Chapter Six

I Hear the White Bird Speak for the First Time

… we are not quite what we imagine ourselves to be, nor are we quite as in control of our beliefs as we think, not quite so essential as we imagine. Our loves and identities move in and through us like viral infections. And yet hope stands before us in places we never suspected: the moment more complex than an eternity, and faith different altogether than anything we now know.
(Inchausti 2005)

I have not made my book more than my book has made me
Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)

I set out in this thesis to explore my practice as a programme leader and learning facilitator using a pallette of approaches to the inquiry. I have described experiences of reflective practice and highlighted my attempts at deeper levels of awareness. I have reflected on my growing sense of connectedness to others and the knowing that comes with reverence. I have faced the ubiquitous nature of human systems and confronted their attempts to colonise my soul (McIntosh 2004) and shut down the space for creative action. And I have chosen to present this account in narrative form, not only because of the polysemic nature of story but also because by thinking *with* stories I am able to add further levels of reflection as the plot has developed.

My purpose in this inquiry has been, as the title suggests, to witness to moments of integrity and presence in fractals of my professional experience. These

characteristics of practice are not a fixed feature of who I am but emerge as I live my life and tell my story. I am what I am becoming. Throughout the inquiry I have tried to reach into my experience to find myself. The inquiry has been a cognitive, emotional and spiritual process - how I think, feel and connect with what is bigger than/different from me. Professional practice, therefore, can no longer be separated from questions of embodiment and spirituality, that is, attempts to understand what brings together the multiple selves of my daily experience and provides nourishment for my way of being in the world.

For most of this journey my experiences and reflection on those experiences was episodic and I found it difficult to craft a coherent narrative. One story, however, kept returning throughout this research - the legend of Brendan's Voyage. This story seemed able to hold my experience in a way that honoured its complexity and yet gave it coherence. It fulfilled the criteria recognised by Nietzsche (1974), who said, "Above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its rich ambiguity" (quoted in Flyvbjerg 2006, 237). It was as if I found myself in the story as I found the story in myself, and was inspired to live in the story as I pondered how the story might live in me. As I began to craft the thesis it was tempting to use Brendan's story to provide a structure for the thesis but this failed. Instead, it has lived alongside, or underneath, my own story, adding perspective and depth to my inquiries.

I first told the Brendan story to my supervision group in April 2008. I have already described how I came to place myself in the story. I became one of Brendan's followers. When I had finished telling the story Geoff, our supervisor, invited us to take a few moments to let the story wash over us, noticing the points when we had felt connected. Geoff mentioned the first moment when we saw the white birds and Margaret was drawn to the rather playful occasion when we were set free from the confines of the boat to run back and forth on Jasconius's back and light a fire to prepare some food.

Nick was captured by the image of us leaning out of the boat trying to catch water from the cliff's edge. Bob, too, was caught by this incident and commented on Brendan's instruction to us to "just hang on for three more days." "By then you were desperately thirsty and I wanted to ask, why did you follow Brendan?" There is a precious moment captured on the recording of the session when, in response to Bob's question I quipped back, "because I couldn't get out of the boat." This produced a spontaneous burst of laughter as the simplicity and depth of this thought caught us all and we were taken to a place of knowing we had not expected. I was touched by the way the story was able to tell a truth that would probably have been missed by a more rational mind. There were many times on this journey when, despite my thirst and frustration, getting out of the boat was not an option, although eventually, like Jonah, I would be thrown out of it.

Our interaction with the story was taken further by a simple activity Geoff then invited the group to try. I was invited to listen as one by one the others in the group adopted an image or incident in the story that had caught them. We were then encouraged to question the image, as the individual gave expression to whatever came up in response. Geoff, taking the place of the white birds was asked, "What do you think when you see a boat approaching the island?" to which he replied, "here is a chance for me to sing and be heard." "Do your visitors always ask the same question?" "No," was the reply, "some don't say very much at all. Some look frightened, some laugh. I like the ones that laugh." Nick, as the crystal pure water flowing down the cliffs into the sea was asked, "How long have you flowed off the cliff" to which he replied, "Since the beginning of time." "And what happens to those who drink your water?" "They become me." Margaret surprised us as the fire on Jasconius's back by suggesting that when the great fish dived beneath the waves the fire kept burning, sustained by oxygen from Jasconius's body.

In different ways we were experiencing the creativity of uncensored imagination, letting the story take us wherever it might go. By staying in the imaginative space the story was able to breathe, offering glimpses of the back stories we bring to our

listening, and discovering our shared archetypal consciousness. At this point in the activity Bob chose to be the mist.

"What are you hiding people from?" we asked.

"Themselves," Bob replied.

"What is the moment of receiving someone like?"

"Slightly shocking. It feels like an intrusion until I've wrapped myself completely around them and I know it is time for me to do my work"

"How long does it take to do that work?"

"It is different, sometimes only days, sometimes months."

"Do you take different forms?"

"I am always a mist but my form as a mist can change - colder or warmer, wetter or dryer, tempestuous or calm."

"What do you feel when they are in there with you?"

"Protective, but I'm also there to challenge them, to test them, to make them a little scared."

"What gives you pleasure?"

"To reveal the island. Sometimes I tease them a bit because I enjoy that moment so much - perhaps that's my naughtiness."

"What do people have to do to break free of the mist?"

"I wait until they are calm and I feel they are ready for me to reveal what I will reveal."

"This story happened a long time ago - where are you now?"

"I'm still there."

"Do people still come to you?"

"Yes."

The mist is a place of transition, a threshold, in which time stands still while everything changes. The mist, of course, says nothing about the way it works other than a broad hint that it tests those who enter, changing form from colder to warmer, wetter or dryer. You have to enter the mist to know how it works. It is a place of ambiguity, confusion and risk.

As I write this concluding chapter of the thesis I realise that my telling of the Brendan story has been too tame, too remote. I was recording the experience as an observer, not as a participant. Although I had decided to "write myself" into the story, and even told it on several occasions in the first person, I had not lived it. I was still searching for the words, drawing in phrases I had drafted and rehearsed in advance. I am fairly self-confident in speaking in front of people and so it may not have been evident to my listeners but I knew - I had not really been on the journey myself.

Yet I had. I had simply rationalised the whole process, suppressing my feelings and missing the opportunity to give full expression to the experiences. It has come to me very slowly but I now see how foolish I have been. In some way I have clung to ideas, like pieces of driftwood, that seem to fit the way I experience the world. But the death of the project finally dragged me from abstract ideas and argument to face the reality of daily life. For a long time I thought I had been to the Land of Promise and reached the river's edge where I was prevented from crossing. At one level perhaps I had. But I now realise the mistake of thinking that the Land of Promise exists on the same plane as all the other islands, just a little further on in the journey, eventually to appear on the horizon.

As we interact with narrative it becomes possible to play with its structure. All places in the story co-exist and so, as I faced death and its consequences, I finally found myself in the boat, in the mist. It was a bit scary but there was no turning back. We had spent a long time together on the boat. I knew every knot in the timber and crease in the leather. Now, unable to see beyond its rough form, drifting in the silence, my journey began to take on new meaning. There is an ancient mariner's saying that, "beyond the edge of the map there be monsters" and I could feel their eerie presence as the mist wrapped itself around me.

What follows, as I bring the thesis to a close, is a series of "meditations from the mist", or meta-reflections on the journey. They are thoughts drawn largely from my journal writing in the months following the death of the project, as I began to

step back and allow the wider ecology to redirect my passion and energy. In different ways they offer different perspectives on what I have learned on this journey. I have developed approaches to inquiry that have influenced my management and teaching practice and these are described in earlier chapters of the thesis. This chapter takes me closer to the heart of my inquiry - the transformation of myself as an actor in the world that I would now argue is the promise inherent in taking an attitude of inquiry to my ways of being in the world. I have come to see that all experience, in Gadamer's (1989) sense of experience, contains an invitation to lift up my eyes and view my reality from a different perspective. Each one involves a small death to ways of thinking or acting in which I was heavily invested. The death of the project was not an unfortunate interruption to my victory narrative, but an invitation for me to locate of myself in the larger drama hinted at by George Steiner (1989), at the end of *Real Presences* when he suggests that "ours is the long day's journey of the Saturday" (ibid, 232) between the injustice and suffering of Good Friday and the promised liberation of Sunday.

I Crossing the Threshold

For months after the death of the Programme in Professional Practice I was unable to function effectively. I initially saw my research as an insider but now I was no longer inside. As I described in the last chapter the context had collapsed and the story, at least the story I had been living, had come to an abrupt and painful end. The system no longer valued the story and had rejected it. Or, almost. After informing me that the project had been closed and my contract would not be renewed I was offered a six month part time contract (two days a week) to complete the development work on a practitioner-based Masters degree. It was as if the system was hesitating in its decision, wanting to keep its options open. This proved frustrating, extending the pain of closure since it was clear that the system had lost the plot and would not be able to muster the resources for the vision to continue.

I have always been a goal-oriented person. I like to finish a job and move on. But this time I had lost control. I was no longer able to continue the project and I was angry that the system had rejected the vision and ejected me. Although on the surface I was restrained, anger brewed beneath the surface and on one occasion broke through the facade. In a meeting with the new Dean to discuss the management of the students who had already enrolled in the PhD in Professional Practice I became frustrated. I insisted that these students should not be required to conform to the traditional PhD procedures. They had enrolled under different terms and conditions and would be unable to fulfil the residency requirements. I also suggested that it would be very difficult to find adequate resources for individual supervision. A head of steam built up quickly and I lost control. The words, "you don't understand Action Research!" burst from my lips. I felt the muscles around my waist tighten and my voice went up a third of an octave as I said it. The outburst did little to improve the conditions for the students or my own situation. There was no point in giving him "a piece of my mind", but I had done it.

Anger arises, according to the ancient fathers of the church, as a result of thwarted goals, goals to which the ego attaches itself, leaving us convinced that the system is wrong. But, as Evagrius (d. 399), Cassian (d. 434) and others remind us so clearly, this arises from the way we think about our experiences, not from the situation itself. This has consequences. Anger leaves us blind. Our judgement is impaired and we are unable to rightly interpret the evidence of our senses. There are, according to this tradition, eight territories of human experience that give rise to false thoughts and debilitating emotions like anger and sadness, and prevent us from being fully alive. This ancient wisdom connects the management of these thoughts and the emergence of virtue. The virtues will "spring up" naturally when we learn to control our thoughts. Like weeds in a garden the thoughts that feed our ego must be uprooted and discarded. Unfortunately this teaching became, two centuries later, in the hands of Pope Gregory the Great, the seven deadly sins, bringing into the western tradition a negative orientation to the spiritual disciplines that the early church fathers would not have recognised.

Following the earlier tradition, however, as we let go of the thoughts that pre-occupy and blind us, the ground is cleared for the virtues to emerge. Perhaps here are the ancient roots to the current recognition of the influence of our mental models. As Bateson (2000) acknowledges, "we arrive at every encounter … betrayed by our assumptions" (Bateson 2000, 161). It is not surprising that former generations attributed these false thoughts to "demons", what today we would recognise as unhealthy projections of others or the self that control our actions. While it may be unconventional in a post-Enlightenment world to suggest that demons are the sponsors of the mental models that protect and defend the ego, in the heat of an experience there is a strong sense of being held captive, of "being possessed" by them. Letting go of their ways of framing my experience was not easy. How could I walk away from a dream that had been twenty years in the making? If, as I felt, the system had lost the plot I needed to be there to help it find it again. If I conceded to the inevitable what might happen to the vision? For weeks I continued to struggle with my thoughts, convinced that the project could be reconfigured and the vision carried forward. I was unwilling to accept the end. But slowly I began to realise that the decisions had been made and would not be reversed. As the backtalk of the situation continued to hammer home this conclusion, I faced a choice. To continue the struggle, with the system and in myself; or let go.

It is a particularly Christian insight to embrace death with hope. The Greek word *kenosis* conveys the notion of self-emptying, letting go of being to allow what might become to emerge. It is a crossing of the ultimate threshold from death to life. This is territory that raises more questions than answers and, in my own struggle, I realised that the demons don't like questions. Their defence of the ego is based on fixed horizons and rigid certainty. The demons, it seemed to me, have no experience of death. They function in a world of continuity. They are uncomfortable in the mist, anxious to come out the way they came in.

I faced a choice. I could continue to exist, to be, in the place the system had put me. I was without work at the beginning of the worst economic downturn of my

generation and just a few years from retirement. Or I could refuse to be named as the system named me (Frank 1995). This would be more, a lot more, than a matter of picking myself up, dusting off my jacket, and moving on. Death strips everything away. For the experience to have meaning I came to see it as the end of "being" and the beginning of "becoming." No longer able to "be" what my personal history and professional experience had made me - a self-confident programme leader and learning facilitator with wide international experience - I was being set free to become what this promised but was not able to deliver while my ego stood in the way.

One way to think about the intellectual turmoil of what has been called "post-modernity" is to see it as a struggle to the death with an ontology of being, rooted in the Cartesian self. Since Descartes: "Everything, in so far as it is in itself, endeavours to persist in its own being" (Spinoza in Olthuis 1997, 237). In a fascinating discussion of power, self and the deconstructionist Derrida, Olthuis describes the inevitable consequences of Spinoza's claim. By linking power and essence, "power becomes the central concept of modern ontologies" (Olthuis 1997, 237). Being, in the Cartesian worldview, is seen as a system of control and domination. "One either dominates or is dominated … To be a self is to have enemies" (ibid, 237).

But Descartes' epistemological and agentic self has proved to be false, falling at the same stake as reason itself. The deconstructionists have convincingly brought us to the edge of uncertainty, the "un/decidability" of living on the threshold. There is no going forward or backward. We are condemned, it seems, to live on a never ending Saturday. For Derrida "once Reason has been dethroned, there is no other possibility for providing direction and hope" (Olthuis 1997, 244). But there is a hint of hope. To cross the threshold would be, as Derrida himself recognises in his interaction with the 14th century mystic, Meister Eckhart, to see with the eye of love, "an eye that opens up a place beyond words, where words are no longer necessary" (ibid, 244). But, according to Olthuis, although Derrida has hinted at what this might be for him, he is unable to come home and tell his story.

The way beyond Derrida's dilemma, following Olthuis, is a response to what I sense is the call of love, a recognition that relationship goes all the way down to the roots of existence itself, constantly inviting response, offering fresh beginnings and new opportunities for becoming. Olthuis proposes that the alternative to Descartes self-grounding in "I think, therefore I am," is the possibility that "I am loved, therefore I am" (1997, 245). Rather than retreating into "the supposed certitude and splendid isolation of [the] ego" (ibid, 246) he offers an image of "the wild spaces of love." I will say a little more about this radical view of the self in the last section of this chapter.

At first unacknowledged and even brushed aside, but then with greater insistence, love was pushing against my assumptions, posing uncomfortable questions. Was I allowing the way the system was framing the situation to shape my response, and, as a result, not acting out of my own framing? Was I allowing the indecision and paralysis to undermine my vision? Was I trying to work around what I saw as institutional myopia? Why was I unable to see that the system had begun to pollute my soul (Owen 2000)? Later I would contemplate ways in which I might have re-storied the situation to take account of other stories being played out in the situation - institutional and personal. What necessities were others in the situation carrying? What emotions were they suppressing as they tried to make sense of what had happened? The arrival of a new Dean had coincided with the closure of the project and I had no time to develop our relationship. In several conversations I tried to find points of connection between our personal stories but they were treated superficially. What story might have built the kind of relationship needed for the project to continue? I began to realise that while I was saying, "all I want to do is help the project, the institution and you to succeed", I was actually putting myself into opposition.

Slowly I began to see that when the system rejected the project it became impossible for me to live the qualities of professional practice at the heart of my inquiry. I came to realise, referring to Torbert's (2004) learning loops, that there is a fourth loop that can take an inquiry deeper than questions of action, plans or

purpose. To be fully myself would involve a shift in consciousness beyond the boundaries of particular systems or ways of thinking (paradigms) to see my actions as part of a bigger story that refuses to be confined to context or time but responds to the embrace of love.

This inquiry began with a programmatic purpose, to take an action research approach to "improving my practice as a programme leader and learning facilitator." For a while I tried to write the last chapter of my inquiry as closure to this story, without success. That story, bound by its objective of improving the teaching and management of a Master's programme, had ended. But the thesis is no longer about a Master's programme but about the qualities of professional life that were crucial to my own performance. My freefall writing in 2007 had given me a new way of framing the inquiry, writing "towards integrity and presence in practice" but I had not realised, until now, that this would open up a bigger story and lead me to pursue these qualities at a deeper level. It is no longer about discovering a particular way of doing professional education. It has become a different story, one that I am still living. How might I live by the principles of integrity and presence beyond the context in which I have worked, and where might this lead me? I was part of a bigger story where I could be *for* others in other places. Drifting in the mist, I began to let go of the context in which I had worked for many years to embrace a world without boundaries. A different consciousness was emerging that is not contained by physical or systemic limits. I had begun to cross the threshold from being to becoming.

II Finding My Voice

Drifting for months in the mist I have had plenty of time to recall the early days of the journey. The cuts and bruises I picked up at the beginning have become calloused and weathered, each one carrying a memory of achievements or injuries on the way. I laugh now at my lack of experience. How did I expect to take this

journey without the full commitment of body and soul? But I remember - it began in my head.

I was slightly taken aback by the reaction of my first supervision group, just a month after starting the CARPP journey. I had carefully crafted a paper describing "my research interests" and felt fairly confident as we began the session. In the paper I acknowledged the "personal background, motivation, values and beliefs" at the heart of good practice, and made the statement that "the transformation of the profession begins in the first person, as practitioners develop an inquiring approach to their daily decisions." (CARPP writing February 2004). Several members of the group had printed the paper and gave it to me at the end of the session with their comments scribbled in the margins. "Do you include yourself as a media practitioner in this inquiry?" one had written. And another: "What are your values? What drives you here? What are your attachments?" (underlined in the original). "Good start David," one person wrote at the end of the paper, "would be interesting to explore your own personal inquiry more deeply." A month later, with a second piece of writing and a different group, the comments were similar, "how does this relate to you?" one asked, "I would like more of your thought bubbles," said another.

At first the challenge to find my own voice left me confused. In response I decided to include more personal anecdotes in my writing as if the presence of the personal pronoun would suffice. Gradually over the months I came to understand the subtle way in which a positivist outlook on life had framed my assumptions about what knowledge is and how it is acquired. I was a technician wanting to manipulate the components of learning in better ways. Action research appealed to me because it allowed me to investigate practice, although I saw this as something outside myself. I was looking at action research from within the empirical positivist worldview (Reason & Torbert 2001). Nine months into my inquiries I wrote, "I am still trying to find my own voice. Writing in a personal voice has been difficult, yet it has helped me see that I had been noticeably absent in my own work in the past. I have enjoyed and benefited from the examples and experience of CARPP faculty

and members of my supervision groups. I have even attempted to mimic some of the examples, but they were not me. First person inquiry is too personal to copy from someone else" (CARPP writing, September 2004).

I would like to think that each movement of my journey has evoked further dimensions of presence in my communication. My awakening to feeling as an essential source of knowledge was traumatic as the stories of that period record, but slowly my sense making deepened as I wrote about these experiences. But it remains easier to revert to cognitive description, offering what Wood calls "an epistemology from the neck up" (Wood 1998, 28). Sitting, with only my fingers active on the keyboard and my eyes focused on the computer screen, I can be tempted by Descartes conclusion that "... this 'me', that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from my body" (Descartes in Wood 1998, 28). I needed to be shaken, emotionally and physically, to discover that "we are embodied beings whose intellectual purchase on the world is mediated by our physicality" (Wood 1998, 29).

A more recent example brings the struggle up to date. We were a group of 16, gathered over a weekend at Emerson College to work on the craft of storytelling. We were invited to wander around the room while shifting awareness of the centre of our being to different parts of our bodies. "Live in your belly," the facilitator invited us, "notice how you feel as you walk the room being present in your belly." At first I found myself thinking about this, not doing it, but the sight of others who were clearly centred and settled in their bodies helped me to let go. As the centre of my attention shifted I noticed that I began to walk differently. I felt solid and strong. "Notice the lack of emotions in this place," the facilitator suggested, "this should be an experience of "is-ness" .... "Now, shift the location of your presence in the room to your chest, the seat of your emotions." As I adjusted the focus of my bodily attention I saw the effect this instruction had on others, their own chests thrusting them into the room. It felt both welcoming and vulnerable. "Can you feel a sense of "we-ness" from this place? Now live in your head." It felt slightly odd to be invited to give attention to my normal way of being, in my head, as we

continued to wander around the room. My more normal posture might have been to sit down, to park my body to give my head full rein. We ended the activity by trying consciously to move the centre of our being forward and back to each of these places. Later I wrote in my journal, "I found it quite difficult to "be present" in the different parts of my body .... It was a challenge to realise how neglected my body has been as a source of consciousness or of expressive being."

The physicality of knowing has been a learning edge throughout this inquiry, pushing me towards a more embodied, relational way of being. This was what I recorded in my journal on one occasion:

> It came on quite suddenly. The muscles in my abdomen contracted and I felt slightly nauseous. My breathing became more rapid and I felt a tightness around my neck. It's a state of being I would label "anxious" - but why was I feeling this way and how might the tension pent up in my body be released? I've become used to pushing on, of ignoring these kinds of feelings, although I suspect if I had been more observant they have often affected my speech or behaviour. This time I have paused to notice the feeling and allow it to work through me and inform my actions.

What I have noticed is how the quality and depth of my inquiry has been enriched as I have "come to my senses" (Berman in Reason 1994, 12), affirming the wisdom of the body and welcoming the presence of this "is-ness" and "we-ness" in my writing.

Early in writing the thesis I recognised a tendency to fall back on other people's ideas to make sense of my own experience. Most of my "secondary sources", to resort to conventional research language, have been books and articles relevant to my inquiries. As a practitioner I have a pragmatic view of ideas. I have not offered a traditional "literature review" with which to locate my inquiries but my reading has helped extend my inquiry, paying attention to the experience and knowledge of others, as I have moved in and out of the literature. In the process I have applied

an evaluative judgement as a practitioner asking, 'how useful is this knowledge to my practice?' I make no claim to expertise in the fields of those I quote. My purpose in foraging in these corners of knowledge is to access ideas that can make a contribution to my intended outcomes as a practitioner (Argyris & Schon 1996).

But I was often hiding behind these sources, allowing them to speak for me. This was noticed quite early by others in the CARPP supervision process. One wrote in the margin of an early piece of writing, "I find the theory literature interrupts your narrative." I shared my MPhil/PhD transfer paper with a good friend and invited his comments. He made a number of useful observations in the margins of the paper but wrote just one word - orphans - on the front cover. He had noticed how, quite frequently in the paper, I dropped in a quotation as if to spice up the text, with no real attempt to engage with the material or show how it had influenced my practice. Was I doing this to let my reader know the breadth of my reading or using the source to add weight to my work? I realise that I have not completely overcome this habit in the present thesis but I am now more conscious of the way in which I engage with other sources.

The opposite temptation also presents itself. I could be accused of being a literary butterfly, attracted to many different ideas but not attached to any. I find pleasure in locating my inquiry in relation to other authors and exploring how, as I engage with their ideas, they provoke and challenge my own experience. However I am aware that when I bring other voices to the discussion and begin to revel in their ideas I am in danger of losing my own voice. I notice how my writing has a different density when engaged with another source. The brief dance of ideas changes the style of my writing and I have to deliberately elbow myself out of their honey trap at times and turn back to my own experience. My reader would be right in recognising, at these times, a struggle to find my own voice alongside others.

These issues have been a learning edge throughout my inquiry and have remained alive as I have written this thesis. While the many incidents and activities of my professional life over more than four years have provided a rich source of

experience captured in notes, audio recordings and journal writing, the writing process itself has proved crucial to my learning. Gradually, as my writing has matured, I have felt more confidence in the way I have tried to weave the threads of experience, reflections on those experiences, and the contribution of ideas from other sources into a written text.

As the inquiry has progressed I have become increasingly aware of the problematic of self. As I seek to write with integrity and presence, who is the "I" that writes? I will say more about my emerging sense of self later but at this point I want to acknowledge that it is often my ego that is the first to type and as it does so it gradually suppresses and silences the soul. As the thesis has developed there have been choices about which tales to tell and how they might be told. Awareness of these choices has grown as the thesis has developed, none more so than during my time in the mist since the project ended. "I" have had nothing to say, wrestling with my thoughts, not knowing where I was going, and at times, not really caring. Attempts to write myself out of the mist failed. I could not find the plot. Frank (1995) describes the impossibility of telling in the midst of chaos. "Chaos is what can never be told; it is the hole in the telling" (Frank 1995, 101-102). I felt that "I" had disappeared. "In the chaos narrative, consciousness has given up the struggle for sovereignty over its own experience" (ibid, 104). My ego tried to write this period of my life as a restitution narrative, fully expecting that I would be able to weave the disappointments, frustrations and pain into the project and get things back on track. But it didn't work. Obstacles and resistance continued to cross the path. It's as if, the longer I tried to live by the myth of restitution, the longer I was condemned to live it.

On New Years Eve 2008, as my full time contract with the institution ended I wrote in my journal:

> "As I sit with my laptop in my writing corner in the closing hours of the year I'm reflecting on the past few difficult months. The closure of the programme in professional practice, the frustrating negotiation with the

> Centre management to provide support for its current students, and my own uncertain future are all very present. I am tempted to recycle the experience again seeking fresh understanding. But this is not the time to be analysing - I've done plenty of that in the past few months. It is a moment to collect myself, to give attention to what I am becoming through this process, to notice the movements of my soul. To feel its unrest and explore the direction of its movement.
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> I notice the pain of my ego stripped of its opportunity to pursue its ambition. I remind myself that it is too easy to assume that my work in the world, at any given time, belongs to me. On a couple of occasions I have expressed the feeling that the programme has been stolen from me. This is not soul language - it is the judgement of a hurt ego. I pause to notice the way in which I so easily become divided, claiming the fruit of the soul's work as a personal possession to be managed and manipulated, lost or stolen. The soul sets free, offering its contribution to the world without price or obligation" (31st December 2008).

The thesis is offered as a narrative, enclosing a broad sweep of professional experience over a five year period. Like the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes I have turned over many sayings in my mind and thought of how best to set them out, seeking to be faithful to the experience and give pleasure to my reader (Ecclesiastes 12:10). What I have done, I hope, has offered glimpses into my professional practice to be judged, not by conventional standards of validity, but by their ability to resonate with my reader. I hope that the narrative has provided space for your imaginative participation, that you have heard my voice and that it has found an echo in your own experience. If it has, it is story, not theory, that has proved to be the more powerful reality (Billington 2001).

During the closing stages of this story I had a dream. In the dream I was riding on a crowded bus, so crowded that the only remaining seat was a jump seat facing backwards, possibly reserved for emergencies. I was so close to the passengers in

the front row that our knees dovetailed. Immediately in front of me was a young boy in uniform wearing a cap with a overloaded satchel on his back. I thought I recognised him but couldn't remember. I estimated his age between 7 and 8. Our faces were no more than a foot apart.

I felt his eyes focus on me and felt slightly uncomfortable. Was he staring at me? Suddenly, without warning, he leant forward and kissed me on the cheek. I smiled and turned away. A conversation had started amongst several of the passengers and I joined in. I don't recall the subject.

The boy kept looking at me but there was nothing sinister in the look. In fact it felt kind and warm. Then again, without warning, he leant forward and kissed me, this time on my lips. And then he stood up to get off the bus at the next stop.

Dreams raise questions, questions that provoke and suggest. Was the boy my younger self acknowledging what I had become? Was there significance in the crowded bus, or that I was facing backwards? Perhaps the kiss on the lips may have been setting my mouth free to speak? Whatever the answer to these questions the dream gave me hope. Although the outward circumstances were pretty dire, I felt affirmed and set free.

III Chasing after Wind

Doing time in the mist gave me an opportunity to read again a book, first published in 1948, that shaped my early practice as a young activist. Its author, Jacques Ellul, was a resistance fighter in the 2nd World War before becoming deputy mayor of Bordeaux. His subsequent academic career was what Antonio Gramsci (1971) would have called an "organic intellectual", a scholar who was not content to just add to the body of knowledge but saw that his "intellectual interest meant concrete commitment" (Clendenin 1989, xxiv). His social and political interests ranged from opposition to the atrocities of the French military in Algeria,

conservation of the Aquitaine coast, and work with disadvantaged youth. He became a Christian "in consequence of his immersion in the saga of the Bible while engaged in the strife of the world" (Stringfellow preface to Ellul 1967, 3). *The Presence of the Kingdom* (Ellul [1948] 1967) inspired my early activism. It rooted my sense of life purpose in a rigorous analysis of contemporary society (offered with a prophetic insight that remains current even today). In it Ellul challenged the dominance of a technical way of thinking *(la technique)* and named the overarching dis-ease of modernity as the idolatry of death. This was the starting grid from which I launched on my career.

Ellul wrote 50 books and 1500 articles. Almost 40 years after the publication of *The Presence of the Kingdom* he turned his attention to writing a commentary on the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, published in English as *Reason for Being* in 1990. In the introduction to this book he says that it could not have been written until the end of his life - in fact these two books bracket his writing career (1990, 4). Ecclesiastes are the reflections of someone with a rich experience of life. Like Ellul himself, the writer was an organic intellectual. Ellul tells us the author "cannot place himself at a distance and consider apparently random human activities as if he were examining insects" (ibid 29). He does not adopt the point of view of a scientific observer. He "does not speak of abstract human beings he sees from afar; he speaks of himself" (ibid 30). "He rubs our noses in crude reality" (ibid 28).

If *The Presence of the Kingdom* shaped the start of my professional life, this thesis has culminated in experiences that find their echo in *Reason for Being*. What follows, therefore, is a reflective conversation between ideas addressed in the book of Ecclesiastes and my experience, helped by Ellul's commentary. It strikes me that Ecclesiastes, written perhaps 2,500 years ago, matches the best of recent deconstructionist writing in its relentless insistence that "all is futility and a chasing of the wind" (2:17). One by one our illusions of knowledge, power, wealth and work are stripped away until the reader is left naked and lost. Yet, this is not the end. Weaving through the pages of the book is another theme that can only be grasped when the illusions have been removed. Ellul quotes Bernanos in summarising the

message of the book, "In order to be prepared to hope in what does not deceive, we must first lose hope in everything that does deceive" (1990, 47).

My first response to the message of Ecclesiastes is to affirm the weariness of trying to claim more than can be known. The writer tells us that the pursuit of wisdom is "a worthless task that God has given to mortals to keep them occupied" (1:13). It only brings sorrow (1:18). Here I must be careful to avoid rationalising my present situation. I am no longer a member of an academic community and it would be easy to use this argument to moderate the grief of leaving. I was in the system and successful. And I played the game. Yet I never enjoyed and rarely participated in the intellectual banter that was the game for some. Ideas knocked back and forth, each time with a subtle change in pace or spin knocked across the net like a tennis ball. Like professional tennis, rank and richest came to those who win the game. William James catches the spirit:

> "I am convinced that the desire to formulate truths is a virulent disease. It has contracted an alliance lately in me with a feverish personal ambition, which I never had before, and which I recognize as an unholy thing in such a connection. I actually dread to die until I have settled the Universe's hash in one more book! Childish idiot - as if formulas about the Universe could ruffle its majesty and as if the commonsense world and its duties were not eternally the really real" (James quoted in Frank 1995, 17).

I began this inquiry expecting to find the formula or formulae that would shape my work as a programme leader and learning facilitator. Instead I have had my nose rubbed in crude reality (Ellul 1990, 28). I have learnt the eternal significance of "the commonsense world and its duties", and the futility of striving to "settle the Universe's hash." In a lecture on Action Research I gave to a group of new research students just before I left the institution I critiqued the epistemological assumptions of the Enlightenment in which I had been schooled:

Although we aspire to holistic action in the world our ways of knowing are fragmented. We assume that we can understand the world best by breaking it down into its parts, looking at reality through a kaleidoscope of lenses - social, cultural, political, historical, theological or economic, for example. Each of these domains of knowledge have developed their own methodology and language, and "knowledge constituent interest" (Habermas) which is characterised both by the need to maintain academic recognition and the inability of its specialists to speak outside their specialism. The difficulty is in putting Humpty Dumpty together again.

Some things in the world can be explained clearly and known with certainty - which is comforting when dealing with many aspects of the natural world. The speedometer on my car, for example. Yet as the phenomena under investigation becomes more complex it becomes more difficult to hold the complexity within the formulas of description and prediction. Despite the most detailed formulas and powerful computer power it remains impossible to forecast the weather beyond a week.

And, despite attempts in the social sciences to address the most fundamental problems of the world, increased knowledge has not resulted in significant social change – the link between knowledge creation and social transformation is tenuous at best. The human world, pushed and pulled by personal motives and changing relationships, is not a structure that we can map with certainty.

And a knowledge of causes isn't a cure.

Even the most deterministic viewpoint has to recognise the unpredictability of human motivation and choice. It is not that the standard methods of inquiry are wrong, indeed they are very good at what they do, but they are inadequate in our attempt to understand the whole. It is not just that the human world is technically complex, in the sense that it is technically difficult

> to grasp, but it is also complex because it necessarily exceeds our capacity to know it incrementally and objectively (Law 2004). "The world is so rich that our theories about it will always fail to catch more than a part of it." (ibid, 8).

Ellul in *The Presence of the Kingdom* expressed this in terms of a call to awareness, a task that includes "a fierce and passionate destruction of myths, of intellectual outmoded doctrines" (1948, 98) and, as we engage with the commonplace world, "to find, behind the theories which splash us and blind us from every quarter, the reality which they hide from us" (ibid). In this pursuit, we are brought to the threshold of the profane and the sacred, a boundary that Ellul suggests marks the limits of human reason. Our knowledge of that which lies beyond the threshold is "hidden from the arrogant gaze of our investigating mind" (Merton 1973, 103).

This research has brought me face to face with the arrogance of my own reason and my participation in the mad and frenetic rush to stay on top of the information explosion. I am reminded of IBM's recent advertising campaign informing their readers that global information now doubles every 23 hours, as if our survival depends upon our ability to grasp the whole. In the view of Ecclesiastes however, the pursuit of such knowledge is futile and "the more words used the greater is the futility of it all" (6:11). This brings me to what I sense is the heart of the message of Ecclesiastes. It is only after we have experienced and tried everything that we can conclude that "all is futility." "The only true wisdom we can aspire to consists of the perception that no wisdom is possible" (Ellul 1990, 159). We are incapable of grasping the whole. This is not a metaphysical claim but a practical conclusion, based on experience. Here is the source of true wisdom - to have applied myself to knowledge and to have discovered its limits. In the words of Pascal, writing 300 years before Ellul:

> "Knowledge has two extremes which meet. The first is the pure, natural ignorance in which all people are born. The other extreme is reached by great intellects who, having run through everything that humans can know, find that they know nothing, and they return to that same ignorance from

> which they departed; but it is a wise ignorance which knows itself" (Pascal [1961] quoted in Poffenroth, 2004, 93).

I am a child of the Enlightenment and was trained as an engineer. I was not taught how to discern the border of what Otto (1917) called "the numinous." The mist may play havoc with my measuring instruments but I learned to put in the oar and row through, convinced the world beyond the threshold is contained in three dimensions and is accessible to rational thought. To my surprise and delight, however, this inquiry has brought me to see the mist as a holy place, an invitation to face what is beyond with *mysterium tremendum* (ibid), and to see this not only in the death of the programme but in each experience, if I have the patience and discernment to recognise it. Here is the genius of reason - it can know and diagnose its own limitations (Poffenroth 2004). Reason, according to Pascal, knows when to step aside, "the way the sense of smell is uninvolved when reading a book.....Like a telescope that cannot take us to the stars but that lets us know the stars are there and fans the flames of our desire to get there, reason points us to what lies beyond itself" (Poffenroth 2004, 95-96).

Unless, that is, reason serves the system. My journal writing in the three months following the death of the project traces two separate paths between my experience of systemic processes and informal conversations with research students. I was on the receiving end of institutional decisions that closed down my role and, at the same time, engaged in debates about Action Research with custodians of the system. For example, I had distributed copies of Guba and Lincoln's (2005) article on paradigmatic controversies in qualitative research at an Induction School for new research candidates and on several occasions the new Dean raised his concerns about the constructivist and participatory paradigms described in the article. He argued for a dialogue between theorists and practitioners, illustrating his view by reference to the field doctor who needs to talk to a physiologist during an operation. He expressed the hope that action researchers would engage with the certainties of earlier paradigms. There was concern, as well, about the idiosyncratic nature of action research. If Action

Research is focussed on practice, where does the rigour come from? I found these discussions alienating and exhausting. It is hard to talk about Action Research to someone who has never done it.

This was in contrast to the refreshing quality of my conversation with students. Although I no longer had mentoring responsibility, quite a few sought out an opportunity to talk about their research. One, a Kenyan working with the poor in the Nairobi slums, wanted to talk before he returned to Kenya. He quickly informed me that he had found an earlier conversation, prior to his first field trip, very helpful and he wanted to update me on his work and seek my advice. It turned out that my earlier challenge - to give the poor their own voice in his research - had motivated him to spend time listening to the poor. He spoke about a particular case. He had tried to locate the poorest person in a village community to ask her, as an older woman, "what is poverty?". She smiled and said, "I am not poor. I have my eyes and my mind and my limbs." But you are not able to send your children to school or feed them well. "The only thing I lack is someone to talk to about my situation." You are involved with the church and meet in the small group. "Yes but this is not the kind of conversation I need." He told me that these voices had helped him see the importance of creating opportunities for organisations involved in poverty alleviation to listen to the voice of the poor.

I noticed a sense of freedom as we talked about the nature of organisations and explored ways in which he might nurture an attitude of inquiry in these organisations that included the voice of the poor. Although I made no reference to my own situation, I was aware that I was influenced by my recent experience of human systems and the way their identity can lead to plans and policies that set limits on permissible action, often smothering the voice of those they exist to serve. This found its echo in the student's experience of NGO's in Kenya and so our conversation turned to ways he might, as a participant in these situations, facilitate the kind of conversations the older woman in the village longed for. This, it seems to me, is the value, and surprise, of the particular case.

In this thesis I have pursued an epistemology of "the commonsense world and its duties" (James) not by dissecting it but by observing one case as a whole - my own practice - over an extended period of time. In the process I have reached the threshold of rational analysis. The epistemological space beyond the mist is the territory of storytellers, not scientists. It can be untidy and ambiguous. In including the contradictions and uncertainties of the case, narrative cannot be summarised and reduced to general propositions. This, however, is not a weakness of the single case but its strength. Indeed, "it is often a sign that the study has uncovered a particularly rich problematic" (Flyvbjerg 2006, 237). "Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is, therefore, more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals" (ibid 224).

This has been a personal story and it is reasonable to assume subject to bias and self-deception. Niebuhr (1949) identifies the source of this distortion in the "pride of reason that forgets that it is involved in a temporal process, and imagines itself in complete transcendence over history" (in Paver 2006, 69). There are two aspects of this inquiry that I hope has kept this overweening pride at bay. Throughout the inquiry I have tried to be transparent, offering my reader access to several cycles of my reflection and presenting my own perspectives, inferences and assumptions as open to testing and critique. Secondly, the contradictions and conflicts themselves constitute an important corrective to arrogant self-serving. As I have bumped into reality I have found the experience has challenged my assumptions and brought into question my ways of doing things. I often found myself short footed, unprepared or in the wrong. I have learned from the contradictions. This is what Schon (1983) called the "backtalk" of the field, something that Geertz (1995) also recognised as a "powerful disciplinary force: assertive, demanding, even coercive" (in Flyvbjerg 2006, 234).

This then is one voice. To adopt the analogy offered by the German theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1987) the world is like a vast orchestra of different instruments before a performance.

> "The choice of instruments comes from the unity that, for the moment, lies silent in the open score on the conductor's podium - but soon, when the conductor taps his baton, this unity will draw everything to itself and transport it, and then we shall see why each instrument is there ... By performing the divine symphony - the composition of which can in no way be deduced from the instruments, even in their totality - they discover why they have been assembled together. Initially, they stand or sit next to one another as strangers, in mutual contradiction, as it were. Suddenly, as the music begins, they realise how they are integrated. Not in unison, but what is far more beautiful - in sym-phony" (1987, 8-9)

I have, in this thesis played one line of the music and one instrument in the orchestra and, through the other sources that have crossed my path suggested some of the harmonies that I have heard. The sound may not always have been tuneful or satisfying but perhaps as you read your line and play your instrument a little more of the symphony of reality will be heard.

IV Confronting Hubris

Robbed of sight as we drifted in the mist my other senses became more alert. I noticed every sound and felt the tiniest breath of air across my cheeks. I was more aware of my inner thoughts and visualised the adventures that had brought us to this place. The days, even weeks, battling the raging storms. The times we almost ran out of supplies. The bountiful gifts we had received from the islands we had visited. But most of all I rehearsed what I had learned on the journey.

I had been excited and overwhelmed by the success of the new programme in professional practice. Although we were pushing the envelope I had the support of the validating university, my own institution and the market. There was little time for reflection as I managed a busy timetable and coordinated its growing demands. I don't know whether, if I had been more watchful, I could have anticipated the

abrupt and brutal action that triggered its closure. But while it continued I was caught up in the excitement and had little difficulty in making decisions or making things happen. I was blind to the possibility that, in acting with such self-confidence, I may have been pushing against the way the world works (or the divine laws as the Greeks would have explained it). Several anecdotes recorded in this thesis reveal the hubris in my practice. It is too easy to presume that when in flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) it was of my own doing and therefore to take the personal credit.

While I have attempted to analyse the nature of power in systems (as I did in the previous chapter) I was less conscious of my own exercise of power. As the project gained momentum, I can now see it was because I had my foot on the accelerator. I had created a new system and had become its first servant, working with tunnel vision to ensure its success. The project had been incubated in a permissive and supportive management culture and this undoubtedly contributed to its growth. But the culture changed with the retirement of the Dean. The morning after the project died I woke to find myself in a different environment, at first unclear and uncertain, but increasingly more tightly controlled. Later I described it as "claustrophobic" in my journal. Several weeks after the project died the retiring Dean told me that, because I was so passionate about what I did, the new Dean found me too forceful. Although I tried to discuss this with him, it was more than three months later, after I had moved onto a part time contract, that he told me, "You are very direct and organised. I can mention something to you and overnight you will tell me what needs to be done..." This sequence of events, from a realisation that I had used directive power to build the project, to the difficulties I had in developing a working relationship with the new Dean brought me face to face with my exercise of power.

In the English language the word power is not used as a verb to describe human action, with the consequence, I suggest, that power is experienced as a thing to be possessed. It is difficult to think of power as action. Instead, we have to speak of "controlling" or "influencing", neither of which are satisfactory synonyms. The

commonplace assumption about power is that it is a finite resource divided, usually unequally, between the participants in a relationship. Perhaps I had to have power stripped from me to see how futile it is to hold on to it. The project had filled my horizon so that I had allowed it to take control. Goals are alluring, particularly as they gather momentum, drawing in the means and energy needed to reach them. Beguiled by the goal I became its servant, exercising the power of my role as project leader to satisfy its appetite - fertile ground for hubris.

Ellul (1948) in his prophetic analysis describes the world as having abandoned the intention of achieving worthwhile ends in its preoccupation with means, "we set huge machines in motion in order to arrive nowhere" (1948, 51). No longer does the end justify the means. Means have become ends, justifying themselves. If we intend to achieve great things we must first produce "a plan", the plan then becoming an end in itself. The way of Jesus feels so different. By rejecting the temptation to turn stones into bread, Jesus was rejecting the notion that human need can be met by technical magic. By refusing to accept the offer of "power-over" he was affirming the necessity for "power-with". By rejecting the temptation to "prove" his divinity by throwing himself from the walls of the temple he was taking a huge risk - without this demonstration of power, everything would remain ambivalent and contestable (Ellul 1976). Yet, having spent time in the mist I now can see that this is where truth is found. There is no incontrovertible proof.

There is a similar ambiguity in Jesus's announcement of the kingdom of God. This surely was the mother of all goals. He tells us that it is worth everything - like a precious pearl, or a prodigal son to be looked for and longed for above all else. Yet, surprisingly, it is impossible to find him attaching a plan or strategy to the goal. There is certainly no timetable, "no one knows the time of its coming." And if there are no plans, then there is nothing to manage. Instead we can expect to see its signs in tiny things like a mustard seed and may discover it in the interruptions along the road (Fisher 2009). In Jesus the end is already present in the means (Ellul 1948). He is the end already present in the means. His model is quite simple - be the end for which you long. So - we do not have "to force ourselves, with great

effort and intelligence, to bring peace upon the earth - we have ourselves to *be* peaceful, for where there are peacemakers, peace reigns" (ibid 66).

I had allowed the project to become an end when the task at hand can never be more than a means. I recall other projects I have been involved in through my career. None of them resulted in monuments to my achievement. Each of them were steps on my life journey, their value in the people I had the privilege of working with and what we had learned together. There may be little tangible evidence of our work but the intangibles live on. The presence of our becoming in the heart of our doing.

This leads me to four brief thoughts. Here, on the threshold, I aspire to a different way of exercising power. It is more like the kind of control involved in flying a kite. My only influence on the kite is in the way I hold the string. I must let the wind do most of the work - kite, wind and myself participating in an elaborate dance. Or, to change the analogy, it's the kind of artistry witnessed in Michael Moschen, the juggler. A New York Times review[31] described his performance as,

> "... unusual for its visual beauty as well as its virtuosity. The show opened with Mr. Moschen juggling eight crystal spheres so effortlessly that these solid objects gave the impression of turning light as soap bubbles or even liquefying as they passed from hand to hand or glided up and down an arm."

The New Yorker (1998) observed that Moschen gives the impression of allowing objects free to be themselves while entering into a relationship with their essential uncontrollability. In the article he describes juggling as,

> "... a right-brain activity that involves letting yourself go, letting things happen ... the most interesting part of my work is learning how to touch an object, and discovering how the objects give up their secrets. I made a rule

[31] December 12th 1998 (Jack Anderson)

> that I would never close my hand around the ball, that I would always keep my hand open. It is virtually impossible to have real control over an object if you are doing that."

The author of the New Yorker article adds, "Moschen told me that this technique taught him that juggling could be less about control than about the struggle to accept the fear and turmoil around uncontrollable events" (ibid).

Secondly, one of the most well know parts of Ecclesiastes is the poem about time. "For everything its moment, and for every activity under heaven, its time. A time to be born and a time to die …" There follows a list of twenty eight activities arranged in opposite pairs. Ellul (1990) provides a summary of a number of general points about the poem. It is reasonable to assume that within the poet's imagination he intends the list to be inclusive of the full range of human activity. Although there is time for everything, it seems that there is no time for doing nothing. Apart from inactivity there is no moral judgement attached to these activities. The poet does not pronounce peace and love, good, or war and hate, bad. There is a time for each. Indeed the poem is followed by the remarkable suggestion that "everything is beautiful in its own time" (3:11) Every moment "contains something valid we must learn to discover" (Ellul 1990, 237). Following this counsel I am encouraged to welcome the task of the moment, whatever it may be. Only the actor can know its proper time. No one else can judge it but God. "In our action we must try to discover how to accomplish, in our time, what God wants beautiful in his time" (ibid 237).

But here is the disturbing conclusion we might draw from the poem. There are twenty eight activities arranged in fourteen contradictory pairs, suggestion that one action (a time for planting, for example) is cancelled by the next (a time to uproot what has been planted). Not only are our thoughts futile, but so are our actions, one cancelled by the next. Although there is no time provided for doing nothing, we are never satisfied by what we have accomplished. Unless I am to descend into hopeless despair I must see this as pointing towards what emerges

through the mist, the realisation that "in the end we are judged by who we have become, not by what we have accomplished" (Feiss 1999, 65).

Thirdly, my reflections on power have also brought me to a new way of thinking of individual action. Notions of power as an attribute or possession locate it in the individual. The word "individual" however has an interesting etymological history. Its origins lie in the opposite of its modern meaning. According to Selby (2002) it originally meant "a person undivided from the whole" (Selby 2002, 83). Its use to designate a single, separate person only arose in the 19th century. So recent articulations of a participatory paradigm don't have to reach too far back to find their antecedents. I act in a nexus of other actors, our participation with each other creating possibilities for transformation. "In this model, which emphasises relations rather than things, the center of attention is no longer "me," as a conscious, choosing, acting individual, but the in-between place where rhythm, eye, hand, tool, and emergent design somehow meet" (Reason 2001, 46). A relational understanding of power sets aside aspirations for control and welcomes emergence, where power resides "in-between" in the heart of our interactions with each other.

This leads me to my last thought on power and to the aspiration of a different posture of being/becoming. It takes me towards what I have learned is a core feature of presence in practice. Presence isn't the absence of conflict and tension but its embrace. Shaw & Stacey (2006) explore this through improvisational drama. Working with Mead's (1934) understanding of communication as gesture-response they suggest "you are *present* when you respond to a gesture spontaneously and are altered by your response … if your response to a gesture does not change you, you will recognise yourself as being less *present*" (Shaw & Stacey, 2006, 90 *italics* in original). This leads me to the conclusion that we are more fully present when we experience our participation as a disruption, in some way, to our way of being in the relationship.

I was too young when I first read *The Brothers Karamazov* and I failed to grasp its significance as a Christian apologetic. It was Inchausti (2005) who drew my attention back to its chief protagonist, Alyosha, who does not attempt to move beyond good and evil "but positions himself between them - on the cross" (Inchausti 2005, 57). Alyosha faces the contradictions of the real world "and takes into himself an ever greater share of the problematics of life" (ibid) and as he does so he is changed. As he leaves the church with Zossima's decomposing body inside he throws himself to the ground. "He fell to the earth a weak youth," Dosteyevsky tells us, "but he arose a resolute champion" (ibid 58). This transformation is represented in the language of developmental action-logics as the move from Strategist to Magician, "from being *in the right frame of mind to having a reframing mind …* A reframing mind continually overcomes itself, divesting itself of its own presuppositions .." (Torbert 1991, 62 *italics* in original). It is only possible, it seems to me, to embrace the polarities of a situation and be able to reframe it, if I am released from the assumptions I bring from the past (what was) and my own desires (what ought to be) to replace them with "mindful, even non-evaluative attention to what is - now" (Cooke-Greuter 2002, 33) - the true qualities of presence.

My journey towards integrity in practice has brought me to this threshold where I can see the hubris in myself and have glimpsed a different way of exercising power. It reminds me of Stradivarius, described in George Eliot's poem "God needs Antonio" (1868) as "that plain white-aproned man, who stood at work/Patient and accurate full fourscore years." When questioned about the rewards of his work he replies,

> "I like the gold - well, yes - but not for meals.
> And as my stomach, so my eye and hand,
> And inward sense that works along with both,
> Have hunger that can never feed on coin."

And as for fame:

"... when any master holds
'Twixt chin and hand a violin of mine,
He will be glad that Stradivari lived,
Made violins, and made them of the best.
The masters only know whose work is good:
They will choose mine, and while God gives them skill
I give them instruments to play upon,
God choosing me to help him. ...

'Tis God gives skill,
But not without men's hands: he could not make
Antonio Stradivari's violins
Without Antonio.

V Becoming Myself

There is a problem in reducing a narrative to anything other than itself and I will therefore resist the temptation to discuss, in any detail, the contribution to knowledge that has emerged through this inquiry. Some of these insights lie hidden in the narrative space that this account has provided, awaiting your participation as reader. Instead I will make a few observations. The narrative explores my scholarship of practice, a way of acting in an inquiring way in the world. I have learned to give attention to the unexpected, to notice the ways my body responds to situations, and to listen to my feelings. I have experienced the ways in which these reactions point to a more relational way of being, and have been pushed, at first reluctantly, to recognise the deeper epistemology of relationship. In belonging is my knowing. I have lived and worked in enabling systems and faced the reversal of fortune when the system closed down the space for innovation. By taking an attitude of inquiry to these situations my professional practice has changed - I might even say, it has been transformed. I make no claim to perfection but at each step my inquiry has been "good enough" to carry me

through, in the same sense that Winnicott (1988) in his work on the formation of the child observed that there are no perfect mothers, only "good enough mothers."

This journey has uncovered other pathways of inquiry that remain untrod, that I hope to explore beyond the pages of this thesis. It has awakened an interest in the spiritual disciplines of my tradition (silence, prayer, sacred reading, and fasting) and prompted questions about their contribution to ways of knowing and acting professionally. I am also curious about the possible connections between what Torbert (2004) and others call "developmental action logics", and ways of understanding spiritual development, what Fowler (1981) calls "stages of faith." Fowler's analysis draws on the work of Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson. I suspect that a practice-centred exploration of this territory could be fruitful. One of the disappointments of the inquiries described in this thesis has been the limited opportunity, in the circumstances, to engage in intentional second person inquiry (Reason and Torbert 2001). I look forward to developing these practices, particularly in communities of faith, where reflection on our vocation might lead to responsible action (for social justice or sustainable living, for example) in the world (Coghlan 2005).

Professionally this inquiry has opened my eyes to the power of story, and particularly the stories we tell ourselves and each other. Stories can help us become the authors of our own lives and I intend to take forward my inquiries in this area through personal and small group mentoring and coaching. I have also carried what I have learned in this inquiry into a new project with another university to widen access to university accreditation to practitioners in the Third Sector[32] using practice-centred inquiry approaches.

[32] The Third Sector is a general term describing social activity that is distinct from the public or the private sector. Various terms are preferred by practitioners in the sector including voluntary, charitable, social enterprise, non-governmental (NGO), civil society organisation, or community organisation. Third Sector organisations are involved in a wide variety of roles including social services, health, environment, recreation, religious and educational activities.

But perhaps the most important ongoing inquiry is personal, as I press towards the goal of becoming myself moment by moment in practice. There is ample evidence of self, in different guises, at work throughout this thesis. The ego self, managing my attempts to manage my responsibilities. The intellectual self, floating above the messiness of life, providing "answers" that didn't work in practice. Throughout this journey I have had a clear sense of agency. I have acted, reflected and acted again. But what gives me the confidence there is an "I" to act with integrity and presence? I have uncovered the hubris in my actions, and the myopia in many of my conclusions. I have practised releasement, letting go of assumptions and holding back from action; and I have been assertive, acting with intention in the world. I emerge from this inquiry, therefore, aware of the essential art of knowing when to persist and when to desist (Marshall 1999). But I also sense there is more to know about becoming myself.

Inquiries into the nature of soul and self have occupied the greatest minds and it is beyond the scope of this conclusion to explore this literature. However a brief assessment will lead me to where I need to go. The notion of a unified self, introduced in the seventeenth century in the work of Descartes and Locke as a substitute for "soul", didn't survive for long (Martin and Barresi 2006). In setting up self as the epistemological centre of the universe, the modernist project was built on a separation between self and non-self. The self "comes to be seen as a *subject*, a center of experience and action, set over against a world of objects that can be known and manipulated" (Guignon 2004, 32). The self was to be the source of unity and power. But it was unable to live up to this exalted role. Hopes of retaining a unified self faded fast. "The story of Western theorizing about the self and personal identity is not only, but centrally, the story of humankind's attempt to elevate itself above the rest of the natural world, and it is the story of how that attempt failed" (Martin and Barresi 2006, 305).

In a familiar image, the American pragmatist, William James suggested that we might think of the unity of the self like a herd of cattle (Martin and Barresi 2006, 226). Each animal belongs to its owner not because they are branded; they are

branded because they belong to the owner. The analogy suggested to James a way of unifying the different selves of our daily experience by positing the existence of a spiritual entity that owns each part. But who is the owner? James was forced to concede that the individual may have more than one personal self, and as an object, the personal self may be divided into the material self, the social self, etc. As the notion of a unified substantial self disappears the human quest then focuses on the choice of a central character to assume the defining role. "The seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation. All other selves thereupon become unreal" (James in Guignon 2004, 112). But who is choosing which self to place my bet on?

Perhaps, as Neitzsche suggested, it isn't necessary to pin my hopes on a single self. While recognising a multiplicity of subjects, he felt no urge to identify a unifying source. Rather, it is in the interaction of these subjects that our identities are formed, "making their entrances and exits as the context demands" (Guignon 2004, 112). So, as Markus and Nurius suggest, we may be a colony of Possible Selves, "all crowding to take possession of a Now Self" (in Bruner 1990, 100), or we may aspire to a "cosmopolitan self" (Giddens in Guignon 2004) that integrates different subjects into an urban self capable of functioning in a variety of contexts.

More recent perspectives on self have turned outwards to find the influences on self, suggesting the self as formed from the interaction of external forces, constructing our ways of encountering things and our own identities as persons. Gergen was one of the first to demonstrate how an individual's self-esteem and self-concept changed in reaction to their social environment (Bruner 1990). My wife and I became grandparents earlier this year, giving us fresh appreciation of the first days and weeks of new life. Before she develops self-awareness, our granddaughter has experienced others - her mother, father, other relatives and members of various social networks in which she now lives. She has experience being a part of "we" through which she is discovering herself, as the product of these social encounters and as fulfilment of the expectations of her social

environment. This can be a liberating or oppressive experience. Foucault, for example, points out the two meanings of the term *subject* - and emphasises the control and dependence that arises in social settings (Guignon 2005). Gergen on the other hand recognised the enormous human capacity for reflexivity and our "dazzling" ability to envision alternatives that enables the self to embrace or escape what the context has on offer (Bruner 1990). But this suggests, to me, a source of being that transcends the social and cultural context.

Rather than a centre-less self or a socially defined self, both of which undermine my sense of agency and responsibility, the notion of a dialogical self fits well with my emerging understanding of relational practice. The dialogical self has its roots in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose insight is summarised by Guignon: "we are at the deepest level *polyphonic* points of intersection with a social world rather than *monophonic* centers of self-talk and will" (Guignon 2004, 121). Yet, while this perspective offers support to a more relational way of understanding myself, like the social constructivist position, it is important to avoid the self becoming a mere placeholder in a web of social interactions (ibid). On its own, the dialogical self remains elusive.

The narrative self, on the other hand, presumes an author. "We are not just tellers of a story, nor are we something told. We are a telling" (Guignon 2004, 127). The narrative self recognises life as a project in self-making, receiving what is given as gift and reworking and refining it to craft a self that is my own. I welcome the introduction of sequence and time to the notion of self. Who I am is emerging through the experiences of time, integrating the new and the old, seeking harmony out of the discordant encounters of life. The different episodes of life, tragic or comic, only make sense in terms of their place in my larger life story and in the context in which it is lived. Crafting an authentic self from these raw materials requires, for Taylor (1989), awareness of what gives meaning and direction to my life - what provides "the frame or horizon within which I try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done" (1989, 27). But I must be realistic. I craft my life in social and cultural settings that contradict "what I

endorse or oppose" (ibid), and impose their own expectations on what is appropriate. I face systemic pressures to conform my story to their story. Where can I find the courage and freedom to be, or become, myself?

Something nags at the edges of my mind as I survey this terrain of the self. Each perspective provides suggestive insights in my search to understand and become myself. Yet each leave me with doubts. Perhaps the self cannot be known. Maybe I should be content with the moment by moment "self-states" of thoughts, memories, physical sensations, emotions and fantasies, like a child's kaleidoscope "in which each glance through the pinhole of a moment of time provides a unique view" (Davies in Cooper-White 2007, 55). Perhaps I should accept Martin and Barresi's (2006) conclusion that "the self stands naked and exposed, revealed for the first time for what it is; a misleading, albeit socially indispensable and incredibly useful fiction" (p303-304).

I have learned from each of these perspectives on self, but am left feeling unsatisfied, incomplete. It may only be a useful fiction but I have a sense that, although it lacks objective identity, the self is never without a centre, even if this is never settled and is in continuous production. I talk to my self, quite often. I tell my self what I need to do. Sometimes I talk to a part of my self. These statements may be just a literary device but how else can we access the conversations we have with ourselves? They may also point towards an important insight. Moore (1992), in his introduction to the soul, suggests that the first step in care of the soul is to become familiar with the ways in which it manifests itself, by observation. He notes that *serv* in the word "observance" refers back to the practice of tending sheep. When observing the soul we keep an eye on its sheep, watching where they wander. I notice in this image that the word sheep in the English language is both singular and plural. Is self, or soul, one or many?

I recognise my self as a conundrum of hopes and hurts, fears and dreams that are unsettled and under constant negotiation. I get through the day because "we" have arrived at some kind of settlement. I am not sure, at this point, whether this is

an active or passive process, whether it is an active choice or whether we find it happening to us, but it involves some kind of ordering of self. Who, or what, then is involved in gathering the self? I am aware that it might be my executive self - my ego, doing its best for me. It may often be my mental self - thinking for the whole and trying to impose its solutions on my action. The process might involve the censoring or denial of some sheep and the privileging of others. The gathered self is always provisional. Life experiences assault and scatter the fragile arrangement, like frightened sheep, sometimes with little consequence, but at others, with huge effect. The disruptions of my life, such as those presented in this thesis, don't just raise questions about my assumptions and intentions. They question who I am in the situation, calling for a new settlement of my self. Is this the destiny of the soul? To be under constant negotiation as reality bombards its territory from day to day?

I have described this inquiry as a religious quest and have framed it with the legend of Brendan's voyage. This ancient tale may seem naive and quaint to modern ears and hardly a suitable way of framing an inquiry into professional practice. This yarn is no match for a comprehensive literature review or a carefully argued research methodology. Yet, as Severin (1978) reflected on his recreation of the voyage, the risks and rewards of the journey not only inspired the early travellers but also those who retraced it in the 20th century. "Time and again we found ourselves deeply impressed, and sometimes awed, by what we encountered at sea … the reality was far greater than the expectations, and stirred us even with our twentieth-century attitudes" (ibid 235).

There is a feature of Brendan's story that I have not highlighted until now. It is what Green (2005) describes as "the tensive relatedness between prosaic and sacral time/space" (2005, 122). There is a natural rhythm in the story between the two, as if the whole journey is lived in this liminal space, "linking the actual experiential reality to the great rhythms of liturgical celebration" (ibid). The journey is "not so much to an actual geographical place as to an integrative center" (ibid 121). The story seems designed to show how "the journey toward or into God is coterminous with the process of humanization" (ibid 120).

While writing this final meditation I pulled a dusty copy of Kierkegaard's book *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (1948) from my bookshelf. As on other occasions throughout this thesis, this may be serendipitous, but my reflection has been arrested by his strident critique of anything that might offer easy solutions to the question of identity. He has no admiration for someone who can swim in shallow water where, if tired or frightened, they can touch the bottom. We have an eternal responsibility to become an individual, he says (1948, 198). We find ourselves, he argues, by choosing ourselves in the light of eternity. He is ruthless in his demolition of all finite settlements. But, as Taylor comments on Kierkegaard's imperative, as we "choose ourselves" by renouncing all finite things, "we receive them all back … no longer as determinants of our final end, but as relative to our life project" (Taylor 1989, 450). In his discussion of Kierkegaard, Carnell (1965) adds that the person who already *is* must *become*, and we become an individual by mediating eternity in time. Outwardly nothing may appear to have changed but this inner transformation redirects our lives. "In choosing myself, I become what I really am, a self with an infinite dimension. We choose our real selves; we become for the first time true selves" (Taylor 1989, 450).

Kierkegaard's notion of becoming an individual involves radical choices to renounce the distractions that offer temporary settlements of the self. Paul expresses this in terms of de-centring and re-centring the self on God (Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:9-10). The verbs in these texts are in the imperative. This is a choice, as Kierkegaard says. We choose to become our true selves by setting aside the old self and its ways of being, and re-centring ourselves on eternity. This new centre opens the self up, "making it capable and willing to give itself for others and to receive others in itself" (Volf 1996, 71). But what might this imply?

To answer this question I needed to explore a different way of thinking about time. After listing the ways in which human action contradicts itself in time, the writer of Ecclesiastes observes that God gives to humans "a desire for eternity" (Eccl 3:11). Eternity is not a metaphysical idea. For the Jewish writer eternity was an historical reality. What is at stake is a different view of time. Eternity is seen, not as time of

endless duration, but time in which each moment is pregnant with the promise of the future - to be fully alive. Purser and Petranker (2005) capture this in their description of organisational change that is based on "unfreezing the future" - a concept that reverses Kurt Lewin's model of planned change. For Lewin, and the dominant culture of organisational change, the mindset is governed by the notion that since the present is conditioned by the past and the future is unknown, change will only come by unfreezing the past to create an alternative future. Purser and Petranker however explore a way of experiencing time that embraces what Petranker calls a "dynamic future" that, although it is without content, "offers the whole of what is and has been and could be" (Petranker 2005, 250).

To play with the analogy of a stream, it all depends on which direction I am standing in the flow. Is the source behind me or ahead? Facing downstream the present flows from behind me with all the drift and debris of the past. I am locked into what Purser and Petranker call "conditioned time" (2005, 197). I am trapped by the contradiction between what is and what might have been. The mindset is of incremental change, focused on solving problems and maintaining narrative identity. Action is based on sense making and rational planning. The only resource available lies in what I have inherited from the past.

Facing upstream, on the other hand, time flows towards me, untouched by human action, unknown to human knowing. This orientation places me in "unconditioned time" that has "neither a cause nor an effect and is thus not subject to the limits inherent in conditioned time" (Purser & Petranker 2005, 194). This is to make the future the source of knowledge, letting go of the stories that constitute the past and finding them freshly available but metamorphosed "from subjective conditioning to dynamic availability" (Petranker 2005, 251). To extend the analogy slightly, the wake, left behind as I move through the water, can never drive the boat. Instead, I listen to the wind and the wind tells me what to do. As the future flows towards me I am no longer who I have been. I am on my way to becoming what I will be. In this moment, as a "choosing individual" (Kierkegaard) I stand looking upstream, my attention focused on what is emerging. My posture, leaning

forwards into the stream as it approaches, as one might when walking into a strong head wind. The desire for eternity resulting in intentional action in the world.

I note a further consequence of facing upstream. My action needs no longer to be determined by a temporary truce between my many selves. Facing upstream I witness what, in the traditional language of my Christian background, is called "salvation." What was scattered is made whole, what was torn apart is reconciled. As I experience the incoming presence of God I find myself overcome with a sense of being accepted and loved, a sentiment captured by Bennett: "At the very point of failing at our own self-invented fantasies of success, power and control, we find a small opening into the Greater Life - the narrow entrance through which we pass into the spaciousness of Love" (Bennett in Cooper-White 2007, 63). It is Love that softens the hard edges of egoic thought and action. It is Love that holds my divided self together and weaves it into something beautiful.

This vision of spacious Love, what Olthuis called "the wild spaces of love" (1997, 247), reminds me of the image of Trinity, suggested by Cooper-White (2007) and quoted earlier in the thesis. "It is like a waterfall, full of light, color, and dancing shapes, that provide continual refreshment, a long cool drink for parched feelings and hardened thinking, cleansing for the perceived wounds and stains, cooling for fevered human hubris…" (Cooper-White 2007, 82). Early on my journey with Brendan we came to a waterfall of crystal pure water. We had drifted at sea for weeks and our supplies of water had run dry, yet the water from the island poured over precipitous cliffs that we couldn't approach for fear of our lives. I was thirsty, frustrated and afraid. Nick, as he moved into that place of the story in the supervision session, imagined it happening in silence, the water plunging into the sea like a sheer shaft of sunlight. "What happens when you enter the sea?" we asked. "I go into the deepest currents of the ocean," was the reply. "Does anything live in you?" "There are no creatures living in me," came the response, "but I have tremendous life giving properties for the plants that live at the side of the stream."

Then who am I becoming? The answer is, in part, my story, a tale of thought and action. But this is not the only story that can be told. It is not the story others, whose paths crossed mine, would tell. The story is not me, yet its details offer a likeness or a metaphor of myself. As you have taken this journey with me, I hope you have glimpsed, sometimes hidden by "the ego self that wants to inflate," or "the intellectual self that wants to hover above the mess of life in clear ungrounded ideas" (Palmer 2000, 69) the self that is emerging from its faltering attempts to respond to the love that holds me together and inspires me to act in unconditioned time.

The decision to offer myself through narrative has been intentional. The moment we try to explain who someone is we get entangled in abstract qualities and character traits that describe the person. When my contract ended in the summer of 2009 I was encouraged to upload my profile on the professional networking site, LinkedIn. I opened an account and filled in the details of my career. A couple of weeks later a good friend challenged me to copy the style others have adopted of using an appreciative language of themselves to beef up their profile. "Just add a few adjectives to the description of your skills," he advised. I pondered the nature of adjectives, attaching themselves as they do, to nouns. The noun "chap" is pretty neutral (perhaps implying some degree of familiarity or warmth) but when the word "wonderful" is added, as my friend did in his email, it changes character immediately. But is my true self just an adjective? My LinkedIn profile languishes online, for lack of self-promoting adjectives.

Although this thesis has emerged in autobiographical form I have been in pursuit of something quite different from a CV. What has developed through the writing has been an awareness of myself, visible indirectly through my encounters with the world. Although the story is quite personal I hope I have avoided the dangers of self-indulgence. I offer this story not because I find myself interesting. Instead my interest is a vocational interest, recognising that: "It is the vocationally-oriented autobiographies, those that point away from a direct, inward perception of the self

to what drives the self, drives it concretely in the world, which are the most revealing of the self" (TeSelle 1975, 165).

Furthermore, in exploring who I am becoming through my encounters with the world I have no intention of encouraging others to follow me, but I hope that my journey might contribute to a conversation that explores what is inevitably difficult to perceive and articulate yet is deeply desired - a quality of integrity and presence that transforms practice. This has also been, for me, a religious quest. In unexpected ways my encounters have pointed me back to my own faith tradition where I have discovered resources that have helped me make sense and find direction in the complex ambiguity of professional life. This has involved theological work, not of the kind frequently practised in the church, from the neck up, but embedded and embodied in quotidian life. If, then, this thesis might add a further line to my CV, I would like to borrow it from TeSelle (1975). Alluding to the Apostle Paul she writes of "the mystery that only the autobiographical theologian deals with. We see into such a glass darkly and know little of ourselves, but some day we shall know who we are even as we are now known" (ibid 176).

beyond the mist
we face each other
strangers before
we meet in the middle
place of love

no longer chasing wind
with furrowed brow and
fevered pace,
receiving each new given
as a gift

yet not smugly settled,
an attitude of inquiry
persisting and desisting
continues in tensive
harmony

awakened to
the hidden senses of
sensation, I turn
upstream to enter
unconditioned time

in spite of heartless
system, self finds its
voice, the story moving
forward to where
God rests

and knows my name.