CHAPTER 9

Building a New Organisation: Part Two

Organisation-Construction and Self-Construction

> "Creating viable and self-congruent identity and finding ways to exercise power are significant challenges for many women" (Marshall, 1995: 25)

I will start this chapter with a reflection on the journey that I have been engaged in over the period of writing this account. As the stories from Chapter 4 onwards have indicated, I have moved from working within a university with an MBA programme and experiencing myself as caught in lived contradiction, to currently being the director of an 'alternative business school' - a small, not-for-profit educational organisation, engaged in a range of educational and research activities on the social and environmental responsibilities of business in the higher education sector, with companies and with multi-lateral organisations both inside the UK and outside it. I no longer feel the overwhelming sense of voicelessness and disjuncture that I expressed at the outset of this inquiry, and on the other hand I still feel as if I am engaged in a constant dance to create and maintain multiple engagements and purposes. I can attest to a much stronger sense than I did have of working with my purposes, in Torbert's sense, but with many continuing dilemmas about how I help create something tangible in organisational and substantive form, whilst maintaining the lightness of touch and openness to multiple truths which has emerged as part of the sort of feminism to which I have said I aspire through this inquiry. In Chapter 6, where I first set out a story about building this new organisation, I used the term 'paradoxical leadership' to indicate what I seemed to be evoking. In this chapter, having moved through subsequent cycles of action and reflection, paying attention to the construction of my own stories, I am re-visiting this idea, and its connection to the notion of 'education for mother consciousness'.

In writing here, I am working with material that is in process to a greater extent than in previous chapters – the ground is moving beneath my feet as I articulate it, and I am not able to get the sense of re-worked cycles which have characterised the earlier stories of practice. But I do want to evoke something of both the challenges and excitements of where I now am, and in so doing, I hope, demonstrate that the work represented by the earlier chapters is part of my present lived experience of self-reflexive inquiry practice. I am presenting here several areas which represent for me, at the moment, key questions or 'puzzles' (Marshall, 1999), around which my energy is taken. They all contain elements of contradiction, and are interrelated – so separating them out in this way is for purposes of explanation rather than a representation of how I experience them. I could have told other stories, more task-oriented and practical ones – and there is much missing here, in terms of explanation. But I am offering here my inquiry-stories. I have divided them into three themes, each to be explored below: questions of commitment and detachment; questions of doing-leadership and being-leadership, and letting go of fear. Where it seemed relevant, I have offered some text on 'encounters' within these sections, as illustration.

First, some brief context-setting narrative:

Early in 1999, J told me he had decided to leave the project. He felt that he had fulfilled his obligation to our founder to get the organisation set up and established, but that it did not enable him to carry out the work he really wanted to be doing, which was organisational consultancy work. So he had decided to set up his own business. He would like, he said, to recommend to our Trustees that I be appointed to succeed him as director. He would be asking the Chair to call an extraordinary meeting to discuss this and decide how they wanted to proceed. He asked me if I wanted this job, and without hesitation I said that I did. I was not surprised that he had decided to move on, and I was also coming close to the point of looking for another job myself, because for me our lack of team-functioning and lack of congruence between our espoused values and actual operations made this a surprisingly joyless organisation. A few weeks later I was interviewed by the Trustees for the post, and subsequently offered the job as director, which I accepted.

My thinking at this point was that I now had an opportunity to try and enact some of the principles I had been struggling to realise whilst working with J. I had continued to feel strongly engaged with the potential purposes of this organisation, even though these were not well articulated by us as a team. I now had to ask myself the question: now you have the positional power to move the project in a new direction – so what are you going to do? And what does it mean to be moving from a position of at least partial marginalisation, critiquing from the sideline as it were, to sitting in the centre of this venture? What challenges does that offer to holding alternative voice and space?

A first point of inquiry: Commitment and Detachment

I have felt a strong commitment to this project ever since I began to work for it, nearly six years ago. At a simple, purposive level, I believe that the world of business education needs what this project was created to provide – an alternative voice, which may spur responses from mainstream organisations. Here speaks my 'certain' voice, which has run as a constant thread through this inquiry. I also believe that I have something relevant to bring to this process: in many ways I have thought over the last few years that this is the only work I can be doing – it seems to bring together, for me, many parts of my professional experience and personal values, and it makes sense of some of the other things that I have done which felt less worthwhile. However, this does not mean that I know how to do the job I am currently doing.

At one level the task is, of course, un-doable: it requires a 'liberating structure' (Torbert, 1991). Much of this inquiry has been concerned with elaborating a critique of business and business education, from perspectives that draw on feminisms. I have expressed a belief that another kind of principle –which I am calling mother consciousness – has been historically and culturally neglected, and may offer a route to a better future (Reason and Torbert's 'sane human existence'; others call it a 'sustainable world'.) I have only the haziest notion of what this kind of consciousness might be – although, as explored in the previous chapter, I have some ideas as to the form of education that might help it develop. But I have also explored the idea that bringing such a phenomenon about is a question not just of propositional knowing, but of living, speaking, being, differently. Despite having little concrete vision of the end-point, I believe that how I, personally, go about this endeavour, my practical actions, do matter.

Macy (1991) talks about "active waiting" – knowing there is no obvious solution to the planetary crisis, not losing touch with that awareness and the feelings of despair it

evokes, and meanwhile acting. She evokes the image of walking on a narrow mountain ridge path surrounded by fog: you can see the path immediately ahead, but not where it goes, and you are frightened by awareness of the slopes to either side, but you walk forward, in the belief that those steps bring you closer to where you want to go. She quotes one of her friends, and anti-nuclear campaigner:"Possibilities, you can't predict, just make space for them. There are so many" (1991: 28). (I have, in 'real life' been in such a situation, lost on top of a mountain in the Lake District in thick fog. My experience was that the fear part was a strong motivator, the realisation that staying still will not get you out of the fix you are in, that there really isn't much alternative but to find a way to put one foot in front of the other.)

So, I have *value*-commitment. Meanwhile, of course, I, and my colleagues, must do things towards fulfilling our organisational purpose, and many of the 'business issues' I touched on in the 'Rational Argument' in Chapter 6 are still part of my day-to-day concerns. I have tried to work with the notion of us as an organisation experimenting in order to test properties of the system around us. I will expand on what I mean by that in practice below. But I also need tenacity, *practical*-commitment, towards helping create this organisation.

And, alongside my commitment, I have a sense of detachment from this project: this has two elements. The first is that what we are trying to do, the work, is - in my view – more important than the project itself. I do not have the sort of commitment that suggests to me I should struggle to keep this organisation alive come what may. Unless we have some sense that it is doing worthwhile activities in relation to the overall direction in which we want to head (along the ridge-path, as it were) I would not consider this worth doing. Part of this sense comes from an unease that the form the organisation currently has– a small, conventional charitable company-limited-by-guarantee, with a board of Trustees answerable to the Charity Commission – is the most appropriate for what we are trying to do. We have an office, computers, filing cabinets, shelves of books and papers. We have a hierarchical management structure: I am paid more than my colleagues. We have office overheads, payroll costs, invoicing systems, VAT returns, accountants, cash-flow issues. In many ways, my work is like running a small business. It would be easy to spend a lot of my time and energy – and not just mine, my colleagues as well – on this organisational machine. But does it help us go where we need to go? There is nothing ironic, or frame-changing, in this aspect of our activity. It sits with me as a constant active wondering. I vividly remember the questions I asked J about the office a couple of years ago:

"I ask him, what purpose does having our office serve? What is it there for? Might it not just trap us into reproducing "office" relationships, which we don't need and which don't energise us? Suddenly the tone of the conversation lifts. He is getting quite animated now, and together we are

thinking aloud about what other way we might operate – from our

homes, as a virtual organisation, meeting two or three weekly for

exchanges of ideas, finding an meeting place to create different sorts of

experiences, just not doing most of the routine admin work". (Chapter 6:

Lunch with J)

(I realise, as I write this, that no one is currently asking me these kind of questions now: perhaps that is one of the problems about being at the top of a nominal hierarchy, even a very small one. My immediate reaction is that I need to do something about this – to 'fix it')

I am also taking into my work a growing awareness, developed in the course of this inquiry, about the importance of inner work (Fox, 1995): I have listened and reflected, over the last couple of years, largely through working on the MSc programme, and with the students on the course, that I cannot carry out 'good' work in the world without paying attention to my internal voices, processes, sustenance, purposes. I do not have a well-developed sense of the spiritual (having been raised in an atheist household, I only set foot in a church to go to school carol-services and occasional weddings): I have had little by way of ritual or contemplation in my life until I became a systematic inquirer. As I have begun to pay attention to my "inner" as well as "outer" arcs of attention (Marshall, 1999), I have engaged these inner events with the ideas and practices of a developing community involved in some way in the MSc (former and current students, speakers, visitors), and my sense of the importance of taking care of this aspect of my life-work has developed. My starting point in this inquiry in many ways set the path for this, because it involved acknowledging a conflict between my inner 'self' (values, purposes) and self I was 'doing'. Feminist theorising on epistemology helped me provide some validation for this, and as I have proceeded, I have found this echoed in many different ways: in the "upstream" practices of action inquiry (Reason and Torbert, 2001), in the private/public dichotomies highlighted by some feminist thinking about work, in the overtly spiritual messages about Gaia and the participatory vision of the world, in the political messages about modernity trapping us all in our heads, disassociating us humans from our bodies, our souls, our enchantment, our spiritual homes in the cosmos. I feel unpractised in this terrain: I feel that I do not know yet how it sits with my work, but I acknowledge that it is an indivisible part of the political, macro purposes I have expressed: it seems to offer another perspective on active 'being'. I have become a novice practitioner of yoga. I am taking seriously my – at times confusing - inner voices: seriously enough to have resolved that I will not again work in a way that feels to me to be violating. This

emboldens me. I believe – but I have not fully tested this belief yet – that I can let go of what is around me.

I have played, somewhat, with the idea of letting go of our particular organisational form – and have to acknowledge that this is not just a game: it affects people's lives and livlihoods. A year ago, during a major review of our project's finances, and after discussion with my colleagues, I made this proposal to them and the Trustees:

"One of the options we could consider is going 'virtual.' This might mean:

- Disband the office, change the form of the current contracts

- Form a group of Associates, all of who would be self-employed carriers of our name and idea. They could all generate work individually and together, and devise an appropriate means to both contribute towards the charity and create income for themselves

- Consider supporting this venture for a limited period, by contributing a small sum towards managing the network and providing limited start-up capital, after which time the Associates would need to contribute cover central costs

- Develop a new website, which would be the 'front' of the organisation, and which we use as a basis for developing distance learning programmes, as funding permits"[1]

In some ways I did not expect this option to be taken up, but I did want to articulate it as a possibility, and discover what the reactions to such a move might be among those who would be affected by it. It was decided not to go in this direction at the moment, most of those involved wanting to hold on to the visible institution-building we are engaged in, and perhaps all of us stepping away from the risk and uncertainty such a move might bring. But I do think there are other options about organisational form open to us. I realise that whilst I am committed to playing some role in 'directing' this project, being its Director is less important to me.

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[1] Excerpt from internal memo, May 2000

Making Educative Spaces

In the absence of certainty, what can we do whilst we actively wait? As an educational organisation, we have opportunities to 'teach'. I currently think about these as places to try and create an 'educative space', by which I mean a bounded space, framed in an educational way, but also framed as being open, in which something can happen. The space is not fully accounted for, and I, as the educator, will aim to invite participation in it. I am also drawing here on Meadow's (1991) idea of putting information into a system in places where it isn't, as an intentional way of creating some small disturbance from which amplifications can grow. I try, sometimes with difficulty, to approach these occasions with openness. Here is one recent example:

Speaking at a 'Business Roundtable':

I am in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It is Friday, and I have been here since Monday helping to present a short course for the United Nations Country Team entitled "Building Partnerships and Engaging Business", alongside someone from the UN Staff College. The Resident Representative (the 'managing director' of the UN team in the country) has invited 50 businesses based in the city to attend a 'roundtable' lasting for a morning, to begin the process of creating partnerships between his team and the business community. He has asked me to make a presentation, lasting around 15 minutes, on corporate social responsibility, to be made after he has talked about the work of the UN in Malaysia, and one of his colleagues has talked about the Global Compact[2]. I have prepared my talk late the previous evening in my hotel room, since we only clarified what

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[2] The framework set out the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, at Davos in February 1999 which exhorts the UN and businesses around the world to work together to achieve meet the world's development goals

the Resident Representative was wanting me to contribute the previous day. My brief is to 'sell corporate responsibility' to the guests.

I have prepared a PowerPoint presentation on my computer. As I was doing so, I knew I needed to get on with the task in hand – to have something I was reasonably happy to present the following day. And I carried in my mind an awareness of the constraining nature of this technology – reducing complex issues to bullet-point slides, manifesting the certainty and simplicity that business audiences so often seem to want. I am worried that I cannot convey sufficient openness in this medium, and I also noticed that I am getting worryingly used to using it. I told myself that people in the room would probably hear me, my voice, my words, my presence, rather than the slides. I can try and unhinge the slides somewhat, in the way I talk.

And I experience this is a dance, a balancing act – owning enough 'conventional' authority to earn an audience, to be heard, and yet doing something to indicate that I am not taken in by this performance. I am thinking about Bateson's (1972) story about dogs that nip each other in play a way that denotes analogically 'this is not a bite'. Can I do this in a way that denotes 'this is not a business presentation'? I am remembering the time I made a presentation on behalf of the university MBA

programme to the parents and prospective students in Pakistan (see Chapter 5: Leaving). At that time I was so consumed with managing my discomfort with the situation I was in that I had no spare attention or energy to allow me to play. I notice that I feel very different now – now that I am speaking on behalf of an organisation which has an entirely different political intent. Unlike my struggle with mis-attribution of who I am by parents in Pakistan, I do not feel entrapped by any attribution put on me. Let them be varied and confusing…

I put together a presentation that begins by talking about my organisation, and its purpose, and then says something about the new demands on businesses in the face of globalisation. As I do so, I recongise that I am in the territory of building and perpetuating a certain discourse in this area of work – naming, packaging and simplifying complex and contested developments without explicitly flagging this process. I have picked up, during the week and from information beforehand that Malaysia is a country which has experienced substantial economic growth as a result of globalisation in the last decade, and has recovered from the economic slump in 1997, but in which the Prime Minister makes public statements critical of globalisation, the World Trade Organisation and the role of multinational companies. I have learned this language pretty thoroughly: I know how to talk "business-speak', alongside holding my doubts about this 'final vocabulary'.

Arriving at the venue, I am feeling pleasurable anticipation. I feel willing to let whatever is going to happen here unfold. The meeting is in a fantastically ornate hotel outside the city, called the "Palace of the Golden Horses": I have never seen anything like it. It feels a bit like stepping into a film set.

There are about 50 people in the room, some from the UN, most from invited businesses. They are senior managers, from both local companies and multinationals based here. Looking at the attendance list, I see that Adidas, Shell and The Body Shop are all represented here, so I know that they, at least, will have engaged with the issues I am going to raise. I will have some 'friends' in the audience.

Everyone is seated around tables of 6 to 8 people, dotted around the room.

As I get up to speak there are many awarenesses with me.

One is familiar: it is a challenge to my right to be here, doing this. I am holding my recognition that what I am doing, right here and now, is participating in the homogenisation processes of globalisation, saying to this group much the same things I would say to a business meeting in the

UK, and fully expecting them to understand and engage. So, I know I am in this process, and at the very least feel a responsibility to show my respect for what they know about their 'reality' that I certainly don't.

And I am feeling my female-ness, in this room of predominantly be-suited men (but there are some women here too). The previous three speakers have all been men. In fact I am enjoying this in some ways. I notice myself being glad that this organisation I am so much part of is being represented here by a woman – that's one little piece of the communication I am seeking to make. I also notice my relative lack of nervousness (though I am 'geared up', ready for action) and recognise this as a territory in which I am working, this is a potentially educational space, where something can happen. This is what I can do.

And this is also about us, together, being in gendered space, in the territory of father-consciousness – results-oriented, rationalist, separated from each other and the world – and for a few minutes engaging in a slightly different discourse. I hold this awareness in this moment, both acting and seeing myself act....

As I start to talk, I am deliberately trying to use the slides as prompts to engage, rather than as some sort of script. I am looking for eye contact in the room, and finding it.

I begin by saying that I have never before been to Malaysia, and that I am very appreciative of the opportunity. I reiterate something the Resident Representative has said a little earlier, that this round-table is an opportunity for some learning by both the businesses and the UN people present, and that I include myself in that learning process

I say something about my organisation:

> Our Mission: to help build a future that is more just, enterprising and sustainable.
> Produce educational activities and resources
>
> Work with companies, entrepreneurs, educators, activists, and policy makers on social, ethical and environmental issues in business

I am using words we devised some months ago, as a deliberate strategy to push a bit at the boundary of what seems acceptable for an educational organisation – being clear that we have a 'mission'. It does not feel hard to use this language to this group.

Then I talk briefly about globalisation, my main purpose being to recognise the competitive pressure that many of the people in the room

will be feeling – this is a 'tough' business environment in which to operate, and I want to appreciate this. I can see nods of recognition in the room: this is their territory, and issues of where the responsibilities of government and other parts of civil society lie will be very different here, with its own cultural and religious traditions

Then I take a step into the 'business argument', talking about some of the ideas to do with the development of 'intangible' sources of value, and their links with brand values and reputation. As I do so, I know that I am rehearsing some of the rhetoric of 'corporate citizenship' (see Chapter 8) – and of modernist commodification. I am using this discourse in order to make connections into the issues with which they are dealing on a daily basis. But I also ask them to notice the language in which this debate is being conducted – and that mainstream business valuation organisations are currently researching the concept of 'social capital'. I hear myself speaking a language I doubt.

Then I ask them, with me, to notice the way some prominent business leaders are talking about issues of social capital. For example, an interesting statement from the great-grandson of one of the founders of 20th Century business:

William Clay Ford Jnr

"I believe very strongly that corporations could and should be a major force for resolving social and environmental concerns in the 21st century….as chairman of one of the world's largest corporations I am in a unique position to be a catalyst for change"

Chairman, Ford Motor Company, Oct 2000

There is a lot of attentiveness in the room, and a lot of eye contact. I am feeling alert, noticing my engagement with this group, hearing my own performance as I deliver it. So, I say, there is an opportunity emerging to begin to craft what a 'responsible business' might look like in the century opening in front of us. At the moment, the idea of corporate social responsibility is emergent…moving on from philanthropy, or simply the giving of money to so-called good causes. I illustrate what these broad ideas and language might mean in this context, particularly in relation to the partnership offer coming from the UN country team. I talk through the examples given, explaining briefly my understanding of what had brought the different players in these partnerships together:

In practice at the local level:

Offering resources – volunteers, equipment, skills and know-how – to help fulfil social and environmental tasks
e.g. Microsoft and Hewlett Packard in Bosnia with UNHCR

Combining with those expert in social and environmental interventions to achieve shared goals
e.g. Rotary International and many companies with WHO and UNICEF to eradicate Polio by 2005

Finally, I say, there is an offer before you, and you have an opportunity here to think through, with others, what this might mean for you. For instance:

> Partnership opportunities as:
>
> Ways of getting things done in a complex environment
>
> Helping create a stable situation in which business can operate – shared interests
>
> Opportunity for building internal capacity, learning new ways to operate
>
> Creation of social capital, enhancing reputation

There are no right answers here, I say, and many questions as to what this means and how such partnerships might work, but the UN team is willing to work with you to explore this.

I am thinking about the whirling possibilities crystallising in this moment –the nature of reality–creation going on here. This is one of the first opportunities, in this county, for a business audience to engage with the corporate citizenship discourse. I am editing out so much, in the moment, working to the rationalist expectations of our culture – even though this is Asia, and this is a learned/imposed culture here

Macy (1991) talks about acting in modern culture as if deadened, as if a nerve has been cut, in our intent to suppress despair at what we are

doing to/in our world/selves. At one level it is crazy to talk, in this rationalist context, about some of the issues I am raising. It gives a slightly surreal feel to what I am doing – reflected in the physical surroundings of this hotel – noticing myself acting, appreciating the performance of those around me, noticing us co-creating something – wondering if there are the hints and possibilities of otherness in the process. But this is ultimately serious play.

I am asked lots of questions in the ten minutes allocated for this after my talk, then there is animated discussion around the tables. I join one group: several say they have never really thought about these kinds of issues before, but one of them is from Adidas – he has come over from China specially for this meeting – and he talks about his company's work in developing a code of conduct on labour standards. The report-backs from the tables at the end of the discussion session are very positive: the Resident Representative is clearly delighted with the response.

Then, over lunch, a man who is angry engages me in conversation: he introduces himself as a building contractor. Explain to me, he says, how it is that we are just struggling to catch up with what it is the Western multinationals demand of us when they change the rules of the game?, How can William Ford say that stuff, when we are just getting to grips

with the sort of production his family started off? Why don't they allow us time? He tells me that he is constantly asked to increase the level of environmental protection measures contained in his tenders to multinationals, and it is making the work uneconomic for him, threatening the jobs of his workforce. We need to develop first, and then attend to the environment, like the West did, he says. I engage with him, acknowledging his problems, but also the threat to the environment here in Malaysia. Can't you learn from mistakes the Western countries have made, I ask him. We talk for half an hour, and as we do so I think that, on the one hand, I have no understanding of this man's life, knowledge, priorities, hopes, nor he of mine. But also, as two human beings, we can meet and communicate somewhat across our differences. Maybe this conversation is what matters most here: I am fully absorbed by it. Gradually he becomes less angry, and talks about the spiritual nature of the Asian relationship with the environment, and the way it is over-ridden by the business imperative. Perhaps there is a need, he says, for us to be developing a different approach of our own. I agree with him...

The feedback I get from the 'outside world', it seems to me, is always ambiguous....

A Second Inquiry Point: Doing-Leadership and Being-Leadership - Agency and Relational Work

At the end of Chapter 4, I considered two contrasting feminist approaches to managing organisations: Martin's (1993) suggested 'practices of feminist management' and Gherardi's (1995) ideas on the use of hypocrisy, irony and embarrassment as tools to enable women to use their power in these gendered contexts. Irony, suggests Gherardi:

> "insinuates doubt. The ironist recognises herself both as a product of discourse and a producer of discourse. Such a picture "conflicts with that brand of feminism that asserts a truth principle – male domination – from which it derives a political consequence" (1995: 146)

In order to try and create space in which things can happen organisationally, I have attempted to establish the project in set of relationships with friends, supporters, partners and co-workers. I am actively attempting to use a "growth-in-connection model" (see Chapter 3), which Fletcher (1988) characterises as based on mutual empathy and mutual empowerment . But I am also, conceptually, locating this as a web in the sense used by Capra (1996), a small part of a systemic whole, rather than in the sense used by Helgesen (1990) of (just) personal relationships.

As I explored in Chapters 7 and 8, I previously experienced problems when my expectation of collaboration exceeded our collective capability. I have come to understand collaboration as a very hard idea to live – something which, of course, cannot be easily purposefully brought into being, and yet is unlikely to emerge without purposive action[3].

Our project, because of the area it is working in, and the network brought by the sponsoring company, is one with many 'friends'. We regularly receive emails, letters and phone calls from people (in many different parts of the world) who have met one of us, come across our work, or heard our sponsor giving a speech in which she has mentions

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[3] Torbert 1991. See also Coleman and Rippin, 2000, an account of a not very successful attempt at collaborative action research which includes reflection on the idea of 'getting people to collaborate'

us, or discovered our website, who simply want to say 'glad you exist: keep going!'[4]. Clearly, this offers a great opportunity for building what I might call a community of interest, a loose grouping with whom ideas and initiatives might be tested out.

I have been through several phases of activity in pursuit of this idea, with the aim of building rich, diverse connections, holding a systems-model in mind. These have included:

- A 'stakeholder dialogue' day attended by 30 people in July 1999, shortly after I took on the role of directing the project

- Starting a monthly electronic newsletter

- Starting work on a conference to be led by the associates, with regular follow-up meetings, an e-conference group and later a dedicated website

- Making a proposal about how the associates relate to the trading arm of the organisation then clarifying the relationships between associates and core staff and inviting responses

I have very ambivalent feelings about the concepts of 'leadership' and 'the leader', because of the gendered ways in which I see them constructed in leadership discourse. Even those writers working with systems perspectives of leadership (Senge, 1990), working with ideas of 'leaderly learning' (Vaill, 1996) and 'inner paths of leadership' (Jaworski, 1996), retain, in my reading, strongly gendered constructions of the role. Jaworski writes eloquently about the need for a fundamental shift of mind from seeing a world of parts to seeing a world of relationships, and then goes on to depict his subsequent path in relation to a "hero's journey", crossing the "threshold of adventure" and withstanding the ""road of trials and the "supreme ordeal". His is undoubtedly a manstory (Gergen, 1992). Like much writing of this genre, leadership is constructed as

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[4] For instance, this email received in Jan 2001:

Dear Gill, It was nice to meet you in Gothenburg. I hope you had a good trip back. I saw the very long article in "Svenska Dagbladet" yesterday (or second biggest newspaper) on your programme. That was nice and interesting indeed. I understood from this article that you now expect to have a rather large group of Swedish participants for the next course. This will fill a necessary gap in the Swedish educational system - I do not feel that Swedish universities and other teaching institutions have been able to meet the requirements for training courses on sustainability/corporate social responsibility. I hope that your programme, through its exposure in our media, may inspire such changes, but unfortunately there is a long-standing suspicion between at least universities and the private sector. I experienced this five years ago when I tried to raise the issue here at Stockholm University. Things are changing, but it takes time - too much time I feel. GOOD LUCK! With warm regards, J K, Consultant, ERM Stockholm

that which heroic white men, albeit sensitive ones, working to build trusting relationships, aspire to.

Vaill discusses at some length the idea of being rather than doing, of leadership as concerned with continuous learning, of the role of the spiritual in the sort of integrity he is advocating, but still somehow stays within the paradigm of 'managerial effectiveness'; the point of his work is to lead the organisational world 'better' in a 'world of white water', not necessarily somewhere different. It retains the individualistic orientation: he describes the major themes of his work as:

> "the reality and persistence of the white water, the need for managerial leaders to learn more effectively to cope with its effects, and the possibility of living and working in white water actually sharpens and strengthens leaders' ability and determination to stay in touch with the spirit that runs through our organizations and our lives" (1996: 188)

From the perspective that I have been developing through this inquiry, the issue is not that leadership contains something front-end about it (or it is simply an attempt to drive-from-behind), but more, I begin to think, that leadership towards mother-consciousness, however envisaged, is essentially paradoxical. Torbert seems alone in exploring this dimension in his concept of 'transforming power' which:

> "invites mutuality…[and] requires a continual humble effort - not just to be rational, but to be aware of the present moment in all its fullness, …[and] actively seeks challenge and contradiction…[and] is enacted analogically.. [and] empowers all who come within the radius of its influence, including those who oppose its influence" (1991: 56-58) .

I do not pretend to be exercising such kind of power, but I can begin to see that such paradoxical playing may be part of the territory I am moving towards.

Although I am working with an attachment to relational values, I am also clearly agentic. I see reflected in these accounts my capacity to be stubborn and unmoving, judgemental, focussed on (my) right way of doing things – even when that way is collaborative in intent – and strategic, goal-directed. I have clearly at times dropped through the conceptually-placed multiplicity of situations and held on to the concrete, single place. I have also to acknowledge that an ability to 'get things done' has stood me in good stead in terms of career advancement.

Marshall (1984) draws on Bakan's (1966) ideas of agency and communion to articulate two human tendencies, which suggest different ways of interacting with the world around the person. Marshall locates them as complementary possibilities, resources available to everyone, rather than fixed aspects of people. An agentic strategy is one to "reduce tension by changing the world about it" whilst communion "seeks union and co-operation as its way of coming to terms with uncertainty", and

> "Whilst agency manifest itself in focus, closedness and separation, communion is characterised by contact, openness and union" (1984: 65)

> From the perspective of communion, understanding of the world is conducted in wholes, patterns of relationships, and paying attention to the connection between parts rather than the parts themselves – and as part of this appreciation, acceptance is offered of how things are, with change perceived as a natural part of this, without a need to control or master it. (1984:67).

Agency is about doing, communion about being. These tendencies, she suggests, have become suffused with gender associations and culturally skewed into dichotomous either/or relations. The danger is that either tendency, used to the total exclusion of the other, can become degenerative rather than adaptive. Capra (1982) makes some similar points in his discussion of the Chinese view of the cosmic principles of yin and yang, which combine to form the Tao, the continual process of flow and change which is the essence of being. Yin and yang represent the polar tendencies which limit this flow, but are opposite tendencies of a single whole. Yin is all that is contractive, conservative and responsive, whilst yang is expansive, aggressive and demanding (1982: 18). In Chinese thought, these principles have no moral association, neither is better than the other. Like the sun (yang) and the moon (yin) they express difference. What is not seen as 'good' is excess, or imbalance, of one or the other. Capra suggest that Western masculine-centred thinking can hardly capture the original idea, since the female-passive-bad-yin connection has become so established, but that for the Chinese yin is not passivity, which is inconsistent with the dynamism of the Tao, but a consolidating cooperative energy,

which stands in complementary, dynamic relation to the expansive, competitive yang energy.

As I have made these first person accounts, I have drawn on the gender-associations of these principles, associating agency with masculinity, separation and, by implication, an energy I did not want to own (see for example, Chapter 6, Working with M). One of the interesting things I notice from what Marshall and Capra, in their different ways, are saying, is that such separations are, in themselves, agentic – employing the binary principle which is deeply established in Western thinking and culture. Although there is much to suggest that there has been both conceptual and cultural suppression of the communion/yin principle through modernism, mother consciousness, it would seem, would involve not 'payback time', valuing everything based on communion over everything based on agency, but some form of superseding this inappropriate, historically specific construction of 'opposites'. As often before, the feminist politics of this path is confusing.

But from this place, at this stage in my inquiry, I need to affirm my agentic self: that energy in myself which helps me to put the next foot in front of the other along the ridge-path to somewhere still obscure. It is my agentic self that is pushing at boundaries, and that I need to draw on to hold the institutional, financial, 'modernist' space within which new activity can be grown. Moving towards my evolving picture of mother-consciousness seems to need not so much some sort of androgynous 'balance' of energy, but dynamic, paradoxical, aware movement between these not-opposites. Of course this is hard to do: I suspect that my agentic self has been in the ascendant during this period of organisation-building (which in itself, I notice, is an agentic framing for what I am doing). I notice my self moving between different behavioural strategies, wanting to open organisational space for collaboration, and then being impatient when these are not filled in the way that I envisage. Here is one such example.

Meeting with some Associates

It is a Friday in June, the last day of one of the MSc residential workshops. I have spent the day working with my learning groups on the course. I am very tired, and so are the participants, who are at the end of five days of challenging ideas, intense discussion and almost constant interaction with each other and with the visiting speakers and core staff.

I have called a meeting of our associates, to discuss a proposal that I have put to them. The meeting is starting at 5.30pm: it is the only time we could find, since this involves several of the people who have been at the workshop, and some of them will be leaving the country to go home at the weekend. Its not an ideal time, eating into Friday evening in this way – I don't want to work in this way, but I do want to have the meeting. Nevertheless, 15 people have come.

A loose group of 'associates' has been meeting for nearly a year now, trying to evolve a way for them to have a relationship with the project that is mutually worthwhile, and enhances what we can all do. I now want to move this relationship forward. This is the proposal I have made, sent as a letter a week before the meeting:

"I think we may have reached the point where the idea of 'associates' needs more definition, if it is to enable those who feel part of it to know how to take action as an associate.

The [organisation] has a two-pronged structure: the charity and a trading company. The company has made a covenant to give any profits it makes

back to the charity. It is trading at a very low level, because most of what we do fits within the remit of the charity.

I would like to explore the possibility of streamlining this arrangement by concentrating the education and dissemination work that we currently do within the charity (which employs the core staff and covers the overheads) and using the company as a vehicle through which the associates could operate under the [project] 'brand'. There are various ways we could make this work, which I would like to discuss with those who are interested.

….The company could become a locus of innovation and experimental work within the overall ethos of the project, working with companies and non-profit organisations, moving in whatever practical direction the associates steer it. Ideas, contacts and experience could move freely between the company and the charity. We would need to decide lots of practical issues….but I think there is a real possibility here to build on the energy that is clearly part of the existing associates group, without tying it down with an expensive overhead structure.

Although I am at present the sole director of the company, there is no reason why this should remain the case, or why other changes to its

format and legal structure could not be considered. Perhaps it could be an 'employee share–owned partnership' (like St Lukes), perhaps it could be run by individuals in rotation – perhaps you have other ideas and visions.

What do you think?"[5]

I talk through the proposal, and various people ask questions, of clarification mainly, to help them understand the situation. I am realising, as they do so, it is very difficult for them to see this situation, this possibility, as I do. How could they? Working with these issues fills the whole of my working life, whereas for most of them it is some peripheral part that has to be squeezed in. Suddenly I feel as if my energy has been used up, and I can't get any sense of excitement in the room. I have already named this to myself as a 'good idea' – and I want that reflected in the responses of those around me. I feel as if I have done my performance, and now I want something back, I want to be met, and challenged. I am puzzled and a bit disappointed – there is not much talking. Why so little reaction to such this offer? I ask them – "what is going on here? I would find it really helpful to get some reaction". One person says she feels as if she needs time to think about this, and others murmur agreement. There is a gap between what I expect and what this

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[5] Extract, letter to Associates, June 2000

group (including me) can deliver right here and now. I get a sense of hesitation, no one knowing how to step into the space I am offering; perhaps it does not seem like a real offer, perhaps I am still filling the space too much.

As I leave, one person comes up to me and says she will gather some responses via email, and get something back to me. I thank her, and leave the building. How much work does it take, I wonder, to grow participation? Clearly more than I have so far given it.

As I think about this account now, I notice its purposive nature, strongly framed by me. I chose the time at which to make this proposal, partly because I sensed something needed to help people create more frame within which to carry out these relationships. I recognised through my propositional knowing that this was a situation where the paradox of framing in order to supersede the frame might be relevant – but in the moment, in the room, I did not help create inquiring space (taking on responsibility for setting the tone). Later, people who has been at the meeting told me they need me to explain more, to share more with them – and several months later some of them still perceive me/our organisation as keeping things to ourselves, not being open enough

I felt as if I was met with silence – but the silence of interested people who have been silenced, rather than of people with nothing to say and no stake in the ground. I went on working at it, at this space: I framed it again, circulated more notes, suggested some different 'categories of associate' to help people locate themselves. The responses to this were more positive – but at the same time, it was a smaller, more bounded offer I was making.

But I do also get positive feedback. One of the people present at that meeting, who is now living in the US, wrote to me afterwards about how she might continue to have some relationship with us. She said:

> "Your style of leadership is deeply collaborative. You have a calm, quiet manner
>
> which invites participation, but at the same time you are very good at holding
>
> everyone to the job at hand and setting clear boundaries regarding time and task. It

really is a brilliant balance between open facilitation and steering the ship, so to speak"[6]

A Third Inquiry point: Letting Go of Fear

It is noticeable to me, when I look at my accounts of my work with the MBA programme (Chapter 5) how fearful I seem to have been, of being found out, unmasked as not who I seemed to be. I can still remember the feeling, a nauseous feeling in the pit of my stomach, the way my stomach seemed to lurch instantly when someone said something that I felt to be threatening. In my bid to prevent this from happening, I engaged in active, and onerous, processes of self-management. Somehow I could see what I was doing and still not find a way to feel safe enough to disengage from it. I felt my own hypocrisy very painfully. Marshall (1995) comments:

> "the price of maintaining a competent, consistent, professional image is high, when
>
> it is driven both by personal injunctions to be perfect and by gender dynamics
>
> which encourage women to mask any potential differences from dominant norms.
>
> (1995: 83)

This did not feel like a playful or ironic multiplicity, but an exhausting and perilous double life.

One of the effects of that kind of self-protection was never allowing myself to be fully present in the moment – always managing that liminal/boundary space, as I tried to stop the projections and representations of the mainstream from taking over my own naming of my 'self'.

I began this inquiry from that place of discomfort, feeling 'myself' to be inauthentic and engaged in dissembling. As I have worked with first-person inquiry, I have come to feel that the notions of self I am, in fact, working with are more complex and multiple than that situation at first suggests – and, indeed, that moving in the ways that my purposes suggest, this has to be the case. Many authors working with ideas of postmodernity (notably Gergen 1991) discuss the dilemmas of the de-centring of the concept of the

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[6] Extract from email

unitary self which has been a cornerstone of modernist thinking. But, as I touched on when thinking about the idea of reflexivity in Chapter 2, feminisms add another dimension to this debate, because of the importance placed on subjective/first person knowing by feminist epistemology, and the significance attached to ideas of 'authenticity', particularly in standpoint feminisms. Addressing these questions, Griffiths (1995) suggests that 'fragmentation' of self is an ordinary part of the condition of being human, with each of us holding together some sort of multiple identity consisting of a coalition of fragments, which may not be consistent with each other. Authenticity requires "acting at one's own behest, both at a feeling level and at an intellectual, reflective one" (183) and ongoing action and reflection on one's own incoherence, with awareness that the possibility for self-deception or 'bad faith' is never far away. From this perspective:

> "Authenticity is best seen as a continuing process, one which requires constant effort…Being true to oneself does not mean seeking [a unitary] core. It means undertaking the difficult business of assessment and transformation within a changing context of self" (1995:185)

Griffiths stresses the need for some of this reflective work to be done collectively, within communities willing to learn from each other – and cites academic work as one of the ways through which such collective reflection may take place. I locate myself in this territory, putting my own incoherence through this account into a (partly) public space. And in order to permit myself to do this, I have worked to silence, or at least quieten, my censoring and judgemental self, as well as my frightened self.

What has emboldened me? There, I suggest, many threads. One is that, in having become more aware of, and articulating, some of the disciplinary work I have been engaged in through my own self-management, I have been more able to supersede it – or at least, to make more choices about whether I do this or not.

I have also watched, and been in the company of, many 'brave' people in the course of this inquiry. I identify them to myself as brave because they, to echo Griffiths, 'act at their own behest' rather than at the command of others, and they take personal risks in doing so, even though the risks may be invisible to a mainstream view. I am reminded of Macy's (1991) reference to the prophecy of the Shambhala warriors, whose weapons are *compassion and insight*:

> "Now the time comes when great courage - moral and physical – is required…for they must go into the very heart of barbarian power, into the pits and pockets and the citadels where the weapons are kept, to dismantle them" (1991: 180)

These warriors are difficult to see because they "wear no uniform or insignia and they carry no banners", but their work relies on their passion and their recognition of the interconnectedness of all humans and non-humans, reminding us that "the line between good and evil runs through the landscape of every human heart". This is a different kind of battle from that of the hero of patriarchal imagery, and a different kind of leadership. I find it helpful to think there are many ways to 'do battle', some less bloodthirsty than others. I can remind myself that there are no imperatives here to be a certain way, and that when I feel them, I can ask myself what I am doing to myself.

A third strand to my relative release is that I have become part of a loose community of people who, in many different ways, and incorporating still a wide range of differences, personal and political, are nevertheless engaged in working at creating changes at various levels within the social and political systems towards mother-consciousness, sustainability, justice. Partly this has come about through the nature of the work I now do, and partly it has been a result of intentional community-building on my part – with my immediate work colleagues, with our 'associates' as discussed above, with the people who are involved, as speakers and participants, in the educational programmes I am working on. My sense of personal marginality, whilst still at times acute to me, is at least located now within other kinds of support, tacit and explicit. I see selves reflected in

others relationships with me which I can form into a coalition, rather than this being an undoable task.

And the fourth interconnected thread is the 'inner work' aspect of what I am now doing, referred to above. This slight sense of detachment feels important: ironically, in being not quite so captured by what I am doing, not so engaged in moment-by-moment struggle to hold myself together, I am free enough to be able to give attention *at least some of the time* to being fully present in the here and now.

I am going to a meeting of our company sponsor (who also chairs our board of Trustees) and TC, who is setting up a new 'corporate citizenship' consultancy business, which also has some sponsorship from this company. The meeting is set to discuss some difficult issues about a forthcoming publication: there are a lot of different interests involved (including those of our project) and this is not going to be an easy meeting. As I go through the door of the meeting room I say to myself, like a mantra: "keep breathing: don't get hooked into argument, be fully present, try and enjoy being here with these people, find some enjoyment in this"....

So, at the moment, organisation-building has taken on a much less clear path than that I anticipated (in Chapter 6). I am more confused, but expecting to be so. I see my handling of the expectations of our project's Trustees – and many other 'stakeholders' – for me to produce a clear business-plan, to set well-defined financial and organisational targets with specified timelines, to clearly define our market-positioning and niche products, as part of the ongoing juggling that I need to do in order to try and hold open the space in

which this endeavour might grow. I cannot ignore such things – or one sort of reality will take over and close our doors – but I also try not to become victimised by them, or even (especially) too convinced by my own responses. A little disjuncture between expression and intent, it seems, is part of this territory.

Never again will we stand

On the threshold of a new age

We that are here now are touched

In some mysterious way

With the ability to change

And make the future.

Those who wake to the wonder

Of this magic moment

Who wake to the possibilities

Of this charged conjunction

Are the chosen ones who have chosen

To act, to free the future, to open it up

To consign prejudices to the past

To open up the magic casement

Of the human spirit

Onto a more shining world

You can't remake the future

Without remaking yourself.

Each new era begins within.

It is an inward event,

With unsuspected possibilities

For inner liberation.

We could use it to turn on

Our inward lights.

We could use it to use even the dark

And negative things positively.

We could use the new era

To clean our eyes,

To see the world differently,

To see ourselves more clearly.

Only free people can make a free world.

Infect the world with your light.

Help fulfil the golden prophecies.

Press forward the human genius.

Our future is greater than our past.

Ben Okri, from *Mental Fight, an anti-spell for the 21st Century*, 1999