

**Extract from Oliver Lowenstein's essay : :
The Re-enchantment of the Word
More Than Us Symposium, Inverness, Scotland**

Again and again, there are snares and thickets in the perspective embodied – at least as far as I understand it – by both Griffiths and Abram, and how wholly uncompromising it is in its seeming rejection of the ambiguous gifts of the modern. Griffiths' take, romantic, truthful and beautiful as it is, is part of the stand-off between a very small group of ultra-romantics and the colossus of pragmatism. After the conference, my mind returned to my sense of these two very different perspectives and to asking how their differences might be reconciled. Were I to sign up to Abram's and Griffiths' nomadic sensibilities, could they work in the pragmatic world? How could they be applied in various organisational contexts, for instance all the practical work that has gone into this *More Than Us* project? Are the two sensibilities irreconcilable, or are there ways to nurture a conversation between the one and the other? Despite strong impressions from their books, I am not sure where Griffiths and Abram stand on the organisational bodies, the planning and other abstracted future planning on which societies depend. From this, larger questions flow, such as whether poetry and song could ever become part of the way organisations and bureaucracies, such as SNH, or at a larger national scale, the NHS, work and think: not as 'leisure', as distinct from work, but embedded in, to paraphrase the late Mary Douglass, 'how organisations think.' I like the idea of future planning when it comes to care of the sick, weak and ill. At the same time I felt moved by both Griffiths' and Abram's very physical and immediate realm of the poetic, which led to this reflection. When Griffiths writes that, 'modern, urban, work oriented societies teach people that freedom is something you outgrow; freedom is deadened by detail and deadline, by caution and clocks,' she is right. But the question I arrive at is how to bring Griffiths' call for life and freedom into the modern, into the organisational, the bureaucratic and the abstract? Lynas made a start when he pointed to the chasm within the environmental world, between the scientific, non-emotional mindset and the turbulent blue of artists. Griffiths again: 'We glint when the wild light shines because we are animal in our blood and our skin. We are not born for pavements and escalators, but for thunder and mud.' From a certain perspective, true again, although I wondered how this might be conveyed to pragmatic types, such as the architects who designed the Great Glen House building. Sustainable architects, as much as the managerial class who people Great Glen House and oversee Scotland's nature and landscapes for the rest of us, exist and work within a different environmental space. There's a need for a bridge between.

I yearn for a world where the poetry of Griffiths and Abram is a fully realised part of organisational culture, and at the same time where organisational culture is arranged in a way that it can let poetry into the arid slog of statistics, data-information and reports. Such imagined conciliation isn't about definites, but about the contingent, where openness to potential is allowable, where spaces for conversations, about what poetic bureaucracies might resemble, are possible and where one could imagine a discussion about the character of a nomadic NHS organisation. If reconciliation between such diametrically opposed ways of seeing, of being and of doing is difficult, the need for a conversational next step is there, to find a way in which Abram and Griffiths might enter the heart of the machine. Otherwise there's an easy rejoinder to such beauty; it is not only irrelevant, it could never happen.

This, of course, is to draw out aspects of one of the more obvious, but partially veiled, paradoxes, on which a conference such as *More Than Us* provided a moment of reflection, with its focus on the confluence of the ecological arts, culture and environmentally-hued activism. It is nearly always there, when these intense green campfire pow-wows are held in the midst of the infrastructure and fabric of modern society, which collide with the ecological unconscious and the subterranean strand. Below this, there's a further layer, part of the bedrock of events such as this. Since Inverness is mainland Britain's most northerly city and a lodestone of the political, administrative and cultural aspects of the Highlands and Islands, these two days of cultural events were part of SNH's entrée into this northern world. What remains intriguing to contemplate, some distance both in time and place from those two days, is what level of impact the days' talks and ideas had on the minds and bodies of those attending from SNH; whether, and to what degree, the passion, the poetry and the play, made themselves felt, remaining in the minds of those who, in the first light of the next morning,

would be faced by feasibility studies, new governmental targets to be overseen, or empty posts to be filled? Of course, change works less directly. Was there a significant impact on people, or would those who attended say that change has to come from elsewhere? And if the latter, to where do such organisations usually turn for substantive change? The conventional answer and primary site for this is with education. And where would this begin? Usually with children: our future and that of the planet...