CHAPTER 10
On Reaching an End

> "And when we have delivered ourselves of all we have to say, we go back to being
> again, in our field as before but not as before. Once more around the spiral"
> (Rowan, 2001: 118)

It seems inappropriate to name this chapter 'conclusions': the sort of reflexive inquiring
process that I have been engaged in is not one that yields 'research conclusions' in the
normal way, and although I am drawing this writing to a close, the process will continue
in some other form, echoing Marshall's (1999) stance of "living life as inquiry". But this
is an ending of sorts, and so a place for looking back on the process, and pulling some
threads together. Ending in this case is a point of decision, to choose to end, a feeling that
I need to complete my story if what I am writing about is not to become so extended over
time that it looses timeliness and relevance as personal process. It has already spanned six
years of my life – long enough for my children to have grown to the point of separation
away from the family of their birth, an idea almost inconceivable for me at the time when
I started this work. It is time to move on.

So I would like here to return to the questions of research validity I raised in Chapter 2,
and offer some thoughts about the method of inquiry I have been engaged in.

Reason and Marshall (1994) suggest that all worthwhile research speaks to three
audiences – 'me', 'us' and 'them': it makes a difference to the researcher's 'being in the
world', it says something in terms of practical relevance to a community struggling with
similar issues, and it produces some kind of generalisable ideas usable by third parties.
These audiences weave into the suggestions I made in Chapter 2 about possible 'situated
validities' (Lather, 1997) that might be relevant for this work. These suggested some

questions that might form the basis for a consideration of its validity: have I shifted my *being* through this work, moving out of the lived contradiction in which I began? Clearly this is the 'me' dimension. Have I been able to offer 'subversive stories', connecting my first person experience with its political context and thereby developing an alternative discourse to the mainstream/malestream? This is the dimension that speaks to 'us': others who 'advocate feminism' from the perspective of an engaged and situated knowing. Am I making any contribution to the feminist political project, working towards practices and ways of being which would support mother-consciousness? This is the most generalisable of the validities I am suggesting, speaking to at least some 'thems'. And finally, what are the action-outcomes of this work, am I *doing* differently?

Such a list of questions may be problematic (I could answer "yes", "no" and "maybe" to all of them), since these dimensions seem to me to be more processes than destinations, more themes to be engaged with than lines to cross. Perhaps this relates to Lather's assertion that situated validities try and move away from 'policing', resting instead on an 'incitement to discourse', a place for conversation, knowing that validity in times of epistemological uncertainty is always problematic, deferred, unresolvable. So, let me engage with these themes.

Subversive Stories

I have made a choice, in undertaking this work in this way, to try and put my first-person, experiential voice at the centre of my process, and therefore of my writing, and at the same time to move between that voice and the macro-political context within which I find myself. I have deliberately chosen to articulate a 'minority' position – one drawing on feminisms – and to engage that with a mainstream, well-established story about the business of business in a late modern/postmodern world. This inquiry process has been a space in which I have kept my critical feminist voice alive. It has represented a sort of inner-arcing conversation, which has enabled me to rehearse, articulate and give shape to thoughts which I would have little other location for. It has enriched the perspective from which I view what I am doing, strengthening the multiplicity of places from which I view the world. Since I am always, every day in touch with the hegemonic, masculinist explanation of business, reflected pervasively as a 'regime of truth' in all that I do, this

requires some effort, as I have explored in these accounts, but effort I consider worthwhile.

But choosing to write in this way is not just in order to hold the space for me. Since I am making my writing accessible to you, reader, and submitting it as a piece of academic work within a doctoral programme in a university management school, I am also holding the possibility that this piece of discourse, shaped in this way, can add to the body of work which articulates situated voices from the margin whilst at the same time having something to say about mainstream subjects. As I said in Chapter 1, this is a personal process, but situated within the feminist claim for the relevance of personal experience in highlighting and tracing the workings of power systems. It is, then, also a self-conscious piece of discourse-making, a pebble I am throwing into the propositional pond of academia with the hope of making some ripples.

I enjoy exploring ideas, and they are the tools of my profession – I am engaged in disseminating, and creating, propositional knowledge, and in working with others as, though their roles as students, they develop ideas and practice. And words make worlds. Like others advocating feminism (Lather, 1991, 1997, Ferguson 1984, Treleaven 2001) I am acutely aware of the territory of discourse-building as a site in which realities are co-created, and where resistance can be engaged, where difference might be shown. I know that the way I have chosen to do this inquiry places it outside 'normal' qualitative social research, but I would not choose to do it in any other way. For personal and political reason this is a difference I wish to hold.

In working with stories, I accept that what I have written has a partial and contexted kind of validity. Whilst knowing these stories address serious issues, concerning gender, power, politics, sustainability, and pardigm-shifts, I am also struck by the entirely *contingent* nature of this account: it has happened to have emerged in this form, containing these particular stories – but I could have chosen others, I might have developed alternative explanations for them, I could have picked different authors to draw on. What has been for me an absorbing and engaging first person process is not about *truth*, but offers *a* reality, constructed for now from this place, with a view to articulating a particular 'view from the margins'.

And working in this way has helped me to engage with another sort of contingency, and perhaps another sort of subversiveness, that of the moment-by-moment process of 'reality-construction', the constant and subtle dance between intention/head and action/located body, the processes by which the multiple possibilities of all moments become crystallised into a particular shape by the micro-processes of mundane and sometimes/usually unthinking interactions. Bohm's (1980) systems view of implicate and explicate order is evocative here. I find this both terrifying and energising. It reminds me of the importance of keeping attention in the here and now, and the impossibility of doing so. It reminds me of the constant possibility of difference and otherness in the moment, and the chasm between that possibility and how we, humans, normally live our everyday lives. (And I recognise that I, too, have to be 'normal' at times!)

The 'feminist project'

One of the threads that has run through this work is the bumpy conceptual territory encountered by the confluence of ideas of feminisms and ideas of postmodernism. I have drawn on postmodernist thinking to suggest that, whilst the political project associated with feminism is not to be abandoned – since 'social injustice' and 'oppression' still seem relevant descriptors of aspects of our current reality – its pursuance is likely to involve something other than the sort of intentional politics of modernism based on a feminist authenticity. Holding such commitment and living lightly (Marshall, 1999) with it has emerged as one of the tracks of this inquiry. And I have noticed my committed self, whilst loosening up her expectations somewhat, is still standing at the end of this inquiry.

One of the results of having developed for myself, as *constructed* rather than *received* knowledge (Belenky et. al. 1986), the conceptual stories that constitute this inquiry is that I can now see feminisms reflected within corporate social responsibility, the area in which much of my practice takes place. It took me a considerable period – almost two years – to come to some point where I felt I knew what this inquiry is *about*, where I was able, conceptually, to join up my various preoccupations with feminist perspectives on epistemology and research, feminist perspectives on organisations, management and management education, and the responsibilities of business in a world of globalised markets. Once I began to re-frame these issues as interconnected faces of father-consciousness, and my transformational intent as involving a movement towards a successor mother-consciousness, the inquiry began to take new shape. I could then begin to tell myself a different story about why someone 'advocating feminism' might be involved with business education, and to locate my inquiring attention to the small interactions of (my) concrete experience as located within that intent. I began, I think, to *own* the space I was in, rather than to try and rationalise it away, trying to lay to rest the ghost that haunted me at the outset, full of the 'oughts' and 'shoulds' of the feminist critical voice, of having compromised on my principles. I have experienced this as a process of becoming more free, through being disengaged from a commitment to particular outcomes, and hence more able to participate in the here and the now.

I now see that I can work from here to elaborate this connection – and am beginning to do so. In 2000 I ran a workshop at Warwick University's annual Corporate Citizenship

conference on Gender, Values and Leadership, and have subsequently submitted an article to the Journal of Corporate Citizenship entitled "Thoughts on Gender, Power and Poststructuralism in Corporate Citizenship", which at the time of writing is with the reviewers. I have taught sessions as part of our MSc programme on gender and power, and our organisation is now running a research project for the UK Department for International Development on Gender and Codes of Conduct, which I am supervising. These are tentative steps into engagement with third-person interventions (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, Reason and Torbert, 2001), consisting for the moment of me putting some ideas 'out there' to a wider community, while knowing the limitations of these sorts of within-frame actions. But this inquiry has offered me a number of ways in which I might think about such forays in terms of 'change strategies': as testing the system to discover some of its properties (Meyerson and Scully, 1995); as beginning to build a 'field' (Wheatley, 1991); as a disruptive discursive moves (Lather, 1991); as points of resistance to the 'manstory' of business, even socially responsible business. As Ferguson says:

> "the act of changing the way we think about the world is a way of changing the world, since it is a world partly constituted by people's beliefs about it, and about themselves" (1984: 196)

I have also explored at some length, in Chapter 8, the ways in which I see my current educational work with the MSc programme as a (tentative, experimental) education for mother consciousness, and hence, in my terms, contributing towards a re-framed feminist project. I work at this with the close collaboration of my colleagues at the university, and feel sure that the quality of that relationship has enabled us to create something together we would not have been able to do alone.

I still find it easier to say what such an education should *not* be, rather than what it should be (it should *not* be banking education (Friere, 1972), it should *not* involve a pedagogical double-bind (see Chapter 5), it should *not* enact masculinist disembodied knowledge, it should *not* presume to foretell the future, it should *not* pretend to know the answers to questions, it should *not* seek conformity of expression, knowing, practice). But I now sit a

bit easier with the paradox of not being able to know what is needed, whilst still making space in which to act, to create something processual which may help with the generation of that knowing. Being at the edge of not knowing what to do here seems, to me, to be a good thing. And, at the same time, engaging in the here-and-now with explicit issues of gender in that programme is still a challenging edge at which to work for all concerned (see discussion in Getting Feedback, in Chapter 8).

Different Behaviour

In the Introduction, I said that my work during the period of this inquiry involved "setting something up from nothing, taking an outline idea and – with others – bringing it about". So, although this account has included and alluded to a good deal of reflection and theorising, it is also underpinned by, and taken out into, a lot of activity – I have been very busy in the 'outside world'. I now run a small business education organisation concerned with corporate social responsibility, and spend my working days in contact with academics, students/course participants, managers from the business sector, activists working with NGOs, campaigners, consultants, programme officers working for multilateral agencies, civil servants and others. I spend a lot of my time communicating, in one form or another.

In some way, as I said in Chapter 8, my practice – particularly my educational practice, what I do in relationship with learners - has not changed very much in the course of this work, but the meaning I attach to it, and the meaning-context in which it takes place, have changed a lot. I think it is evident, from these accounts, that the educational work is in some ways easier to locate in the sort of relational, multiple, open universe I am envisaging, than the organisational-building work. The organisational work I have been exploring brings me right into questions of agency, leadership, authority – in fact, right into the territory of gender and management, where I have struggled to reconcile my propositional knowledge and my behaviour. As Chapter 9 indicates, I have reached a place where these issues seems to me to be lived with and played with, rather than resolved. Using the 'metacommunicative resource' (Gherardi, 1995) of irony, doubting the 'final vocabularies' (Rorty 1989) I nevertheless use, promises to be a continuing point of tension and learning. I still don't know how to do this, and doubt that I every will.

There is another emergent area of engagement for me which is of relevance here. A small group of people who have taken the MSc degree are now experimenting with how to work with our organisation as 'associates' (see Chapter 9). Having tasted some of the issues of liberating structures and paradox through the course, they are increasingly forming a community which holds me – and my colleagues – to some sort of accountability for our actions, asking us to notice when our espoused theories and actions are at odds with each other. They are – thankfully – 'friends willing to act as enemies' (Reason and Marshall, 1987), in the pursuance of collective learning and progress towards a collaborative and appropriately values-based organisational form. I see this also as an activity of creating mother-consciousness. I enjoy the fact that some process that I and my colleagues at Bath have set in motion is looping back in this reinforcing way, helping strengthen itself. This is not always an easy process (my life might be easier *without* being held to account); our collective pushing at the organisational boundaries is sometimes wearisome. But it does, to me, seem important, part of helping each other not fall into unaware conformity. In Chapter 8 I referred to the MSc programme as being a "stake in the ground, to which I must return, reminding me of the nature of the task", and in a sense the associates enact that process, asking me/us to *do* what we profess.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) suggest that looking for some sort of 'enduring consequences' of inquiry is an indication of its validity. I could cite some of these developments – the MSc course, the organisation and the work it is doing in the field of education for corporate social responsibility – as suggestive of such longevity. But at the same time I do not feel I can say whether these things would have happened, in much this way, without my inquiry – I cannot asses the significance of my particular lived presence in the midst of all this. I can only say, having moved through an inquiry process I continue to be busy, active in my field, as Rowan (2001) says: "as before but not as before".

Being

Above all, for me the worthwhile part of this inquiry has been at the *being*-level, in the lifeworld on which all this activity rests. I began this process in a state of distress, feeling trapped and personally and professionally disempowered. Through inquiring into my self-management of the contradiction between my work and the values I thought I held, I was able to let go of the self-imposed strictures that kept me where I was. I then explored how I might enact my principles towards more feminist ways of working in cycles of inquiry into my educational work and organisation-building work. Holding the macro-context story of what I was doing whilst I conducted the first-person work gave me a sense of scale and significance in what I was doing, tying together theory and practice, which helped me to both dwell in the detail and not forget (too often) it was just a detail. I have learned that working towards mother-consciousness involves paradox, ironical forms of intervention that sometimes I seem to manage and sometimes I don't. But whether I 'succeed' or not to act with sensitivity in multiple dimensions, I *feel* quite different from how I did. I feel stronger. I feel more free. To use Griffiths' (1995) phrase, I feel more as if I act at my own behest.

I have in the course of this inquiry left a tenured academic job and launched myself into the uncertain world of helping grow a new organisation. I have gone from a job in which, although doing it quite well, I felt lost, to one which I am often inventing what to do, and feel is a space to which I am bringing an important part of 'myself'. I have a story, no doubt a temporary one, which works for me, about what I am doing and why. And the process of articulating that story, here, has enabled me to carry more voice outside the first-person place. In this inquiry, wonderfully supported by CARPP, I have given myself permission to express things that previously ran around inside my head as 'private knowing'. I have put them out here as both personal process and political act. Although, for the reasons I have already given, I would like you, reader, to have some understanding of this account, and perhaps to bring it into play with some parts of your own experience, there is another level at which this first-person process has had enough engagement for me to mean that it alone is what matters here. Foucault talks about

"creating the self as a work of art" (McNay, 1992), and in a sense that is what I have been doing, acknowledging that such a process is a continuous, life-long engagement.

Feminist First-Person Reflexive Inquiry?

I have very much enjoyed working with the method I have used during this work. I believe it has enabled me to access the territory I wanted to.

I stated my intention at the start of this work to use an approach that drew on both feminist and action research groundings. This meant drawing on a feminist epistemology, in which "distinctive and fundamental" aspects are a privileging of women's subjective experience, and a commitment to political change (Kemp and Squires, 1997). I also located this work within what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) have called the 'seventh moment' in social research, where the purpose of the exercise is to "move towards social justice", and linked this to the generative intent of action research and its concern to contribute to "human flourishing" (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). This has involved a two-way movement, therefore, between outward-directed attention to the political, social, gendered context in which I my research/practice is set, and inward-directed reflexive attention to "the ground on which one is standing" (Reason, 1994). In order to do this, I have told two sorts of stories: 'propositional stories' concerned with ideas and theories about the political context, and personal/reflexive stories about my experience and my attempts to act with purpose in the light of both my values and my knowing. I have sought an alive engagement between these two territories, using the action/reflection cycles of first person inquiry do so. I have revisited two areas of my practice – my work in helping create a new organisation, and my educational work – in two main cycles over the period of this work, punctuated by sub-cycles of inquiry.

The cycling process - paying attention to my experience, writing a story about it, reading it, reflecting on it, then taking my thoughts back into my practice - has enabled me to notice patterns, to hear my own sense-making processes, to attempt to disrupt and change some of the ways in which I seemed to be working against my own intentions. The story-construction has been part of the inquiry, not just a communication about it. As I have worked, I have become increasingly aware of the problematic dynamic between setting out to achieve an intention and thereby imposing framings and assumptions on a situation which are at odds with that intention. I have therefore come to question the whole nature of intentional action for change, and wholeheartedly acknowledge that for someone who carries a feminist critique of the world, with all the exhortations that carries with it, this raises dilemmas. I can only say that, as a result of this inquiry, I hold in my person the dual imperatives of the need for continued action towards a different sort of future – one based on what I have named here mother-consciousness – and the need for constant and widespread awareness of the problems associated with intentional action based on purposive assumptions. I concur with Lather when she says that, in the face of rampant reflexivity, "just getting on with it may be the most radical action one can make" (1991), and at the same time, the rampant reflexivity seems to me a crucial, indispensable part of living ourselves into a better future.