



KISSING JOY AS IT FLIES

Entwining Eurythmy
and Goethe's 'Delicate
Empiricism'
– An Exploration and
Articulation of a
Social Practice as
it Emerges

Dissertation for the Masters in Reflective
Social Practice

“He who binds to himself a joy

does the wingéd life destroy

But he who kisses joy as it flies

lives in eternity’s sunrise”

(Blake in Untermeyer, 1963:292)

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The Lost Camel

You have lost your camel my friend and everyone's giving you advice. You don't know where your camel is but you do know these casual directions are wrong. Even someone who hasn't lost a camel, who's never even owned a camel, gets in on the excitement. "Yes, I've lost my camel too, a big reward for whoever finds it." He says this in order to be part owner of your camel when you find it. If you say to anyone's suggestion, "I don't think so," the Imitator says the same thing immediately, "I don't think so either." When good information comes, you know it right away, but not the Imitator. That bit of information is medicine to you. It gives colour to your face and strength to your body. Your eyes brighten, your feet get lively and agile, you say; "Thank you my friend, this truth you give feels like freedom to me! Please go in front, be the leader, you have the scent of my camel better than I do."

But the Imitator doesn't feel the intensity of these clues. He hears your wild outcries though and gets some inkling of what it might be like to be close to finding a lost camel. (He has indeed lost a camel but doesn't know it yet.) Wanting, and imitating someone else's wanting, has blinded him. But he follows along in the searching, calling out what the others call out.

Suddenly, he sees his own camel browsing there, the one he didn't know he'd lost. Only then does he become a Seeker. He turns aside and goes by himself towards his camel.

The Sincere One asks, "Why have you left my search?"

"Up until now I was a fake. I was flattering you, because I wanted to be part of your glory. Now that I've separated myself from you I am more truly connected to you. I know what you are doing. Before, I was stealing camel descriptions from you. When my spirit saw its own camel, that seeing filled everything. Now all my insincerity and copycat words have changed to virtues. They brought me here. I was sewing my own seed though I thought I was working for nothing. Like a thief I crept and entered a house and it was, my own."

Be fiery cold ones so heat can come!

Endure rough surfaces that smooth you.

The subject of all this is not really two camels, there's only one lost camel, but language has difficulty saying that. Mohammed said; "Whoever knows God, stammers." Speaking is like an astrolabe pointed at the sky. How much really can such a device know, especially of that other Sky to which this is a piece of straw, that other Sun in which this is a fleck of dust?



Something stirs in me when I listen to my friends, Duncan Mackintosh and Ashley Ramsden, (1998:7) tell this story by Sufi mystic and poet, Rumi, on their CD, “This Being Human”. The rich cadences and rounded syllables of their sound-filled words, their whispered asides and accentuated phrases, their well-timed pauses... and most importantly their understandings of Rumi out of long immersion, are all carried on the sounds, breathing life and meaning into the tale. Not only this, because I know them both and have watched them perform, I can imagine with an inner eye their subtle gestures and twinkle in the eyes, that bring nuanced depth to the story and its relevance for me personally. So that when listening, I am not deciphering or interpreting the content but stand before a whole and living experience of Rumi, as mediated by the meaning making of my friends. The story resonates and comes to life in my inner being. The pictures dance with a substance that my understanding can take up directly without having to ‘figure it out’ with my logical mind. In fact if I tried to interpret it with my intellect, analyse what a camel could mean, and find similes for daily experience, the living activity of the story would be lost. It is precisely in the fact that my meaning making happens not just in my head but in a bodily resonance and a sensory tingling of excitement that accompanies a budding understanding, it is in this that the power of the story lies. I am fully in the story and it is fully in me. There occurs an embodied recognition of the generative quality it holds in its depths.

It gives colour to your face and strength to your body. Your eyes brighten, your feet get lively and agile, you say; “Thank you my friend, this truth you give feels like freedom to me!

The story is not confined in time. The pictures live on within me, changing each time I return to them; they move as I move, resonating in new places, allowing new meanings to emerge; taking me deeper in an iterative process of seeing more and more. As I read the story now, I immediately hear the sounds of my friends’ words and qualities of their telling, enabling me to enrich and

bring life to the written text, the vivid depth of which resides in me, developing a life of its own. I have formed a relationship with the story, which is alive and growing and I can revisit at any time.

But what if I had never heard the story narrated and only had the written text in front of me? And what if I lacked the inner capacity or attitude to allow the images to speak to me, lacked the imagination to breathe life into the words in a way that was true to the story itself? What if I could only take them at face value, understanding only their limited, literal meaning? Of what relevance would a story of a lost camel have for me in my busy modern life where, thank you very much, my mode of transport is a highly efficient and reliable motorcar? Not much. After all, stories are only stories, either for children or, in as technically visual and dynamic a form as possible, an entertaining distraction to relieve us from the pressures of the hard realities of ‘real’ life.

There is little doubt that when we look at the West (and an increasingly large proportion of the world under its cultural influence) the ‘what if’ is not a ‘what if’ at all, but a reality. We find it difficult to connect in any depth with a world that often seems as if it is an arbitrary collection of discrete and disconnected events and objects, a world of impenetrable surfaces, separate from each other and we separate from them, out of which we struggle to make meaning and from which we often feel alienated and disempowered.

We *know* that the world is alive but we struggle to experience and feel this in a vital way, and the nature and pace of our technologically based existence does little to help. We have been taught that in order to get to know the multitudines of living organisms and how their inner ‘mechanisms’ work we need to cut them open and divide them into the smallest bits possible. I loved doing this in my high school Biology class – peeling back the skin and connective tissue of a dead rat to find lots of baby rats inside, trying to cut a sheep’s eyeball in half with a blunt scalpel, blowing up lungs like a bellows. We had a lot of fun. But in all this cutting and pulling and separating we were met with more surfaces, more ‘things’. Our teacher then put them back together again

diagrammatically in a sequence of biological processes, clearly portrayed on the overhead projector. (Those were the days before power point.) We copied this down, learnt it by heart and now ‘knew’ how life worked. The greater the certainty, the higher the marks. There was little room for mystery or wonder at the incredible order and beauty of it all.

In our Western world we bump up against boundaries and live life on the surface. Not only have we lost a sensibility for the living inwardness of the world and the inwardness of the other, but a connection to our own inwardness, and, in the name of objectivity and rationality, we actively question and even deny the relevance of our inner lived experience. Having whittled away at our ability to encounter and make sense of the world directly it is not surprising that we seem to return again and again, almost without knowing it, to the two-dimensional diagrams on the overhead projector to get a grip on a world ‘out there’.

Of course we have inner lives, but we need only look at social media or the self-help section of any bookstore to see that it is an inwardness filled with the deeply subjective sympathies and antipathies, opinions, desires and angst of a displaced people frantically searching ‘out there’ for ‘happiness’, security and meaning, and fuelling a thriving ‘quick-fix’ psycho-therapeutic culture. Even where we have the best intentions and strive towards ‘doing good’, Thomas Merton (in CSSGJ,2006:2) warns:

Those of us who attempt to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening our own self-understanding, freedom, integrity and capacity to love, will not have anything to give to others. We will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of our obsessions, our aggressiveness, our ego-centred ambitions and our delusions about ends and means.

What, in part, we seem to have lost is the ability to create or hold open an inner spaciousness, a well of repose, a ‘place’, where the inwardness of the living world and of the other can enter into dialogue with our own inwardness

in a way that we can all come to life more fully. David Abram (1997) felt this loss keenly on returning to the West after long immersion in the indigenous cultures of the East where he had profound, almost mystical experiences of communion with the animate earth. I can well imagine that returning home and sharing his stories in some circles, they would have been written off as so much ‘mumbo jumbo’. For the real tragedy is not only has the dominant culture of the world lost its collective camel, but also the ability to know, or even acknowledge, what a lost camel might look like.

A Hall of Mirrors

In his seminal work, “The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World”, Iain McGilchrist (2013) finds this tragedy the very crux of the present day crisis, that the West has systematically and rationally thought and lived itself into a virtual “hall of mirrors” created by the intellect while doggedly and determinedly cutting off all available exits. And it is continuing to do so with a conviction, arrogant confidence and misplaced optimism that it is on the right track, despite being presented with overwhelming living, empirical evidence to the contrary. All of which, as McGilchrist vividly describes in fascinating case studies of right hemisphere impairment of the brain, are characteristic qualities of the left hemisphere, of the dominant and uninhibited intellectual thinking of our time. Insight, unfortunately, is not one of them, and his picture of the present is one of “a sort of insouciant optimism, the sleepwalker whistling a happy tune as he ambles towards the abyss.” (ibid:237)

What is exceptional about McGilchrist (2013) is that unlike the way scientific research is usually done, with its tendency to exclude and specialise, he has formed a picture of the brain, “where mind meets matter”, (ibid: 1) within the context of the whole of human and cultural development from ancient times to the present day. He has done this out of his long experience and research across many fields of human endeavour, including neurology, psychology,

philosophy, literature and the arts, and has approached his subject in as whole and living a way as possible. What he has found is that,

“...for us as human beings there are two fundamentally opposed realities, two different modes of experience; that each is of ultimate importance in bringing about the recognisably human world; and that their difference is rooted in the bihemispheric structure of the brain. It follows that the hemispheres need to co-operate, but I believe they are in fact involved in a sort of power struggle, and that this explains many aspects of contemporary Western culture. ...[These] two fundamentally different ‘versions’ delivered to us by the two hemispheres, both of which can have a ring of authenticity about them, and both of which are hugely valuable; ...[have] fundamentally different sets of values, and therefore priorities, which means that over the long term they are likely to come into conflict.” (ibid:3,5)

So what are these two different versions? Goethean natural scientist and researcher, Craig Holdrege (2005:29) states, “...the phenomena we confront are always richer than the abstractions we use to explain them...” This gives us a picture of the two types of relationships we have with the world: the direct, sensorial, lived and empathic experience of the world that *presents* itself to us as a whole, embedded in its particular context, by means of the right hemisphere; and that world *re-presented* to us, fixed in words and concepts through the focused activity of the left that sees in bits, carefully removing things from their context and detachedly dealing with them in isolation, where they become ‘things in themselves’, easily transferable and universalised. While the division of function is not absolute and both hemispheres are engaged in all functions of the unique and mysterious phenomenon of human consciousness, even to a certain extent language, the overriding characteristics of hemispheric function are as above. We can see therefore that the left hemisphere is dependent on the right to deliver to it the world of new experience out of

which to extract its concepts, but once these are formed, it is strongly drawn to and can only know with conceptual clarity in a self-referring circular way, this abstracted world that it has made. (McGilchrist,2013:Ch.4)

Through the arts, the philosophers, literature, poetry and science McGilchrist follows the pendulum swings of the “power struggle” between the hemispheres from early history to the present day where he believes it has settled almost irredeemably in favour of the left hemisphere. This mode of thinking and way of seeing is so pervasive in the West (and increasingly throughout the world) that we hardly notice it. (ibid:5) Holdrege, (2006:1) concurs. “The problem with biases” he says, “is that we often don’t know we have them or how strongly they inform the way we view and act in the world.”

Both McGilchrist and Holdrege believe that it *matters* that we have this bias towards “the strong propensity to take abstract conceptual frameworks more seriously than full-blooded experience,” (Holdrege 2006:1) because,

“our disposition towards the world and one another, [is] fundamental in grounding *what it is that we come to have a relationship with*, rather than the other way round. The kind of attention we pay actually alters the world: we are, literally, partners in creation. This means we have a grave *responsibility*, a word that captures the reciprocal nature of the dialogue we have with whatever it is that exists apart from ourselves.”

(McGilchrist,2013:5)

In other words a decontextualised, fragmentary, mechanistic, abstract and dominant left hemisphere perspective will create a world in its own image. It is McGilchrist’s thesis, and our own experience, that it has done and is continuing to do so.

Henri Bortoft (2007), physicist and proponent of the science of wholeness pioneered by J.W. von Goethe, also holds the view, born out of his extensive research, that there is no such thing as a separate, objective world ‘out there’. Rather it is our very seeing which brings it into being and hence the *way* we see is deeply significant and relevant for the world. He also understands human beings to be endowed with two modes of consciousness, seeing the division not in spatial terms but in time.

Taking his lead from developmental psychology, Bortoft (2007:15) describes these two contrasting ways in which we organise our world as ‘action’ and ‘receptive’. In early infancy we are in a receptive mode of being that “allows events to happen ...is nonverbal, holistic, nonlinear, and intuitive. It emphasizes the sensory and perceptual instead of the rational categories of the action mode.” (ibid:16) (As with McGilchrist’s right hemisphere.) As we grow up, so the theory goes, we encounter the “solid bodies” (ibid:16) of the physical world through the manipulation of which we develop a focused perception and ability to “discriminate, analyze, and divide the world up into objects”, resulting in “an analytical mode of consciousness attuned to our experience with solid bodies”. (Left hemisphere experience.) Out of this comes our “object-based logic which Henri Bergson called ‘the logic of solids’” (ibid:14), which then gradually comes to dominate our adult way of being in and seeing the world.

In other words, out of our experience as infants of being able to move and re-order the ‘objects’ around us we have developed a way of seeing the world as something to be worked ‘on’. Changing the world requires the re-ordering and manipulation of ‘things’, even non-physical ‘things’, like whole organisations, communities and ecosystems, as if they were bounded and fixed solid bodies. We ‘act on’ the living world like a child in a nursery playing with a pile of blocks.

It is clear that this action mode, this way of seeing, dominates the world of environmental, social and economic change. What is more interesting to me

is how subtly, almost insidiously, this way of thinking creeps into even our most earnest attempts to overcome it. Bortoft spent much of his life exploring alternative, more holistic modes of consciousness¹, yet the way in which he accepts and lays out this version of our process of development from infancy to adulthood is marked by a reductionist, cause and effect way of thinking. The complex process of human maturation is built up in simplistic step-by-step manner that goes like this: we interact with the physical world discovering solid objects, which we then manipulate. This causes a focused attention and perception of boundaries to arise, and an ability to analyse and divide the world up into things. We then internalise this process and all this results in an analytical action mode of thinking, which in turn is “institutionalised in the structure of our language”. It comes to dominate our way of being in the world, in Darwinian fashion, “for reasons of biological survival.” (ibid:16) This is a magnificent example of the grip of materialistic Western thinking which reduces the mysterious, complex and varied process of human maturation to a number of logical and linear steps and, through its love of generalisation, completely disregards, in classic left hemisphere fashion, whole cultures where the receptive and holistic mode of being manages to remain intact into adulthood.

I do not know enough about developmental psychology to know if this is an accurate appraisal of its theory, *per se*, or whether it is just the way Bortoft presents it. This is not important however, because what I want to highlight here is how difficult it is to loosen ourselves from the clutches of the linear logic of the left hemisphere. If someone like Bortoft, who has devoted himself to researching wholeness and practising new ways of seeing, can slip up in this way, he rightly says, “since we are not aware of our own mode of consciousness directly, we inevitably identify this world [of the left hemisphere] as the only reality.” (ibid:15–16) We find ourselves back in McGilchrist’s “hall of mirrors” and it seems impossible to simply think ourselves out of it. So if

¹ e.g. His work with the J.G. Bennett, explorer of higher consciousness. (Bortoft 2007: x)

we are locked into a world created by the very thinking that is determined to keep us there and have lost the ability to think, or even imagine, any other way, how are we to get out of our predicament?

The World Revisited

It would seem counter-intuitive to our intellectual logic to try to find a new way of thinking by returning to the body. But this is just what phenomenology, the philosophical discipline inaugurated by Edmund Husserl in the early 1900's, attempts to do. (Abram,1997:Ch.2) It is indicative, though, of just how far removed and disconnected from our lived experience thinking had become, and how imprisoned Husserl was in this 'hall of mirrors', that it was with a certain sense of surprise that, after long and hard deliberation, he finally concludes that the answer to the philosophical question of how we recognise a world other than ourselves, "seemed to implicate the body – one's own as well as that of the other – as a singularly important structure within the phenomenal field." (ibid:37) *Knowing* this, however, was one thing, but actually *doing* it was quite another. It took Husserl a lifetime of struggle to finally return to some form of direct lived experience, and it was only just before his death that he could overthrow the deeply entrenched Copernican Theory that was blinding him to his senses and say with conviction that, from a phenomenological point of view, the earth does not move. (ibid:42)

It was the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who, connecting deeply with his body and senses, plunged into a direct experience of the living world. But far from finding a firm ground to stand on he discovers that his "body subject", as he calls this tight-knit union of self and body, is "a creative, shape-shifting entity" (ibid:46-47) whose boundaries are permeable and through which he merges completely with his environment. In this state of mutual exchange between sentient and sensible, he opens himself to the world, which comes to expression through him and "thinks itself within" him. (ibid:54) As a living, sensing body he regains the experience of being

inextricably embedded in an animate world with which his senses are always in conversation.

This unbounded, ungrounded, shifting state of oneness with the world is a pre-conceptual, pre-knowing state of being.

To return to things themselves is to return to the world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language...
(Merleau-Ponty in Abram,1997:36)

Experiencing the whole of life living through him and he in life, in pure receptive mode, he thus bumps up against the difficulty of articulating this in language and explores a more poetic, metaphoric use of the word that can evoke the experience in the reader. David Abram (1997) regards the phonetic, alphabetised language of the West as largely responsible for disconnecting us from a pictorial text of a world rooted in the particularity of place and time, leading to the complete abstraction of both.

Abram sees Merleau-Ponty as opening the way to a truly authentic phenomenology which strives "not to explain the world as if from the outside, but to give voice to the world from our experienced situation *within* it." (ibid:47) He calls for a return to this form of embodied, indigenous 'knowing' of the "more-than-human mystery" of the animate earth as a touchstone for reality, a way of regaining our humanity (and humility) and preventing us from turning into the technologies with which we choose to surround ourselves in our virtual, self-made world. (ibid:x)

Seeking our Camel

Although I have difficulty with the way Abram reduces the human being to "one of the earth's animals," (ibid: 47) I resonate strongly with his call to

re-embody ourselves and our world. I have shared similar experiences of immersion in the mystery of the animate earth and struggle with the digitalized sterility of our Western culture that so disregards it. But when in this state of deep, purely sensorial at-oneness with nature I find it difficult to even begin thinking let alone “give voice to the world” or contemplate any course of action. It is truly a state of being rather than doing; a state of allowing things to happen rather than participating in any active way to initiate change. Rilke’s (1992:72) state of,

*what a child
sometimes gives himself up to
and grows still
and has to be
shaken out of.*

This form of consciousness is that of the First People, still expressed through the indigenous cultures of Indonesia that Abram encountered, by whom he was deeply influenced and whose sentient connection with the animate earth he calls us to emulate.

As a young man following a deep impulse to seek his path in life, Paul Myburgh (2015) lived for a total of six years with the last remaining small band of Kalahari Bushman “uncompromised” by the modern world. He tells a similar story of their oneness with their world, which became his world: their identity and language intoned out of their particular landscape, held in the embrace of the starry celestial dome on the vast expanse of the burning Sand Face, from whom they took their name, given life by the great Being of the sun. The People of the Great Sand Face were different from the People of

the Stones, their language was different, but all lived in complete harmony with the beings of their world; (“They have no word for ‘truth’ because there were no lies”) (ibid) the plants offering them food, water and medicine which they knew with an intuitive touch; the animals calling them to their own sacrifice through a sacred pact and an intricate language of the body:

*...if your ribs start palpitating
then you take your arrows
because you feel the short black hair of the ribs of the springbok
if you climb Brinkkop
watch closely among the trees and green spruits
the springbok you have already seen with your body...
...I always wait silently for the words of my body...
we lie down in front of the shelters
...it looks like we are sleeping
...but we are reading our bodies
we read everything which is moving on the plains down below
the holes at the back of our knees tingle
and then we wait
and then everything comes to us*

(//Kabbo in Kroch,2004:43)

The First People did not have to decide what to do, how to act, they waited and listened and read their bodies, and were told. “All was given.” (Myburgh, 2015 – a talk)

In eurythmy, the movement art born out of human speech, the gesture for this form of consciousness is the intoned vowel 'A', an open-armed gesture of complete oneness with the world, as sounded in the word "*Father*". A gesture of awe-filled wonder ...and dependence.

We are no longer those people, whose way of seeing and being, and therefore whose world, vanished as they came into contact with our Western ways.

*people were those
who broke for me the string
therefore
the place became like this to me
on account of it
because they've broken the string
I no longer hear the ringing sound through the sky.
therefore
the place does not feel to me
as the place used to feel to me
on account of it
for
the place feels as if it stood open before me
because the string has broken for me
therefore
the place feels strange to me
on account of it*

(Dialkwain in Krog,2004:13)

So my question is, from this place at which we have arrived, even if we could "return to things themselves", (Merleau-Ponty in Abram1997:36) how would we act?

We yearn for that communion with the living earth which was given to us before we broke the string. But we can only look towards such a world from our separated stance. A stance of *certainty* about the physical world, hard-won since the time of the Enlightenment through an increasingly refined intellect that can now to an unprecedented extent 'know', exploit and 'control' "the place [that] feels strange to me", to its great detriment and with increasingly unpredictable outcomes. A place whose language we no longer speak and whose words have become the dry husks of abstraction, the last vestiges of any memory-pictures of its life having been systematically eradicated over the centuries by a scientific 'religion' of objectivity. An 'I – It' relationship whose gesture has become deeply ingrained in us. (Wyschogrod in Philosophical Society.com,2015:online)

A gesture embodied in eurythmy through the vowel, 'E', as pronounced in the word, "*Head*", and created by firmly crossing the arms in front of us to form a barrier in the shape of X. We also find it in the words, *safe* and *self*, as we stand in our isolation scrutinizing the things of the world with the crossed beams of our focused gaze.

But we cannot simply open our arms and retrace our steps to return to an intimate and participatory relationship with the earth, as Abram would have us do. We have woken to a sense of separateness and personal agency that cannot be willed away in self-directed, left hemisphere fashion. For despite our best intentions when it comes to acting we act *on* the world, (or ourselves) often aggressively in order to achieve our supposedly altruistic but self-defined aims. So how do we find an embodied way out of this self-enclosed hall of mirrors in a way that is congruent with and apposite to the authentic needs of the world? McGilchrist (2013:460) suggests that we must "try to keep the door open to the possibility of something beyond the customary

ways in which we think, but which we would have to find, *painstakingly, for ourselves.*” (My emphasis.)

And from what better place than one of contradiction and *uncertainty*? For we are creatures of the earth, physically embodied and enmeshed in the mysterious living processes and sentient experiences we share with its plants and animals. *And* we are beings able to stand apart from that earth, manipulating but not mastering the secrets of a universe whose structure and functioning our brains seem to reflect, (McGilchrist, 2013:460) imbued with a consciousness that connects us to *that other Sky to which this is a piece of straw, that other Sun in which this is a fleck of dust.* This being human, our particular make-up and place in the order of things seems to be, by design, a place of ‘between-ness’.

Eurythmy – the Movement Art of Between-ness

Today, in this wilderness retreat where I am writing, I begin my daily eurythmy meditation by becoming aware of how I stand physically in the world. I feel my feet ensheathed in my soft eurythmy shoes, contained without constraint, the yielding wood of the deck pressing through the thin soles, leaving me lightfooted, yet grounded. Aware of my posture I automatically become more upright, back straightening, shoulders wiggling, my breathing deepens and head floats lightly. Slowly I lean back, the pressure moving along the soles of my feet until it is firmly in the heels. My whole body feels pulled down by this weight, my arms hanging like lead at my sides. Leaning slowly forwards, without bending at the waist, my place of contact with the earth moves forward and I become lighter and lighter, my arms rise of their own accord until I am teetering on the tips of my toes like a bird ready for flight. I do this a few times until I find *that* place - the balls of my feet in soft but firm contact, my arms as if suspended, almost horizontal, a levitational pull counterbalancing gravity and I feel taller. A sudden shift in awareness, tingling porosity of skin and the air like a sheath around me. Quietness descends, (or is that just the wind dying down?) a bird calls shrill and clear. The encircling fynbos leaps into sharp relief and a breeze glitters the water’s surface. I am inside this space and inside my body, as one.

My attention opens to the three planes that hold my form: the vertical, unbounded by head or feet but following imagination beyond the stars to light and clarity, and through the depths of the earth to memory. Outstretched arms and fingertips brush the infinite horizons of the encircling horizontal, uniting me with the earth and all those who live on it, moving me rhythmically from side to side. (With others, the room is soon filled with smiles and laughter.) The forward-back plane most familiar to us Westerners, focused, linear, goal directed and active in the world because we only know the half of it, always looking forward to the visible even when moving backwards. Taking time I pay attention to the back of my head, arms, back, all the way down my legs to my heels, allowing that surface to lead me. A mysterious world opens, a world that moves as I move, a world I can sense but cannot see, even with my inner eye. I stand between the world of discrete things before me and this invisible unboundedness at my back. I suddenly see that, in fact, I *am* the interface between the visible and invisible.

The backspace is not just the physical space behind me, the wash-up area I have just turned away from but of which I have a memory picture, a “re-presentation”. (McGilchrist, 2013:152) Nor is it the invisible world that withholds itself from Abram (1997:51), the hidden faces of a clay bowl. The world of our backs, phenomenologically, is truly invisible in that it is a non-physical space that we can, however, experience directly. When I enter this ‘backspace’ with awareness, not only am I connected with something large behind me but the visible world opens out before me. When I then move forward, maintaining an inner connection with that largeness, it tempers the narrow focus of my directional movement, giving me both focus and oversight, and a sense of being carried by something more powerful than my own, narrow, self-directed movement.

I stand in the centre of these three infinite planes that have become so much richer than the flat Copernican constructions of my mind. Through paying close attention to my lived experience I have co-created a three-fold world of living qualities. They are not figments of my imagination but are brought about by the geometry of my human form as it stands in the “depth” of the

“lived world” (Merleau-Ponty in McGilchrist, 2013:148) and are given life through my attention. And where these three infinite planes or different ‘worlds’ conjoin is in the region of my breast, that place most closely connected with my sense of ‘I’. In this place, the world (in both its infinitude and particularity of place) and I come together. And it is out of this place, this centre held by the infinite periphery, that in eurythmy we move.

So, lightly grounded with awakened senses, ensheathed by the air and held by the infinitude of form I find myself in a place of neither repose nor action but of ‘anticipation’, a pregnant space of possibility that tingles with life out of which I am drawn into movement, a collaboration between the all-encircling space and the opened internal centre in the region of my heart. It is the challenge of eurythmy to be always at that fine edge of unfolding aliveness, with the danger of falling either way – going through the motions of beautiful technique, or dreaming in a sea of feeling, indulging ourselves in the flow.

For the defining quality of eurythmy is that I am awake and aware in every moment of placing each foot; in every hand and arm gesture inwardly forming and outwardly following through; of every person with whom I am contracting and expanding, moving and countermoving the space between; and always of the periphery out of which the movement arises, anticipating and making visible through both body and consciousness, the poetry, music or pure form of which it is an expression. My whole being needs to become a finely tuned instrument of heightened perception and embodied thinking.

God picks up the reed-flute world and blows...

...Remember the lips where the wind breath originated

and let your note be clear.

Don't try to end it,

be your note.

...Let everyone climb on their roofs and sing their notes, sing loud.

(Rumi in Ramsden & Mackintosh, 1998:2)



Kairos Eurythmy
Training Programme 2015

Inside this reed-flute world, both playing and being played, we sing through our bodies, participating in the unfolding whole.

A Poetic Empiricism

All becomes poetry when we look from within ... because poetry is science, is the breath of the same spirit by which nature lives. ... And never did any science originate, but by a poetic perception.

(Emerson in Obuchowski,2005:CVIII 364-5)

A towering individual of his time, J.W. von Goethe was a man deeply rooted in and influential of the culture of Central Europe. Faust, (Goethe,1960) the protagonist of his great and life-long work, is the quintessential Western human being whose struggles and strivings, whose desire for a direct knowledge of the living world, as well as for his own power and control over it, and whose errors and self-centred deeds with their often disastrous consequences, form the content of this rich and magical play. His risky pact with the devil may even be seen in the light of that sense of optimistic invincibility McGilchrist (2013) describes of left hemisphere consciousness. So it comes as an affront to our carefully constructed ideas of fairness and social justice that at the crucial moment of his death Faust does not go to the devil, as we'd perhaps like him to, but is snatched from the grasp of Mephistopheles and transported to the spheres of redemption. It is a riddle we can ponder, but a riddle that for me has a ring of authenticity about it. For in Faust we recognise the self-centred way of seeing and being in the world that has brought us to the cul-de-sac in which we now find ourselves, giving us perhaps the unique opportunity, out of ourselves and in freedom, to find a way out. And it is Goethe, the scientist, who I believe can show us this way, not so much out of, but *through* it.

Goethe stands out as a scientist because not only did his phenomenological approach predate the 20th century phenomenologists by over 100 years but

he had the ability to recognise the inaccuracies of the reductionist Newtonian science of his day and to see where this abstract, positivist approach was leading. He thus firmly rejected it. (Steiner,2000)

To docket living things past any doubt

You cancel first the living spirit out:

The parts lie in the hollow of your hand,

You only lack the living link you banned

(Goethe, 1960:95)

Goethe's interest was in learning to know that "*living spirit*", to "become utterly identical with it." (Goethe in Holdrege 2005:30) The astonishingly overlooked fact in the history of science is that he achieved this. He developed a truly objective way of knowing the living world 'from within' through what he called a 'delicate empiricism'. (ibid:29)

"... Dr. Heinroth speaks favorably of my work; in fact, he calls my approach unique, for he says that my thinking works objectively. Here he means that my thinking is not separate from objects; that the elements of the object, the perceptions of the object, flow into my thinking and are fully permeated by it; that my perception itself is a thinking, and my thinking a perception."

(Goethe in The Nature institute:2015)

What is striking about this passage is its sense of mobility; the flow of movement and countermovement between seer and seen, between perception and thinking, and the mutual permeation and transformation that occurs through which a living betweenness arises. And the surprising word describing this liminal and luminous space and state is, 'objective', a word we have come to understand as 'out there', fixed and separate from the self.

Here is a worldview that requires us not just to learn a new ‘method’ but involves a turning upside down of our perception of the nature of reality, and to see it as that which comes into being through the multidirectional, reciprocal dance of simultaneity between seer and seen. How do we get our heads around this? The answer is, we don’t, for it is precisely this desperate need of ours to ‘grasp’ through fixity that leaves us with ‘the parts lying in the hollow of our hand’.

Rudolf Steiner immersed himself in this dancing way of seeing the world when, as a young man, he edited the whole of Goethe’s scientific works. He also saw the ever-present danger of fixity saying that the significance of Goethe’s discovery of the archetypal plant and its metamorphosis does not lie in it as fact or concept, (its reification) but in “the magnificent building up in thought of *a living whole of mutually interacting formative laws.*”

The greatness of this idea ...dawns upon one only when one tries to make it alive in one’s spirit... One then becomes aware that this thought is the very nature of the plant itself translated into the *idea* and living in our spirit just as it lives in the object; ...what is at work outside enters into the spirit of man ...as something evolving, becoming, as something never at rest within itself.
(Steiner,1988:Intro)

Goethe’s delicate empiricism shows us that “the way to the whole is into and through the parts.” (Bortoft, 2007:12) His ‘method’ begins with observing these ‘parts’ in as exact a manner as any empirical science. But unlike positivist empiricism we do not immediately theorise, intellectually drawing conclusions based on a purely physical, mechanistic and utilitarian understanding of the world and its relationships. Striving to remain open we gather as many perspectives as possible, viewing them in relationship to each other, seeing what patterns may be emerging, using all our senses to come into closer relationship with what has drawn our interest so that it gradually starts to reveal more of itself and we may begin to see it more deeply.

Once we have allowed the phenomenon in through our senses, we dwell within it and allow it to dwell within us, re-imagining in an embodied, sensorial way all our sense impressions through a process Goethe called ‘exact sensorial imagination’. Laying our observations side by side, and through disciplined practice, we gradually overcome the separateness of each discrete observation allowing the process to come alive in us. “We ...connect within ourselves what *is* already connected within the plant.” (Holdrege,2005:36)

...we will see that empirical observation finally ceases, inner beholding of what develops begins, and the idea can be brought to expression.”
(Goethe in The Nature Institute:2015)

Holdrege (2005:31–33) likes to see this process as a conversation between him and nature. The attitudes of interest; receptive attentiveness and deep listening; respect for nature as something in its own right; awareness of one’s responsibility, what one brings and the boundaries one may be transgressing; a true willingness to change through the encounter; and an overall awareness of the process as a back-and-forth between partners, all form part of this delicate empiricism.

We recognise here the attitudes of presence, awareness and responsibility emanating out of a respect for ‘what is’ that also lie at the core of Gestalt therapy (Naranjo,1993). We also see the essential elements of a reflective social practice where relationship and an open and fluid between-ness lie at the heart of an understanding that for real transformation to occur all parties need to evolve and change.

Goethe’s delicate empiricism is a disciplined practice that both demands and engenders a radical transformation of ways of seeing and thinking. Finding our way out of the cul-de-sac we have created through our culture of abstraction is not about building a new road, but involves transforming our way of

perceiving the old and “making it alive in one’s spirit.” (Steiner,1988: Intro.) And for this *we*, have to come into movement.

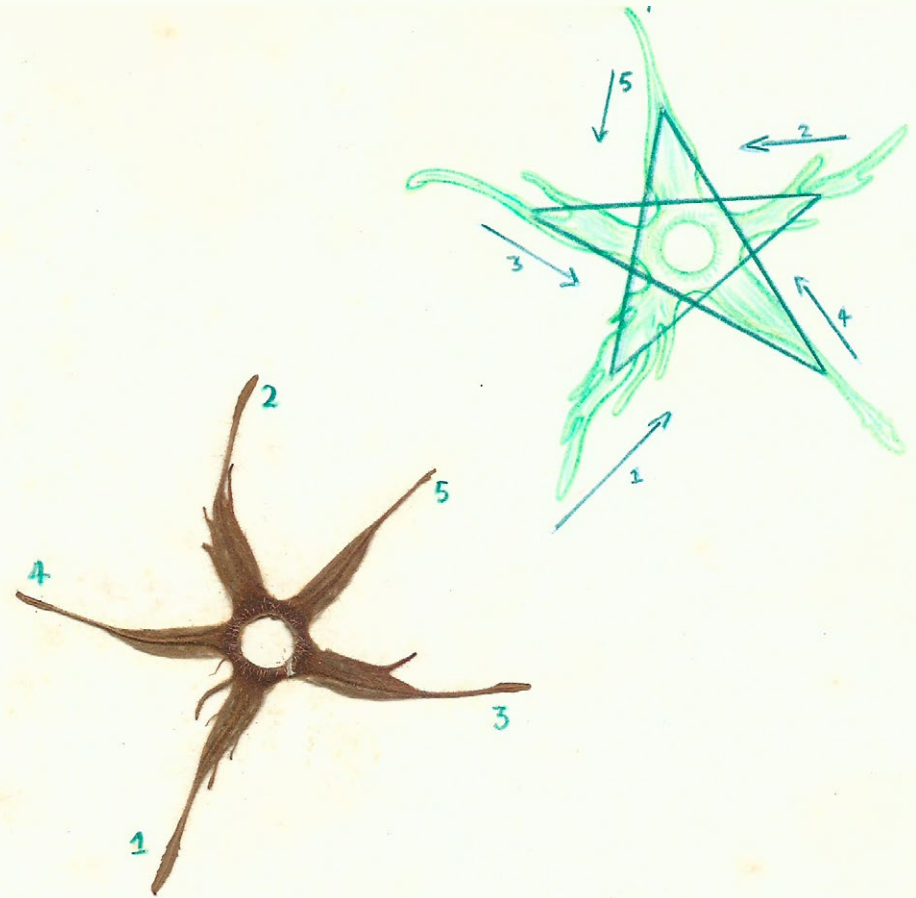
It is perhaps no co-incidence then that Steiner initiated the movement art of eurythmy in 1912 in immediate answer to a question posed by the mother of a young girl interested in learning an enlivening, health bringing form of dance, because eurythmy is born out of the “living whole of mutually interacting formative laws” (ibid) underlying the living world, in particular those of the mysterious faculty of human speech. Steiner rather cryptically stated that this new art of movement “was to call upon new possibilities of knowledge,” and would “be a matter of *the word*, not [of dancing to] music.” (Steiner,2002:15)

Like Goethe, Steiner developed the faculty to objectively “become utterly identical with [the phenomenon]” (Goethe in Holdrege,2005:30) and participate in bringing forth the living “idea” or ‘whole’. The living whole, or ‘life body’ of the human form Steiner saw as coming into being through the continual forming and reforming of the invisible gestures of speech:

“...When we utter a word we produce a definite form in the air. If we were able to utter the alphabet from a to z in such a way that the whole could take shape in the air, we should have the form of the human etheric body.”

(Steiner,1984:12,13)

These intoned gestures, movements and principles of language inform our movement in eurythmy and come to expression particularly through poetry, the language of the imagination. McGilchrist (2013: 119) sees language as “rooted in the body” and says that, “To the extent that the origins of language lie in music, they lie in a certain sort of gesture, that of dance,” which is social. (ibid) Interestingly Steiner calls the form of eurythmy that portrays music as, “visible singing”. Both see the relationship between language, gesture and human movement. “Movement does not arise out of that which is at rest; the form at rest arises out of movement.” (Steiner 1984:13) In a sense, we not only



speaking but are continuously intoned or spoken into being through the forming and informing of the living “etheric” (ibid), connecting us to the life-carrying, mobile geometry of metamorphosis and the infinite. (Whicher, 1971)

I have begun to see eurythmy as a new language giving voice to the living, holistic world delivered by the right-hemisphere. A couple of organisations I have worked with have told me that eurythmy has become part of their language. “We speak about the ‘backspace’ now,” the director of one said and of how they want to work more out of that awareness². It is a shared language of experience that evokes understanding without reducing the living fullness.

I bring a form of eurythmy pioneered by and developed for the workplace by Annemarie Ehrlich, with whom I trained. What drew me in part to Annemarie’s way of working was her phenomenological approach, unusual amongst eurythmists, which is particularly suited to revealing the field of social relationship as a living, moving, between-ness of perception and thinking and seer and seen. I try to bring a ‘delicate empiricism’ to my practice - the exploration, through eurythmy, of self, other and the world in dynamic relationship - and see a natural fit between eurythmy and Goethe’s way of seeing. It is this relationship as a social practice that I chose to research and try to make visible.

My Research

I chose for my research project a two-week course I gave at the Centre for Creative Education in March 2015 on Goethean Observation to a class of twenty-seven 1st year students studying a Bachelor of Education (Primary). My approach is qualitative and I strive for congruence between content and approach by attempting to practise a delicate empiricism with regard to the

whole project; during the course, reflecting on it, making meaning of my observations and the data collected and observing the writing process.

I have drawn from my own observations, lesson plans and journal notes as well as material from my years of practice. For institutional assessment purposes the students were required to do an assignment and I asked them to write a short piece sharing their observations, experiences and insights from the eurythmy and how these perhaps related to a Goethean way of seeing/ thinking. It is from these writings that I have drawn the students’ direct quotes.

The social eurythmy photographs taken by my colleague, Paula Hathorn are of a group I am subsequently working with doing the same exercise as described here, and are used to give a richer, more tangible picture of what we did.

I look for what Goethe called ‘instances’ of the universal – specific vivid examples through which the whole can perhaps find expression – to explore my questions.

My three areas of exploration are:

- *Myself in practice* – Can I practice a ‘delicate empiricism’ of the unfolding process of the course and class, its learning needs, social dynamics and myself as part of it?
- *The Relationship between Eurythmy and a Goethean approach to social practice* – What do they bring to each other and what arises in the space between?
- *My practice* – What social practice can I see emerging and can I find an appropriate way of articulating this?

² Conversation with Carly Tanur of Mamelani, November 2014

It is important to note that these questions were not clear to me in the beginning of my dissertation. They have only emerged (and have subtly changed) along the way as one can perhaps expect in a living, emerging practice. The subtle changes have reflected a shift in my way of seeing from a more left hemisphere, unidirectional desire to discover what eurythmy can bring to the world of social practice and Goethean observation (with a sense of attachment to proving an outcome) to now inquiring into the nature of their reciprocal relationship, leaving me excited about what I might find. But it certainly did not start off like this.

Caught In the Gaze of the Basilisk (McGilchrist 2013: 165)

In one of the earliest renditions of my dissertation I wrote:

It is the last residential of the Masters programme at Towerland and we are in the second day of a workshop to prepare us for writing our dissertation. We have engaged in many invigorating creative exercises to stretch us in our writing but now it is crunch time. Our pens poised, we are given the prompt; “My dissertation is about...”

Heads down, everyone around me begins writing busily, the scratching of pens on paper testimony to the wealth of work and ideas already invested in the many varied research projects – or so it seems to me. But I sit, turned to stone, staring through the curving window pane, seeing nothing but the deep, paralysing internal fog so familiar to me when I am asked to articulate my practice. “So what is it you really do?” the mocking inner voice asks.

My experience was one of an icy and complete disembodiment and try as I might there was nothing that I could get hold of to even begin writing about. For years I had been trying to ‘see’ my practice clearly and it seems that these repeated and very focused attempts were the very problem.

The essential problem is that the mind [left hemisphere] can only truly know, in the sense of bring into sharp focus and ‘see’ clearly, what it itself has made ...the sort of knowledge that enables a thing to be pinned down and used.

(McGilchrist 2013:163)

But how to articulate a practice that dips us into the ethereal world of our own fine, life body, the gossamer fabric that spins us out of the life of the universe? A practice that to be grasped and pinned down melts like the mist leaving me with ...nothing.

Try as I might I could not even recall instances of what I did, no pictures arose and the only conclusion I could come to was that not only did I have nothing to write about but I had no practice. Firmly imprisoned in the disembodied and abstract left hemisphere I experienced what McGilchrist (2013:332) calls a “loss of metaphor”, which presents as “...a loss of cognitive content.” For metaphor, which arises out of embodied experience, is a “vehicle of thought”.

This experience illuminates the challenge of making visible and communicating a living and intangible practice of between-ness in a world of hard facts where “explicitness forces us towards acknowledging only the world of the left hemisphere.” (ibid:161) But it also demonstrates the incredible grip of the left hemisphere; the harder one tries to loosen it through direct measures, the tighter its hold becomes.

My journal entry on that day reads:

9 February 2015 – This masters programme has taken me to the edges of myself, where I am confronted with my own fears of inadequacy ... I know this ‘Black Hole’ well... Can I perhaps stay in this place with equanimity, this place of authenticity, and see what emerges?

The Goethean Observation Course

When we no longer know how to go further, let the plants tell you, the plants that you let spring up, grow, blossom and fruit within you. Learn the language of the flowers.

(Steffen in Kaminski & Katz, no date:4)

Goethe learned this language of the flowers. I was tasked with ‘teaching’ it while myself still learning. We cannot learn *about* Goethe’s way of seeing because it requires a mobile, holistic awareness inaccessible to left hemisphere subject-object language. We have to *do* Goethe. (Bortoft, 2007) Hence the course I designed was experiential, with many different observation activities to explore both our manner of seeing and our relationship with the world we see, and gave as much thought to content as to the group process.

What We Did – *Paying Attention through Movement*

I integrated five eurythmy sessions, each an hour long, including 10 minutes of reflective journalling, into the course over the two weeks, three of which were in the first week over three consecutive days in order to develop and deepen the experience. I concentrated on one exercise, created by Annemarie Ehrlich, which we did in a variety of ways of increasing complexity and which provides many different opportunities for observing the layered complexities of living process, natural and social. Starting simply and with increasing complexity we executed the same circular form/choreography in three different orientations; forwards and backwards along the circle line, and sideways while all facing the centre of the circle. The exercise also involves the giving and receiving of wooden balls bringing concrete responsibility to their engagement with the others as well as embodying and making visible, through their own particular gesture, the principle underlying all human interaction. (All students’ quotes appear in italics throughout.)

We moved in a eurythmic flow passing a ball to the person in front of us, being conscious of our partners, body space, posture and hand movement, exchanging the ball back and forth...We then took the movement to the next level and exchanged partners every time we passed the ball, always moving on either the right side or left of the person we were passing, depending on which hand the ball was in, always using your body to completely feel and connect with your self and surroundings.

We moved to the rhythm of a poem about the sea, demanding attentive listening and co-ordinated movement in response to the subtle changes of tempo and rhythm. The poems are important and I normally choose these carefully to suit both the exercise and the situation. The language of poetry is the language of the imagination, needing no discussion or explanation, a pictorial language that through rich image and metaphor stirs the soul to life as we move.

What We Did – *Paying Attention through Drawing*

Included in the various observation activities were a number of drawing exercises one of which was caring for and drawing a growing bean seed throughout the course because as Goethe remarks:

“Sketching develops and compels attention, without doubt the highest of all accomplishments and virtues”

(Goethe, 30 Nov 1816 – in conversation with von Miller)

One student writes:

... I found I had my own perception of how the bean seed would grow which was completely different to the way it was growing. I had to take time to observe the bean and its growth to understand it fully and become aware of its movements before I drew it everyday... I also treated and looked at these beans as if they were my growing babies or children. I spoke to them and watered them regularly and I found a sense of protection over them. Even though the observation [module] is now complete, I will continue to nurture them.

Closely observing the unfolding coming into form of her plant she not only learns about the bean but about herself and her perceptions. Through her attentiveness she comes into intimate relationship with her bean as it quite literally reveals more and more of itself through her care. This exercise evoked in her the “intrinsically empathic” gaze of the right hemisphere which “acknowledges the *inevitability* of ‘between-ness,’” (McGilchrist 2013: 166) engendering her feelings of warmth and protection. Not only the world but *we* are changed by the quality of attention we bring and we can understand why Goethe calls it the “highest of all accomplishments and virtues.” A virtue the practice of which is itself transformative.

This is a far cry from the detached, “auto-pilot” state many students described as their normal everyday way of seeing the world. As McGilchrist (ibid) notes, we are always in relationship with the world. Seeing it in this detached way is “merely a disengaged relationship... The between-ness is not absent, just denied, and therefore of a particular – a particularly cold – kind.” Given our mutual reciprocity with the living between-ness that is our world, the denial (or in this case ignoring of it,) must therefore be a cold denial of or detachment from ourselves in some way. Many students used the word ‘auto-pilot’ quite naturally along with other mechanical or computer related words



when metaphorically describing themselves or human beings in general. The human being as detached automaton living in a cold world is a reality we continue to create.

Warming to the World – Practice Emerging

I find I am observing my dissertation writing process in the same way as I observed my bean plant, with the same wonder and astonishment at life unfolding. It has developed from something unknown that I could not get a grip on and filled me with fear, into a relationship where I experience living inside my dissertation as it comes to life through me. Through this I have a growing understanding of the nature of practice not as a 'thing' apart confined to what I do, but as an integral part of my way of being, paying attention to and moving through the world. Like the students caring for their little beans, I find that I am loving it.

I did manage to remain in that 'Black Hole' of fear and uncertainty when first asked to articulate my practice. I embodied it in the way that, in eurythmy, I hold the pull of both the centre and the periphery of a circle I am moving. This helped to temper my fear with interest and I could resist being pulled into its dark depths or retreating from it into a more superficial, intellectual and 'safe' approach. I began to see this as part of my practice in which resisting the pull of either pole requires the inner mobility of remaining open despite feelings of enormous uncertainty, feelings that drive us towards either fixity or escape. Experiencing this extreme doubt as the tension of a eurythmical movement was enormously helpful.

One of the students also experienced real fear when she started to open herself to seeing the world in this mobile relational way:

I found myself being more open and aware of how and what I observed, this led me to feel vulnerable. ...I felt I was nowhere near ready to feel so vulnerable. My fear of not having control crippled me as well- this is something I work on daily.



Social researcher, Brené Brown (TEDxHouston, 2010: 4:18) discovered that what prevents connection in people is “...excruciating vulnerability, this idea of, in order for connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be seen, really seen.” Opening to seeing the world is also opening to being seen. Brown found that it requires a kind of ‘whole-heartedness’, and developing a sense of being worthy in order to stay in this difficult place. (ibid: 6:34 – 7:51). Far from being just a method, delicate empiricism is a path of personal and spiritual development and developing the inner mobility to embrace vulnerability is a large part of this alive and unpredictable practice. The above student discovered her sensory embodiment of the backspace in eurythmy comforting, giving her the courage to shift, for a bit, her deeply entrenched disposition to the world:

... Prior to this experience I had a mindset of trying to figure something out before embracing it ...one does not go into the unknown unarmed. However this experience changed my perspective somewhat. During last weeks eurythmy exercise I surprised myself by how much I enjoyed going backwards. ...I found moving backwards to be more calming. I engaged in all of my sensory awareness while doing so.

Tanya Layne, fellow masters student and Municipal Co-ordinator of the South African National Biodiversity Institute, who did eurythmy with me some years ago found that the eurythmy movement has supported the strengthening of her inner flexibility to move through the uncertainties of an environmental and social practice :

The eurythmy has helped me with my facilitation. I am giving myself permission to not know, to question from various sides. It's about moving with intention into the unknown. Orientation is intention...

We can also see how this ability to remain open (and vulnerable) - the inner practice of a certain flexible tension - enables the developing picture to form



in a Goethean way through the questioning from various sides while holding one's orientation. She continues:

This modality gives me a physical experience of how it is to move fluidly through the curves while holding the straight line.

[As in walking a figure eight where we are inwardly holding the invisible straight-line axis while moving its curves.]

The straight line is holding the vision, the curves are like fishing for opportunities. I am now giving myself permission for walking the curves. It is a way of working through building relationships.

It is about the gathering of perspectives, getting to know the terrain and most importantly, about paying attention to and nurturing relationships that all moves us forward in this living practice, the intention not constraining us but holding us inwardly to the vision, the form emerging through the curves. But we have to be wakeful in order not to limit that line in either time or space:

When we moved the line we discovered that we created the boundaries of where it starts and where it ends. That is what we do in life, we create the boundaries, the divisions in the way we see things. (Participant of eurythmy workshop in London, 2011)

In writing this I have experienced myself creating boundaries a number of times. The line of argument emerges out of the writing, I discern its glimmerings and then I fall in love with it, it becomes *my* line and in no time I find myself manipulating the facts to make it go in the direction I want. Goethe warned us about this:

We often find that the more limited the data, the more artful a gifted thinker will become. As though to assert his sovereignty he chooses a few agreeable favourites from the limited number of facts and skillfully marshals the rest so they never contradict him directly. Finally he is able to confuse, entangle,



or push aside the opposing facts and reduce the whole to something more like the court of a despot than a freely constituted republic. (Goethe, Proteus Masters handout)

I have been very dependent on my tutor's feedback to see this swerving into intellectual reductionism and would then have to go back to the phenomenon to observe the reality. Gradually I have started to recognise this pattern myself and catch it in the process. Interestingly, I become aware of the beginnings of this 'despotic' process through a sensory discomfort, a bodily unease of something not ringing true, and I realise that what started out as discernment is quickly going towards my dividing off and eliminating data thereby reducing the whole field to support *my* argument or arrange things in a neat sequence of events to bring them to completion. The moment I become conscious of this, a bodily relaxation, an out-breathing occurs and immediately I feel more open to observing what is really there, much of which I have conveniently blotted out in my mind's eye.

I used to ignore these bodily feelings of discomfort occurring generally in life, overriding them with my mind, and often still do (usually to my chagrin). But I have come to trust them as needing my attention. For it is not just conscious observation that constitutes our perception of the world. "Emotion and the body are at the irreducible core of experience: they are not there merely to help out cognition. Feeling is not just an add-on... it is at the heart of our being....". (McGilchrist 2013: 185) This embodied, feeling way of attending to the world, broadly described as affect, is pre-cognitive and is the first part of us to experience and make an intuitive, right hemisphere assessment of the situation as a whole. Our conscious making meaning of what we experience comes later and can be distorted by any number of social and self-imposed motivations as Goethe shows above. Being less conscious, our bodily response is more reliably true as it is in touch with our deeper more authentic feelings and so "less able to lie." (ibid.)



Developing the practice of becoming still and attending to the subtle shifts in feelings and movements by “reading our bodies”, (//Kabbo in Kroch 2004:43), enables us to discern any lurking incongruence between our truer implicit responses and the rationalisations, manipulations or suppressions of the intellect. Openness and authenticity lie at the heart of practice if we are to truly allow the phenomenon to reveal itself in our ongoing conversation with the world in becoming.

I have begun to see the pattern of discerning the ‘line’, grasping it acquisitively and then letting go and breathing out, as an almost rhythmical dance and to inwardly experience it as a curve, which as Tanya said, is like “fishing for opportunities”. It is a dance between *Imitator* and *Sincere One* in which the true line becomes richer and is helped to find the direction *it* wants to take by the veering off, the pausing and most importantly, by the looking further, that this entails, often surprising me when I see something familiar in a new way. Out of this, new thoughts arise as the landscape increasingly comes into view revealing not a new direction as much as a deepening and expanding of the first glimmerings.

Expecting the Unexpected

The process of looking further to see the new and unexpected is not a focused search but a broad, peripheral open gaze. In fact, according to McGilchrist (2013:163) if we were to rely only on our focused search we would never be able to see anything new at all. “The difficult bit about the ‘stickiness’ of the left hemisphere is that once we have already decided what the world is going to reveal, we are unlikely to get beyond it. We are prisoners of expectation.”

... almost all of the class, including me, instantly jumped to conclusions when discussing the movement [of the ball] but when we really truly observed how the ball was moving our initial conclusion was completely different to what we discovered.

They discovered in a very embodied way that could not be refuted the discrepancy between what we think we see happening in a complex situation and the actual reality that only reveals itself through careful observation. This happened many times. In the beginning they expressed their ‘observations’ (actually opinions) with immediacy and great certainty and were shocked that they were wrong, but gradually they became more tentative and inquiring about what could be happening and took more time to really look, resisting jumping to conclusions and staying more open. The new comes to us by means of the right hemisphere through our experience of the world at large. Thoreau (in Holdrege 2005: 35) captures this necessary shift in our way of seeing from the left to the right hemisphere exactly when he says:

Be not pre-occupied with looking. Go not to the object, [left hemisphere] let it come to you... What I need is not to look at all – but a true sauntering of the eye [right hemisphere].

But how do we do this? The dominance of our sense of sight and the familiarity it engenders is problematic as it seems to be very closely linked to left hemisphere thinking and its familiar, circular, self-enclosed way of seeing (or not seeing) the world. So sight both suppresses the other senses and is, at the same time, absent, leaving us living in an abstract ‘reality’.

It was a shock to realise that I didn’t even see the person who was in front of me, the partner I was interacting with. How often in life do I not see people?

(Participant of eurythmy workshop in London, 2011)

McGilchrist (2013:163) is not surprised; “...not only is the left hemisphere dealing with what is (already) familiar, but... [anything new]... is bound to become familiar all too quickly because there is a tendency for it to keep recurring to what it already knows.” And if what is before us does “not fit the template we are currently working with”, we don’t see it – even when that is a person right in front of us and with whom we are exchanging wooden balls.

This was a common experience and the ‘current template’ in this situation was, planning their way forward, trying to figure out what they had to do and looking ahead in preparation for what they thought was going to happen so they only “*took note of those two or three ahead, and not the person we were meeting*”. The result was that they were neither present to the other nor to themselves. So developing a ‘sauntering of the eye’ is not as easy as it may seem and yet, if we are to see the phenomenon as fully as possible in order for the ‘whole’ to start to reveal itself to us, this is exactly what we must do.

I discovered with surprise early on in my eurythmy practice that our ‘sauntering eye’ is awoken by walking backwards. Asking the group to do the form backwards (thus removing the dominant sense of sight) not only awakens other senses but always brings with it a tremor of confusion, slight anxiety and feelings of “how is this going to be possible?” Their feelings of certainty are jiggled. It is then with great surprise that they discover that not only is it easier and more enjoyable to move backwards, but like the very nervous student above, they feel calmer.

*...I felt a shift in myself, I instantly was relaxed, which was not expected...
...I really enjoyed going backwards, which was surprisingly easier than going forwards, because it gave me the chance to connect with myself as a whole...*

It is interesting that the shift from left to right hemispheres does not happen gradually but suddenly, bringing with it a feeling of connection accompanied by a sense of joy.

It was particularly powerful when we did the form backwards. I was able to sink deeper into my senses, and my awareness seemed to become much more expansive. I had the awareness of my backspace as well and because I did not know who was behind me, there was a deepening of presence and I was able to more fully and clearly see what and who came before my eyes...It was like meeting the person for the first time, which was surprising.

Through *sinking* into her senses (rather than *using* them as a tool) she becomes more present to the surrounding space and her gaze immediately expands, not just quantitatively but qualitatively. She sees in a new way, *more fully and clearly*. This open gaze is therefore not diffuse or lacking in detail but seems on the contrary to improve our ability to see with clarity. The awakening of the right hemisphere through eurythmical embodiment enables a wholeness of awareness of both point and periphery, a core principle of eurythmy. We also realise that seeing the new is not just about new content. What is perhaps of much more importance is that she is able to see the person appearing in front of her *as if for the first time*. It seems that this embodied, right hemisphere, open gaze enables us to see what is very familiar with fresh eyes and more clearly.

Having over time become aware of the role sight plays in perpetuating what I now see is left hemisphere thinking, I pay a lot of attention to acquainting participants with all their senses - taking time to gently draw their attention to their backs in a sensory way before moving backwards; feeling the textures and temperatures of the different balls, observing the colour and grain before handing it on; listening to the sound of their feet on the floor or for the pauses in the rhythm of the accompanying poem; observing and experiencing their limbs in movement from both within and without; becoming aware of the whole surface of their skin and following their shifting relationships with those moving around them using this organ of perception, not just their eyes; as well as reminding them of their responsibilities and the principles governing their movements; all of which enables them to move backwards with more confidence, awake to their surroundings and aware of what they *can* control as they enter the unknown.

I became more open, I used my senses and felt awake within myself ...I enjoyed it so much because I was awake. ...It was a refreshing feeling...

The opened senses become portals to both the world *and* the self. Again, a sense of joy arises at being *awake within herself*. McGilchrist (2013:163-164) states that we must be “vigilant” in order to maintain this attitude of open

possibility to prevent it from being quickly shut down by the narrowing focus of the left hemisphere. But to me 'vigilance' already has too much of that dutiful, left hemisphere focus that removes us slightly from the here and now and already starts closing these newly discovered avenues to the world. Joy, on the other hand, is re-vitalising and life enhancing and seems to be the companion of a wakeful sense of embodiment.

We see here the close relationship between *attitude* and a sense of embodied experience. If we look carefully at the above it is not just a self-generated inner attitude of openness and expectation towards the unknown, nor the fact that the students were walking backwards into the unfamiliar, that enabled them to shift into a right hemisphere way of seeing. The critical difference between going forward and backwards was their degree of *embodiment*, which in turn caused an immediate shift in their way of seeing, impacting on how present they were in themselves and therefore, to the world around them. For to be present to the world it seems one must first and foremost be fully embodied and present *in* oneself, which is a very different state from being 'self-conscious'. The latter is a dis-embodied, left hemisphere state where the focused gaze is turned onto oneself, detached and scrutinising from the outside. When we are present we become luminous to ourselves and open the world.

Moving backwards brought more order, ...we weren't so focused on who to pass the ball to or which direction to go in ...we were following the direction of the ball as well as each other... My movements were so much smoother, almost as if I was just following a specific path...

...it was more exciting, not knowing who was behind me, and that bit of wonder and anticipation, waiting to see who would appear...

"By rejecting the role of change agent, we make meaningful and orderly change possible." (Beisser,1970:online) Consciously entering into our own embodied life we enter into and take our lead from life's ordered flow. An





inner shift of perception is enabled presenting as a bodily relaxation, and the focused desire to strive for or effect change wanes. Acceptance of what *is* begins to dawn. Like all things living, this is not a condition that is fixed, the tide of acceptance and resistance ebbing and flowing between the hemispheres, but slowly a more open, attentive stance to the world may begin to appear; "...that "bending toward" of spirit and intellect and ear' to be seen in Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* in San Marco." (McGilchrist 2013:152)

Walking backwards into my dissertation I noted:

My dissertation seems to be finding an order of its own, "almost as if I was just following a specific path..." Suddenly it is no longer a 'line' that is emerging but an increasingly substantial idea or 'whole', coming into form. I feel that frisson of "wonder and anticipation", which allows me to let go of my line more easily and look forward to what will appear. I feel relaxed, which in turn helps me to stay open and pay attention to all the parts, even the ones that I at first judged as 'disagreeable left hemisphere abstraction' (and therefore instinctively want to discard). I am beginning to trust this process in which what wants to appear is unfolding more fully. It has been a surprise to realise that my 'disagreeable behaviour' is just as much a part of the phenomenon of my unfolding dissertation as that which seems more agreeable. This is helping me to hold back from judgment more readily and simply observe attentively. And the more the 'whole' becomes visible, the more I recognise what constitutes a part.

"...acceptance (in the form of self-acceptance...) leads to growth rather than stagnation. Life is process, and living it is all that is required to maintain its flow."

(Naranjo: 7)

Practising the Practice

This week's eurythmy exercise was harder for me to grasp ...I felt as though the image was before me but just in a blurry state and I could not seem to get it clear.... It seemed as though we were just going through the motions...

Reflecting on the final eurythmy session three days before the end of the course, I realise that I brought too much too quickly. It is only when we have time to get to know something and experience it in greater depth that it becomes meaningful. But this was not the only reason for the lack of flow in the lesson.

I did not expect the movements to become so complicated and I really struggled ...because the class was so disruptive and I could not focus one bit. ...I was more annoyed than I had ever been. All the fun was ruined because of the annoying chatter.

There were about five or six students who I had started to think of as 'the back row bunch' because they tended to chat amongst themselves during the lessons and but had never been disruptive. They had been absent the previous day and it was this group that was chattering and playing around. I sensed that they had not fully arrived back in the class after their break and something was going on between them that had taken their focus. My response to the "annoying chatter" was to try to observe what was going on and find ways to engage them, but when they still did not settle I could feel myself getting annoyed. I felt tense, with an irritation that was in danger of turning to anger, and a strong urge to dictate and control. Noticing this I made my feelings explicit and said, "Now I'm starting to get grumpy, and I don't want to get bossy with you." This helped both them and me, and the session continued a little better, but we were definitely still "just going through the motions".

At the end of the morning two young women asked to speak to me. They expressed their annoyance about the group who had been disruptive saying that

it didn't just happen in my class and that the group had "bunked" the previous day's lesson to go out to breakfast together. They felt the group was not taking their studies seriously, were making it difficult for others to learn and asked me to please do something about it. Then, as if they had already come up with a good idea together they suggested that I find a way to motivate *them*, to get them interested in what we were doing.

All through the course I had tried to practise a conscious openness and attentiveness to the class process, so I entered this conversation feeling aware, calm and centred. I listened carefully and only asked a question or two for clarification during their story. I was not feeling defensive about my lesson nor trying to figure out any solutions while they were talking, but just listening. It was when the two women became quite animated about their suggested solution that my ears pricked up. I had a sense of sitting back fully into my body, aware of the space around me, time slowed a little and the question arose, so what's really going on here, what am I seeing? And suddenly I was seeing and hearing a lot.

I saw that the two women were white, middle class and had clearly benefitted from a good school education. I heard them say '*them*' with a hint of condescension and saw the unconsciously patronising smiles when they suggested I find a way to motivate the group. I saw that 'the annoying group' was largely coloured and clearly some had experienced the limitations of an education system that has never recovered from apartheid. I saw that I did not judge the two women for their attitude towards the others but was more interested in it as a social phenomenon, and this surprised me about myself. I saw that this was only the end of the first term of the first year and that the class was going to be together for four years. I remembered noticing that the class tended to stick together in little groups and I had to actively get them to mix and work with people other than their friends.

This whole experience felt exactly the same as walking backwards; the sense of the landscape opening up in front of me, the observations presenting

themselves whole and together (not sequentially) in a fresh way. There was no boundary to the landscape, it was open and I felt inside it, part of it and as such with a role to play. I experienced the pregnancy of the moment, budding with the possibility of something new coming into the class which simultaneously was a possibility of something new for me, or, if left, what felt like the continuation over the years of more of the same which had a feeling of hardening into fixity about it. I could see the way I had to walk and felt excited, with a sense of anticipation, and suddenly knew exactly what to do. It was about helping the class to really *see* each other. This all happened quite quickly but with no sense of rush and a spaciousness that allowed me to feel very composed. I had not thought it out, the whole simply presented itself to me.

Reflecting on this brief moment now I realise that what I missed all through the young women's story, was a sense of between-ness. It was not something that my conscious mind picked up but more an experience through my body of the *gesture* of the story, two quite solid 'bits' standing opposed to each other, a 'them and us'. But it was only when they said 'them' in a particular way that it came to full consciousness. In a very subtle bodily way I was from the beginning looking for what Plato saw as, "a smooth, dense stream of gentle light from the purest fire within us [that] merges with the light from what it sees, so that 'one body' is formed". (McGilchrist 2013: 165)

In this lack of between-ness we see our characteristic stance of separateness that Martin Buber calls an 'I-It' relationship:

The 'I-It' relationship is characterized by the fact that it is not a genuine relationship because it does not take place *between* the I and the It. When another person is an It to me, I am, first of all, perfectly alone. I gaze at him and view him from every possible direction, I observe his place in the scheme of things, and I find elements that distinguish him from me. All of this, however, takes place within me;..."

(Wyschogrod in Philosophical Society.com 2015: online)

I had planned for the class to spend the next day in small groups observing a tree following Goethe's process of delicate empiricism. I instantly knew I had to change this and so once the young women had finished their story I told them that we would observe the class as a living social organism the next day. This was clearly not the answer that they were expecting and they went away a little curious.

The next morning, sitting in the circle I introduced how we would start observing the class through the facts, or 'parts', as a way of seeking the whole. We started with the quantitative; the number of students in the class, (what they had thought turned out to be wrong), the male-female make-up, getting the small group of men to sit together and then age. I asked them to arrange themselves with the youngest on my left and the oldest on my right. This involved lots of movement, discussion, and working out in detail, down to the month, who should sit where. There was also surprise and growing interest when their assumptions were challenged by the facts.

This was the warm-up to the crux of the exercise. The question I had posed to myself was, what can I bring to help them to see through the divisions and stereotypes that run so deep in our society and perceive the other in a living way as a unique human being? It is my experience that you cannot be disinterested in someone whose story you know, so I looked for a simple, factual and brief way they could share their stories. In eurythmy I often start by asking people to walk their own straight line, which, through my questioning, they discover begins at infinity. In one organisation I worked with someone had seen this infinite line behind them as a picture of their lineage. Remembering this I decided we would observe each other through the lens of our ancestry, also a way to bring our diversity into the room. I asked them to tell us about the lineage of their mother and father, going back as far as they knew, plus one random fact about them. The youngest woman began the round by saying that on her mother's side her ancestors came as slaves from India. I noticed an instant stillness in the room as the quality of listening deepened, and as we went round the attentive openness to the storyteller

never tired. There were many warm interjections as people picked up commonalities of heritage, a notable one being the possibility of a young white man and a coloured Muslim woman sharing a Swedish great-grandfather who had jumped ship in Cape Town. But what started to emerge in a way that filled me with wonder and I had never before experienced, was the rich, interconnected history of our country coming to life in the room between and through us, expressed through the vivid particularity of each person's story as we all lived inside it. And as in the eurythmy, we felt a sudden unity and harmony holding such colourful and idiosyncratic diversity.

The final round was to share the details of their immediate family, their religion (or not), number of siblings and where they were placed in the family. I was astonished at the backstory that came through just these details and the empathy and solidarity expressed through their realising that "Most of us come from broken homes." What emerged from the small group conversations afterwards was that they did not really know each other, as they had never really seen each other before. Now they were seeing each other, as if for the first time, with greater interest and understanding. This became very obvious to me the next and final day of the course in the quality of their warm and relaxed interactions while reviewing the module together.

What also struck me was how much 'softer' everyone looked, a softening that seemed not to come from having *been* seen but from the interest they showed towards the other. Buber states that the I-Thou relationship is a true relationship because it takes place *between* the I and the Thou, a relationship in which "our whole being must be involved" (Wyschogrod in Philosophical Society.com 2015: online) and thus we change. It was this coming forward of their whole selves in a gesture of empathy that made them visible in softer depth.

In the I-Thou relationship.... everything possible is risked without any defensive position being left to which the I can withdraw in case of need.

(Wyschogrod in Philosophical Society.com 2015: online)

To the extent that we can hold such an openness to the other, to that extent we can approach embodying in a truly selfless way the eurythmy gesture for the vowel, 'I', as voiced in the German word 'Ich'. An upright gesture, a counter-moving stretching of the arms above and below, evoking an inner living between-ness, a gesture that never comes to completion...

A Delicate Dance of Between-ness

Climbing into the skin of the two weeks the students and I spent together what do I begin to see? A group of people coming together in a common field, bringing all our experiences, expectations and ways of being, to meet for a while with the intention of learning to see the world more fully, of learning to look through Goethe's eyes, to know a little this radical way of coming to understand what we take for reality.

We entered, and in all manner of ways started to explore our space, ourselves, one another and our way of seeing. We brought our experiences into the eurythmy sessions (and vice versa) where we moved and flowed together forwards, backwards, in and out, and began to see more: patterns within patterns, movements and countermovements, "*more and more subtleties, overlapping forms and counter-forms, I really began to understand this way of observing*". Relationships that we thought were clear and finite suddenly opened up, moving and transforming, leaving us holding a number of contradictory positions simultaneously and many more relationships than we first saw. "*Once I saw this, my awareness immediately expanded, and my previously limited perception began to widen. It was then that I felt a sense of the form being truly alive*".

Paying attention to the 'things' of the world we began to see their movement and the spaces between. "*As I took note of how and where the ball was moving to, the pattern became more visible in my head, as if I was looking at it from a bird's eye view*." Seeing ourselves inside the space, "*we were all particulars*

to a greater whole,” and stumbled over our habitual way of seeing; “my first instinct was to blame someone else whom, I realised, I was very likely not even paying attention to.” We bumped up against each other and got very annoyed and struggled with our entrenched need to manipulate and control, but “the urge to manage gradually faded when I started to use all my senses.” We woke up to ourselves in what we were doing and started to be more self-aware. “I was struck by how much attention I paid to my own movement, not just others.”

We discovered that we have bodies. “I have never connected to my body for feeling and observing while I am doing something, it was the most amazing experience.” We began to listen to and trust it. “My body then made decisions based on what I was physically aware of instead of what I saw.” With the shift in our awareness, we felt different, the world opened and moved. “I really experienced the shift...from the busy abstract internal dialogue to the reality of the work we were doing. My perception of the actions performed and of the room changed, when I consciously made myself aware of my surroundings. I saw a rhythm and flow happening as the wooden balls moved around the circle the class had made. I felt so calm and happy, just allowing myself to move freely without intense thought. The smooth movement reminded me of life, constantly moving, changing and evolving. I was so intrigued when our movements changed from jerky to smooth and synchronised.”

Entering with awareness into the body’s living form we were graced with the magnificence of the experience. “With a silent mind and active body I started having the most amazing sensations. I felt one with everyone, almost as if we were one organism. I felt a force that seemed to create an awareness of the influence the space behind and in front had on my movements. ...This is a truly magnificent feeling that allowed me to focus completely on whatever was appropriate whilst remaining calm and assertive, to be fully aware of my environment and its contents as well as use pinpoint focus and accuracy regarding my essential senses.”

And the more we saw what we were creating the more it came into being, warming us and uniting us in its flow. “I was genuinely surprised by the comforting feeling of unity whilst participating as a class during this exercise. We

started off as individuals but ended up as a single mobile unit, which I found fascinating!”

Like clouds parting briefly to let the warmth and light shine through we caught glimpses of this luminous whole and could say, “We were practicing Goethe’s way of seeing by being it!”

Looking Back, Looking Deeply

Reflecting on my and the students’ observations and experiences throughout this process I return to my research questions and try to distil what I see and is now living with me.

- *The Relationship between Eurythmy and a Goethean approach to social practice* – What do they bring to each other and what arises in the space between?

Looking deeply at the above, what appears through this social practice entwining eurythmy and Goethe’s way of seeing, both rooted in the delicately forming processes of the living world, is a deeply embodied, whole, participatory and generative *experience* dancing into life within and between us. Naranjo (1993:17) says of experience:

If attitude is a deeper issue than technique, ...experience is still a deeper issue than attitudes and constitutes *their* source. Without the appropriate attitude techniques become empty forms. Without experience even attitudes become second hand dogmas... Experience...is self-duplicating. It creates the external forms that convey its pulsating heart.

Be fiery cold ones so heat can come!

Endure rough surfaces that smooth you.

The experience of generative between-ness evoked through the reciprocal relationship between eurythmy and ‘delicate empiricism’ can transform the way we relate to the ‘other’, and therefore transform ourselves and our world, from a separated, I-It relationship, to the whole hearted and vulnerable between-ness of the I-Thou.

- *My practice* – What social practice can I see emerging and can I find an appropriate way of articulating this?

The nature of this entwined practice is both implicit and substantial. It is, like Gestalt therapy, “*simply* implicit,” in that inner change comes about through “the living process of interaction”. Its essence lies in embodiment and ‘doing’. “Action engenders substance or touches substance.” (Naranjo 1993:11) As such it is a substantial practice, not only enabling substantial insights and shifts in individuals but creating the social substance of between-ness where enlivening new forms of seeing, being and relating to each other and the living world can come to birth.

Its principles can be held in a framework for which I use the students’ words:

All that is required of me is to be still in the moment, open to the world before me and pay special attention to detail.

I give myself time...letting the situation, activity or image speak to me

Presence, awareness, and an openness to learn and really see are the key requirements in Goethe’s way of seeing.

Do your part and everything else will take place.

An attitude born out of the experience of consciously sinking into and listening to our living, sensing bodies.

- *Myself in practice* – Can I practice a ‘delicate empiricism’ of the unfolding process of the course and class, its learning needs and social dynamics including myself as part of it?

Through integrating the above principles of practice I was able to evoke a delicate empiricism that enabled me to play my part in helping the class to shift into a new way of seeing, not just in general terms, but in their particular situation of seeing each other more deeply and more warmly, in an ‘I-Thou’ relationship.



The social practice of embodying Goethe’s delicate empiricism through the practice of eurythmy, and illuminating eurythmy through a delicate empiricism, involves the inner development of the practitioner and is, at its core, a journey of personal and spiritual development. It is the dance between *Imitator* and *Sincere One*, there is no other path if we are “to find it, painstakingly, for ourselves”. (McGilchrist, 2013: 460) ...*Only then does he become a Seeker.*

Learning this practice is learning to *live*, in ourselves in the world.

“The purpose of life is life itself.”

(Goethe, 1949:134)

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