Chapter Two

Facing into the Wind

Oh my soul, be prepared to meet Him
who knows how to ask questions
TS Eliot (1941)

Inquiry … means asking without expecting answers, just pondering the questions, carrying the wondering with you, just as everything else comes in and out of awareness … Inquiry is not so much thinking about the answers, although the questioning will produce a lot of thoughts that look like answers. It really involves just listening to the thinking that your questioning evokes.
Kabat-Zinn (1994)

In my experience of mentoring research students as they begin their inquiries it is the indeterminate methodology of Action Research, an expectation that we cannot know in advance how to manage the inquiry, that they find difficult. It is much easier for the researcher to hide behind an established methodology. But Action Research is not an excuse for sloppy research. For me, the rigour involved in Action Research is focussed on the moment of awareness and is found in an unwillingness to let go of questions too quickly, subjecting my purposes, assumptions and actions to critical reflection. The quality of this inquiry, I suggest, lies in part in its attention to detail.

The Fodder of Experience

As my appreciation for Action Research grew in the early stages of this inquiry I began to collect an enormous amount of "data". My daily practice became the source of my inquiry and, unclear about what might be important, I tried to capture as much as I could in my journal, handwritten notes and audio recordings. It was as if I was driving a bulldozer, piling up notes on experience for later reflection. It was, I thought, all grist for the mill. It would take some time before I came to realise, in the words of Mary Catherine Bateson; "Wisdom comes not by accumulation of more and more experiences but through discerning pattern in the deeper mystery of what is already there" (Bateson 2000, 242).

The notion of experience has a long tradition in the history of ideas (Jay 2005). It is not my purpose to record the features of this history but to note a significant observation by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989) that helps me distinguish between mere existence and experience. For an experience to be an experience, in Gadamer's thought, it must run counter to our expectations. Only through being surprised (Schon 1987) do we acquire new experiences, and therefore learn. This gives reason to those who suggest the importance of critical incidents in reflective practice (Fish & Coles 1998), of recognising that living life as inquiry (Marshall 1999) involves attention to our living contradictions (Whitehead 2006), disjunctures (Jarvis 1999), disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow 1991), arresting moments (Shotter & Katz 1996) or holy disruptions (Lonergan 1990). "What seems to be required," writes Mason, "is a disturbance or a resonance. Not a tidal wave, but a ripple sufficiently great to be distinguishable on the choppy surface which is my experience" (Mason 2002, 68).

So the raw 'data' of this inquiry is my lived experience - those moments that arrested my attention and gave me occasion to pause and connect with my circumstances. What I would now recognise as "being present". Or being absent. As some of the anecdotes I will recount in this thesis suggest, giving attention to my lived experience is like waking up, of glimpsing just briefly, a quality of

participation in the moment during a casual conversation or formal meeting. In these moments I sense an integrity in my practice - the release of all I have been becoming into the present moment, aligning word and action. But there is a paradox in being fully present in this way, of being fully in the moment and yet not holding on to it as it passes. As quickly as I find fulfilment I must let it go. There is a driving edge to the present as it tumbles into an unknown future. But there is a strong desire to hold on, to savour the moment rather than step into the 'now' and let it pass. I struggle to control the experience, the action, the moment - to give it purpose and direction. I notice, incidentally, a lingering essentialist view of the 'I' in these sentences. Who I am as I enter the present is who I have been becoming. Integrity is to be as fully present as possible; presence is to be there without holding on.

These occasions, when I am alert and engaged, bring into question the familiar ways in which I have understood the world and invite me to re-construct reality in new ways, either in-the-moment or after the event. They ask not just "what might I do or think differently" but "how might I be different" in this situation? They open to the possibility of a larger, more systemic consciousness. Attention to experience, in this way, is soul work. "Just as the mind digests ideas and produces intelligence," Moore says, "the soul feeds on life and digests it, creating wisdom and character out of the fodder of experience" (Moore 1992, 205).

This raises a crucial question about the way in which I make sense of experience and the process by which this influences my action. I would mislead my reader if I give the impression that this is primarily a rational or conscious process. The delight of waking up in-the-moment and responding to the occasion involves layers of understanding that I may not be fully conscious of. While acknowledging the contribution of reason and analysis in my choices I am also aware of the role of convention and personal history in my action.

John O'Donohue (2003, 140-141) tells the story of a farmer who visited an art gallery in the big city. The farmer lived on the shores of Loch Corrib, the second

largest lake in the West of Ireland. As the guide showed the farmer around the exhibition he pointed out the distinctive features of the paintings and their hidden symbolism. The farmer listened carefully but said nothing. When they were finished the farmer said to his guide: "Thank you very much. That was really interesting. You showed me in those paintings things I would never have noticed myself. You have a wonderful eye - it is a great gift and I envy you your gift. I don't have that gift myself but I do have Teannalach." The guide thanked him but was mystified as to what Teannalach was. Ah, the farmer explained, "I live besides the lake and you always hear the ripple of the waters and the sound of the wind on the surface; everyone hears that. However, on certain summer days when the lake is absolutely still and everything is silent, I can hear how the elements and the surface of the lake make a magic music together."

Some time later the guide was on holiday near Loch Corrib and, one evening in a village pub he found an opportunity to inquiry further about Teannalach. The person with whom he had fallen into conversation paused for a while and smiled. "You'll hear that word all right in these parts. But I've never seen it written down. And it is hard to say what it means. I suppose it means awareness, but in truth it is about seven layers deeper than awareness." Perhaps, O'Donohue suggests, the word is an abbreviation of *teanga na locha*, the tongue or the language of the lake.

Since stumbling into this storied account of Teannalach I try to listen for the language of the lake, imagining it as a deep murmuring that blends the cacophony of sounds at the surface into some kind of coherence. This is a very different language to the strident rhetoric of strategic thinking in the domains of management or military planning, for example, where intended outcomes determine present practice and serve as the primary assessment of behaviour. While such rhetoric might create a sense of collective purpose, it significantly curtails the possibilities of human action in the present and rapes the present for assumed benefits in the future. Bourdieu (1977, 1990) thinks of strategy in a

different way.[19] He writes about a "practical logic" that most of us, most of the time, take for granted - a bit like having a "feel for the game", a learned repertoire of prior experience and situational knowledge. Intriguingly, he calls this kind of knowledge, 'doxic experience'. *Doxa* originally referred, in Greek society, to common belief or popular opinion, from which we derive the modern terms of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. In later use, however, it was given a religious meaning, translating the Hebrew concept of "glory". I find this combination of everyday collective intuition and transcendent awareness a helpful insight into practical knowledge, since it recognises the multiple layers of meaning in experience and goes beyond the traditional objective-subjective divide.

While espousing a visionary approach to organisational development, the focus of much strategic planning on outcomes, resource assessment and rational analysis suppresses or denies the transcendent source of such vision. For Bourdieu, however, strategising becomes:

> "an interplay of factors learnt and being learnt, through which an actor knows - without knowing in a rational, calculating way - the right thing to do. The cultural "givenness" of a situation, an individual's competency, resource constraints, personal idiosyncrasies, unintended consequences, and personal and group history, all come together in strategising." (Burkett 2009).

This means that, for Bourdieu, practical knowledge, or 'doxic' experience has a strong improvisational character, and in an echo of Polanyi he writes, "It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know." (1977, 79). Practice is therefore an art - it is developed through practice. This is confirmed by Schon (1983), has been developed as an approach to the critical appreciation of practice (Fish and Coles 1998), and has come to serve as a core perspective on my own professional practice.

[19] I am grateful to Chris Burkett for introducing me to Bourdieu's ideas (Burkett at http://www.theosoc.com/chminissues.html (viewed 15 August 2009).

While this recognises the emergent nature of practical knowledge it also brings to prominence the role of memory in the hermeneutic of experience. In composing a learning narrative I am offering a "second reading of experience" which can be considered "truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it." (Gusdorf in Freeman 2006, 131). This is particularly evident in the way in which unfinished business in our personal history, what Postle refers to as omitted, distorted or distressed learning (Postle 1993, 33), is incorporated in present experience.

A few weeks ago I was asked to play the music for a wedding. I can't remember when I last played the organ or piano in public and I only occasionally take the time to play it in the privacy of our living room. But I accepted the challenge. Some of the music was straightforward and a little practice on Purcell's Trumpet Voluntary and Mendelssohn's Wedding March sufficed, but I had some difficulty picking something appropriate to play while the couple and witnesses were signing the register. I realised the congregation would have nothing else to do except stare at the stained glass windows and listen to my 'performance.'

Because I am so out of practice nothing seemed to work. In rehearsal I played through an anthology of classical music but my fingers got tangled and the rhythms just wouldn't flow. Until, that is, I picked up a copy of Debussy's Clair de Lune. It had been ages since I had played the piece but almost immediately the music began to flow from my fingers. It wasn't something I would have been able to sight read. Written in D flat major (five flats) and modulating into E major (four sharps) it isn't a simple piece to play. I noticed that I had written the date I purchased the music on the cover - the year I turned 15. A few years later it had been put away and had remained untouched for more than 40 years.

But almost a half century later my fingers knew what to do with the notes and, although they are not as agile as they were in my teens I was able to play the music with relative ease. I was amazed at how easily I found the notes, the musical score translating itself into beautiful sound. At several points I had handwritten the

fingering on the music and I was surprised to notice that my fingers seems to naturally follow the pattern I had practised years ago. It was an expression of a deeply embodied knowledge, shaped in early practice, and recovered in memory. Time, it seems, does not eradicate embodied knowing.

But it was not perfect - my lack of practice over the years meant that there were technical errors and I found myself pausing occasionally as if there was a temporary memory loss. As I settled into some note bashing - working over sections to be sure I had the right notes - I noticed something that surprised me. My performance deteriorated as my technical accuracy improved. I was bringing the performance into the present and, in the process, losing touch with the emotional quality of my early performance. I was interrupting the expression of memory to perfect my performance in the present. My embodied memory had no immediate connection to the present moment and I discovered that I had to transform it, seeking expression that fit my present emotional interpretation and the situation in which it would be performed. This was memory, faithful to the past and my early practice but not just re-run for the occasion. It had to be expressed in the present, not just revised by further thought but transformed by who I had become and the situation in which it would be performed.

This reminds me that the process of incorporating prior experience in the present can be used deliberately. In discussing what he calls 'reflection-through-action' Mason suggests:

> "choosing to act in slightly novel ways (using a different hand, standing or sitting differently, not using certain words) in order to heighten sensitivity to notice while engaging in practice. For example, it is said that the brilliant and accomplished pianist Artur Rubinstein would deliberately choose, for a particular concert, not to use a particular finger, in order to keep himself awake and sensitised to his playing." (Mason 2002, 15)

Inquiry in Action

My understanding and practice of action research has developed over the length of this inquiry and I cannot, therefore, outline in simple terms a methodology in the way this is understood in conventional academic research. My inquiries do not fit into the framework of a research discipline (such as sociology or psychology) and its conventional methodologies. Readers hopeful of a tidy description of the way I have gone about my research and a tightly argued justification for its appropriateness to the claims I make about "knowing" will therefore be disappointed. This does not, however, imply lack of attention to rigour and quality. I hope to show how I make sense of experience and how I link this with ideas from the wider field of scholarship, giving particular attention to the choices available at each stage of the inquiry. Action research is full of choices and what I can aspire to is evidence of quality in my awareness of the choices and the manner in which I make these accessible to wider scrutiny.

This is inquiry, not to prove something but to improve it, drawing on a wide repertoire of tools and skills that will be discussed in the remaining sections of this chapter. What follows, therefore, is not a conventional section on methodology but an introduction to ways I have inquired into my professional practice in order to open up my approach to further reflection. I begin with an incident from my practice as a learning facilitator. At the beginning of 2007 I took over responsibility for coordinating the Research Induction School (RIS) for prospective PhD students. This six week programme had been established to help incoming students develop their research proposal and identify their supervision team. In previous years it had comprised a series of lectures and workshops from different members of faculty on their areas of expertise. Little attention, it seemed to me, had been given to the pedagogy. As one of several innovations I introduced to the programme two weeks into the process I set the group (a woman from Zambia and three men from Bulgaria, India and Belarus) a formative assignment to present a critical response to a public lecture given by an Oxford Don on the subject of witchcraft in Africa.

They chose to dramatise what, for them, was a central concern they identified in listening to the lecture. The lecturer had set himself up as an expert in the field (and he was clearly very knowledgeable) but the students had observed that he had researched the topic as an outsider. In their response, presented a few days later to a small audience of other researchers and faculty, the Zambian danced a traditional village dance (to the accompaniment of African drum music) while the other three sat around a table, their backs to the dance, role playing an anthropologist, a church leader and a Scotland Yard detective discussing its meaning (the lecturer had referred to the case of ritual killing of children in the UK a few years ago). The discussion that followed their presentation lasted for more than forty five minutes.

That afternoon I met with the students to talk about their experience of the lecture, what they felt they had learned from their attempt to present a critical response, and the feedback they received from their audience. I had intended this to be the end of the assignment but as they shared their comments I sensed that there was more to be learned and, spontaneously, I suggested that they each write up a brief commentary on what they had gained from the experience - deliberately choosing another form of presentation (writing) for the exercise. This extension of the assignment had not been planned and arose in-the-moment as I interacted with the group. I describe this as a sense "that there was more to be learned…" I want to be careful not to reduce this to a rational decision. Different impressions may have contributed to the sense I made of the moment - the creativity they had exhibited in the performance and the energy that was now present in their discussion. It felt right to go with the flow and the suggestion was welcomed by the group.

I was excited as I read over their reflections a few days later. There were very positive comments on how the group had worked together. One wrote, "we were able to achieve something greater as a group than we could have achieved independently. In the future, I need to remember to utilize this kind of collaborative work." There was an honesty about the process, "I found myself

holding back critique," another wrote, "because of his academic stature and expertise in the field. I had critical thoughts, but I did not manifest them, speak them, or write them down."

They had noticed different kinds and qualities of learning in the different phases of the assignment - the struggle to understand and follow the formal lecture, or what one feared was a trivialisation of the material when critiqued in a skit. One was "struck by what our audience did not see in our presentation" and another observed that in the discussion with faculty following the presentation, "the faculty identified several key observations that I and the group failed to make." The Indian had accepted the African dance as a cultural expression of thanksgiving but commented in his written piece, "... but if I look from the other angle as an outsider especially as one who is unfamiliar with the langue (sic) and tradition her dance looks eccentric or demon possessed," confirming experientially, what had been said in the lecture about European ways of thinking about African cultural practices.

And perhaps most perceptively the African, who was most familiar with the issues, noticed that in their presentation, they were in danger of exhibiting a view of the issue that had been critiqued in the lecture - the tendency for European academics (and Scotland Yard detectives) to lump (the term used by the lecturer) African religious practices and witchcraft together.

As I read over each of the accounts, it occurred to me that there would be a further benefit to convening a second session to discuss what the participants had written. This in itself proved a valuable learning activity. It was the first time the group talked with each other about the way they had worked together, raising important questions about their collaboration and the way leadership had emerged amongst them. The members of the group had only met each other two weeks before, yet, despite coming from very different cultures and educational backgrounds they were able to work together to offer a perceptive and creative critique of the

scholarship of a respected academic. And I had learned a lot about my own practice as a learning facilitator.

I share this incident in order to open up my inquiry practice to scrutiny. As a small scale cycle of inquiry it offers an example of moments of awareness and a quality of presence at different stages of the experience which influenced, in consequence, the choices that emerged. Over the period of practice included in this research I have made use of several approaches to inquiry. Initially I was drawn to Action Research through my experience with reflective practice and located my research within the tradition first articulated by Donald Schon (1983). "The unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it," he says, "and changed through the attempt to understand it." (Schon 1983). While aspiring to knowing and reflecting 'in' action I often resort to reflection-on-action in order to probe the influences on my practice further. In different ways I seek to "re-frame" (in the sense described by Schon) a situation or incident in order to disclose its meaning. With a little practice I now see these different techniques as alternative ways of participating in the appreciative system described by Schon (1983) - probing the situation and carefully analysing its "backtalk." Although I continue to experiment, several approaches in particular have entered my quotidian practice.

I start with my action in the world. Action reveals being - I am what I do. It is, according to Michael Novak (1971) "our most reliable mode of philosophizing. In action we declare our cosmology, our politics, our convictions, our identity" (ibid, p46). So much of my action, however, is unconsciously driven. The first discipline, therefore, is to cultivate a deeper awareness of my actions through listening and attentional skills - what Mason (2002) calls "the discipline of noticing." It involves an immersion in the experience, paying attention emotionally and imaginatively, acting out of this awareness and being changed by it. In the incident recorded above I was pleased and excited by the imaginative way in which the group chose to present their critique and this confirmed my belief in the ability of students, when provided with what Torbert calls "liberating structures" (Torbert 1991) to

respond creatively. This contributed to my 'sense' that there was more to learn from the experience. Scharmer says, "the way we pay attention to a situation, individually and collectively, determines the path the system takes and how it emerges" (Scharmer 2007).

In the early days of my introduction to Action Research I rather studiously (and clumsily) made use of a number of different tools. I experimented with double and triple loop learning (Torbert 2004) and multi-column analysis (Senge et al 1994), and became more intentional in my use of a learning journal (Ghaye and Lillyman 1997, Moon 1999). I practised the inner and outer arcs of attention (Marshall 2001), finding the discipline of "noticing myself perceiving, making meaning, framing issues, choosing how to speak out, and so on," (Marshall 1999) challenging. As I probed the reality in my daily practice I became more aware of the mental models, beliefs and assumptions that influence my sense making. Knowing-in-action (Schon 1983) is a complex activity involving perceiving, thinking, interacting and doing, in real time. I began to notice gaps between my espoused values and values in use (Argyris 1999). In describing a teaching incident in March 2004, for example, I referred to Heidegger's words, "Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn." (Heidegger in Jarvis 1999, 13). I wrote:

> "This notion is a core element of my espoused theory. I see myself as a learning facilitator, or what Smyth calls a 'collaborative learner.' (Smyth 1991). But this leads me to the struggle I find in balancing inquiry (listening and asking clarifying questions) and advocacy (offering interpretations and explanations, or making suggestions). A 'let learn' approach requires action by the student and I sometimes lose patience and am tempted to instruct - "let me spell that out for you ..." I realise that this is not just a question of facilitation skills. My own dispositions play a role. Do I listen carefully enough? How interested am I in their hesitant articulations?"

The next chapter of this thesis offers further discussion of my Action Inquiry practice. It forms an essential foundation to my emerging understanding of professional practice.

Relational Inquiry

My inquiry does not occur in a social vacuum. In most of my professional activity I am working with others and this interaction has a crucial influence on my sense making and action. There is, of course, a practical difficulty of turning the numerous conversations, meetings and seminars that fill my day into collaborative inquiries, yet by taking an attitude of inquiry myself and attempting to create a relational space there can be a qualitative shift in understanding. Bruner talks of "distributed intelligence", the idea that community involves more than "a set of conventions of praxis" but can be "a way of exercising intelligence" (Bruner 1996, 154).

In facilitating the learning experience that emerged from the lecture on African witchcraft described above there are indications of collective intelligence at work. The initial task presented to the students simply stated:

> "You are expected to work together on the seminar this week. The assignment is to present a critical response to the Tuesday lecture, to be given on April 10th. Work together in planning the presentation and ensure that each of you is involved in the planning and presentation. Think creatively about the format - you are at liberty to include any communication form you feel would be appropriate, possibly offering a variety of presentations to convey your ideas." (April 2007)

Early in the planning of the presentation one individual provided leadership - an interesting role since he had told the others that he had found it difficult to follow the lecture because he had not been able to hear everything from where he was

sitting. Other members of the group compensated for this and enabled him to shape a consensus from the ideas that were proposed. The dramatic presentation served as a collective expression of their reaction to the lecture while respecting their individual perspectives. A key element of the skit arose from the African's understanding of the dance as an expression of Christian thanksgiving - an insight that was missed by those who were watching. The Indian, with a background in television, worked on the staging and other technical aspects of the presentation.

As I map the learning process in this example I can identify both individual and collective sense-making:

Individual	Collective
My action, as learning facilitator, to set up the activity	
Individual participation in the lecture	
	Collective sense-making and choices in preparing the presentation
	Improvisational drama providing occasions of simultaneous leadership and individual expression
	Collective sense making with the audience
	Agreement to continue the inquiry through individual writing
Individual sense making in writing	
	Collective sense-making in the group

But while there is evidence of collaboration in the incident recorded above I also want to acknowledge that this could have been strengthened further. Although I was working in a group I realise that I have given a personal account of the experience - at this stage in my inquiries I was focused on my own sense-making

and choices. A more relational awareness only emerged later in my approach to inquiry. But there is a feature of the incident that points the way. As I/we faced the fodder of experience, there was something more than the discipline of noticing involved in shaping my/our understanding and action. We were fully immersed in the process. The learning process was enriched by the energy and commitment we all brought to the occasion. Knowing in this way is not just about awareness, but attitude - there was an attraction that both facilitated and deepened the learning experience.

I will explore the epistemological grounding of this approach to inquiry in a later chapter of this thesis so will only offer a brief introduction now. Living in a relational world I reject the notion that knowledge is a private possession. Martin Buber ([1937] 1970) tackled the subject-object dichotomy by recognising that the Other is also subject and proposing a subject-subject relationship he called "I-Thou" in contrast to the "I-It" of subject-object. For an I-Thou relationship to emerge I must let the Other be a subject and affirm our shared involvement in sense making.

This, it seems to me, does not require formal agreement or even conscious commitment. I am learning, in my practice, to adopt a posture of inquiry in my daily encounters with others. Margaret Wheatley (2002) hints at some of the qualities that might characterise this relational posture - curiosity, courtesy and charity. As my inquiries around this practice have developed I have added to this list the quality of reverence - a capacity to be in awe of the Other - and the influence this has on my sense making. While I cannot establish intentional collaborative inquiry in every meeting or conversation, I am convinced that by taking an attitude of inquiry myself, and attempting to create a reverential relational space, my agentic "self" is replaced by a collective will that can lead to positive change in my/our practice. Reverence, it seems to me, has all but disappeared in our social life, pushed aside by more practical values like justice and respect. The cultivation of reverence for whatever lies beyond my control has become an important feature of this research journey.

A relational posture heightens awareness of issues of difference and power. As I open myself to the Other I find a stranger - a work colleague, a student, a friend, even my wife - and look across the distance that separates us in an attempt to receive what is offered. As Reason says, "as soon as we touch upon the question of participation we have to entertain and *work with* issues of power, oppression, gender ..." (Reason 1994, 2). I am conscious, for example, of my role in initiating the learning activity and the cultural expectations of the participants of their "teacher." These concerns will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis.

In exploring the relationship between ontology and epistemology I have been tempted to delimit ontology with the adjective 'relational'. This reflects my belief that the cosmos is relational and every part of it connected to other parts and to the whole. To present my fundamental view of the world in terms of a 'relational ontology' may be a slightly clumsy way of highlighting a basic characteristic of the world that now shapes my practice and offers a standard of judgement against which I wish my claims to knowing to be assessed. The notion of myself as a participant in that which I seek to know has become central to my inquiry. "Discovery is facilitated by becoming part of the system." (Keller [1985] in Bradbury & Lichtenstein 2000, 553).

Incidentally the story I recounted above also illustrates a process of social construction. The little experience I have of an action orientation to knowledge creation has made me realise how slippery reality is. Even constructivists imply something more fixed or permanent than I sense it is. Having given an account of social reality many are quite content to live in the house they have constructed. Yet, for me, just as I think I have located something, it slips out of my grasp - whether the reality is personal or social.

A key aspect of my understanding of action research is therefore its emergent character. I seek, in my inquiry, to stay alert to opportunities for deeper learning. What was particularly rewarding, for me, in the incident I have described, was the way in which the participants came to see how each cycle of presentation (in their

drama, our discussions, or their writing) opened up further insights into our understanding of the topic. Our knowing would have been impoverished if we had stopped the process sooner.

Systemic Inquiry

As I now write about this experience I am aware of a blind spot in my thinking about the student's seminar presentation. At the time I was deeply immersed in the process and only conscious of the immediate circumstances. I gave little thought to the wider context of faculty and institution. Several of the faculty had attended the improvisational drama and contributed to the subsequent discussion and I missed an opportunity to involve them more fully in the sense making process, particularly since I had hoped to develop more inclusive and creative learning experiences in future.

In my rather naive, optimistic outlook on life I underestimated the challenge. "To ask faculty to change a curriculum is like asking someone to move a graveyard," Catherine Bateson observes (Bateson 1989, 97). I came into academic life quite late in my career and it took me some time to learn its ways. Resistance to change is characteristic of many fields of professional life but, in my experience, it finds particular expression in higher education in territorial control and elaborate tactics to avoid more work. This is illustrated in several incidents that will be recorded later in the thesis in which I attempted a more collaborative approach to course development. In a way only life can explain, however, my emerging practice of thinking and acting systemically came as the project I had been involved in began to collapse and the opportunity to influence its future development slipped through my fingers.

Action Research involves a process of micro-political interventions in practice in order to change it. I make conscious decisions about where and when to act, to 'persist' or 'desist,' to use Judi Marshall's (1999) terms. I make choices in selecting

and crafting the stories I tell. The quality of my inquiry is, in part, to be judged by the quality of attention I bring to these choices. Am I aware of the habits, customs and systemic coercion that shape and constrain my decisions? How do I navigate the complex relationships and tensions between the subjective and intersubjective lifeworld, and the systems world in which my practice is located (Habermas 1987)? Does my inquiry give sufficient attention to the "regimes of truth" (Foucault 1977) that shape my context and impose their normalising processes on my (and our) practice?

Thinking systemically involves an awareness of what is not in the room or explicit in the conversation. It is to realise that, despite appearances, individuals are "un-divided from the whole" (the original meaning of the word 'individual' (Selby 2002, 83)), and situations are episodes in a larger flow of activity. Again, experience became the fodder for my understanding, exposing the wider influences on my action. If this thesis had been written a year earlier it would have been a victory narrative. The Post-graduate Programme in Professional Practice had been launched with university validation and a very positive response from the market - 20 students had enrolled in the PhD programme in the first six months. Yet, out of sight and sound, the forces that would erupt with the destructive energy of an earthquake were shifting.

Thinking and acting systemically confronts the practitioner with the limitations in attentional skill and contextual understanding. In simple terms the experience that forms the central narrative of this stage in my inquiry involved three circles of systemic influence - the conservative culture of higher education in the UK and, in particular, its attitudes to professional learning; the policies and structures of validation and collaborative relationships in the partner university; and complex cultural and economic influences in the leadership of the Centre that was host to the project. Seismic shifts in all three contexts formed a background to what happened in the middle of 2008 as their influence seeped through the layers into everyday relationships.

Twelve days after receiving notice that the university intended to withdrawal from the partnership we had established, for example, I observed in my journal that the professional relationships amongst senior staff at the Centre had become jittery. I was reprimanded for informing one of our partners of the decision, and a couple of days later the clashes became more pronounced. Four of us were meeting to discuss the next steps. The plan being proposed was to move the students affected by the closure onto the existing well established PhD programme, offered by the Centre and validated by a different university. I was hoping, at that stage, to be able to find another university willing to validate the project. The mood of the meeting, however, was to consolidate under one PhD programme even though the structure and regulatory framework of the traditional programme was unsuitable for Practitioner Researchers. My journal records some of my feelings:

> "I began to feel distinctly uncomfortable. We were talking about the institution and the programme. I was trying to hold a space for a way of doing research that had been embedded in the programme and that now floated like a spirit released from its body. It was this - not the programme structure - that had captured the imagination of the market. I was being told, "but at the institutional level it must now fit with the existing regulations and committee structure. You must work with the system." "But hopefully," I responded, "the system can be modified." "We can't have students in the same programme on different paths," I was told by the chair, and the regulations of the existing programme could not be changed.
>
> I was being isolated in the discussion and it was getting personal. Realising that there was no room for manoeuver I asked, "can we change the subject?" I was knocked back by the response, "You are not in the chair," he replied, "I'm in the chair." I noticed that for the past few minutes, the other two participants had been silent so I said, "I'd like to know what the others think?" The retort from the chair was swift and brutal, "Don't try to use other people in the meeting to bolster your argument."

I should inform the reader that until the withdrawal of the university partnership the person in the chair had been my strongest ally in the institution. He was the only academic who fully engaged with the project's development and he had given unequivocal support to its unique features. It was difficult to now find him taking such a strong defensive position on behalf of the institution. There was no doubt - the system was in the room and I had chosen to question it.

Relationships with the chair would improve over the months following this incident but it became clear that I needed more than tactical changes to my relational inquiry to respond to the situation. Perhaps what Prigogine (1989) calls 'disequilibrium' is necessary for systemic awareness. He writes;

> "In equilibrium each molecule can only see its immediate neighbours. Out of equilibrium the system can see the totality of the system. One could almost say that matter in equilibrium is blind, and out of equilibrium starts to see." (Prigogine in Selby 2002, 85).

Nevertheless, making sense of this period of my inquiry has been difficult, not just because of the personal consequences (the collapse of a project I had committed several years of my life to, and the loss of work) but also because, in the confusion of the moment, rational explanations were inadequate. It took time to begin to see the disruptions as liminal moments, exposing deeper levels of knowing both of myself and my circumstances. The disruptions raised questions I could not articulate, yet which fueled my inquiry. Perhaps, to follow O'Reilley, they were like Buddhist 'koans' pointing to "a ground of knowing deeper than the rattle of cognitive thought." (O'Reilley 1998, 38). In the disequilibrium I began to glimpse the mystery of the whole and found myself drawn angrily and tearfully into its embrace.

This parallels, in the way I now think about it, the emerging levels of consciousness (Wilber 1990, 2005), stages of personhood (Heron 1992) or post-conventional action-logics elaborated by Cook-Greuter (2002) and popularised by Torbert

(2004). Professional development, as I have come to experience and understand it, includes an aspirational dimension. I aspire to what Torbert calls the 'super-vision' of living the four territories of experience in both first, second and third person in real time. (Torbert 2004, 18). Super-vision that can shape systemic action is not, at least in my experience, an endowment or permanent achievement, but occurs as epiphanies that come and go, like presence - occasions when I perceive the whole as a gift. It is, perhaps, to glimpse what David Selby calls "the signature of the whole" (Selby 2002, 77).

In one sense, therefore, the thesis is an account of the tactics I use as I confront the strategies set by the systems in which I work (de Certeau [1984] 2002). At times they are aligned but at others divergent. What self-deception! Beguiled by opportunities in which I thought I had the authority to design the system myself, in the background was the colonising pull of larger systems. No wonder I did not recognise or name them correctly. Habermas (1987) describes the colonisation of our everyday, communal lifeworlds by administrative systems driven by the demands of policy or economics. Perhaps most insidious in an academic environment have been the discourses that set out the pathways for intellectual development, gifting to students methodologies that are self-validating within the discourse, making their own inquiry so much easier. Both the systems and I emerged from this period of our shared history changed in subtle and obvious ways. At times the journey was a pleasure. At others the storms seemed life-threatening and both the systems and I emerged damaged in some way.

Writing as Inquiry

These approaches to inquiry may constitute the features of my quotidian practice but there is another level of knowing that shapes this thesis. As I write I move from being to presenting, giving permanence to a particular account of momentary experience, wrestling with the ambiguity of the words that will lie on the page, conscious of how the reader will find connotations behind what I intend as

denotation and spin a metaphor or story in unexpected ways. The fodder of experience currently lies reported in my journal, email archive, audio recordings of student seminars and business meetings, and various other detritus that I have collected through the past few years. But all that is past, and as Antonio says to Sebastian in *The Tempest*, "what's past is prologue."[20] My inquiry is now in exploring the shift from experience to presentation and the different kind of knowing this evokes. As I craft a narrative from the numerous incidents of the past five years, I am making a selection of anecdotes and developing the plot in ways that constitute a theoretical framing (Czarniawski 2004, Bruner 1990) on the passage of time. This is where I now name reality.

And that is not easy. Mary Catherine Bateson (1989, 2004) suggests the metaphor of composing as a way of capturing the artistic and choiceful way in which we talk or write about our lives. There are many versions of this period of my life I could tell, emphasising its continuities or discontinuities, successes or disappointments. Its not that one account is true and another is not. They may serve different purposes or address different readers. My purpose, in this thesis, is to offer an account of my professional experience that explores the changes, one might even call them transformations, in my practice that have occurred as I have become more consciously aware of being present in and for the moment.

I must avoid the impression of a carefully crafted, perfectly lived, experience. As already noted, there have been many unexpected twists and turns, moments of emotional confusion and pain as well as elation and contentment. This is a representation of life as it has been lived in all its uncertainty and confusion as it appears now through the eyes of the present. Bruner (1990) captures this in his observation of the curious nature of autobiography that "is an account given by a narrator in the here and now about a protagonist bearing his name who existed in the there and then, the story terminating in the present when the protagonist fuses with the narrator" (1990, 121).

[20] The Tempest Act 2, scene 1

Writing is a primal form of presentation - a choiceful act of moving from experiential to presentational knowing (Heron 1992). My background in journalism would encourage a descriptive style of writing, providing just enough information for the reader to enter the experience themselves. My academic study of communication convinces me of the complexity of this process. Early models of the communication process were based on information theory and couched in terms of stimulus-response. Messages could be coded and successfully decoded on reception. But as the empirical evidence mounted, context and culture entered the frame, leading to a recognition that meanings are created by the receiver and the research focus turned to the structural analysis of the way signs work in culture, resorting, in many cases, to the analytical power of semiotics. I used to enjoy asking the question "When does a message acquire meaning?" in a communications seminar and listening to the answers.

But after a couple of years asking students to present a semiotic analysis of the media coverage of the Oscars, or The World Cup, I began to notice the way in which this approach objectivised the message. It was possible, figuratively, to put the media event on the laboratory bench and dissect it down to its semiotic molecules. But having separated it into its diachronic and synchronic parts what did we know? Perhaps how it had been constructed and, for some, even ideas on how they might construct their own media messages - the choice of colour, frame, and camera angle offering paradigmatic choices for the editor or producer. In the words of Walker Percy (1983) it was a form of self-transcendence through technical analysis, but; "The pleasure of such transcendence derives not from the recovery of self but from the loss of self. Scientific and artistic transcendence is a partial recovery of Eden, the semiotic Eden, when the self explored the world through signs before falling into self-consciousness." (Percy 1983, 123)

Percy (1983) understood that objects and signs (*signifieds* and *signifiers* in de Saussure's[21] terminology) are not sufficient in the creation of meaning. Rather

[21] Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) is considered the father of modern linguistics. His work laid the foundation for a science that studies the role of signs in social

than recovering the innocence of Eden where signs corresponded to that which they represented, the link between symbols and reality is arbitrary. Percy's contribution to communication was to recognise that, despite its arbitrary character, the significance of the word lies in the human agent that speaks it. The word brings things 'out-there' into meaningful relationship with the speaker and, in its utterance, offers that word to others in the co-creation of meaning. So to speak or write is to create a world in which I exist and seek mutuality.

Naming reality in this way is in contrast to the cacophony of words that roam free of their source, words that no-one owns, serving instrumental ends and organised by technical means. These are what Ellul calls anonymous words; "the word may be prostituted ... the anonymous word has no name, and this is not really a word. No one has spoken it ... It does not commit anyone to anything" (Ellul 1985, 158). Open to technical manipulation the anonymous word can serve any purpose.

Action Research and in particular, first person inquiry, is sometimes criticised as self-indulgent and solipsistic. My initial rebuttal to such criticisms from colleagues was to point to the purpose of such inquiry. Action Research is not solipsistic if it seeks practical wisdom that leads to social transformation. My answer now also includes this search for an authentic voice, for a language that connects me to reality. Ellul points out, "In the Bible the word is an integral part of the person. It is true if the person is true" (Ellul 1985, 158). Such committed speech or writing is an invitation to relationship - with reality and with others. So writing as inquiry, for me, recognises the unique quality of knowing that emerges as words give expression to experience and, in the process, disclose something of myself towards an other (in this case my reader), inviting them into a shared inquiry.

Perhaps a small example will help. In the account that follows I bring to words the experience of a small group community planning meeting, and attempt to illustrate

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life and provided a system for analysing language and, subsequently other communication forms.

how the seemingly small and personal micro-practices of my work are suffused with social and political implications.

> We had decided to meet in an informal setting and gathered in our living room over coffee. As the meeting progressed I became aware that I was addressing my comments to Robert[22], the committee chair, who was sitting directly in front of me on the opposite side of the coffee table. Because of the position of their chairs, Carol (Robert's wife), to my left and Paul, to my right, rarely received eye contact from either Robert or myself. I realised that Paul was slouching in his chair and making very few contributions. He had become quite passive and I was concerned that he had withdrawn from the discussion.
>
> As the meeting progressed I decided to address the issue and commented on what I had noticed. Paul immediately agreed with my analysis. I therefore offered to swap seats with him in order (from my point of view) to bring him into the conversation. We continued the business of the meeting and, very soon, he began to contribute in quite an animated way. I don't think it was just because his presence had been acknowledged - his position had changed in relation to the chair of the meeting and this gave him more confidence. I also noticed that I began to slouch and my contribution became less dominant. Re-arranging the seating had re-balanced the power in the room.
>
> This proved to be important to an issue that came up later in the meeting, a discussion on whether to invite another person to join the planning group. Carol proposed her name but in a slightly uncomfortable way since the candidate was her daughter. I found myself "to one side" listening as the conversation wove its way through the merits of her involvement. Paul, in his new chair, offered his views quite clearly and in favour of the appointment.

[22] To preserve anonymity and yet enable the reader to follow the action I have used pseudonyms in telling this story.

After some time Robert, the project leader, turned to me to say that they had not heard my view.

This was difficult. I had felt uncomfortable when the name first came into the conversation and had been trying to decide on my response. I took the plunge and referenced the circumstances that had led to Carol's own involvement in the project several years earlier when a number of people had objected to the undemocratic way in which, as Robert's wife, she had been appointed to the planning group. Carol said that the reactions we had received to that decision did concern her now.

After the meeting I reflected on what the rearrangement of the seating had allowed us to do, how it may not have been possible for me to raise the sensitive issues had I been in the "power" chair I had relinquished to Paul, or if I had, how it could have created a far more difficult atmosphere. Instead my contribution was a "voice from the side" and this may have made it easier for us to explore how, and not just whether, Carol's daughter might be involved.

So what has been happening as I have given this incident written form? A number of things are going on, influencing my choices as I write. In offering this small window into my quotidian practice I am writing myself towards understanding. In the minutiae of word choice I am seeking a form that brings meaning to the experience, a process that is aided by the flexibility of a word processor. Am I content, for example, with the meanings conveyed by my decision to describe Paul's posture as "slouching" and his participation as "passive" for example? Or in another case, I initially described my recollection of Carol's introduction to the group as a "criticism" and wrote that "I was pleased" by the reaction of Robert and Carol to my comment. As the words formed on the page, however, I became uncomfortable with the slight smugness they conveyed. This is not just about getting it right, as if words could ever be that precise. But, like a musical phrase that, once it has begun, finds its own direction, sentences tilt towards their resolution and I want to leave open enough space for a response.

Writing gives access to the experience and the sense making that was going on. I sometimes think of words like trowels digging in the soil of experience to uncover its treasures. As I save the draft the story is fixed, becoming a container of meaning I can offer to my reader, inviting you to connect and interact with me. Are my words trustworthy? Do they draw you into a relationship with what is going on and have I avoided closure, leaving sufficient space for further inquiry? And most importantly, am I present in the writing? The story identifies me as a part of the problem, my dominant position and self-confidence combining to exclude Paul from the discussions. Each aspect of the situation - the arrangement of the chairs, my decision to voice concern over the power dynamics of the situation and choice to move "to one side", and then to bring to speech an incident from the past that was in danger of silently shaping our future - involved choices about how I worked with the power that was distributed in the room and how I now choose to represent it. It also illustrates the ethical nature of practice. Power exists in every situation and can be used (or mis-used) for the common good. So, while it is necessary to describe the ethics of my inquiry as I have done in the Introduction, it is also essential to evidence an ethic of everyday practice rooted in the values I espouse, establishing a further quality by which this thesis may be judged.

Narrative Inquiry

I chose to offer the incident recorded above as a story, what may be called an anecdote, an account of a fragment of experience chosen to expose a fractal of my social practice. This introduces a further dimension to my inquiry. As described earlier, this thesis is a learning narrative, or narrative inquiry. As such, it is a "multi-layered and many stranded" (Clandinin & Connelly 2000) form of inquiry, reflecting inward and outward, backward and forward on my professional practice. While not following a strictly chronological form, the thesis gives careful attention to unfolding events and their sequence. At the same time there is something incomplete about these stories. The reader will experience a sense of being "in the midst" of processes that extend into the past and reach towards the future.

Interventions in my context of practice can be seen as shaping the narrative plot, designed to influence the story of the institution and shape the experience of my students. Even this statement may imply more than is intended, as if I knew what I was doing and had control of the consequences. Many of the stories told in this thesis bear resemblance to what Mary Catherine Bateson calls "hit and miss epiphanies" (Bateson 1994, 115), incidents that only now, in their telling, have become part of the learning experience.

Narrative nevertheless serves my purpose mimetically, providing a way of representing my practice, as well as functioning as a tool of inquiry. As experience flows onto the page it finds form in anecdote and commentary laced together into a larger narrative structure. The mimetic step, of course, is huge. Representation is a misleading term. As Richard Rorty (1980) makes clear, there is no one to one correspondence between words and the worlds they purport to represent. The production of a text seeking to represent reality is another reality, related to its source by social convention and shared practice. And, if experience cannot speak for itself, if it can only be accessed through words or other forms of presentation, there may be competing accounts of the experience, raising questions about how these conventions arise, and the purposes behind particular forms of presentation. It is therefore important to explore, briefly, how narrative serves mimetically in this thesis.

> A life is mostly remembered in bursts of short stories
> Beautifully interwoven with people, places and events
> A word, a picture, a smell can set it all in motion
> And you can close your eyes and see it clearly
> As if it happened only yesterday (Trammel in Moore, 2008)

There is an important inquiry around the choice of incidents and the way in which they are weaved into the narrative. Czarniawska reminds us that Aristotle first differentiated between a simple story (in the sense in which I am using the term "anecdote") and a plot that organises them into causal relationships (Czarniawska

2004, 124). In working with the word "anecdote" I am offering a more conventional term for Bateson's "hit and miss epiphanies." At the same time I am aware of the low esteem attributed to anecdotes in the empirical epistemology of the academy. The term "anecdotal evidence" is often used pejoratively. It is of course impossible to generalise from "mere" anecdote. But this is not my purpose in offering storied accounts of incidents from my practice.

I use the term "anecdote" in the sense given by Robert Frykenberg (2001) of a special form of story characterised by "its peculiar and unique potential for conveying the very essence of truths and understanding about human experience" (Frykenberg 2001, 119). It is not just a small story but what Stendahl describes as *le petit fait vrai* variously translated as "little actual happening," "small hard truth," or "little true fact" (Frykenberg 2001, 136). The Greek term *anekdota* (literally, something "not given out, not published") hints at the origins of the word in memorable events that have not been published. It is its association with such striking incidents, or surprising experience (Gadamer 1989) that makes it useful for my purpose. Anecdotes also possess a speculative and emergent character in the sense implied by Bourdieu's doxic experience. They allow questions to hang in the air, open to possibilities. This is a similar intention to what Boje (2001) calls antenarrative - that which comes before narrative, before memory is reified into story. It is still in a state of flux, of coming-to-be. "It is reflection under way," (Boje 2001, 5) in the middle of life, in process.

The anecdotes I offer in this thesis serve as metonyms of my practice. They provide a glimpse into my way of being in the world. It is tempting to work over these stories in rigorous reflective cycles of analysis and commentary. This has been a learning edge in my inquiry, allowing these stories to enter the public arena and not completely closing down their potential meanings to serve an explicit purpose. In this I am following Frank (1995) who makes the important distinction between thinking *about* stories and thinking *with* stories. "To think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyse the content. Thinking with stories takes the story as already complete; there is no going beyond it" (Frank 1995, 23). An

example may help. Part of the following story was told in the Introduction but, in this context, I will re-work it to illustrate the practice of thinking *with* stories.

It took me 17 minutes to walk from the office to my hotel and, in the evening, it was normally a pleasant experience. Although temperatures during the day in Nicosia could reach the low 40's by the time I finished work there was a cool breeze and the walk was a refreshing break from the enclosed confines of the office.

The mid-evening traffic is quite heavy and I had to be careful as I crossed the roads. Even the pavements in Cyprus are obstacle courses. The paving stones are uneven and once without noticing I stepped into a space where a paving slab was missing. The slab had obviously been removed to plant a tree - the hole was at the end of a long row of trees planted into the pavement. But this space was empty. I could have sprained my ankle.

My thoughts turned towards the amazing ability of my eyes, mind and feet to choreograph the movement of my body, adapting instantaneously to changes in the terrain. Most of the time it happens without conscious thought. I am amazed at the many different ways I might put my foot forward and how, with each step, it is able to commit my whole body weight to another unique place on "terra ferma".

I am reminded of a walk in the mountains near Zermatt in Switzerland. It happened 15 years ago. I had been given sabbatical leave from my work and choose to spend a couple of weeks walking in the Swiss mountains. It was early May and the snows had melted on the lower slopes but one day I decided to follow a path higher up and on a part of the mountain exposed to the north. There was still snow on the ground when I exited the train at Riffelalp and headed down the path. At times the path narrowed and I was faced with a drop to my left of several hundred metres. At other times the space widened creating even more uncertainty. For a time I was unable to

find the exact route of the path through the snow and I wondered whether I should turn around.

Because of the uncertainties, my steps were more carefully planned and I took the time to test the ground under the snow before transferring my weight to my foot. My whole being was engaged in exploring, testing and committing myself to the next move. It was with some relief that, some 5 hours later, I returned safely to the town.

In everyday life, and with each step, my foot has to come down somewhere, making a split second decision about where and how to settle. Most of the time this occurs without thinking. It is an intuitive action, occasionally brought to my attention by an unexpected obstacle. My thoughts are out ahead, taking in the surroundings, possibly searching for a glimpse of my destination. Meanwhile my feet are adjusting step by step to the ground beneath and my brain is instantaneously assessing the conditions and coordinating my torso, limbs and feet in an apparently effortless balance in motion.

Everyday experience often feels like the snow covered mountain path and the idea of reflecting later on what I might have done has no value. My recall of the details would be incomplete and I would have no way of knowing whether a different choice would have worked out better. When I have tried to "reflect-on-action" I have felt it to be limited, even contrived; determined by the subconscious selections of my memory and my current intentions. (September 2004)

As I read over this short narrative I am struck by the everyday nature of the experience - a walk back to my hotel from the office and a hike in the Swiss mountains. The writing process gives them significance, triggering a reflection on how my experience of the world around me sharpens my self-awareness (paragraph 3) and how this brought to memory another walking experience, one

anecdote connecting to another, embedding itself in the narrative. The last two paragraphs move to a different level of reflection as I notice thoughts awakened by the anecdotes that reinforce my growing unease with the limitations of reflective practice. So the narrative development yields an insight with wider implications - a case of thinking *with* stories. In constructing an account of my professional practice in this way I am proposing a narrative way of knowing (Bruner 1986), a narrative epistemology.

As already described, narrative involves the purposeful linking of fragmented, non-linear, apparently random events into a larger story. The key feature of such linkage is plot, the movement from one learning experience to another. Plots provide movement and offer the reader a structure that helps make sense of the story. In this way they must offer plausible access to the chain of actions and events on which they are built. Czarniawska suggests "that plot can be fruitfully considered to be the work's theory" (Czarniawska 2004, 124). So, as the narrative structure, or plot, emerges in my writing, the thesis offers a "theory" of practice that is held in the narrative. It has a mythopoetic character (literally the construction of reality from story, *poesis* being the Greek word for "the making" and etymologically the origin of the word poetry), the narrative process of interpretative and imaginative creation giving shape to the "hit and miss epiphanies" of past experience. The narrative serves mimetically as my theory. The reader must judge whether it offers plausible access to the ebb and flow of my action in the world and justifies my claim that it serve as a metaphor of my professional practice. "A story knows more than its teller" (O'Donohue 1999, 147).

A Religious Quest

It should have become clear to the reader that this inquiry is not framed in a positivist paradigm in which everything can be known. Each experience drives me further into the mystery of life itself and teases me into Teannalach's deeper levels of awareness. Such inquiry is finally, I suggest, *theonomous* - that is, it has to do

with God. But here I need to tread carefully. What do I mean by the referent "God"? I am not writing of the God of philosophy - the metaphysical concept of God as the ground of being. Writing of this god Heidegger concludes: "Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god" (Heidegger 1969, 72). No wonder our culture has signed his death certificate.

Ricoeur (2000), also criticises attempts to reduce the referent "God" to a form of knowledge. His solution, however, is to recall the episode in which Moses faced the bush that was on fire, although it was not consumed (Exodus 3:3-15). Here Moses discovers God as the unnameable name. If the people ask Moses who has sent him he is to say "I am has sent me to you." And then, in a significant insight into this ambiguity, God expands on the "I am" by proposing that Moses say, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent you. This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." In other words, God can only be known in the particular story of "your fathers". There is no "positive ontology capable of capping off the narrative and other namings" (Ricoeur 2000,174).

God's answer to Moses not only names God in the story of his predecessors but invites him to take the story forward. In revealing his identity God is calling Moses to action, to liberate his people from slavery. It is as if God is known in his relationships to people (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) who in their actions take the story forward. And the story, and with it, God's identity, will continue. So in Moses' response to the call, God becomes the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob ... and Moses.

A burning bush was probably not uncommon in the semi-arid environment in which Moses kept his sheep. But this one was not consumed. Liminal moments (Turner 1995) like these can turn up in the most routine circumstances and their significance easily missed. Only when Moses turned to look, when he paid attention to the phenomenon, did God speak. Henry (1999), in exploring this story,

notes that Jewish legend asks a question that is not answered in the Bible. What sort of voice did Moses hear? Was it, asks Henry, the deep solemn bass of Cecil B DeMille's choice in the film *The Ten Commandments*? Perhaps, the legend suggests, it was the voice of his own father whom he had hardly known since they had been separated a few months after his birth. A haunting and intimate touch, reinforcing the idea that once Moses had stopped to pay attention to the burning bush he was drawn into a web of connections across the generations that called him to action.

Understandably Moses is reticent to fulfil the call and God offers no certainty about the outcome. "This shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:11-12). The only guarantee is "that when you have done what I am sending you to do, you will have done it." (Henry 1999, 104). God speaks to the Moses who is yet to be, who is capable of liberating his people. "God listens to what I may become, and therefore challenges me to come out of myself in order to become myself" (ibid).

Heron (1996) locates belief before knowledge, suggesting that the warrant for belief may make a claim plausible but that this is not as well-founded as knowledge. Research, he suggests, "seeks to convert plausible belief into well-founded knowledge" (1996, 52-53). In religious circles, however, it is often the case that belief acts as a source of certainty. Religious belief claims its origins in revelation and is convinced that its truth is a divine deposit. Either the bible or the church may serve as its repository. Parker Palmer (1993) describes the way "the spiritual traditions have been used to obstruct inquiry rather than encourage it" (1993, xi). With this in mind Ellul's (1983) distinction between belief and faith is helpful. Belief provides answers, he suggests, faith does not; faith listens while belief talks: "it wallows in words" (1983, 101); faith presupposes doubt, whereas belief excludes it. According to Ellul, "the purpose of revelation is *not* to supply us with explanations .. but to confront us with questions .. to get us to listen to questions" (ibid, 100). So faith does not rush to "convert plausible belief into well

founded knowledge" (Heron 1996). Faith lingers with what is unknown, enabling me to navigate its uncertain terrain with hope.

From early childhood I have been immersed in the Christian narrative. It is woven into the fabric of my memories, dreams, hopes and fears. These stories have, at the best of times, provided inspiration for my way of being in the world. They have shaped what Turner (1974) calls the "root paradigms", the mostly unquestioned assumptions about the nature of the world, that have carried me through life. Yet I am not a passenger or a dispassionate observer. I am a participant in this story. Like Moses I feel the responsibility to take the story forward and in so doing, to disclose fresh insights into its meaning. So living by faith, for me, is to live life as inquiry, embracing the questions that make me responsible (that is obliged to respond) and throw me back upon my freedom, taking me to a place where I risk myself in the answers I give and the actions I take (Ellul 1983). In the words of Michael Novak (1971), the religious drive "is, in itself, the restlessness with disharmony, the dissatisfaction with inconsistency, the demand that feelings match thoughts, thoughts words, words actions and actions the dynamism of life … It is the drive to raise ever further questions, to venture new actions, to expose oneself to new experiences" (Novak 1971, 5). Living life as inquiry and venturing new actions is my way of taking the story forward. This results in my own unique anecdotes, often faltering and inadequate, that nevertheless seek to mirror the larger story to which I owe allegiance.

In the spirit of narrative inquiry let me think with a personal story. Pope John-Paul II died on April 2nd 2005. At the time I was serving as Programme Controller for a satellite television network in the Middle East. Six months earlier I had been asked, as a non-executive member of the Board of Directors, to take on this part time executive role in order to help launch a five year strategy. I quickly learned that the management style of the organisation was autocratic. It was lead by a very capable former engineer with clear ideas on where and how he wanted it to grow. He ran the organisation on the edge financially and functionally, putting enormous pressure on his staff to deliver. He had a reputation for unilateral interventions

which had demotivated staff. Management meetings were a facade. They often ended up with a public lynching of a member of the team for failures in performance. Rarely were collective decisions implemented, so that senior staff took little initiative.

The broadcast operations were complex. Programming was produced in several countries of the region. Schedule planning was located in Cyprus and broadcast operations were in London. This needed careful coordination and professional management. When the Pope's health deteriorated at the beginning of that week I had checked on our state of readiness and ensured that adequate procedures were in place. The production team in Lebanon had prepared a feature length tribute and it was ready, on the server in London, to be broadcast on instruction from the Scheduling Manager. As far as I was concerned everything was in order.

The Pope died at 21:37 Central Europe Time on Saturday evening. A short while before, the CEO phoned me to ask whether everything was ready for broadcast. I repeated the procedure we had put in place. The Scheduling Manager would monitor the news and was authorised to phone the transmission centre in London to interrupt the normal schedule. I was satisfied that the procedure was clear and I had confidence in the team. I went to bed.

I woke the next morning to the news of the Pope's death and immediately phoned the Scheduling Manager. She was clearly upset. Minutes before she had taken a phone call from the CEO who had scolded her for not acting more promptly. Apparently at midnight, without contacting either of us, the CEO had called the London transmission centre and authorised the broadcast of the obituary himself. When he picked me up at my hotel a couple of hours later I had hardly climbed into the car before I was reprimanded. In my journal later I wrote:

> "The angry criticism that greeted me when I climbed into the car on Sunday felt like the corrections of a headmaster rather than the concerns of a

> professional colleague. Before we had even left the car park I had been pushed onto the defensive."

Even now I recall a tightening in my neck and the pinching of my voice. I tried to explain the importance of giving the staff responsibility. I had confidence in the Scheduling Manager's abilities and was planning to review the chain of events with her for our mutual learning. Besides, I suggested, in delaying transmission of the programme until Sunday morning it would have given us a much larger audience. But my responses were rebuffed. The CEO was convinced that being the first station to pay tribute to the Pope was all that mattered.

I am not proud of my actions in the initial confrontation. Two different value judgements collided. I was pushed onto the defensive and took the bait, mounting arguments for my values against my opponent. In a world in which self exists over against the other, power is unilateral. I didn't learn this from the Christian narrative.

Drawing from insights in performance studies (music and theatre) Fodor and Hauerwas (2000) explore the idea of faith as performance. What might have happened if in the incident above, as the barrage of criticism hit me as I was fastening my seat belt, I had drawn breath long enough to view the encounter as an opportunity for imaginative improvisation, anticipating the impending confrontation and deflecting the attack? Fodor and Hauerwas suggest the tactic of "out-narrating" the other, receiving the contribution of others as potential gifts. Working with the ideas of Samuel Wells they suggest that: "Performing the Christian faith chiefly entails "working out how to accept ... things that present themselves as 'givens' but which are not"" (Fodor and Hauerwas 2000, 391). This resembles in some ways Torbert's (2004) fourth part of speech, what he calls framing, although as I see it this involves not just naming the frame, but transforming the "gift" by receiving it as a contribution within the frame of what Hauerwas calls, "The Peaceable Kingdom" (Hauerwas 1991). What does the gift look like framed in this story?

This is easier to write about than practice. Working out how to accept the attack while struggling with the pain it has inflicted is hard. It is too easy to act in ways that foreclose the story rather than find, in the moment, ways of keeping it going. As Fodor and Hauerwas (2000) point out, the distinguishing feature of the Christian story is its peaceable character. This ontological bias towards peace rather than conflict is in contrast to an ethics built on the Cartesian self - the self that exists over against the other, that sees the other in relation to the self which, if resisted, must be coerced or disempowered (Olthuis 1997). Olthuis quotes the theologian Paul Tillich's definition of such power as "the possibility a being has to actualize itself against the resistance of other beings" (Olthuis 1997, 238). To be a self in this way of being is to have enemies and fosters a world in which violence and conflict dominate the social environment.

What then, leads to peace? How then to accept the attack, to embrace the difference, to situate the incident in a more peaceable narrative? After the initial encounter I decided to draft a memo to the CEO. This gave me an opportunity to craft a response that invited a wider discussion about the direction of the organisation and the empowerment of its people. It also provided the space for him, in his own time, to read and respond. I concluded the memo with these words: "I would like us to talk about this together. You will have other perspectives that need to be included and I don't expect this to be easy or comfortable for either of us. I just know it is essential. And a final word - whatever else you "read" into these words I trust that you sense respect, love and commitment."

The conversation never happened. Issues as complex as these are rarely resolved in the moment or in one incident. Sometimes all we can do is offer a gesture of love. But what emerged from this experience, for me, was a sense of letting go, of being released from responsibility for the outcome. Fodor and Hauerwas compare this to the way a performer becomes so involved in their performance that they are possessed or taken over by the work (Fodor and Hauerwas 2000, 397). These moments of "ecstasy" (ek-stasis) can be compared to Heidegger's releasement - times when we let go of our personal agendas and experience ourselves as

participants in a shared event that is greater than ourselves (Guignon 2004), recognising that "love is the difference that matters" (Olthuis 1997, 249). This is not, I suggest, an invitation to passivity but a way of thinking of our action in the world that synchronises with its rhythm, keeping in time with God's slow, peaceable, reconciling grace. This attitude nurtures a patience that recognises that the kingdom of God is not fully realised; that prays in all situations, "your kingdom come, your will be done"; and, that embraces the stubbornness and incorrigibility of the people and systems that dominate the world in hope that they can be transformed, even if the process may involve, as in the case of Jesus, suffering and death.

> "There are three things that last forever:
> faith, hope and love;
> and the greatest of the three is love"
> (I Corinthians 13:13).