

# 14. Questions about the Postheroine

## Learning for Me

### A Resonant Question

In the course of doing this research our eco-sociotechnical system has more palpably deteriorated. The icecaps have melted at a faster rate than expected. In the UK carbon emissions reduction targets have been increased from 60% by 2050 to 80%. From climate scientists we hear there is an increased urgency to act if the most severe effects of climate change are to be avoided. And in the light of recent more extreme climatic events<sup>33</sup> the public discourse seems to be shifting now from how we might mitigate climate change towards how we might adapt to it. Nevertheless loss of species, loss of vital rainforest and loss of biodiversity continues unfettered. And with the credit crunch, the economy which is built on the principle of digging things out of the earth, making things people don't really need, shipping them vast distances and then throwing them back into the earth

#### **The news today, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2009**

Darwin's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary is being celebrated.

Rumours that Lloyds Bank will be nationalised as banking crisis continues and economic recession deepens

Respected IPCC scientist warns that in the light of new emissions figures from 2000-2007, climate change will happen more rapidly and with more disastrous effects than previously thought.

A scientist from the institute for the advancement of science estimates 100 million earth-like planets capable of sustaining life might exist.

Jade Goody, a celebrity made famous by Big Brother and diagnosed with terminal cancer prepares to wed and die in the public eye

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<sup>33</sup> e.g. The European heat waves in 2005. The UK floods of 2007

has started to falter but dependent on it now, we rush to resuscitate it, as yet not knowing how it might be reinvented in a more sane way. How might we, as a society, as a human race, have the equanimity to innovate in times like this? This is a big question but in it lies a small but deeply-felt personal question:

*How can I act with equanimity and meaning in the light of all this??*

In many ways the research described in this thesis has been an attempt to articulate a personal response to that question. As I explained in Chapter 4 I see my inquiry as bi-directional. I have been working to tune my personal inquiry practice to my public work in the world. In this chapter I will reflect on how this has been for me and what I have learnt from it.

I want to emphasise that though the reflections in this chapter are personal, they still relate largely to finding a ‘work’ response rather than a purely personal response to acting with equanimity in these times. This reflects my ongoing attempt to work into my experience rather than out from it. What I do not describe is an inner layer of thinking and experience in relation to climate change. This privatized layer ranges from innate survivalist emotions (‘we must escape and build a passive house and become self-sufficient’) to thinking around how I might live and what choices I make to try to act more sustainably. I hesitate at the full privatization because I also want to create in this thesis a feeling of the history and mood of this time. So in view of that hesitation I will introduce first a more lived response to that resonant question of how I do live and work with the issue of climate change. This is a piece of reflection I wrote a year ago now, in Feb 2008, a day after the Lowcarbonworks team had met to discuss the different theories that related to our work.

# A Lived Response



February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008

## Living and Working with Climate Change

I wake at 6 – my son Alex (who is 6) has had a bad dream and wants to climb in beside me again – I like cuddling him in these dusky moments between sleep and waking. His touch is gentle now – he doesn't kick anymore. He lies carefully not wanting to be a nuisance – just wanting comfort and security. In those moments I know I can give this to him – the mere fact that I'm there makes him feel safe.

My head is throbbing, fuzzy – a thought hangover. My stomach feels tense – there's exhaustion coming out through my arms. What is it? I remember our long project theory meeting yesterday. And hazily between sleep and light I try to understand the mood, the cloud that's arrived now – scudding across the blue-sky focus of the earlier weeks.

My mind scrolls back across the project theory day we had yesterday. It'd started off happily enough with communities of practice. The discussion was already stimulating and connected to a question that's been very alive for me recently: "does tackling climate change require a new way of working?" Increasingly I think yes - right down to the core of how we do things. Energy up, brain active. Then Michelle started to edge us toward bigger questions with a thoughtful presentation on the social construction of climate change. The theory she brought in highlighted the difficulty in reconciling in particular the local 'indigenous' view with the 'global gaze' of the disconnected macro political view. I liked here particularly the chat about science and scientists – Susan, or was it David talked of how they are necessarily sensually connected with the world but that the scientific discourse excludes that connection. This reminded me of what John Horgan found in his book the "End of Science" where many scientists privately held deeply spiritual views but did not wish to discuss them. David mentioned his own indigenous knowledge – when he's rowing he can tell the wind has changed. And I thought too of my own noticing of the seasons and the changes and how increasingly that has embedded the reality of climate change in my psyche. A warm day in February is no longer a happy source of glee.

Lying here now, a dark little giggle erupts as I recall the afternoon, and I suppress it not wanting Alex to stir. A tragic-comic image flashes into my mind of the whole team standing stoically on the Titanic. The discussion had led us to a desperate point you see. Gill had presented us with this recent perspective from sociologists at Bath who propose there is now a new narrative of postecologism building up around climate

change. These guys point out that though the *discussion* is ratchetting up about climate change, the will to actually take action has effectively been squashed. Green radicalism is over. The war has been won by the middle ground and the underlying capitalist ideal of continuous economic growth remains intact. Goals are set fifty years out safe in the knowledge that they won't need to be delivered. I was absorbed listening to this. I think we all were. The room went quiet – a strange otherly mood was descending. And suddenly, right there in the meeting I had this vivid image of us all standing on the deck of the Titanic and noticing that we'd even stopped rearranging the deckchairs. In that silent moment it felt like we were all just staring at an iceberg. I was feeling emotionally low now – I was tired, there'd been conflict over the agenda and somehow all this was moving me from an intellectual space into somewhere altogether more emotional. Peter said "Oh dear, this is very depressing, shall we sing a song". I laughed semi-hysterically. Judith got up to go. As she opened the door someone said, perhaps there is nothing out there and we imagined her stepping into a void with a silent fading "aaaahhhh". Lying in bed now I laugh quietly again as I remember this shared comedic moment. A burst of black humour always warms my heart, but I recall a real human vulnerability in the room in that moment and it's with me still this morning. What can we do?

The meeting moved on quite appropriately to a discussion about adaptation. Carol presented her work with different groups in the Southwest looking at preparing for changes in the climate. This year and last year we've been shielded to a degree by El Nino she said – so apparently it is all going to kick off in 2009. Here surely we were managing the Confucian paradox – moving from the outer orbit of the discourse of all discourses right down to Tewkesbury, floods, climate change, locally and in the here and now.

David said that actually mitigation might now best be addressed via adaptation. It's not actually a dilemma. With all other species racing to the poles, might it not be better for us as a race to start adapting with our indigenous rather than our intellectual knowledge? I do admit that at times I think where can I take my family away from all this – where the safe, in out of Alex's breath can continue. I suppose this is my human survival instinct kicking in - my own expression of adaptation. David's point was (I think) that this wasn't necessarily countervailing to mitigation. And putting together all I've heard in the past month it seems we may be in that period now where mitigation ceases to drive the agenda as we grasp at adaptation – in other words we are now really 'in the thick of it'.

Well that's it – that explains the fug-head and the sad feeling in my bones this morning. I felt wrung out by the end of the day. Came home and worked late on finalising the Merton case for the workshop – adding the new inputs to the learning history with care and respect. It felt soothing to get back to the learning histories – but a cloud had gathered over what sometimes feels like beautiful work. Was I not 'tinkering around the

edges' of mitigation, kidding myself it might actually make a difference. Was it not unlike the false security I offer Alex in those pre-dawn moments when he wants to know for sure that everything will be ok.



Story end.

## A Reasoned Response

### Introducing the postheroine

The story hones into a particular morning and a particular mesh of theory, thoughts and emotions. I will now move to write about such issues in a more rationalized way. This starts with an introduction of the postheroine and what she represents.

At the end of Chapter 3 I reflected how my outward facing inquiry had led me into a masculine problem-oriented, sociotechnical world. I wondered what might disappear from my reportage and my practice by occupying this more technical, public world. I fleetingly introduced some of Joyce Fletcher ideas. Her writing about the paradox of postheroic leadership and her ideas about disappearing acts were symbolic of the feminine world of collaboration and relational practice that I didn't want to forget. As I went forth in my research I wore these ideas like the charm necklace I actually do wear around my neck.

And just as from time to time my hand flies up to my neck to feel

the beads on my necklace so too I would check these relational ideas from time to time



**Figure 55:** My relational charm necklace with beads: *love, trust, mum, inspire and dream*

knowing they represented a link out to a whole different set of questions that concerned what practices and skills are compatible with acting meaningfully in the context of our world today. The postheroine idea was one charm on this metaphoric necklace that I could feel but not really see. Postheroic leadership is a term associated with new models of leadership that have emerged in recent years as increasingly the leadership in our knowledge based environments is understood to rely:

less on the heroic actions of a few individuals at the top and more on collaborative leadership practices distributed throughout an organisation.

(Fletcher 2004 p.648)

So it is a leadership that is expressed through a distributed network of actors whose capacity to interact in relation to each other dictates the quality of how they collectively lead. I extrapolated to presume that a conceptualisation of leadership that emphasized collaboration and that rejected the notion of the single heroic prime mover would be needed if we were to move to a more sustainable world. But beyond that I was not sure of the details or the implications for practice. What did this then mean for the individual in the postheroic network? Who was the posthero, nay the postheroine? What did she do?

The notion of the postheroine took on an idealized, oracle-like quality for me that departed from the writing on postheroic leadership. My postheroine was an individual who was in relation to others but knew how to take meaningful action to address climate change. I aspired to be a postheroine as a shorthand meaning not-hero. And in reflecting on my own actions and those of the participants in the research I was trying to shape what it was to be a postheroine.

The next couple of sections will hone in and reflect on some of the strategies that I adopted in trying to be postheroic. They simultaneously start to build a picture of the postheroine whilst also deconstructing it as I describe in my reflections some of the difficulties with my strategies.

# Qualities of the postheroine

## She forgets herself?

My first response in choosing how to act was that I needed to forget myself. In chapter 4 I declared that this would be an outward-facing inquiry. Working from the change needed in the system, I would tune in my practice and any first-person inquiries to the challenges, which I encountered along the way. As a result the public face of my work was quite methodologically and problem focused. Here is a problem: “the lack of learning between successful projects that reduce carbon” and here is a methodology to address it: “learning history in an institutional setting”. The first-person challenges I met whilst doing this work were not of course neatly aligned to big systemic issues. They were what they were – a mix of my personality, experience and the nature of the field in which I was engaged. However according to this idea of being ‘outward-facing’ I was more likely to make inquiries of those challenges that were in some way relevant to the research. And where these referred to my personal practices I would explore them but it was more likely that I would do that in private.

So for example, in the private realm, there was a recurrent question about ‘my achiever’ and how to let her have a valued place in what I was doing without letting her dominate. This wasn’t a formal inquiry just something I thought about from time to time. It didn’t impede my work – it certainly helped me to get things done! On the other hand the challenge of my nerves about speaking in public stood to really impede the research and so it became a personal inquiry for me into the act of ‘stepping-in’. This saw me trying to coax myself into flow and improvisation more in my practice and away from my long-standing pattern of thinking and over-preparing. And in the course of the research I had plenty of opportunity to practice. This inquiry, which I shared with friends and my CARPP supervision group, enriched the way I worked. There is a whole story to it and the fact that it is omitted makes it no less important to the learning I got from it. This is the point. I learnt that however I might face myself outwards, personal questions and inquiries still occurred and had a life of their own through the work. However I tended to frame them in terms of what I was trying to achieve with the research rather than as inquiries solely contributing to my development as a person.

This framing led to a disjuncture between my outer and inner work that was brought into stark relief for me by my CARPP co-supervisee Dave, who having listened to me first describe my despair in relation to climate change and then move on to a detailed description of my learning history work in session, asked:

So when you talk about your own sense of despair, to what extent do these [learning history] interviews and the way you are writing these up, uhm, how do they interact with your own views....? Do you pick up anything hopeful from these stories?

DAVE in CARPP Supervision: 9<sup>th</sup> October 2007

Though I blustered a reply in session, it was only when I listened back to the tape and heard Dave's question that I stopped and realized that no, I picked up nothing hopeful at all from the stories. My despair about climate change felt quite immovable. Though I hoped others might be inspired by the learning histories as I momentarily often was, my big despair was privatized and untouchable. The approach of an 'outward facing' inquiry had meant it was separated off. By following the precept of forgetting myself unless there was something important impeding the research I had boxed up my feelings entirely and it was only when Dave questioned me that I realized this kind of gap was surely unhelpful. It meant I was not personally engaged at all in the practice of hope and inspiration though I expected my participants to be.

## **She is articulating 'different moves' in the system?**

In the theory chapter I explained how I hold an evolutionary view of change. This means that change is not something I believe I can purposefully control. It is rather something I have to find a way to meaningfully be a part of. With the research, I hoped to get involved in processes of variation and selection and introduce new possibilities for how we might learn from each other and become more sustainable.

This idea of variation was important at quite a fundamental level for me. I often described what I was doing as the making of 'a different move' or 'an unusual noise' in



the system. I think this is why form was so important to me. The journalistic nature of the histories; the imposition of a long read on busy executives; the graphics and colour of the learning history workshop: these all were minor, but nonetheless, different moves – departures from how things are normally done. The form of my ‘move’ needed to be sufficiently different so as to be a variation – perhaps a mutation - on what we were used to. It was an attempt to create alternative patterns and forms of working whilst remaining distant from the idea that these alternatives might be any better than other options. And even if they seemed better I also tried to distance myself from the notion that they might be selected on their merit. If a few people danced along with me to this ‘different move’ then well and good. And if they did not? No matter. What I had done still had meaning in that it was a contribution to variation.

There was congruence between the idea of a mutative ‘different move’ and the way that learning histories were being used as a vehicle for learning. The learning histories themselves were all about inspiring fragmented and varied responses rather than simple replication. At the Eden conference<sup>34</sup> in 2007, I remember getting quite agitated when in a plenary session the discussion centred on how exemplar projects might be replicated.

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<sup>34</sup> A sustainability conference at which I presented the Merton history. Mentioned in passing in Chapter 7

Uncharacteristically I grabbed the microphone and said something like:

**MG:** The question is not how we replicate but how we mutate – it behoves each of us to try to do something new in how we are responding to climate change and just hope something comes of it.



**Figure 56: Caught speaking in a plenary session at the Eden conference 2007**

I remember a few nodding faces in the crowd and perceiving many others looking at me as though I was quite mad. My 'different move' shows how committed I was to this idea that learning from what has already been done can be creative, personal and expansive. An innovation in and of itself. Talk of replication kills off that possibility and as the research went on I became quite passionate in my resistance to mechanistic images learning that included best practice, knowledge transfer and so on. Such notions robbed the learner of their creativity.

The 'different move' approach to acting and living meaningfully with climate change was often very liberating. It gave me the permission to experiment and to behave a little bizarrely (in my own terms) from time to time. And I was freed from any great expectation from these acts. But it was a harsh position to take and difficult to hold permanently. I simply could not fully detach from my 'different moves'. Dammit I wanted people to join in. I wanted to be understood. Particularly in the early days of the research, when many approaches to the system in which I hoped to locate my research

went unanswered, I continually felt like I was transmitting noise into a vacuum faithfully – speaking in an empty room. It was dispiriting and the idea that it was natural for a ‘different move’ to be met with misunderstanding was insufficient to get me through moments of despondency and disappointment. Later when my work started to get a hearing I noticed how these different moves required energy to sustain them. Eventually the impact of the work petered out and I was left reflecting had it been worth it? What difference had it made?

So the idea of the ‘different move’ was my way of describing a contribution of practice to an evolutionary ferment. It built on what was done already, but it was different and the trick was to get that sameness and difference in tension with each other.

## **She learns and connects with other innovators?**

As the research proceeded and I became enmeshed in the learning histories I was studying I increasingly thought of my own work in terms of an innovation journey. This thinking linked strongly to my thoughts on evolutionary change and the previous point that learning (or variation/mutation) from others is itself a creative act albeit one that is seldom rewarded.

In keeping with my views, elements of the innovation journeys described in the learning histories rubbed off on me in curious ways. Phrases and snapshot scenes from the histories were stuck in my head. ‘Creating a buzz’ from Merton came to represent building momentum behind an idea as I did for the learning history workshop. Also in Merton, ‘Friday afternoon calls’ represented an end of week opportunity for more spacious conversation and twice or three times I too had significant Friday afternoon calls that helped me make progress with the work. In Kirklees the visual image of being on a boulder tumbling inexorably down a hill and ‘being on for the ride or not’ (Jimm Reed’s words) often comforted me when I found myself off the fence and on for the ride of a presentation, the workshop, indeed this whole PhD journey. And from Barnsley the famous phrase “It’s a no-brainer” became part of my vernacular and a route to playful but challenging conversations as to why most things involving climate change seemed to be “a brainer”. Scenes too played on my mind. When I was in a private situation where I might have an opportunity to network, a picture of Adrian at the vets in Merton would

flash into my mind. I would notice how in my private sphere, I didn't always have the energy to take conversations that were sometimes full of opportunity to a place that might be helpful for my work. In this case a scene from the learning history was aiding me to inquire into my own capacity to innovate and sustain energy.

Being open to being informed by what others had done before me seemed a meaningful thing to do despite the fact that I was somewhat blind as to where such learning might lead me. It became formulated for me as an essential aspect of being a postheroine. The effect of this learning was much more subtle than acquiring information. By finding participants' words coming to my lips I gained a sense of connection with them and their stories. Though my actions were singular and identifiably mine, I was not acting alone but acting with others. This felt rewarding and it echoed Thurstan's and Jane's separate responses to learning history work as reported in earlier chapters when they described feeling 'part of something' and more emboldened as a result. This sense of connection was vital for me but it sometimes felt vicarious and lopsided. Connected as I was to the participants and their stories, it did not feel as though they were connected to me. The postheroine must find a way to accept her smallness, as the next section will describe.

## **She gives without expectation?**

The 'big issue' was so huge that my approach was to try to work with it as purely as I could with no expectation of ever actually seeing the difference I was making. So my 'different moves' implied an act of faithful giving. The depth of minute preparation for the workshop and my attention to its form was out of proportion to any perceived outcome. It was practical and detailed work. Similarly the website. The act of 'really listening' to people and reflecting back their stories in a detailed learning history was, to a degree, eccentric even in the world of research where often conclusions are drawn across a much bigger dataset. Participant's surprise was akin to a person receiving a present and I sometimes thought of the work I was doing in terms of sacrifice and service. When I thought in these terms then I found myself comfortable and accepting of the work I was doing. The next excerpt from a CARPP supervision session illustrates this:

**MG:** The thing is, when I'm in action and I'm engaged in the field with people, listening to them, I just feel like 'it's the work'. It's not me, it's just

the work and it's so worthwhile and I can really stand up for that. And I can really say that it is worthwhile to sit down with people like John<sup>35</sup> and if nothing else happens, ...if none of the rest of it happens...he said, he sent me back his feedback and said "I've given you a garbled account and you've given it back to me in a coherent form and that has helped me" – and if nothing else happens that is great. I have no hesitation in that, but the hesitation comes in if I catch myself being ambitious.

Me talking in a CARPP Supervision session, Jan 2008

The tension between grand ambitions and sacrifice was palpable for me. My whole way of working was built on an edifice of the non-ego. My position led me at times to be so pre-occupied with avoiding my 'ego' that I could speak of little else! The 'different move', the 'forget myself' aspects of my postheroine together with her sense of sacrifice was making a martyr out of her. Another disjuncture had appeared.

It was in my CARPP supervision that my colleagues gently encouraged me to explore this and to take more ownership for my ambitions. In the same January session, Geoff urged me to be grandiose, for a moment at least:

**Geoff:** I used the word grandiose because you were shying away from it, and possibly rightly so, but there is some element of this [your work] that is brave and bold and beautiful and big.

**MG:** Yea – I mean I'd love if the guy who runs the Beacon scheme said – this<sup>36</sup> is great let's use this – but guess who's tied up with that – it's my ego. So I have to divorce my ego from attaching myself from something that did

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<sup>35</sup> Name changed

<sup>36</sup> The learning history approach is what I am referring to here. There had been interest in possibly taking the approach into the government agency for learning in local authority

become successful. But increasingly I do feel there is merit in this way of working as and of itself, me aside if you like.

Conversing in the same CARPP Supervision session, Jan 2008

When I read this now, particularly the words '*me aside*', I see myself caught in the narrative of my own 'ego-lessness' – my martyrdom - and not giving the work the due attention it deserved. In truth I longed to luxuriate in the ambitions for widespread change and learning that might be realized through this work. I wanted to entertain them, but was afraid that if I did it would have been purely ego and grandiosity. Yet that might have been a more generative narrative to entertain, once I didn't take it too seriously.

This linked resonantly to the theme of 'reward and recognition' that came up across the learning histories. Reward and recognition was important to me, just like it was to the participants to whom I spoke. At the workshop, in a casual evening conversation, one participant described his struggles when a sustainability initiative that had originally been his idea was taken up in his council but was widely attributed to someone else: "I should just be happy it went through", he remarked, "but somehow it irked me that I didn't get credit for the idea". Several others including myself recognised this uncomfortable clash between what we then interpreted as our ego and the greater good. Now I am not so sure it is helpful to frame it as ego. Might it not also be described as the desire for creative expression? The challenge for the postheroine is retaining ambitions and garnering individual rewards whilst acknowledging these cannot be hers alone.

## Reflective interlude

Reflecting on this first articulation of the postheroine I notice how she does express the many of the relational skills of the feminine: she listens well, she empathises, she connects to others, she learns with others and she is self-sacrificing and serves, she is opportunistic. Yet, from the challenges I mentioned as I was writing I recognize some traits in my postheroine that were difficult and counterproductive. She keeps some of her relevant views separate, she tends toward martyrdom, she doesn't stand up for her ambitions, and she can be gloomy and depressive. She clutches her despair to herself like a comfort blanket.

If I think about the participants I met and admired who were actually 'doing something about climate change' I could reel off a set of attributes: they were passionate; they worked with others; some had huge egos; some expressed quiet desperation; many expressed resolute conviction; they all enjoyed recognition; all were opportunistic; they were outspoken; all were tenacious; some were magnificently bizarre. Some of these qualities might be termed postheroic, but others are most definitely not. But what they all shared was 'they did something' – they made a different move. They took action from the centre of their beings and it was meaningful. And their sentences started with 'I'. I start to wonder then if this whole notion of the postheroine is creating a disempowering tension between the masculine and the feminine. In an attempt to articulate how we might lead ourselves out of a situation is there not an assumption that leadership whatever it might be, is worth waiting for, and significantly it is done by others. It moves the question: "what might I do?" to the passively voiced: "how might leadership be well done?" Whether heroic or postheroic it is a conceptualisation that suggests waiting and looking rather than doing and seeing. Somewhere there is postheroic leadership that will know what to do. Is there time to figure out what it is?

As ever, at just the right moment, I find a writer who puts my germinating thoughts into words for me. Having explored the idea of postheroic leadership as it might have been expressed by a leaderless group of quilters who produce patchwork quilts collaboratively in a timely and successful fashion, Ann Rippin concluded by suggesting there had in fact been no leadership at all. Though she acknowledged that distributed leadership might have been there but hard to detect "*like gold beaten to a wafer thinness*" (p.214), she went on to suggest it was more likely that the concept of leadership is an unhelpful preoccupation that inhibits individual responsibility:

My own position is to highlight the dependency implied in this depressive fetishisation of leadership, seeing leadership as a messianic function that will save us from certain decline and to take responsibility for our own actions

(Rippin 2007 p.220)

I think I agree.

# Beyond the postheroine

## Learning for me

Past the hero then is the postheroine and beyond that is just a person doing her best. The fact that, in terms of the big issue, there is no happy ending is surely not a surprise. In the past three years, carbon emissions have continued to rise, more species have been lost and the economy has started to unravel. The learning I have been drawing is simply about how to go on acting and working with meaning in such a landscape. Following on from my attempt to describe myself as postheroic I will draw some learnings from this cycle of reflection. The learnings below show how my understanding of what it is to act meaningfully has been shifting as a result of these reflections.



### Seek out moments of reward

I take more time now to savour or even seek out moments of success. I don't move relentlessly on. After my final session with B&NES I let myself enthuse about it with a friend knowing that this is a small act of celebration of what has occurred.



### Enjoy moments of hot-blooded hope

I am trying to unfasten my clutch on despair a bit more by embracing a more unknowing stance about the future. When I watch Barack Obama being sworn in, part of me knows one hero cannot save the whole world, but I let myself enjoy a moment of hot-blooded hope nonetheless.



### From self-sacrifice to abundance

I try to frame my practice of giving without expectation a little differently. I try to move from seeing it as a form of service and sacrifice to a form of participation in an abundant world. This feels less isolated. I notice the abundance of others and participate with them in this rather than thinking of it as 'giving back'. When I read Ann Rippin's quilting paper I write and thank her. Julian, who so generously gave his time to help me create the 'mythic deprivation' picture that I showed at the end of Chapter 9, says he wants to explore how to link action research with graphic visualisation and climate change. I make time for this. It is a rich and interesting thread that is just opening up.





## Entertain grandiosity

Now I let myself entertain 'big plans' and 'grand ambitions' from time to time. With colleagues we are trying to strategise about how we might continue work based on learning history; I sometimes try to think very big. I catch myself in the martyr non-ego narrative more and am beginning to see when it is unhelpful.



## Seek moments of pointless elegance

The beauty of a moment in and of itself, whether it is in nature, in my work or with my family and friends has become increasingly more important to me. I say pointless only to prevent these moments from being hijacked into belonging to some greater plan. So they can have meaning in their own right and irrespective of what happens next. A bird chirping in my local woodland transformed by snow; Sitting with Welsh children hearing their stories about food and noticing how easy they are in narrative and knowing that this moment relates in a circuitous way to the learning history work I've done; Or after months of acrimonious practice hearing my children play their piano duet right through and witnessing them hug each other at the end. These are all moments of pointless elegance that stand alone and have meaning.

All these learnings are to do with changing my personal narrative of who I am in relation to the world I am in. This narrative does not change overnight. But it offers a variation on some of the more fixed and stuck narratives I have been carrying and no doubt this variation will continue. From despair, I move more quickly to unknowing. From trying to work out and identify 'moments of transformation' at the start of this thesis, I have moved to balance this with an honouring of and search for 'moments of pointless elegance' and a tuning of my practice to recognise this. There is a further move then away from ends to means and a search for beauty in action. At its extreme the action must carry a pointlessness. Ann Rippin illustrates this with her story of collaborative quilt making where some women simply throw away the quilt once it has been produced. And perhaps this is what I have also been doing with this learning history work. Creating something beautiful to be thrown away. The pointlessness embraces the abundant and the unknowing and so allows for at least a little sneak of colour to lighten up an otherwise grey and gloomy scene.

*“From Butterfly wings to the hurricane  
It’s the small things that make great change  
The question towards the end of the lease is  
no longer the origin but the end of species”*

Lemn Sissay<sup>37</sup>, Poem

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<sup>37</sup> Broadcast on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 2009 on Channel 4 as part of the Darwin 200<sup>th</sup> birthday short films.