms, which are fundamentally different. For example, presentational forms represent wholes, while discursive forms represent parts; presentational forms represent tacit knowledge, while discursive forms represent explicit knowledge.

For a theoretical framework, we draw specifically on the ‘extended epistemology’ articulated by John Heron. His four interwoven ways of knowing (Heron 1992, 1999) reach beyond the confines of conventional intellectual positivism to embrace the pre-verbal, manifest and tacit knowings we might associate with artists, crafts people and our own guts and hearts and bodies. Heron says:

Experiential knowing – imaging and feeling the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing – is the ground of presentational knowing. Presentational knowing – an intuitive grasp of the significance of patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical and verbal art-forms – is the ground of propositional knowing. And propositional knowing – expressed in statements that something is the case – is the ground of practical knowing – knowing how to exercise a skill (Heron 1999: 122).

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

In this chapter, we place a magnifying glass on the second of Heron’s four-fold ways to knowing – presentational knowing. We will extend its focus wide to include the transitions in and out of presentational knowing, coming up from experiential and then onwards towards propositional knowing.

The full category of presentational knowing was a late addition to Heron’s theory, encompassing intuition and reflection, imagination and conceptual thinking (Heron, 1992: 158). It was only through experiencing the value of coming to know the world in this way that he came to believe that presentational knowing “was valuable in its own right, not only as a bridge between experiential grounding and propositional knowing” (Heron, 1992: 175). Presentational knowing can be the least mediated (most immediate) way of knowing following direct experience. Heron (1992: 176) goes on to say:

If we agree that presentational symbolism is indeed a mode of knowing, then we can no longer conveniently distance ourselves from its use by delegating it to the artistic community. We need to bring it right back into the mainstream knowledge quest.

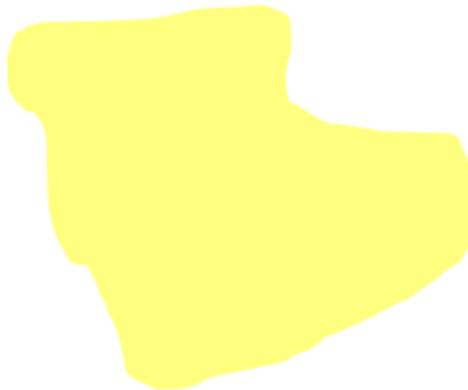
Heron (1992: 165-168) further claims that:

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

Over the past three years I (Chris) have been exploring around the edges of and into presentational knowing through the forms of improvisational court jester-style clowning and storytelling, plus numerous presentational knowing, writing, poetry and visual art-based workshops which I have attended or (co-)facilitated. This foray into presentational forms is in response to increasing complexity in my working life and a sense of “hitting the buffers” of what my intellect alone can “work out.”

A friend once asked me whether I found that my intellect “got in the way”. Lately it seems to me that it can cloud out other knowings with its certainty, which serves me well only in some situations. This writing does not claim to be **the** epistemology to presentational knowing, it can only be **an** epistemology, based on our experiences of and ideas about presentational knowing and the ways in which we construe meaning from those experiences.

Through a process of gathering books, films, music, images and memories, of sleeping on it, of reading, walking and talking, I asked myself what I see when I look through that magnifying glass at this concept of presentational knowing. After a week of this process of active mulling, I woke up early with an intuition about a pattern of co-arising themes (highlighted) and roughly noted them.



- 1. **Sensuous encountering:** using all our ways of sensing to experience the world directly with a whole-body sense of curiosity and appreciation for the glorious mundane²;
- 2. **Suspending:** hanging fire with fresh³ rounds of clever intellectual retorts in order to become more deeply acquainted with the responses to experience of our more-than-brainy bodies to the more-than-human world;
- 3. **Bodying-forth:** inviting imaginative impulses to express themselves through the media of our bodies without our intellects throwing a spanner in the works and crushing those responses with misplaced rationality or premature editing and critique;
- 4. **Being in-formed:** becoming beings whose living and actions form and are informed by the rich experiences, surprises, provocations and evocations of presentational knowing, both as perceivers and as creators.

In the next four sections of the chapter, we expand on each of these themes, drawing on our own experiences as well as a rich diversity of ideas and creative actions from thinkers and artists who work in at the deep end of presentational knowing, taking it seriously as a way to knowing. Rather than pitting the presentational against the propositional, we advocate the healthy, dynamic interplay of all of these ways to knowing. Gregory Bateson (2000: 470) contends:

There are bridges between one sort of thought (intellectual) and the other (emotional), and it seems to me that the artists and poets are specifically concerned with these bridges. It is not that art is the expression of the unconscious, but rather that it is concerned with the relation between the levels of mental process... Artistic skill is the combining of many levels of mind –unconscious, conscious and external- to make a statement of their combination.

Wahl (2005: 74-75) makes the link between the need for multiple epistemologies and the development of greater sustainability when he says:

We are in a process of a fundamental shift in society's guiding paradigm, as our motivation for achieving knowledge changes from an aim to increase our ability to predict, control and manipulate natural processes to an aim to increase our ability to make the complex dynamics and relationships in nature more intelligible in order to participate appropriately in the health and wholeness sustaining processes of Nature... The fabric of life is unravelling with humanity as a conscious witness but also a cause of the disintegration. We are desperately in need of what Goethe called 'knowledge utterly in tune with the nature of things.'

² *Glorious:* magnificent, wonderful, splendid, intensely delightful. *Mundane:* commonplace, everyday, of this world. *Glorious mundane:* that which is intensely delightful of this world, the wonderful everyday stuff of life. Similarly, Arthur Frank calls for the recognition of a "mundane charisma" (Frank, 200X, exact date unknown, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~frank/ride.html>).

³ We inevitably carry into the encounter all our intellectual knowing, hypotheses, memories and personal constructs of how the world works. And good thing, too, lest we be run over by the next bus whilst sensuously appreciating the glorious qualities of its rapidly advancing redness.

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



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

SENSUOUS ENCOUNTERING

Messy, rich direct experience where we are a part of our complex, creative planet is the grounding for all our other ways to knowing (whether we like it or not). Without experiencing

and acknowledging an earthy, sensuous rootedness in the world around us, we run the risk of perpetuating the disconnected, objectifying intellectualisation that keeps us apart from the wider world.

Paradoxically, the process of writing this chapter has kept me (Chris) apart in this way, cocooned with my computer and the ever-present books. I surround myself with flowers at the writing table and fill the birdfeeders for company now my dear dog has died and I am no longer being taken for walks by him.

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

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

If our dominant modernist, throw-away society mitigates against such appreciation, then, as Dewey (1958: 54) puts it:

There is work to be done on the part of the percipient as there is on the part of the artist. The one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention to perform this work will not see or hear. His ‘appreciation’ will be a mixture of scraps of learning with conformity to norms of conventional admiration and with a confused, even if genuine, emotional excitement.

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

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

Architect Christopher Alexander (1979: 548) tells a story of what it is to relish such experience:

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



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

(Richards, 1997: 155)

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

We can choose how we pay attention to the world through the qualities of our reflection. And we can choose how we respond when we allow our attention to be caught by something out there through a child-like receptivity of being spoken to by the "thing". Both choices offer the opportunity to enrich the ground of our experience. But what of the qualities of those experiences? How are we to be responsible for the kinds of experiences with which we populate our living? What choices can we make about the contexts that will in-form us, about what we pay attention to, and about what experiences we immerse ourselves in? Sewall (2000: 85-90) warns that

Without awareness of the body's response to each place and moment, our experience is little more than a 'view from nowhere.' With our senses cut off from a deep engagement with the colors and sounds of a dense and vibrant life-world, we become increasingly disembodied.

The choices we can make (and our responses to those that we can't) build a foundation for our responses to the world. With a sensuous, erotic, curious, playful and emotional engagement with experience, we have a rich compost to work with as such foundational experience begins to quicken into response.

SUSPENDING

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

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

In MC Richard's language (1964: 65-66), suspending is the "and" part of a rhythm she likens to breathing:

To bring the universe into personal wholeness, to breathe in, to drink deep, to receive, to understand, to yield, to read, life. AND to spend wholeness in the act, to breathe out, to give, to mean, to say to write, to create life.

When the group I (Chris) work with are improvising clowning, Vivian asks us to become aware of "suspending", that is allowing the next responsive impulse to emerge – from the whole body and not as a premeditated idea had in advance of taking action⁴. Suspension means staying open to what the imagination brings up. In one improvisation game, the clown standing to my right plays with an imaginary object or substance, vocalising sounds to bring the squishy, bouncy, stretchy, huge or tiny object to life. I feel slightly nervous as my turn approaches. My intellect takes over for a moment: will I be "good enough"? I let the thought go (or suppress it). I know from experience at this that hidden self-doubt doesn't help. I watch and listen to what he is doing, and gradually join in. I copy his movement and in unison we enact being devoured by an object which has become huge in his imagination. I carry on playing and the clown to my right gradually stops. His imaginary object has been passed on to me and I am "infected" by its presence. I continue – this is the moment of suspension – until I receive (from where?), a surprising and unpremeditated imaginative impulse. I am drawn to stepping outside of the huge object and folding it up, crushing it underfoot until it is a long flat... thing... that I pick up. The clown on my left watches me, copies me and takes over. And so it goes on.

Suspending can be an embodied, rhythmic movement from which improvisation can emerge. Goethean practitioner, Heather Thoma (2003: 17) describes this movement:

⁴ In improvised clowning, premeditated reactions – "coming in with an idea" – show a mile off. The clown becomes drained of emotion, and so do the audience, who cease to respond. Laughter stops. Poignancy and resonance ceases. A shared carpet of breath unravels. It all gets a bit too clever for its own good.

Rather than deciding where to move through my thinking mind, I am patient and waiting to discover how the intelligence of my body wants to reveal itself in motion.

Perhaps it was in this spirit that the poet John Keats (written Sunday 21 December 1817) coined the phrase “negative capability” in a letter written to his brothers:

I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”

Many writers have commented on the idea of negative capability. For example, MC Richards (1964: 115) calls it “[enjoying] our doubts as symptoms in the process of knowledge”. Heron (1992: 174) says that Keats “meant the empathic attunement to be out there eating seed with the sparrow”. Bamford (2005: 14) suggests that it is “a most gentle, intimate emptiness.”

Suspending seems to be a process of allowing non-intellectual space both for fundamental, wise, right, essential knowing to distil from complexity and, at the same time for fundamental, wise, right, pluralised⁵ knowing to multiply from complexity (where that complexity includes our current intellectual constructs).

In clowning, one of the “objectives” is to hold open a premature intellectual interpretation of an event, object or relationship until it is actually experienced. For example, one of the very first exercises “new” clowns experiment with is called “Scene One”. Here, the clown simply steps onto the stage with nothing in mind, no ideas at all. The clown makes eye contact with the audience – still with a blank and receptive state – and approaches a blanket left on the floor in the middle of the stage. The challenge is to respond to the blanket – to interpret its meaning – in the moment. And then leave the stage, acknowledging the audience on the way out. Through this simplest of improvisational forms, I (Chris) have seen the blanket transformed into tents, shrouds, babies, monsters, ghosts, animals, security blankets, nun’s habits and so on and so on.

Through “Scene One” we see what is at the core of this type of improvisational clowning – embodying an innocent naïveté as if the world was encountered anew in each moment. Clowning invites the practice and lived experience that Zen Buddhists might call “beginner’s mind.”

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

⁵ This term comes from Augusto Boal’s “Image Theatre”, a part of his “Theatre of the Oppressed” (Boal, 1979). Image Theatre invites multiple interpretations of human bodies sculpted into different representations of feelings, ideas and relationships to proliferate without collapsing meaning down to one “right” answer or meaning.

(Chris) Such receptivity, in clowning, often results in the clown “becoming” the phenomenon. We have a specific improvisation which invites the first of three clowns to make an entrance on the stage and spontaneously embody (temporarily turn into) something, for example a radiator. A second clown comes on and affirms their “identity” (“Phew! It’s getting hot in here” says the second clown. “Would you like me to turn myself down a bit?” says the first, twiddling with her own imaginary radiator controls). The third comes in, still improvising, and then “names” the situation, for example “Did somebody call a plumber?”

Suspending implies letting our spontaneous, empathic, intuitive responses come forward, rather than striving to make it happen through some effort of will. Bateson (2000: 439-440) points out the limitations of the intellect (or conscious purpose) working in isolation when he says:

“Wisdom I take to be the knowledge of the larger interactive system – that system which, if disturbed, is likely to generate exponential curves of change. [Consciousness] is organized in terms of purpose. It is a short-cut device to enable you to get quickly at what you want; not to act with maximum wisdom in order to live, but to follow the shortest logical or casual path to get what you next want, which may be dinner; it may be a Beethoven sonata; it may be sex. Above all, it may be money or power.”

Through suspending we are allowing our primary thought processes to flourish, thinking in images – imagining - before reducing those thoughts to linguistic or other languages. Suspending sits at the core of improvisation, imagination and intuition.

In clowning, suspending particularly means attending to the complexity of our emotional responses. In my (Chris’s) experience, clowning has demanded that I become better practiced and more open to paying multiple attentions at the same time to, for example, my emotions, my inner state, the props on stage, other clowns around me on the stage, the audience, what is happening around the audience. The clown is forever drawing wider and wider boundaries around what is included and relevant.

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

Presentational knowing all too often finishes at this stage, after conception (sensuous encountering), but before birth (bodying forth). Perhaps its offspring are aborted before they’ve even begun. When (2000: 87) considering the making “experience sing”, psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Ken Wright suggests that “experience is latent until it finds a form”. In the light of these issues, the question now becomes “what happens (or not) between suspending in order to let something arise, and the expression of that emergent gesture of response?”

Both in this writing and in my (Chris’s) life, it is all too often at this point – where the ground needs to be prepared for the expressive presentational act – that I falter. I have stumbled during this piece of writing with a week of searching for links between suspension and bodying forth. How might the process I have experienced in this act of writing (which, after all, is some form of presentational knowing) give me a clue about the point I wanted to make? How could I express the link between suspending and bodying forth? During that week of groping around for links, I bobbed up from sleep one night, scribbled this in the dark,

and found my link through the idea of my emotions having “nowhere to go” and my gestural responses being somehow “incomplete,” “unfulfilled” or “frustrated.”

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

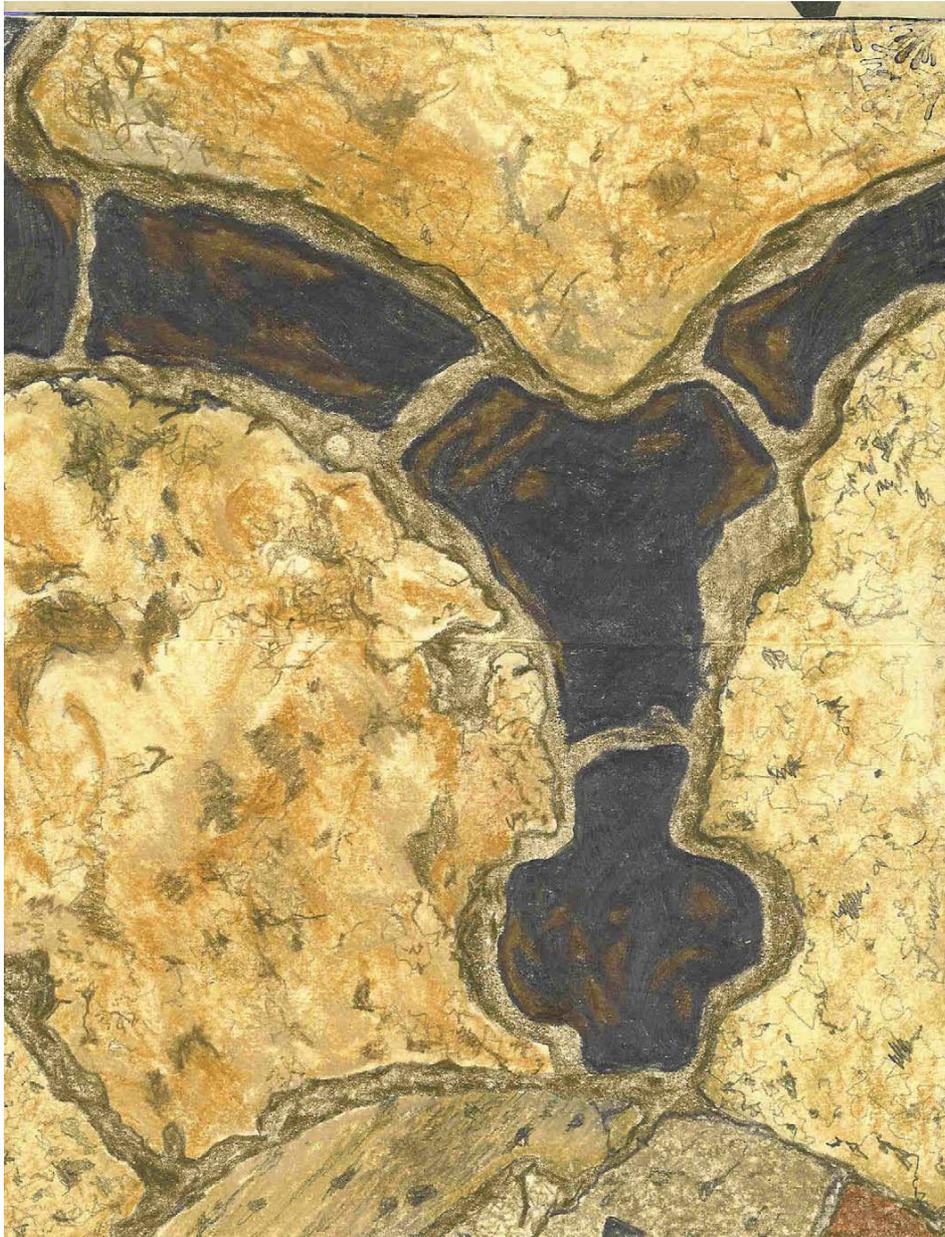
If I look at my everyday life, for example, walking my dog through the field at the back of the church, my experience can often be bittersweet, an unfulfilled yearning for a more profound connection. Last week, in the frosts of January 2006, I picked up a russet leaf perfectly framed with frosty edging. I admired it for some time and it began to melt in my hand. I mused about painting or photographing it. I put the leaf down and did neither. I tend not to give space to or value the gestures which may have arisen in response to experience (although picking up the leaf was in itself a gesture). I feel too short of time, too self- and society-pressured to puritanically put “real” work before “just arty stuff.”

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

Von Emmel (2003) suggests that such a frustration contributes towards a misplaced addictive consumerism. She states:

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

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



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

Shotter expresses this as the difference between “withness” and “aboutness” thinking (Shotter, 2005).

BODYING FORTH

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

I (Peter) find wood carving a discipline which paradoxically involves being prepared, with the right tools and time, with sharp carving tools, and creating space, opening to a wider ecology of mind. In participatory practice you no longer know where you are going to end up, and in a sense the very point is to end up with the unexpected. One moves away from the security of what is known to radical uncertainty, to almost a feeling of vertigo in stepping away from well trodden paths of expression.

MC Richards (1964: 116) suggests a combination of “ready vision and groping”. To explore this, we have borrowed the phrase “bodying forth” from MC Richards and from David Abram, who both used it (Richards, 1964, Abram, 1997). Richards (date unknown) comments with relation to her pottery practice:

Incarnation: bodying forth. Is this not our whole concern? The bodying forth of our sense of life? Is this not a sense fully as actual as our sense of touch...That is what form is: the bodying forth. The bodying forth of the living vessel in the shapes of clay.

Abram’s wording (1997: 74) is more immediately connected to the direct expressions of the body. He writes:

... communicative meaning is first incarnate in the gestures by which the body spontaneously expresses feeling and responds to change in its affective environment. The gesture is spontaneous and immediate. It is not an arbitrary sign that we mentally attach to a particular emotion or feeling; rather, the gesture is the bodying-forth of that emotion into the world, it is that feeling of delight or of anguish in its tangible, visible aspect.

This aspect of presentational knowing can operate *within* the body as gestures (glances, blushes, sighs and held breath etc), and *through* the body, mediated by the materials and tools used as channels for expression (paper and pencils, clay, singing, dancing). Heron (1992: 166) stresses that there is more to presentational knowing than (just) the expression of deep feeling and emotion. He adds that the “aesthetic patterning” of presentational knowing also has “certain inherently pleasing formal properties, some basic harmonic order in the scheme of things which is intrinsically satisfying to contemplate when we discern it in nature and when the artist embodies it in a work of art.”

At best, this means that we constantly reveal ourselves through our minute expressive gestures (this is very clear in improvised clowning, where hopes and fears betray themselves

even in the pattern of the clown's breathing). We meaningfully (and aesthetically) express both our individual and wider truths through that which we create. At worst, the bodily gestures might be dismissed as an irrational side effect of being alive, and expressive acts might be reified as "Art" with a capital "A", cut off from ordinary life and only valued if produced by those society labels "Artist."

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

During the summer of 2003, I (Chris) worked with a large, British-owned multinational company. Together with a colleague, we were looking at different ways to knowing with a team of engineers. The idea behind this work was for the participants to free themselves up from the strictures of organisational life in an attempt to develop a wider view beyond corporate boundaries. Some of the men shoehorned presentational knowing into the back end of propositional knowing when they told me that they'd "go along with this arty stuff" if it was what the CEO now wanted from them. In this way they were backtracking from propositional to presentational knowing rather than building on direct experience and, in some cases, all spontaneity was lost in a rash of bullet points. Propositional knowing was masquerading as presentational knowing and both seemed far removed from the participants' exposure in the workshop to dancing, singing, meeting prisoners and conversing with recovering drug addicts: the phenomena themselves. I can feel in my own writing when words start to get unhitched from my experience, floating upwards into a headful of ideas.

Body superfluous.

Brain on a stick.

The sculptor Brancusi (Giménez and Gale, 2004: 30) pointed out the importance of context for presentational knowing when he said: "It is not the things that are difficult to make, but to put ourselves in [a] condition to make them". Part of that process might be described as the inner states of sensuous encountering and suspending explored earlier. Another part might be the context which calls forth our responses from the unexpressed privacy of our inner worlds out into the manifest arena of expression. Art critic Harold Rosenberg (in Belgrad, 1998: 105), in writing about abstract expressionism, puts it that: "[the canvas is]...an arena in which to act – rather than a space in which to produce.

(Chris) In the clowning, the different improvisations have a structure, an informing pattern or form, within which the spontaneity unfolds. Each improvisation starts with some limiting conditions, within which the clowns are expected to at least start off. The impros have their names: the Solo; the Siamese; the Two plus One, the Professor and Assistant and so on. As I learn the patterns of these improvisations, their archetypes and their rules – I get to know them in my body (connaître again...) – and then I can start to break the rules knowingly. "The art of transgressing beautifully," clowning teacher, Vivian Gladwell, calls it, and it is a major theme in the art of clowning which has implications elsewhere in life.

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

In January 2006, I was improvising with another clown in response to a story we'd been told from the real life of a woman who'd been knocked off her bicycle by a silver car while

she was cycling in London. We walked on stage (with no plan) and laid down on the ground to become the tarmac road, and then I became the bicycle, my partner became the silver car and eventually she crashed into me. I moved in slow motion, and as I reeled, I accidentally knocked over a large wooden candlestick which had been standing on the stage draped in a white cloth. I heard the candlestick fall and turned to see what had happened. I looked down at it. I looked up at the audience.

The audience looked at the candlestick. I couldn't ignore the accident and what ran through my head was "this is a dead body. If this is a dead body then who am I because I was the woman coming off the bike and she's clearly alive because she's in the audience. I don't want to say she's dead. So, whose is this dead body?"

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

We work the material we have at hand.

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

If we can keep open and allow a response to be called forth, we stand a chance of the personal and the universal uniting – the subjective immediacy and an objective (or intersubjective) immortality to be expressed at the same time in one gesture – *aha!* – which is at once evocative of the particular and resonant of the universal. It is to these two ideas – of the dialectic between experience and expression and evoking the sacred -we now turn.

Again, I (Chris) face one of these cusps where I need to receive the ways in which I can link bodying forth and what I want to explore around "being informed". I know (in the *connaître* sense of being acquainted with through experience) what this link is. I feel it. I know it in my flesh. But I don't yet know about it (*savoir*) in a way I can express in neat propositions. Somewhere in my body, the chasm between this section and the next yawns at me. It feels just the same as that split second on dry land before I jump into the swimming pool.

BEING IN-FORMED

(Chris)...and there we go, over the gap and past the new subtitle. I've jumped the chasm and am sneaking in here using my *italic voice* so I can get a non-academic word in before the quotations and memories all start up again in this new section, "being informed". So here it

is... writing as inquiry, suspending and bodying forth all at the same time. This is what I want to express: being in-formed has become important to me. I am a being that is in-formed.

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

(MC Richards (date unknown))

The greatest art is less the creating of things than the creating of our own life. Suzi Gablik (2002: 168-9).

If we are in-formed largely by two-dimensional emails, Cartesian thought processes, planning, time management and report writing, then how are we ever going to develop and grow our sensory and emotional capacity to respond to the more than human world in any way other than more reports, emails and abstractions? If we are in-formed by two dimensional screen images, plastic keyboards, plastic dashboards, smooth roads, flat pages, packaging and manmade materials, how will our senses get to know (*connaître*) the wider, deeper world? We are seeking to enrich, not to impoverish the sensory ground of our being.

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

Such a perceiver-creator dialectic is related to what Heron (1992: 171) calls a "post-linguistic propositional knowing". Heron (1992: 172) contends: "We become aware of the interfusion of dynamic events in mutual exchanges of information feedback: the interpenetration of cause and effect". Our states of being affect each other in virtuous and vicious circles of mutual reflection and influence. How we form and in-form our living in turn influences and patterns our responses to the world.

After a week's workshop in clowning, I (Chris) can become so imbued with the clown's childlike view of the world that when the workshop is over, the residual effect lingers strongly to start with. During these times, I (and others) have noticed that the world seems to respond to me more openly, as I have been opened to it. Simple encounters like buying fuel on the way home, or chatting at the supermarket checkout temporarily take on new significance and delight. People entering through doors seem to be "making an entrance" or "doing a crossing" and I notice greater richness in the everyday gestures and eye contact which otherwise I might miss (a bit like watching film footage in slow motion where even the smallest blink or glance takes on new significance). It's as if the heightened awareness of the clown energy calls forth greater engagement and playfulness in others. For me this evokes a feeling of shared humanity, a playful twinkle in the eye, a meta-communication about this being human which I associate strongly with our species-level need to find compassionate ways of living that are less destructive, less acquisitive, more just and more in tune with the world of which we are a part.

Shotter (2005: 137) argues that:

Due to the ineradicable, spontaneous responsiveness of our living bodies, when someone acts, their activity cannot be accounted as wholly their own – for a person’s acts are at least partly ‘shaped’ by their being responsive to the others and othernesses in their surroundings.

This has some resonance with Ken Wright’s Donald-Winnicott-and-Marion-Milner-inspired ideas on making experience “sing” (Wright, 2000: 88). He points out:

There is a circularity in this creative ‘singing’ or ‘saying’, a dialogue with the world that results in each party (world and self) becoming more alive... as the world is transformed by the creative utterance, so the artists themselves are transformed by the world – through their own visionary seeing and praising of it.

Gaia expressing herself through us.
 Not denying that voice.
 Sacred.
 Sustainable.
 Engrossing.
 Fun.
 More alive.

I (Chris) am writing now on the edge of my experience. This section feels more like writing out a dream of that greater aliveness, a self-soothing in the face of bittersweet engagement with the seemingly intractable systemic problems that are thrown up by human societies’ habits of acquisition and (often unintended) destruction.

We need to engage more fully in equal measure with both the good and the not-so-good of what’s happening.

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

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

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