10

The Spirit of Transformation

Slippery and Illusive Territory

In our final chapter we engage with the role of spirituality, the sacred and religion in the transformation of perspectives and lives. We explore mythos, ritual, and wisdom as responses to questions that seem illusive to rationality's gaze. But we also enter a cautionary note, for the reader, and for ourselves, since the terrain is slippery, illusive and contentious. Words fail or fall short, 'For fools rush in where angels fear to tread': a verse from Alexander Pope that inspired the title of the Batesons' book—father and daughter—on the epistemology of the sacred (Bateson and Bateson 1987). In idiomatic English, the verse is used to caution inexperienced people against attempting what the more experienced might avoid. So, we hesitate: we are educators, psychotherapists and researchers, not theologians. But we also think that the marginalisation of the spiritual and transcendent, as well as the idea of the sacred, from discourses of adult education and transformation, leaves a troubling vacuum. One greatly weakening our potential repertoire as educators and researchers.

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We have been aware throughout this pilgrimage of the inevitable limits to human knowledge, when framed through the perspectives of reason alone. We have addressed disconnections, dualisms, and tensions that characterize adult education as well as the wider human condition. We have argued for a larger, more inclusive and 'holistic' sensibility, at many moments, where diverse ways of seeing and acting can dynamically and creatively co-exist, if in tension. We place inverted commas around 'holistic' because we are concerned that this word, too, like transformation and transformative learning, is in danger of becoming cliché, meaning all things to all people; a premature signifier of what is supposedly good and desirable yet devoid of meaning. Holism can be used to blur difference and avoid thinking about what is meant by interactions within systems, of which we are only a part, like our world's ecology. Or the word is used to disguise difference and difficulty. We want to celebrate the notion that difference is part of being human, and that dialogue is fundamental to learning within it, and to notions of transcendence.

We have explored words like connectedness, and learning, as a work of composition, a weaving together of fragments of experience into something larger: a narrative form redolent with meaning. But our words fall short when seeking to bring the argument to a climax, or to some satisfactory if inevitably provisional closure. There is tension in what we seek to do: to write of the numinous, the ineffable, or the mystery of curiosity and struggles to learn; and of the faith necessary to create meaning, insight and agency in and from experience. Lifelong learning is too frequently ontologically sanitised as well as instrumentalised, to the neglect of the whole human subjects at its core.

Philosophical and spiritual paths have of course been followed by people and communities across time and geographical space. They have sought answers, in different ways, to the need for meaning, and for bonds that celebrate and foster belonging, trust, hope, and care for human fears and limits. This goes beyond materiality, or the land of facts; or even the spiritual, in some of its more super-natural manifestations. Maybe the dualism separating the material and spiritual needs to be overcome. What might then be the contribution of spirituality, the sacred, and even religion to understanding, and generating satisfying

stories of significant learning? Experience of the sacred, of symbolic practices, and embodied rituals, and even encounters with the numinous, matter in many people's life narratives. The role of religion, and its relationship to the sacred and the spiritual, as well as to the mystical, has been powerful. Religion appears in many guises, including the secular—arguably under the banner of communism, fascism, a-theism, or even consumerism—and yet, despite the promises of secularism, and the Enlightenment god of reason, religion itself has not withered and died, despite its frequent tendencies towards fundamentalism, or anti-learning. But such tendencies can be shared by atheists and humanists alike (see Carroll and Norman 2017).

Our framing of the role of the spiritual and religious is informed by Laura's systemic perspective and Linden's psychoanalytic ideas: they invite us, in different ways, to cultivate perpetual curiosity about experience, forged in dialogue and relationship, where metaphor and story excite and illuminate the depths of who we are. It is an auto/biographical project in these terms; in the final resort it could be about the place and importance of love, hope as well as despair and hate in our learning lives, individually, relationally, as well as socially. But love matters, maybe most of all. Terry Eagleton (2009) quotes Kierkegaard in *The Sickness unto Death*, that a believer is someone in love. It is the same with knowing: because a woman, like Laura, takes a passionate interest in women's liberation, and struggles around this, in her own life, and through this begins to understand more profoundly how patriarchy functions. This has happened in our book, which is an ongoing, loving dialogue and passionate engagement with our subject. We must love the possibility of something bigger and better when engaging with our objects of enquiry.

Religious Saints maintained that we must love things (and maybe ourselves?) before we can know them, because it is only through our attraction to them that we come to know more fully. Faith enters the equation because all of us, including the scientist and materialist, use faith's energy to sustain the quest for understanding or establishing causalities; theirs too is a kind of pilgrimage. Transformation, even in the academy, requires faith in the possibility of illuminating a truth or in developing deeper understanding, even when driven by postmodern

scepticism. There is a kind of faith at work in the latter, albeit wrapped in the language of scepticism towards meta-narratives. The desire for truth, albeit always and inevitably relative, and constrained by discourses, shapes all our perspectives, even when we consider truth itself to be a modernist illusion.

As intellectuals, we are trained or encouraged to avoid words like truth. When we have used love, hope, or wisdom as key words in our ESREA Life History and Biography Conferences, some colleagues have reacted with astonishment and criticism. This is not properly scientific, they say, or it is a kind of therapy, they insist, rather than the rational pursuit of truth, or good enough empirical research, on which collective credibility depends. On the contrary, we suggest, there is the grave risk of losing relevant and potentially rich ways of knowing, in the evocative if ambiguous realm of mythos. Narrative, poetry, and art go beyond the logic of evidence into a qualitatively different yet important domain. They can be used to re-define evidence as a 'phenomenological truth' (Laing 1967). We can feel stranded in postmodern, post-structuralist scepticism, and even in a dehumanised, overly cerebral and anesthetised criticality. Love matters in our formation, and maybe transformation—when a good enough other comes alongside; someone or something celebrating or legitimising our existence, which in turn enables us to feel seen, welcomed and curious about the world. Someone or something which cultivates desire. Someone or something which, maybe, helps us defy the potential formlessness and alienation of liquid modernity.

So, this chapter is challenging, for both of us, in different ways. We dialogue across its pages, trying to connect spirituality with critical and political thinking, as well as logos, on the one hand; and the latter with the imagination and mythos, on the other; and to consider transformative experience alongside religious understanding of encounters with the divine, including metaphorically. We finally disclaim the tendency to separate transcendence from immanence, matter from spirit, seeing these as intimately interwoven dimensions or dynamic prerequisites of transformation. Transcendence requires material to engage with, an immanent context for its realisation: like a workers' tutorial class, perhaps, or Freirean inspired group which becomes aware that oppression is often cultural and material, rather than 'natural' and inevitable.

The Power of Myth, and Ambivalence Towards Religion

Tension, pain, anxiety and frustration as well as joy, enchantment, satisfaction and a kind of creative ecstasy are important in learning of a lifewide, lifelong kind. We do not find satisfying answers to pain and suffering, or joy, in human experience in a simple click of a mouse, or brief excursion to a google website. The process is deeper and more challenging: the whole is more than the sum of the parts when we play with different perspectives. Especially, following Socrates, when we remain open to our ignorance, folly and hubris, as well as compassionate to ourselves and others, in the limits of our understanding. Seeing the humanity of the other and understanding that they too strive for truth while riddled with doubt. This can apply to those of a religious sensibility as much as to the humanist. There is no simple binary divide between faith and faithlessness, between conviction and scepticism, among the religious or non-believers. In this sense, we are all seekers after meaning. We are challenging either/or dichotomies, even when there is tension, for academics, in recognising reason's limits (which the academy does not like), or in opening a space of curiosity towards the spiritual and mythos. Science, or scientism, perhaps, has given overwhelming primacy to reason, and has refused, at times, to place a limit on what reasoned human understanding, or a rational education, can achieve. This reaches back to Plato and the association of our own reason with the divine controlling source of knowledge. Honing our rational powers brings us close to God (Hobbs 2017). On the other hand, we can be seduced by mysticism, by a premature closure of thought, or by the power of a myth or belief, that proves illusory or even dangerous.

Logos, Mythos and Religion

It is important to recall, at this point, the Greek distinction between logos and mythos. The Greeks believed they co-existed, without needing war, or walls built between them. We suggest, like the Greeks, that

mythos can help us to expand our troubling attempts at lifelong learning in spiritually enhancing, even transformational ways. We acknowledge tensions within, and between us, about aspects of mythos, not least when meaning and insight become solidified into what can seem to be the false certainties and inflexibility of formal religion. Religion, and spiritual practices, can serve as an avoidance of difficult thinking, a closure, a final answer, an end to curiosity, an escape from the reality principle into a false Oceanic bliss, as Freud described it.

There can be ambivalence even dismissiveness towards religious perspectives among radical writers on transformative learning and adult education. In some readings of Paulo Freire, for instance, there is little or no reference to the influence of liberation theology in his pedagogy (Kirkwood 2017). Opposition to religious belief partly explains the scepticism towards Tawney's Christian Socialism and the idea of the Kingdom socially incarnated in the good adult class: a sceptical Marxist materialism took over, at least for a while, in some of the British adult education literature. Profounder forms of critical learning or movement from false to truer consciousness was the prime key to progress. Still is, for many. Consciousness of the alienating material realities of ordinary people's struggle to make a living, forced as they have been to sell their labour cheaply while losing control of time, craft and dignity. Argument has raged over the extent to which cultural life, including adult education, was determined by economic relationships or had the potential to transcend these. Aspects of workers education in the United Kingdom, including the tutorial classes inspired by Tawney, were said to have tamed students' potential proletarian radicalism, incorporating them into a kind of neutered national consensus. Interestingly, in the history of workers' education, dialogue broke down between some of those holding differing perspectives, in what the historian Jonathan Rose (2010) called 'the whole contention concerning the Workers' Education Association' (pp. 256–297). For some historians, opposition to the Church, any church, was fuelled by the latter's role in schooling and its disciplining of the troublesome masses on behalf of the masters. Building criticality was part of the struggle to interpret and eventually overthrow capitalism, because of its degradation of humanity. However, we wonder, time and again, whether criticality is sufficient to sustain

and enliven curiosity about experience in its messiness and disillusion, including in the struggle for a more equitable and humane social order.

Laura's ambivalence towards religion is strong. She grew up in a Catholic country and experienced religion's patriarchal power to colonise thought worlds and bodies, and to use blame and shame for 'educational' purposes. All infused by the fear of ultimate punishment and inescapable infernos if the right path was not taken. God as omnipresent, omniscient and male, teaching women to feel badly about their sinful bodies, always reminding them that it was she, after all, and her weakness in the Garden of Eden, that was responsible for *mankind's* fall. She, as the other, corrupt and corrupting, needing containment and discipline. The common-sense idea of sin and punishment entails no compassion for human error. It has created joylessness and incuriosity, alongside control and discipline, in Laura's experience of both public and Catholic schools.

For Linden, there is ambivalence and anxiety about the conservatism of the Church in England and its alliance with the State, as well as, too often, with the rich and powerful. This, despite Christianity's roots in a theology of the divine in ordinariness, and of solidarity with the poor and love for the outcast and despised. The problem no doubt, historically, stems from the Emperor Constantine's Nicene council, where Christianity became the religion of the State. Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God the care of our souls, became muddled. There is also for Linden, like Laura, anger at religious zealots obsessed with sexuality, who rage against the Queer other, as they project their own deep-seated anxieties into otherness. (And of course, this is not only about 'sex', it is the fear of dis-order and of messiness that can drive the political zealot.) People however who represent institutional power often neglect one central imperative in the New Testament—to love one another in a spirit of solidarity and magnanimity. It is the Mary Magdalenes of the world who get pushed to the margins, rather than members of the world's Sanhedrins, or the Caesars, and maybe many male theologians.

And yet, religious and especially spiritual perspectives are not easily expunged from a theory of human learning; they are present everywhere, even in our book, if not always explicit. Our ambivalence creates

generative possibility: it helps keep open a double description, and seek a more encompassing perspective, to overcome the dangers of dualistic thinking. We have noted the dialogue between Dante and Jung, in Chapter 6. And the idea that we are all riddled with doubt as well as the possibility or some faith, of whatever kind. Bateson thought the sacred was a manifestation of the pattern which connects (Bateson and Bateson 1987), and he writes about 'conversion'—radical perspective transformation—in his discussion of Learning III. Religious understanding of transformation, in diverse traditions, is about finding meaning, ecstasy, pain, and the capacity for subjective transcendence in crises; and of a living relationship with the divine, or 'god', whoever she is. Transcendence can inspire us towards the good, beyond our own existence, and to acknowledge a common humanity and the need for solidarity with the poor. It can be forged in a dialogue like ours, where new possibilities open, for ourselves and, maybe, for you as our reader. We have the metaphor, and auto/biographies of pilgrimage to draw on to serve as an allegory of a lifetime's learning. The seventeenth century English poet, Abraham Cowley wrote that 'Curiosity does, no less than devotion, pilgrims make'. In Linden's case, there is an insatiable curiosity towards the symbolism of Christian sacrifice, and of solidarity with those crucified alongside us; and of forgiveness for those who drive nails into our hearts. New life and compassion can be found on pilgrimages, like Dante's imaginal journey, drawing, inter alia, on the Christ figure, Beatrice, Mary and Virgil. Good inspirational objects, in psychoanalytic language, to nourish an inner journey.

For Linden, religion is too implicated in his story to be omitted, although he often does so in his writing. It is a way of being in the world that helps make sense of life and to articulate the deepest of emotions. Above all, it is about a relationship and an openness to continued possibility; in effect, more of an existential commitment than the acceptance of a given set of supposed religious 'facts' (Carroll and Norman 2017). For Laura, its place is marginal in her life, after adolescent struggles to find a more spiritual way. But we have both stood in front of the church in the small village near Milan, where Laura lives, and talked of the symbolic power of the mass, especially when unencumbered by theological excess. As with all rituals, it can work as a

metaphor of transformation, of digesting something of the divine in everyday objects. We have talked of the loss of shared rituals at times of change and transition, at births, weddings, and funerals, where there can be avoidance of giving offence, or crass commercialism. We have been left feeling dissatisfied, sick and empty. On the other hand, a humanist funeral service, as Richard Norman notes, can be deeply satisfying and spiritual, in celebrating how a person has contributed to others and the social good. And where members of a congregation are invited to express their feelings—in poetry, literature, a thought or anecdote—as part of bearing witness to a life (Carroll and Norman 2017).

But Linden's memory is also of a soulless municipal crematorium, where the death of a father and mother seemed bound into the logic of industrial production, with the next set of mourners waiting outside, and an allowance of 15 minutes to say goodbye. Linden loves the rituals of the Church, and the sense of mystery, magic, awe and time at the heart of the sacraments, including the spirit of the Anglo-Catholic service. The symbols of transformation, the mythos of the mass and of resurrection, can be dismissed as non-sense, or as a mythic, symbolic glimpse of life renewed. There can be a profound humanity at the heart of this, as there can be in a humanist funeral. This is a place where dialogue across difference is fruitful.

Writing like this feels, to me, Linden, like coming out, because the academy often considers such matters as purely private even supernatural affairs. Materiality rules, as does homo economicus in various accounts of how things work or of the possibilities for radical change. People are driven by greed, narrow self-interest and material desire, so apologists for capitalism argue, which in turn drives economic growth. In Marxist terms, religion is most often the great opiate and distraction. In Marx's vision of Communism, however, technological innovation brought abundance for all, and the fruits of the earth could be shared equitably, according to need. Human beings would only have to labour in the morning, and only then to fulfil necessary tasks. Other times were for family, fishing, reading, and for rest and conviviality. Strange to observe that Marx's communist utopian vision appears to celebrate a spirituality alongside social and economic transformation.

Linden has suggested, too, in Chapters 5 and 8, that a spiritual and religious sensibility—seeing the image of the sacred and divine in ordinary people—has played an important role in struggles for a socially just order. Paulo Freire was inspired in this way (Kirkwood 2017), as was Tawney. Both were grounded in a spirit of equality between everyone, and in the importance of nurturing dialogue, openness, curiosity, respectfulness and love, as well as the possibility of transcendence in democratic well-being. The same applies in the work of the Italian educator Capitini. In such a context, psychoanalysis can seem a hard-edged rationalist enclave, but there are constant efforts to reclaim the divine and transcendent there too (Sayers 2003). Freud himself used myth, story and literature, almost despite himself and his claims to be a good rational empiricist (Symington 1986; Allison 2017). Just occasionally, he used the word love (Honneth 2009). In Jung, such sentiment was stronger, as was the importance of transformation in the soul's difficult pilgrimage through life and death.

So, we need an open dialogue about how mythos can open new windows on the auto/biographical, cultural, epistemological, therapeutic, and political spirit of learning. In their book *Re-enchanting the Academy*, Angela Voss and Simon Wilson (2017), juxtapose the spiritual and sacred, and education, against an extreme scientific materialism and rational empiricism dominating the academy. They encourage openness to ancient as well as contemporary images and intuitions of how the world works and selves within it. They call this mythopoetic soul work. Their aspiration echoes Terry Eagleton's (2009) rejoinder to the arch rationalists Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, who equate religion with pseudo-science. On the contrary, Eagleton insists, it does not claim to be science but rather a search for meaning and justice nurtured by the power of love. Karen Armstrong (2009) observes that when Freud and Jung started to chart their scientific search for psyche or soul, they both turned to ancient myths and stories for help. We should remember that myth, or mythos, was never intended to be an accurate historical account of events, but rather a way to grasp the complexity and mystery of human existence and of learning, as in Bateson's 'thinking in terms of stories' (1979, pp. 14–16). Something happening all the time, frequently beyond our immediate awareness. We draw on myth

when needing to illuminate the puzzles, possibilities and limitations of our lives, even to the point of death, and maybe beyond. As Carroll and Norman (2017) observe, the great stories of the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition can resonate with everyone. The Garden of Eden is a parable of shame and sexuality, while the story of Noah and the flood is one of hubris and environmental catastrophe.

However, mythos should be treated suspiciously, at times. We must cultivate the capacity for 'double' or 'multiple' description (Bateson 1979), a critical reflexivity, alongside an imaginative, heartfelt freedom. We noted in Chapter 6 how Jung's archetypes were both powerful and dangerous, in his own biography, in the seduction of the cult of the supreme leader who embodies the earthy spirit of a whole people; as in Nazism. Linden notes (West 2016) how Islamist radicalizers target young people with powerful myths. A myth about Bosnia has been central to radicalization, providing a compelling story of the West's hostility towards Islam. The 'Christian world' conspired against brother Muslims in Bosnia, who were white, but they were nonetheless slaughtered, as the West stood by at Srebrenica. Radicalisation works by emotional, imaginative and mythic appeal to the past constructed in the light of the present, and to the present in the gaze of the past. Jihad becomes a heavy responsibility requiring toughness, even brutality. The victory of the Muslim armies, over the King of Jerusalem, Guy of Lusignan in the twelfth century Battle of Hattin, is interpreted as an outcome of a long process of small-scale, hard-hitting battles against a powerful, militarily superior enemy. Past struggles are reinterpreted in the light of the present for what is said to be needed against the new crusaders of the West and its client states. Muslim clerics may speak in the language of theory; the jihadi groups act through mythic stories and doing (Hassan and Weiss 2015). We need critical reflexivity to balance the seductions of the theatre of myth and the objectification of others.

Ironically, in the Bosnian conflict, the use of historical trauma and resistance, in mythologised form, was potent for the other side too. Milosevic, the Serbian leader, used stories about the slaughter of many of his people and the alleged murder of King Lazar by Ottoman Muslims in the Battle of Ksovo Polje, to 'explain' present miseries and justify terrible actions against Muslims. This is a narrative of

humiliation that had to be avenged. Actual events were different but myths of the murderous, threatening other play into individual and collective psyches, fuelling hate and the need to annihilate (Varvin 2012; West 2016). Voss and Wilson (2017) suggest that the academy can offer a precious gift of antidote: the cultivation of critical reflexivity as part of a search for meaning, which includes understanding our own conceits as well as of those across a wide historical canvas. New age counter-cultures and their intoxication with enchantment, for example, take us only so far: critical voices within and without need space too.

Spirituality and Sacredness Beyond Religion

What place then, if any, for notions of the sacred in transformative experience? The sacred as mystery, requiring respect, awe but also representing a potential power in struggles against barbarism. Picasso's *Guernica* is sacred in such terms, including the image of the suffering woman at its heart. The Goddess of ancient times is brought firmly down to earth in the savage destruction of the city, by the products of science. The alliance between science and power can bring us to perpetual destruction, especially when nothing is sacred (Bateson and Bateson 1987). But can there be any shared criteria to illuminate the elusive concept of the sacred, beyond formal religious understanding? And what kind of knowledge can we now jointly create, in dialogue, on the theme of the sacred in transformative learning?

In her 2003 ground-breaking book on spirituality and culture, one inspiring our present chapter, Libby Tisdell wrote: 'if one wants to educate, it is incumbent upon educators to examine the variety of ways in which people construct knowledge' (p. xi). Breaking a silence on the sacred, on spirituality and religion, means listening to other voices from 'different cultural, class, and gender communities, recognizing the knowledge that is present in those communities' (p. 8); and, we suggest, by recognising silenced stories within ourselves and learning biographies. Like the play of free association in the psychoanalytic hour, we must search for greater openness with reference to our desire, demons, dreads and conceits.

Tisdell was assuming, in her research, that the sacred and spirituality are bigger than religion, if we define them as the awareness and capacity to honour interconnectedness and mystery in life. They entail making meaning and transformation as a movement 'toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self' (p. xi). A profound learning process of widening definition and perspective is a consequence of better knowledge and intuitions of the processes of 'moving forward and spiralling back'. Of the non-linearity of learning journeys, as the present recreates or mingles with the past, in midlife, for instance, where time begins to feel scarce and we might wonder as to what we have achieved, existentially. Or in illness, when we feel vulnerable and where there can be intimations of our own death; or in the loss of loved ones. These moments represent, for many, acute times of questioning, doubt, and evoke the imperative to create meaning, or find a narrative thread to guide us through existential labyrinths. It is about being and becoming more fully human. We appear to need experiences of birth and death, of loss and displacement, and of worries about those we love, to act as triggers to engage with the big questions of life and learning.

Breaking the silence on spirituality means re-integrating the multiplicity of forms that knowledge can take in our theories of learning and education. And by integrating art, ritual, dream, music, metaphor and diverse symbols into our work. Maybe writing itself—a theme of our final metalogue—is part of breaking free of logos' grip, by bringing literature, poetry and other literary forms, alongside art, into play. To embrace the spirit of poets and novelists, while respecting the discipline logos brings. Many researchers in interpretative and qualitative studies bring narrative and creative sensibilities, auto-ethnographic imaginations and artistic knowledge into the academic frame (Bochner 2013; Chang and Boyd 2011). Qualitative research, in many forms, illuminates and interrogates dominant discourses—scientific as well as moral, political and religious—and 'seeks to ground the self in a sense of the sacred, to connect the ethical, respectful self dialogically to nature and the worldly environment' (Lincoln and Denzin 2000, p. 1052). Complexity then re-enters this portrait of self in relation. An image of a golden thread helps too in weaving together knowledge of ourselves, unconscious life, and the other, and what she represents, as well as to

appreciate the wisdom of nature. This resonates with Bateson's idea of the sacred as a celebration of wholeness (Bateson and Bateson 1987). Something not excluding science, mathematics, technology, or conscious purpose, but woven together with aesthetics and ethics, the unconscious and narrative imagination. Besides, an epistemology of the sacred recovers values and insights lost in the Enlightenment project's embrace of positivism: if all humans are sacred, worthy of recognition and respect, then it is easier to compose a universal human ethic emphasising a common sacredness, and the unacceptability of oppression, whatever hideous or disguised shape it takes. And to celebrate the possibility of many truths, which are silenced in evidence-based mantras. 'This sacred epistemology interrogates the ways in which race, class, and gender operate as important systems of oppression in the world today' (Lincoln and Denzin 2000, p. 1052). The sacred provides the groundswell for a celebration of a universal commitment to lifelong learning, to social justice, and to the quest for a well-lived life.

Bateson thought that ritual and metaphor (not only individually, but collectively) enhance our sense of the sacred and the *sacramentality* of gesture and context markers. Rituals and metaphors can heal the splits that open between mind and nature, because they convey profounder information that cannot be communicated in words. This is information and meaning beyond formal 'evidence'. Presentational knowledge and forms of enactment can liberate our complex, lifelong struggle to understand, not least ourselves. What does it mean when Lake Eerie is poisoned and for our psyches to be poisoned too? What is lost and murdered in the process? What does it mean for species to be annihilated or for a rain forest to be desecrated? A sense of tragedy, but also of awe, mystery, transcendence can be evoked by authentic participation in enactments, rituals and ceremonies of resistance. These are not optional extras, but fundamental necessities in struggles to protect fragile ecologies. We need myths to teach of humility, and our place in the sacredness of a fragile earth. Noah, in the Biblical story, was pilloried for his warnings about environment catastrophe, only to be proven wise. Myth and ritual can inspire us to action, and keep us keeping on when everything seems hopeless, and others are contemptuous of our actions.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage became for us a powerful metaphor of processes of transformation, and, we suggest, of lifelong learning. Libby Tisdell (2017) has written of her pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago, the Way of Saint James, towards Santiago de Compostela, after a difficult and deeply painful divorce. There is a literal movement of self, serving as a microcosm of a whole life, as she kept a journal on moving in and across various spaces. There were poetic and what seemed sacred moments of turning towards the light, looking at a sunflower doing the same; and of experiencing the pain and rawness of blisters, and learning to live with this. She would pick up her mat and walk; blessing her feet in the process; 'and finally it was the beauty of the sunflowers, or the bounty of the vineyards, the welcome presence of the waters of *'una fuente'* (a fountain), or of other blessings on the way. That was the cycle, from the pain to the blessing; and then onward, making my way by walking. I followed an invisible thread to the Sacred Source that helped me manage the pain. What a miracle!', she wrote (Tisdell 2017, p. 346) . There was group singing that wove connections to her Catholic, Irish roots. There were Irish folks singing with her and, in such moments, it was difficult to separate the religious from the cultural and spiritual.

She wrote that she was more of the Irish Catholic than she realised or cared to admit. She summarised diverse insights from her pilgrimage: the spiritual and cultural importance of reframing connections to images, like the crucifixion; the physical, embodied dimensions of movement; the realisation that there was a thread to guide her in the labyrinth. It included new forms and life in old phrases re-born, like taking up one's mat and walking. These can feel meaningless at other times but pregnant with significance on pilgrimage. The pilgrim must listen to her body: pain is to be engaged with and tended to; and there must be awareness of limitation. Not everything can be done, and time is finite. There are frequent encounters with the labyrinth, and the risk of losing oneself, but also of a thread to guide the pilgrim on, and a faith in the life enhancing qualities of the experience; of how the sacred is glimpsed in a flower as well as the rhythms and textures of music and

outpourings of joy. The unconscious can burst into life, in dream and even day dreaming: of letting Dante and other good objects enter our souls and enrich our faith in the journey.

Tisdell writes of longing in the call to pilgrimage and of departure; of moving into new ways of being. Of being care-full in her journaling and subsequent writing. But her account raises many questions too: might her perspective be overly optimistic, and even, dare we say, characteristically North American in its evocation of progress? After all, the founding of the United States derived from the pilgrimage of a set of patriarchs fleeing European tyranny and religious hierarchy, and supposedly moving towards tolerance, constitutional government, and freedom of religion and conscience, or so the story goes. Of course, the account omits the genocide committed against First Nation peoples. However, to frame Libby's testimony in this way is ungenerous, because she, we, inevitably, write from within a culture; and, in her case, she explicitly acknowledges the importance of learning from, rather than annihilating the other. Maybe European academic cultures are too weighed down by historical pessimism, and visceral memories of our capacity to destroy others on an industrial scale. We are more suspicious, or some of us are, of religious sensibilities, because of the damage they have done, to women as well as men, in places like Italy.

I have been a pilgrim, Linden writes, going solo and yet finding the company of friends. I was walking on the French side of the same Camino, the Chemin de Saint Jacques, starting at the old pilgrim gathering point at Le Puy-en-Velay in the Massif Central. I walked over three weeks to the Abbey de St. Foy, for the Festival of St. James on July 24th. The journey across the testing terrain of the Massif Central was hard, with many blisters, and doubts, interspersed with moments of ecstasy. There was danger, intimations of mortality, when lost and stumbling towards a cliff edge, in the dark, one evening. I learned that to cover delicate, blistered feet with layers of sock was the wrong answer; as was diving into cold water, only to aggravate the pain further. Logos as well as mythos was required for the journey.

Small moments brought joy and glimpses of the sacred. Like finding a way down a mountainside, despite the blisters, which often hurt more when going downhill. One path was shrouded by trees, and there was

no light in what seemed to be like a dark, Gothic cathedral nave. Then a pinprick of light appeared, eventually becoming fulsome and eventually appearing as the glistening white Abbey de St. Foy perched on the mountainside, shining in evening sunshine. (Sainte Foy was a 12-year-old girl, martyred in the fourth century, and who, it was claimed, could a source of healing for the pilgrim.) As I wove my way towards the Abbey, someone was playing Bach on a piano, in a cottage, opposite the path. A window was open, so the music could be clearly heard. Tears of joy flowed in a moment of healing and a glimpse, maybe, of the divine.

Earlier I met an older man called Richard, at the door of a small remote church dedicated to Saint Pierre. The church had a much celebrated eighth century Carolingian alter. Richard had walked from the old German Democratic Republic travelling nearly 2000 kilometres across the Alps to see this: his journey was made only a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and I think he relished the new freedoms of travel. But there was a notice on the church's locked door, written in French, which he could not translate. It stated that the buzzer should be pressed three times, for so many seconds, and then to push the door open. He had been there for hours, trying to understand. I said Bonjour, and he asked if I understood English and French. The joy on his face was uncontainable when I said yes, and we were able to decipher the notice and share together the ancient beauty of the church alter. Afterwards we told stories of our pilgrimage and lives. Later, he was ill, and rested at a gîte d'étap—a rest house on the route—as I went on my way, because of time. There were glimpses of beauty, faith, love and even healing, as well as vulnerability, in those moments of connection.

The experience of pilgrimage is like a calling, a quest, one that may be personal but also collective. It can be political too, as witnessed in Chapter 8, with reference to the Peace March of Assisi. You can go solo yet find good company, and the rhythms of walking are more attuned with a potential for deeper forms of conversation and connectedness, not least with oneself. Pilgrimage is about having a goal, dealing with a life crisis, and having sufficient faith that something can be resolved, in its own time. Linden, like Libby, was wrestling with disorientation and the deepest of dilemmas, in his case the threat to a new job at a

university in Canterbury; and the pain of separation from children in his move from Oxford where they continued to live, after a searingly difficult divorce. But the pilgrimage was not enough, and he was soon sucked back into the tensions of the day job. It needed more time. Like 25 years, as the first draft of this chapter was completed, close by the Chemin de St. Jacques, in Languedoc Roussillon. It is in writing that we can compose more of a whole: a pilgrimage becomes a fragment of a larger, lifelong, liberating if never complete process; a quest for meaning, truth, beauty, integration, individuation, critical wisdom, healing, openness as well as generosity of spirit.

Big Questions and the Transcendence of Ego

The spiritual perspective on transformation raises big questions that every human being, and culture, asks, consciously and unconsciously, in varying ways. Does life have meaning? Why is there suffering and death? How can we pursue happiness? What is the 'good enough' life? Why do events so often feel beyond our control? And what of hate as well as love in our relationships? When we become more reflexive about our humanity, we are forced to face our shadows, and the pervasiveness of evil and pain, in every day experience. There is hate, violence, and destructiveness, at all levels of micro, meso, and macro worlds. It is to be faced not avoided. The trigger towards awareness and greater reflexivity lies in darkness: of divorce, loss, illness, and the disorientating dilemmas these provoke. But it can lead to learning of a higher order, or deeper quality of transformation. Some might call this level 'conversion', an 'awakening' (in Buddhism, the 'bodhi', or knowledge of the true nature of things) or Learning 3 in Bateson's classification.

Deeper learning seems to entail re-organisation of the relationship between us and the world, and with the people and objects with whom we interact. Overcoming the idea of a separate, autonomous, self-determined, over essentialised 'I'. For Westerners, maybe more widely, it must involve some transcendence of Ego, letting go, at least for a while, of our narcissism and tendency toward manipulating people and objects for our own ends. We are talking here of a quality of learning that

includes deep epistemological revision and even soulfulness. It is intellectual, emotional, practical, material and spiritual at one and the same time.

Jung's notion of soul (see Chapter 6) was bigger than the self, containing within itself a larger system. It encompassed the unconscious as well as encounters with the divine. Soul work is a practice: it entails enacting and expressing something that is not (only) I, but is still real and can lead, maybe, to encounters with God. But Jung's God is not 'up there in the skies' nor 'down here on earth'. Not outside, nor inside us. The divine is within anything that disturbs and calls us to be more than we are. During an interview, a few days before he died, Jung said:

> To this day God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse. (Jung, quoted in Edinger 1974, p. 101)

Our willful path is governed by conscious purpose, but we must admit, at times, that we have little or no control of the complexities of our life. Like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, we become free of our burdens when we abandon conscious thinking and can bless life and beauty. So, the image of God, as a collective archetype (Jung 1963), can work as a reminder of our limits and the need to accept them, to surrender, to find rest. The representation of God—in those religions that allow it (interestingly, many religions are iconoclastic)—is too often deceptive, narrow and over-determined. A projection of all we want him or her to be; the giver of gifts or recourse of last resort, who should answer our prayerful demands. But how can this old man with a beard, symbolising the Father, speak to women or indigenous people, or to those who grew up without a father or did so with one who was violent? An image that fails to fulfil our need for life enhancing symbols has to be re-imagined, because, for some or many, it does not work.

Jung (1916) claims that another human being, or group, can stand for our soul image, and have a role in our path of learning beyond Ego. Sabina Spielrein, it seems, fulfilled this function for Jung. Bateson touched on this kind of fundamental learning in a famous chapter on

alcoholism (1972, pp. 309–337), encompassing the idea of 'hitting bottom', and feeling panic but then discovering and surrendering to a 'Power greater than the self' (p. 331). We might call it God, Nature, or History but it is a sacred moment, when we learn to surrender. The theologian and former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, suggests, from a different perspective to Bateson, that the universe exists because of some prior independent agency, which can, in certain instances, be called intelligent, and can be drawn on in the darkest of times (Tallis and Williams 2017). The belief system is different but the process similar.

Bateson thought the process of becoming (ontogenetic), and what and how we know (our epistemology) are profoundly interconnected; hence, a change in fundamental premises, 'those premises that are more deeply embedded in the mind […] and the less susceptible to change' (p. 336), become an ontological/epistemological change affecting the whole universe of a person. 'If we deeply and even unconsciously believe that our relation to the larger system […] is symmetrical and emulative, then we are in error.' (p. 336). This is not simply the error of the alcoholic, in her everyday struggle for control, but a wider contemporary one. Culturally speaking, there is a dominant metaphor of control and conscious purpose, even to the point of ecological abuse. It has to do with being in thrall, addicted, stuck, and omnipotent while needing to escape from the tyranny. Surrendering is a requirement for mental health: Bateson analysed the 12 steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous project: to be able to manage one's addiction, it must be recognised, we must admit vulnerability, and accept a greater power. Philosophical and spiritual leaders have often articulated a language of meaning, belonging, trust, and hope amidst the fears, limits, and defeats of life. Experiencing the sacred, and encounters with the numinous, in many people's stories, relate to acknowledging our vulnerability, and yet finding power, glimpses of truth and ethical commitment too. These elements can constitute moments of existential, embodied as well as relational transformation. But for some feelings of emptiness or of the void can remain. Samuel Beckett enigmatically reminds of this, and how words so often fail. Yet even Beckett, the poet of meaninglessness never entirely gave up on faith, however faint, and his writing represents a qualified transcendence, in dialogue with Dante.

Mythology and the Origins of Fear

We seem overwhelmed by the fear of fear and anxiety, at times. It is unsurprising if we analyse the roots of culture and civilization, at least in Europe: the foundational myths of Western civilization depict life as a traumatic process, pregnant with discontents. The Swiss German psychoanalyst Franz Renggli writes in his book *The Origin of Anxiety* (2001), that Mesopotamic myths told of birth as separation, and the prototype of all struggles in human life. Renggli makes an initially strange observation that as apes, we 'expect' to be able to grasp our mother's fur, and hold on to her body, to be sure not to lose contact; we are born with that instinct in our hands and arms. But the human mother does not have fur, so it is up to her to hold her baby. This story celebrates the mother's (or carer's) capacity for holding, also profoundly and poetically described by Winnicott (1971). Our dependence on the other is absolute, and we maintain this deeply experiential, embodied knowledge for the whole of our lives, mostly unconsciously, since education teaches us that we *must* be autonomous. Western education focuses on enhancing autonomy, at all ages, in all conditions, at all costs. Dependence is constructed, psychologically and culturally, among the most feared of experiences, and negatively evaluated in a culture often celebrating the 'self-made, self-standing, self-realising' person or more often 'man'.

Renggli's narrative is fascinating. Historically and symbolically, he says, fear was fuelled, and became a major affair, when civilization aborted nomadism. Nomad mothers, in fact, carry their babies with them, in strict contact with their own body, everywhere, always, day and night: it is too dangerous to leave the baby alone, in the wild. When huts and villages, and cities, are built, this is a further step towards separation. Babies no longer need to be transported, and they become a burden, since different kinds of work are required in farming. Babies can then be left alone, and for longer than should be expected. The experience of separation nurtures fear and rage, desperation and anger, as a healthy protection for the baby from being hurt and wounded. These emotions fuel psychic development and awareness, but separation, as Freud taught, is potentially destructive, discolouring a whole life. Separating, in good enough ways, is part of lifelong learning.

There is historical evidence of the moment in history when fear became a fuel—maybe the most effective fuel—for civilization. The first Suma songs, in fact, describe crying babies, and distressed parents who do not know how to calm them; even the Gods, they sing, are shaken by their fear and tears. Mesopotamic songs, myths, and art suggest the constant danger of impending death, in the new born. The goddess/demon Lamashtu, a personification of evil and destruction, is the protagonist of many myths with her terrifying aspect, able to make fields and wombs sterile, a bearer of fever, pain, and death to the new born child as well as the adult. She especially chooses babies. For Jewish people, the demon is called Lilith. And if we follow psychoanalysis, a crying baby, externally as well as internally, is asking to be listened to, soothed, by our adult self. The baby is part of the adult, the adult is inextricably linked to the baby: fear of separation, at any stage, even in adulthood, lies barely concealed, beneath surface appearance.

Materialism and the Spiritual; or What Kind of Knowledge Are We Pursuing?

> If I had been asked fifteen years ago what I understood by the word materialism, I think I should have said that materialism is a theory about the nature of the universe, and I would have accepted as a matter of course the notion that this theory is in some sense non-moral. I would have agreed that the scientist is an expert who can provide himself and others with insights and techniques, but that science could have nothing to say about whether these techniques should be used. In this, I would have been following the general trend of scientific philosophy associated with such names as Democritus, Galileo, Newton, Lavoisier, and Darwin. I would have been discarding the less respectable views of such men as Heraclitus, the alchemists, William Blake, Lamarck, and Samuel Butler. For these, the motive for scientific inquiry was the desire to build a comprehensive view of the universe which should show what Man is and how he is related to the rest of the universe. The picture which these men were trying to build was ethical and aesthetic. (Bateson 1972, p. 265)

Interestingly, the paragraph is titled *What Is Man?:* if the generalised use of the masculine is nowadays unacceptable, ironically it encourages us to ask questions about the gendered nature of the perspectives we address. Is there a feminine and masculine way, or at least symbolic tendencies, in ways of knowing and journeys to the sacred? How can we reframe the opposition of materialism and spiritualism in a way that is mutually encompassing? The feminine way has recently been explored by a colleague of ours in a book on adult teaching and learning representing a search for Sophia or the Goddess of wisdom (Fraser 2018). How might marginalised stories of the feminine divine, and of what has been dismissed as primitive, be incorporated into our own ways of seeing? The question entails engaging with our silenced or repressed psychic resources, including, in Jung's terms, anima and animus. Or we can think of what has been culturally denigrated about us, but finds expression in our dreams, creations, gestures and maybe rage. Are we able to listen to and for them? Women and indigenous voices, and even a renewed contact with traditional practices, beyond colonialist destructiveness, can act as triggers or waymarks to new openings, and even, depending on our biographies, to movement towards Catholicism, Islam, or the Buddha, or to the Mass, meditation, and pilgrimage. Or other material ways to celebrate spirituality in our lives. Materiality and spirituality are not separable in such terms: the one brings life to the other, when life is conceived as a whole.

Bateson was worried about the opposing 'insane nightmares' (Bateson and Bateson 1987) of materialism and supernaturalism. Both, in fact, pursue separation—the former, of observer and object; the latter, of creator and created—instead of searching for the connections and interdependence of mind and nature, Pleroma and Creature, humanity and god. Religion can mean confusion and hypocrisy but also serves as a royal road to transformation, when experienced afresh on pilgrimage, and when we connect with the other, or otherness, including those who have gone before.

Our whole book is a quest for a more complex, encompassing, liberally articulated perspective on learning, and the need to value embodied narrative, as well as presentational ways of knowing. We must also be careful of the danger of framing these other forms of knowing within

a rationalist perspective. It risks trivialising (von Foerster 1984) a living, complex, even mysterious system and reducing it to an observable input–output machine. Trivialisation is everywhere, in unexpected places, not least in religious institutions, in their management and commodification, as well as in education and lifelong learning (e.g. when stories are used to instruct people to follow given scripts and roles, such as be flexible in the fragile market place of liquid modernity).

There can also be the reduction of philosophy to an overly abstract academic discipline, obsessed with the meaning of disconnected fragments called words, removed from real life concerns and struggles for virtue. The love for wisdom (Philo-*Sophia*) should never separate her from her friends *Episteme* (justified knowledge), *Ennoia* (thoughtfulness) and *Arete* (virtue and excellence of any kind). They are the roots of our civilization, which the Ancient Greeks celebrated when placing their four statues on the façade of Ephesus' Library. Fraser quotes Aristotle's four forms of knowing—*techne* (skill), *phronesis* (practical knowing), *episteme* (scientific knowledge) and *sophia* (holistic knowledge, accounting for all things) (Fraser 2018, pp. 43–65). Different descriptors, but similarly identifying philosophy as a practice, a way of life, asking big questions and searching for meaning (Hadot 1995, 2002).

We may also reimagine wisdom narratives that avoid placing human beings at the forefront, or at the centre of things, like gods. Paradoxically, the humanistic project is problematic in this regard, in that humans are not the centre of the world. Without wisdom, and humility, we forget or ignore everything of mystery, and the realm of the unknown and unknowable, and our place in a larger scheme. The human condition does not entirely, or even mainly, accord to a set of laws or clear linear order: action is based on experience, and experience is subject to ongoing, unceasing variation; it points forward, to something further, a larger picture, a whole that may finally transcend our capacity to know. We are painfully aware that there is always a possibility of something else, from the background, from the depths and darkness, from the unknown, or the Other, breaking into the scene, undermining our certainties. It can happen at any moment in a life. Good science provides for uncertainty, not final answers; logos is always provisional, while mythos takes this as its prime territory.

So, the promise of happiness linked to science, to rational, epistemic knowledge, or evidence-based epistemology, is deeply flawed. Rationality offers foresight, but always provisionally. Conscious purpose, ruled by the cortex, is necessary to survive, to organise collective action, and to develop sophisticated technologies. At the same time, when becoming overly organised, it represents a dreadful menace to life and the planet (Bateson 1972). Fruitful action, ruled by conscious purpose, including our desperate efforts to control natural phenomena, and specifically to triumph against hostile and dangerous forces, is overly based on rational knowledge. Epistemic foresight—along with its technical outputs—seems to be an essential condition for a 'fully satisfying' human experience. But it is only one component, among many, in a quest for wisdom.

We are not against reason. The trouble is that reason has been considered sufficient for men and women of good will to live together and build a better society. And yet, history mocks this dream. The dream of the Enlightenment was one in which knowledge—not faith—was the only true and reliable basis for peace, freedom, and justice. In the dream of science, the establishment of universal knowledge would guarantee fair shares for all, unconditional approval for appropriate actions, which would then preserve society from hate and conflict. The French revolution symbolised the worship of reason, with the dignity of each human being, and the possibility of new bonds between people—horizontal instead of the vertical ones of the *Ancien Régime*—enshrined in its edicts. But the hope rapidly morphed into the Terror, as the masses became the new masters. That is how masters always behave, Lacan (1991) observed: they take over.

And what of reason's claim nowadays? We are offered the route to the best personal, professional and political action, derived from evidence-based data. Or this is what we are encouraged to think, unquestioningly. This is the new religion of the Algorithm, which risks degenerating into a form of trivialisation, if not terror. We are shaped to trust the algorithm, and to rely on decisions taken by some application but online searching may have marginalised serendipity and intuition. Mythos and the spiritual, working with the critical, might help us challenge new and troubling masters.

There is something profoundly hubristic and mistaken in thinking that satisfaction and emancipation can be the natural outcomes of (one)

Truth, religious or scientific, Catholicism or Communism, or even the digital world. Bateson called this a 'pathology of epistemology' (1972, pp. 478–487), based on the illusion of total knowledge and control. Predictability will not promote well-being or the good, if not counter-balanced by wisdom in the form of art, emotion, ritual, and dream; by mythos working to tame logos and its grandiosity. When human kind refers to science alone, it can be 'blinded' by an excess of light. Western faith in rationality is based on epistemological reductionism, eliding the content of scientific discourse, 'laws' and probabilities with the mysteries of reality itself. There are of course other forces at work: power, repression and the unconscious, which can at times fuel a social Darwinist universe of hate, envy, violent competition as well as the cult of success. We seek other ways, on our pilgrimages, to feel and think difficult thoughts, and to take care of our addictions, as well as to improve our sensitivity to glimpses of grace and beauty, of ugliness and injustice, of heaven and hell, in the ordinary. Poets know this. William Blake sought to reconnect heaven and hell, in spiritual life, rather than split them off into empty bombastic religion, or the denial of the sensuous and real. Both heaven and earth may be experienced in the here and now, if we learn to be humble and sensitive to their personal and cultural presence; especially when we engage with the difficult pilgrimage of psychic integration.

Keeping on Keeping on

We are approaching the end of our journey into multiple perspectives on transformation, learning and life. We feel like tightrope walkers. Maybe in fact this is a good metaphor for the human condition. Violence and fear, injustice and meaninglessness, mental suffering and materialist disaffection threaten our lives, locally, globally and ecologically. We exist perilously on an edge, struggling for balance. Our quest for safety, meaning, hope, and love is never ending, and, in fact, a matter of balance. But in the Anthropocene era, humans seem to be the masters, threatening to guillotine the planet itself.

The problem, as Bauman suggested, could be getting worse as learning, lifelong or in schools, is narrowed down to efficiency, or flexible functioning. Commodification brings the intoxicating promise of money,

material things, endless partners or new cars, even at the cost of impoverishing ourselves and the planet's resources. Learning to compete against brothers and sisters, friends and neighbours, and to 'win'—until the moment arrives when someone else 'wins' against us. There lies hell on earth. If learning is considered an individual commodity, a good to be accumulated, 'capitalised', bought and sold, an element in 'natural' competition, there is little or no possibility for mutual learning and recognition of the other; and for expressions of social solidarity. We must learn how to learn cooperatively in a way that nobody need 'lose'. And we must nurture an ongoing transformation that we do not always control.

Such transformation is desperately needed but often feels beyond our grasp. It entails, as we have said many times, a cultivation of a higher or more inclusive reframing of perspectives, which includes challenging the very suppositions of 'civilisation', based on binary thinking, splitting the individual from her environment (since birth), and the dominance of conscious purpose alongside the refusal of our fundamental dependence and vulnerability; and a dis-connection between parts and whole, subjectivity and the world. To learn how to re-connect—or celebrate existing bonds, if barely perceived—is the most difficult and yet the most relevant learning we can engage in; it is about facing and coping with fear, insecurity, silence, death, and otherness, as well as building meaning, a sense of the sacred and of interconnection in the everyday. The sacred, like love, is silenced in our consumerist discourse. Nothing is sacred, not even a cathedral, which we consider in our final metalogue.

But we can find hope in the unexpected emergence of new rituals, myths and metaphors. Adolescents experiment with rituals of bravery and belonging, and they embrace new (but very old) rituals of transition from adolescence to adulthood, at school, or in transitions at university. Marginalised people re-invent language, clothing, and self-expression on the streets, in new forms of art, music, dance and graffiti. And even the old ceremonies of marriage, burial, christening are re-interpreted in new ways, sometimes coloured by consumerist ideas, but often designed to share and celebrate togetherness. While we can be critical of the 'marketisation of the sacred', entailed in many contemporary ceremonies, we should recognise that, even in a world of cynical accountants or managerialism, it is impossible to eliminate myth, metaphor, and ritual altogether (Voss and Wilson 2017). They are part of us, and necessary for our lives and learning.

The very concept of perspective reminds us, throughout the book, that 'reality' as it appears is 'a product of our perception of how life is organized' (N. Bateson 2016, p. 152). Perceiving is not a passive act. When we see outlines, we 'create', 'construct', and name 'objects', 'spaces', 'individuals', and so on. We enact our perspective with others and make it 'true'. After that, we treat our distinctions, and what emanates from this, as 'real'. Human knowing, and culture, is partly about drawing boundaries, between us and them, past and present, mythos and logos: this is how we tend to function. It is our gift and our potential tragedy. As William Blake put it, when it comes to boundaries, the wise person and the fool are so close:

> Wise men see outlines and therefore they draw them
> Mad men see outlines and therefore they draw them. (William Blake, quoted by Bateson 1972, p. 27)

We want finally to return to the beginning of the book and reconnect with Bauman's notion of how fragile and superficial formation can be. Transformation becomes elusive, and even an illusion, at times, because it depends on sufficient feelings of selfhood to live a nomadic, imaginative life. Selfhood is fundamental to transformational learning, rather than the play of identity, as some have argued (see Illeris 2014). The self we have in mind is not over psychologised, but deeply embodied, forged in relationships; it is developmental rather than fixed, contingent on others and their/our responsiveness. Sometimes open, sometimes defended, hopefully with sparks of authenticity. There is scope for a real lifetime's quest for selfhood.

Curiosity and emotional openness, as well as qualities of mind, including critical reflexivity, are necessary for the journey. They are relational in quality. They depend on experiencing the good enough love of the (m) other, the attentiveness of a teacher/educator, the presence of a loving and caring group of brothers and sisters, and the ecstasy in a work of art. To have hope, we need to think that reparation and healing are possible, even when good enough love is hard to find in a manic, fractured and careless culture, organisation or family. A potentially agentic, questioning, challenging authentic selfhood may be reborn in an adult education class, a women's group or in social action in the local community.

The proximal system—the meso-system—is relevant in the shaping of this enhanced form of selfhood. Such selves are needed socially, culturally and politically to challenge the abuse of the other and the fragile eco-system. We have experienced, across the book, dialogical spaces with diverse groups of academics, students, professionals and adult learners. There is a need for a renewed adult education, a community-based approach to learning, a reassertion of the importance of the public realm, and of the interdependence of all learners. The connections we might then make encompass the spirit as well as an equitable sharing of the earth's abundance. A spirit revitalised maybe by revisiting Blake's Tyger, burning bright as well as the sunflower turning to the light, each glorious if vulnerable and threatened. We are spiritual, imaginal as well as rational creatures, who can thrive in curiosity; and yet who struggle as psychological nomads, even if this is essential to perspective transformation. We rely too on the otherness of myth and art. They constantly remind us that we are not gods. Picture Guernica; picture the baby shredded in a Syrian town by a cluster bomb. Imagine boat loads of migrants perishing in the Mediterranean. Look death and devils right in the eye, they are part of us and require recognition in transformative learning.

An important truth of this chapter, and our whole book, is to claim, with Fraser (2018), that we are more likely to become lifelong learners, in the sense of a struggle towards healing, integration and wholeness, if we abandon rational certitude and embrace curiosity and openness. Dialogue is the necessary road to authenticity and to encounters with truth, however ragged and imperfect; even to encounters with the divine, however fleeting and fragile. In a world that is exploding with diversity and polarisations, this is the only way—if difficult—to pursue the decent life. Such a road requires the right rhythms of conversation, and writing, as well as criticality and reason. We need time, and good quality time for emancipation (Alhadeff-Jones 2016). Time for pilgrimage and to wrestle with our conflicts, dilemmas, paradoxes and conceits. Time to become more aware of our tendency to split ourselves and the world into the binaries of good and bad, one truth rather than another, logos and mythos, the spiritual and material, education and therapy, immanence and transcendence. Transformation lies in resisting these seductive, reductive dynamics in every one of us, and in recognising the pattern that connects.

Fig. 10.1 Milan, *The Duomo and Samsung*, March 25, 2018. Photo by Gaia Bonanomi

Why Samsung? A Tale of Two Cathedrals, a Final Metalogue

Linden: Laura, why is a huge Samsung screen flashing images of beautiful young people, mobile phones and expensive cars on the left-hand side of the Duomo, your stunning Milan Cathedral? (Fig. 10.1).

Laura: A screen? I never noticed it. Well, I don't go very often to Piazza del Duomo indeed. And when I do, I am too busy to raise my head. I guess that it became normal for me. It began some years ago, if I remember, there were protests, but now the city centre is all tapestried with screens. They bring money to the owners of the buildings and to the municipality. Maybe Samsung is sponsoring some restoration of the Cathedral. It is expensive.

Linden: Is this 'normal' to you?

Laura: It became normal. Or better, invisible. We are anesthetized, this is how perception works a difference that once made a difference stops making any difference. We need another perspective to awaken our senses, as you are doing now with me. Thank you, by the way.

Linden: It is also fashion week in Milan. Let's try to work some more on making the strange familiar and the familiar strange.

Laura: Yes, let's do that. Fashion week annoys me so much. But I know that I should be curious: this is an amazing occasion for observation and reflection. Did you notice how people crowd every single place with their smartphones and I-Phones, trying to capture some image to be posted in Instagram? If you do not post, it seems that you do not exist. And a post, of course, needs likes. Is this a new, distorted version of recognition? There are thousands of youngsters hoping to be seen, out there: they wear fancy outfits and as numerous photographers

are chasing them, to capture the 'new emerging styles'. Everybody is a stylist or a photographer or a model, these days. We are entrapped in a new kind of theatre.

Linden: I know what you mean. Yesterday I queued to enter the Duomo. When I finally got inside, I was muttering to myself about the commercialised display of flesh outside, and maybe also feeling a little envious of youth. Those young models strutting their stuff, maybe in beautiful ways, in the Via Dante and in the Vittorio Emanuele arcade. I had gotten up close, with lots of other people, desperate as they were to take photographs of the young and beautiful and of those who clothe them. I was too squashed to find my phone, even if I'd wanted to capture the moment. But I saw something unexpected on the face of one young woman who looked tired: I could see pimples on her face, no doubt to be air-brushed out in the allusions of glamour magazines and the projections of sex, youth and the transforming power of consumption. All is not what it seems. We can be a culture of manipulated desire, of projective identification with consumption and images: if we just had one new thing—a new BMW, a Gucci handbag, or a Samsung—then our lives would be really transformed.

Laura: In these days, flights from Rio de Janeiro, Moscow, Cape Town, Mexico City, Hong Kong bring thousands of adolescent models here, male and female, underweight, distressed, all of them hoping for visibility. Visibility means success, if only for a while. There are agencies that specialize in the transport, allocation, mobilization and marketisation of this human flesh. It is horrible, especially if you think that we are building walls against other fugitives. As a mother I wonder about these children: who sees them? Who cares for them? Are they happy? Are they learning, and if so what?

Linden: The Cathedral offered some respite that day, a moment for the spirit, maybe, and surely there was no better place to be, close to Maria Nascente. There was a mass taking place inside, and I wandered to the edge of the sacramental space, wondering whether to enter. But there was no clear way in, so I meandered to another space beyond the high altar, where there was a replica of the Maria—like the grand and glorious statue at the pinnacle of the cathedral's roof. It was huge, if smaller than the original.

Laura: Yes, the name that Milaneses give to her is 'La Madunina', the little Madonna. The roof is so high that the golden statue looks very tiny. When the sky is blue, that figure on the white mass of the Duomo

shines kilometres away. La Madunina is a symbol of the city. Along with a famous song—Oh my beautiful Madunina—that celebrates the capacity of Milan to welcome and include others, especially from the rural areas and the south of Italy. In the past, inclusion meant the capacity of the city to enhance its workforce to sustain productive industries. The song is also ironic: it highlights the work ethic that is considered a special feature of the Milanese people, different from the rest of the country. If you breathe this air, you become a workaholic! And Milan was the cradle of adult education for workers too. Do you remember the Umanitaria society, where we had an ESREA conference in 2009? But I am digressing. I would like to go back to your experience in the Duomo.

Linden: While I was there, near the golden Madonna, I went back to a moment in Israel, earlier this year, as part of a project on civic education for democracy. We visited Nazareth and Canaan. The young people caught my eye. Young Arab Israelis for the most part, looking, well, ordinary, but also radiant, as the young can, even in poverty. One of them could have been Mary, ordinary, soon to be caught up in, well, a mystery, an encounter with the divine, if you buy into the story. When heaven met earth in the Annunciation. How on earth, so to speak, does the image in Nazareth relate to that of Maria Nascente in the Duomo of Milan?

Laura: I get it. If there was a 'real' Madonna, she would have been like those young mothers. Simple. Full of Grace. What a contrast with those beautiful models that we were talking about. Same age, maybe same poverty, but different hopes and dreams. Different possibilities.

Linden: And then another thing happened, as I left the Duomo. Hundreds of women, I am not exaggerating, in head scarves, in the Orthodox fashion, holding their children's hands, were entering the Cathedral. I asked an attendant what was happening as the cast of characters changed at the altar. Four Orthodox priests took over.

Laura: Are you sure? That's not possible! The Duomo is a Catholic church.

Linden: Wait wait. Yes, I am sure. The attendant said to me 'Oh they have come to worship at the nail from the one True and Holy Cross, it's one of our relics. Both the Catholics and the Orthodox think it is holy, and there are services from time to time to pay homage, in both traditions'. The faces of some of those worshippers seemed awe struck, and the sense of reverence was, well, frankly moving. I had such mixed

feelings, in the moment, as the images of the young men and women in Nazareth flooded back, fusing with those of the young models, of Maria Nascente, and of the young people in contemporary Nazareth.

Laura: Wow, this is a very nice image to share, of inter-religious bridging. But the Holy Nail! I do not know what to think about it. It is pagan, in a way, it reminds me of Bateson's position about totems and rituals, as necessary to contain and convey a complex truth about life that would not be accessible in other ways. He wonders about the end of totemism, the secularization of the Christian message, and more generally, the loss of the sacred, that he considers as a threat to our mental well-being. The awareness of being part of a larger whole, the feeling of transcendence, comes with such consciousness. It also brings shadows with it. The boundary between religion and magic is very subtle. Or between sanity and madness. Rituals bring the body, the unconscious, symbols and metaphors, and mystery, into the picture. What are these people really worshipping? What is the sacred?

Linden: Worshipping gets it exactly. And what is the quality of the experience? More and more I am thinking about the quality of our relationship to knowledge and ways of knowing; and that some ways of knowing are richer and deeper than others. Like the metaphors of the Christian story, once we get beyond the pomp and pomposity of the Church. Buying into the Church can also however be a way of dealing with inner chaos finding a structure, imbibing a story as given. It was the same with Communism; maybe with many other isms too. They abolish uncertainty and give us a home; a false and ultimately self-defeating prison of a home, but a home nonetheless.

I am also thinking of the divine finding space in the ordinary; of a vulnerable baby depending on us for life and nurture. Of a prophet preaching love for the outsider, the outcast, the migrant. Of an idea that recognised the divine in every one of us, an impetus towards equality, which was powerful in the British traditions of workers' education. Of a prophet in Palestine who in fact was a migrant himself. Such metaphors can provoke richer thoughts in us, about the sacred and what happens when it is lost, and especially about the idea of the divine in the ordinary. Rather different in fact from shopping malls built to look like cathedrals, but where the imagery is ultimately tawdry and unsatisfying. I fail to see the divine in a shopping mall, but maybe I am missing something.

Laura: We live in a secular, very prosaic society. I know that you are nearer to religion than I am, Linden. But I crave for the sacred, for the capacity to resonate with the whole, and I understand why so many of us are trying, in our own ways, to achieve some wisdom. So, going back to the beginning of our conversation, that big Samsung screen…

Linden: Yes, I came out, and there it was, temporally blinding, in its sheer power, with its images of bright young things finding happiness and sex in a new Samsung Galaxy 7. Images of transformation; of Maria, and her encounter with the divine; of young models air brushed to sell products to transform your life. Of beliefs that might transform an encounter with a nail. A mix of ordinariness, faith, seduction, profanity and stunning beauty. Christ and the money lenders, came to mind, as did Marx and his observation that all that is sacred is profaned in capitalism.

Laura: It feels like a bad trip with hallucinogens.

Linden: The struggle for me, in this kaleidoscope of images and sensations, set in this scintillating, noisy, theatre of a city, was how to make sense of the collisions. And to answer a question about what on earth has it to do with a book on transforming perspectives?

Laura: You already answered the question. We are doing this in our conversation.

Linden: Do you remember Woody Allen in *Manhattan*, wondering why life is worth living, and finding some answers in a melange of cultural symbols of Groucho Marx, Swedish movies, Marlon Brando, and Cézanne, to name but a few. For him, like me, in the middle of late modernity's bewildering conflicted intensities, energy could lie in nomadic experience, alongside precariousness and fragility. Relationships are crucial for the endless possibility of human transformation in the nomadic life. We can keep on keeping on because there is beauty, all around, alongside ugliness, awe and wonder as well as absurdity, in the everyday; and other people come alongside, to offer things that replenish us. You know, processing such experience, in dialogue, is a profound necessity.

Laura: Yes, it seems that you are more optimistic now… am I wrong? To keep on keeping on, we need hope, trust, good enough relationships. Difficult but not impossible to find, especially if we are ready to cultivate it. The great adult educators we quoted in Chapter 8 were not naïve, they knew about the absurdities of the world. Nonetheless they

were able to dream the world, and the other, as it is not yet, but could be. We need our utopians to guide us on our way through dystopia.

Linden: I think faith matters, in this nomadic pilgrimage through well, to recall Bauman, the liquid modern landscape. There are I think places of firmer ground, forged in the quality of our relationships to people and good objects. We can find such ground in love, joy, exhilaration, in Nazareth, in Michelangelo, and in dialogue about things we hold as divine. By living life to the full, in all its contradiction and messiness. It includes being challenged over the beauty of the Pieta. Keeping on keeping on means keeping the conversation going, however hurt and confused we feel, because there is always another way of seeing, another perspective, and another beating heart of life to inspire and challenge us. Lifelong learning in the company of friends, moments of genuine adult education. Laura, tell me now what you see when you glance at Canterbury Cathedral?

Laura: My perception of your Cathedral was strongly shaped by the context. Canterbury is not Milano! Every time I came to your city we had to pass through the Cathedral grounds to reach the University. This is a great privilege of yours, to begin your working days like that. Knowing that for centuries the pilgrims from all over the 'known' Christian world headed there, to a place that itself became a symbol. And for me, it meant that I didn't have to pay, as all the other visitors do, to be allowed in the space. Pilgrimage and tourism follow different rules.

Linden: But of course, most people do pay to get in there, as they do to the Duomo, unless they are going to a service, or work at Christ Church, or are local. It costs a lot of money. And it is difficult to find the signs that tell you that you can get in free if you want to attend a service or to pray.

Laura: I remember when you took me for a walk uphill, and we followed a stretch of the Francigena route. From a little country church, we were able to see the Cathedral at a distance and imagine the pilgrims' jubilation at the first sight, after all that walking. Nearer to God. I remember the boys' choir in the Cathedral that touched my soul and provoked tears, for the sweetness of their voices. We were having a conference, in those days, right in front of the Cathedral, in the Lodge. The fact that they host academic conferences in their premises is very remarkable. The separation of science and religion, of knowledge and wisdom, is an issue that needs new answers. Firstly, biographically. I was very fond of the Enlightenment, as an adolescent. Science was the solution

to religious obscurantism. Reason could save me from the repression of my teachers—Catholic nuns, by the way. I passed the rest of my life trying to recover from that schism.

Linden: I was thinking then about a story from travel writer William Dalrymple, who visited a Syrian Church, well before recent catastrophes, retracing the steps of a sixth century Byzantium monk. A priest took him inside the church, when a group of Muslims entered, to Dalrymple's surprise. They began to pray at a shrine to the virgin, and he looked on in wonder. 'Oh they come in everyday', the priest remarked, 'she is holy to them too, you know'. The church probably no longer exists, destroyed no doubt by barbarism. We can celebrate and worship objects that might even transcend our differences, while recognising that we can easily destroy them. All that seems solid and beautiful is easily blown away. 'Oh and by the way', the priest observed, 'the Muslim form of prayer, kneeling and bowing on the floor, was learnt from the early Christians, who, at some stage, for reasons of their own, stopped doing it'. In diversity lies a sameness, if only we make the effort to see.

Laura: I am also thinking about representations of women and men. Of idealised motherhood, for instance, in Italian culture, fostered by the Church. Of the need to break free, but then maybe to return, to experience objects in new ways; like cathedrals.

Linden: And I was thinking of men, and dominant constructions of masculinity; and in a sense how feminine the priestly role can be, with men dressed in frocks. Of how feminine it can be, but also how false and abusive it has sometimes been; priestly abuse, that is. And where does this leave me as a father, husband, man and colleague? Maybe we can represent to our children, and to students, a different set of possibilities, of male power that is non-hierarchical, collaborative and enabling. Of a capacity for love, of a non-narcissistic kind, and to take care of the divine in the ordinary. And to engage in conversations in inclusive ways that encompass Mary Magdalene, the migrant, patriarchy and all those who suffer and mourn. And to recognise the spiritual in the social, life in a good object, the potential for transformation in the good metaphor, while also remembering our shared vulnerability and capacity for hubris.