

## Chapter Six – A Good Man at Work

In the last chapter, I have shown how I have stretched this inquiry out to engage with some of my colleagues, within Roffey Park. Now I aim to show how I stretch it further, beyond my organisation, towards those of the clients we work with at Roffey Park. In other words, how can I inquire into *mentshlichkeit* in the practice of my role in the work I am paid to do for Roffey Park?

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A few days later, the student is in front of her again. Sarah leaned back in her chair.

- So now we come to the last chapter. I think this one is particularly important, because it is about you in your work. I think it is about responding to the challenge in that mind map – the ‘financial benefit’ your colleagues talked about.
- Yes their challenge was about ‘where’s the financial benefit in this?’
- What do you think they meant by that?
- I think they meant looking at gender and masculinity. The discussion, as far as I remember, was about how issues at Roffey Park, like gender, only get attention if it’s perceived that they can be earned from. Otherwise they remain marginal.
- Is that a fair challenge?
- Yes I think it is. There is a sense of urgency at Roffey to make money, to survive, particularly heightened by the economic downturn. But for me the issue here becomes about what we are expert *in*. What do we ‘know’ about, that is worth buying? And this has resonance with my concern that I can be seduced into being the ‘expert’; that this is a particular, hegemonic spectre of masculinity I can become haunted by. Hence my use of long words. This takes a further twist with this PhD in itself. It carries with it a badge of expertise. If I’m honest, I would say I want that badge, and I am uncomfortable about that. But I also am hungry for the learning that comes with it. But which is the ‘good’ motive? Another edge - this one is really important. It has been with me all along.
- So this chapter aims to explore how you practice staying on your edge, what did you call it, the edge of ‘not knowing’?
- I’d like to believe it’s as simple as that. It’s a seductive idea. But I think there is a deeper challenge here. I think that there really is so much I *don’t* know, that I spend much of my time *not* being sure, but that in languaging things I have become good at/skilled at performing ‘expert’, languaging it (not just with words, but with my body)...As Philip Corrigan says:

*I am trying to say that language embodies power never more strongly/magically as where it renders bodies powerless. We have been colonized through the enforced modalities of required, encouraged, rewarded discursivity. (Corrigan 1988) p375*

What does he mean by ‘language rendering bodies powerless’? It is like that moment when you are standing in front of a group, talking about things, being the ‘teacher’ and you have the capacity to put an idea into words, to ar-ti-cu-late it, in a particular way that captures, ‘magically’, these eyes and ears looking at you. It’s just like Jim does in the interlude at the very beginning of the thesis, before Chapter One. How everyone, (except the young woman) just seems to lap up the ideas, because he puts them so well.

- Oh I remember that very well. But isn’t that because the ideas make sense, in themselves? They are ‘Reasonable’.
- Of course, but *other* ideas also make sense, even oppositional ones. Like Corrigan asks: ‘Whose ‘Reason’? And one day someone comes along with the ability to articulate a counter argument that makes just as much sense. (This is the nature of the academic method, after all), but before that, in that moment, when we ‘have the group’, isn’t that what Corrigan describes as our being ‘colonized’ through rewarded

discursivity'. We actually colonize, capture and turn to our own purposes these bodies? Borrowing from that Jewish subjectivity, it is like the 'dybbuk' again, a 'particular powerful spirit that enters the body of another'. The academic masculinity is all about the capacity to make that sense, to haunt in that way. Sometimes, it may be just because I am a white, middle class, well-spoken man, that I am *believed*, my ideas are accepted.

- It reminds me of something I heard about the link between 'glamour' and 'grammar' - those who controlled the grammar had the glamour. But where does this get us? Doesn't it lead to a kind of paralysis; a moral vacuum, where anyone with the capacity to articulate becomes the coloniser? Isn't this the worst kind of post-modern argument? It all comes down to fight for control of the means of articulating and distributing ideas.

- I don't know. That's a fair challenge. But there is another way of looking at it. I can embrace my not knowing. It can become a starting point for inquiry. It fits my Jewish subjectivity, because Judaism has in it a long tradition that recognises the limits of what we can know; the humility of knowing there will always be much more to know than we are in the position, right now, to understand. As it says in the Talmud:

*Seek not the things that are too hard for you and search not the things that are hidden from you. The things that have been permitted you, think thereupon.*

*These are your portion. But you have no business with the things that are secret. (Weiner 1969, 1992) p3*

- Isn't that just an old cult controlling the ignorant, keeping them under control? Another type of colonisation?

- Yes, that is one way to look at it. There must be many interpretations. The Talmud is all about multiple interpretations, other voices speaking into the text of the Torah. An interpretation I choose is to recognise the mystery; I find it a good challenge to my white, western, academic masculinity to suggest that there is so much more I just *don't know* right now than I do. It disrupts the tendency to go into the position of expert. It tarnishes the glamour of being the knower. It's actually O.K. I find it usefully humbling, and reassuring. It doesn't stop me wanting to know things. Far from it, it suggests I know 'my portion', as the Talmudic saying goes. This is about 'thinking upon the things you do know'. It is the starting point for inquiry.

- So how does this fit with being a good man and earning money for Roffey Park?

- I think it opens up an interesting challenge. I need to walk a very fine line, an edge if you like. With clients, I need to present myself as the 'glamorous knower'. Otherwise they won't want to spend money with me. So being the knower is a necessary position in order for a place like Roffey Park to survive. This is why my services are sold as a 'Senior Consultant'. But I also want to embrace a way to practice 'not knowing' as a deconstruction of white, male academic masculinity that I can be seduced into being. Between these two positions is a fertile seam, a territory to inquire into.

- It does beg a couple of questions though. Like why should Roffey Park survive?

- At one level the answer to that is easy. I am obliged to the place. It feeds me, I care about it. It feeds my family through the work I do there. It feeds this inquiry process (by paying my University fees). In that sense I owe it. Also, broadly, it is a place that supports good learning, like this. It may be driven sometimes, out of anxiety (as we all are) to bring in the cash, but it does have at its heart the motivation to do good in the world. It is a charitable foundation, with the expressed mission of '*conducting, promoting and supporting for the benefit of the public research into questions affecting the health and welfare of all those engaged in industry, commerce and the public services.*' But it's also because there are people there to whom I am attached. It is my Community, and this research has made it more so. It isn't perfect by any means, but it is worthwhile. So the short answer is: I *choose* to support its survival. Such a choice fits the purpose of being a good man. It's where I find myself.

- OK, but I have another question. What's so bad about being the white, male, academic, glamorous knower?

- I think because I see in it some dishonesty. I know in my heart that I can colonise bodies through my ar-ti-cu-la-tion. I choose to inquire into being a good man. So there is a genuine gap of inquiry here, a truly *mentshlich* dilemma if you like. I have to do both: live with being both the seductive glamorous knower and the *not* knower. That's what I am interested in inquiring into here, in this chapter.

## Deep and Wide

I aim to show through two practice accounts of my work as at Roffey Park how action research may work as a register of in-the-moment attention to a set of values, how they are lived and not, 'living life as inquiry' as Judi Marshall says:

*By living life as inquiry I mean a range of beliefs, strategies, and ways of behaving which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear cut. Rather I have an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question. This involves, for example, attempting to open to continual question what I know, feel, do and want, and finding ways to engage actively in this questioning and process its stages. (Marshall 1999) p156-157*

I am offering an account of 'deep practice'; one that aims to show the challenges of this questioning process in some moment-to-moment detail; and 'wide practice' that sets this into contrast against an account over an extended period of time.

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- Ok, so what is the way you are going to 'process the stages', as Judi Marshall suggests? She's suggesting inquiry and action research can have a systematic programme too.
- What do you think?
- The accounts of your practice below. Is that what you wrote in your first draft?
- Yes that's it, pretty much.
- So it they stand as accounts, as 'data', warts and all?
- Yes I suppose they do.
- So let's go through it, together and see if we can systematically hold an inquiring gaze into it, together. Rather than editing out your foibles, let's look at them and see what they reveal, about the practice of being a good man.
- Sounds edgy! How do we do that?
- Which practices of inquiry that have emerged in the thesis so far, do you think would be most relevant to use?
- This dialogic process really helps. What Bateson says about continuing a conversation, a 'metalogue' between people and nature? He talked about how the problem at hand and the structure of the conversation can be congruent. And here's a man and a woman talking about a man's practice with an eye to gender. I'd like to keep your voice in anyway. I like your pragmatic edge.
- He said *man* and nature actually.
- Yes I noticed that too – thought I could get away with it...!
- Sure you did! You know, as a woman, it bothers me how ...*used to* that kind of thing I get.
- And as a man, trying to be *mentshlich*, I feel uncomfortable about it, never quite sure what I should do...
- O.K. Anyway, as the pragmatic woman (!), let's continue. So we fold the dialogue in. That's agreed. What else?
- I'd like to spot where I am coming from a place of 'expert' and where I am staying with the edge of not knowing I've been exploring in this inquiry, and see if ultimately I can surface a practice that helps me successfully navigate between those two.

- OK, so that's 1) dialogue, 2) expert v's not knowing. A tool and a target to aim for. Excellent. Anything else?
  - I don't think so. Apart from just looking at it as story, and inquiring into it to see what this throws up, in the context of *menstlichkeit* in practice
  - Ok. Let's go.
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### **Deep Practice - The Gender Professor**

I was approached by the Head of Business School of a University in the UK. His remit was to launch a set of 'executive education' programmes. 'Executives' in this instance was a loosely defined term. By and large, it meant managers in a business setting, who would buy places on these short programmes to improve their skills as such. These programmes were seen as an opportunity to bring in some income into the school in order to support its wider teaching and research aims. My role, as a Senior Consultant on behalf of Roffey Park, was to spend two days with the faculty team, a group of specialists at Senior Lecturer and Professor level, to enable them to transform their teaching style into one suitable for a more 'executive' clientele. My work was entitled 'facilitation skills training'.

The Head of the School briefed me that this training was quite controversial, and had varying degrees of support from within the faculty. These are highly-qualified academic staff. They are being required to fulfil a commercial imperative for their employer, the Business School. Of course this imperative has behind it the ideological struggles and wider dilemmas reflecting the political economy of higher education in the 2000s. But arguably the power dynamics impinge on this group, at a local level, with quite some considerable force. In short, for some, it is seen as an opportunity to develop their teaching range; for others, I wondered whether they saw it more as a kind of exploitation; that this was another added job on their already full list. No-one other than the Head had a chance to express this formally to me. I only had only met with him before the training, apart from a brief meeting with one of his colleagues, a Professor of Gender Studies, who is the focus of the reflections below. (I had asked for some time to speak privately with all the faculty members, individually, beforehand, but this would have meant them spending more money than they wanted to on preparation time. So one of the contexts for this was of having had very little time to establish a relationship with any of them before the training began, something I was uncomfortable about).

I was aware of marginal signals of acquiescence, enthusiasm and protest. Acquiescence, in that everyone who was ostensibly on the list turned up, at least on 'day 1'. Enthusiasm, in that most did engage with energy in the training (About 10 out of the 12). And protest, in that two didn't turn up on the second day.

I wondered about my role in this scene. If their job is to become soldiers of the mercenary academic economy, my job is to be their sergeant major, encouraging and cajoling them over the top towards the guns. Of course, there are other views. It could equally be argued, using another metaphor that my role was to act as a kind of midwife, helping the knowledge they had as a faculty to be born in a new context. Perhaps there is some truth in both of these metaphors, but poignantly, the sense I had of myself was more the former than the latter.

I do not want to tell this story as if it were a fully-formed account of some victory. As I write it, I am tracking the possibilities of inquiry as they open and shut before me.

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- Let's pause there, for a moment and look at this 'frame'
- You mean the background, the setting? Yes. I am conscious, reading it now, of so many possible inquiry 'portals'. Actually I am squirming here. So many glaring assumptions.
- There are a few things worthy of inspection. But in inquiry, you just have to step back a bit, and be prepared to unpick the useful things, with out too much defensiveness. It is natural to feel self-conscious. The key question is: what's relevant to your inquiry purpose here? There are always aspects of an account your can interrogate. But what sheds light on your knowing 'expert' vs not knowing, or *mentshlichkeit*?
- There are number of things that really strike me straight away. All the labels for example. *Head of Business School. Senior Consultant. Senior Lecturers and Professors, Executives.*
- Isn't that just the world you move in? The relationship between status and role?
- Yes it is. I *have* to work in that world, and it is seductive (I quite *like* the status of it). The role status is the entry ticket to the game. But then how much do I get taken *over* by it? It's the entry music of that spectre, that *dybbuk* of masculine reason. So these labels might be signifiers of a key territory of the 'hegemonic' expert masculinity. I have to use the status of my role, and how am I *seduced* by it, and how do I spot it and plot my escape?
- What was the other point you wanted to make?
- It was about the tensions and conflicts in the group, between the Head of the School and those who didn't really want to learn to deliver 'executive' programmes. About being the 'sergeant major' more than the midwife.
- Yes I had some questions about that. I felt for you actually. Clearly there were some struggles here around getting in.
- Yes it felt like I had very little time to establish any relationships. They wouldn't pay for my time to do that.
- Was that deliberate? Did they deliberately try and keep you at arms length?
- No I don't think so. Not consciously anyway. I actually got on well with the Head of School. He was quite endearing, a bit bumbly. He had agreed that I should spend time getting to know the faculty. But later he said he had been leaned on to cut the budget and couldn't pay for any of my development time. I could have offered to do it for free but Roffey wouldn't have liked that. So I felt a bit pressured to just 'get on with it'.
- So you were a bit 'thrown in' to this?
- Yes it felt like that.
- So how much of a parallel is there between their sense of acquiescence and protest (where they had that) and your own?
- Gosh, I hadn't spotted that. Yes I suppose there was a parallel there. I suppose we all felt, at some level, a bit like we were acquiescing here. The Head of the School felt arm-twisted by the Dean, the participants by him; me, by the need to just parachute in and run the training. We were all 'sent over the top...' Interesting how in some way I was holding myself separate, as if they were the exploited or acquiescing ones and I was the one who was 'OK'...No wonder I felt more like a soldier than a midwife...
- Interesting. So part of your mystique is blown away. You aren't in some way squeaky clean, and I wonder if that is reflected in what unfolds...

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One of the people involved was a Professor of Management with a specialisation around Gender Studies. Let's call her Esther. As soon as I heard that she had such a research focus (before the course began, in our brief meeting), my interest (and my anxiety) was triggered. Interest because of course this is close to my heart, but whereof my anxiety? Was it because of my own need to 'prove' my credentials in this area? Or because this was all so archly relevant to my inquiry? Or because I was uncomfortable with the role I was playing, in the light of feminist subjectivities? Or all of

the above? I track these both because they are relevant to the events that unfolded; part of my own internal narrative.

I had asked all the course participants, including Esther, to be prepared to offer a 15 minute practice session, in which they would work with the other group members as if they were 'executive' delegates, and then receive feedback. Esther chose to offer a session where she would facilitate a discussion around the question she wanted to explore; 'Why do women find it hard to get to the top of organisations?'

I considered Esther, both before and during this session, as someone who is complying, but with some discomfort. I see her as on the horns of a multitude of dilemmas, many of which I would suggest I share, but some that I, as a man, I could not. Not in the least, my 'guesstimate' is that she herself may well at times have faced the very dynamics she is inciting the group to explore with her in her 'practice' session, within and around this very group, her faculty colleagues. I am also informed by my own experience of running 'gender' courses: the uncomfortable truth is that organisations are structurally hostile to women (and other marginal groups) making progress. The literature on this abounds, for example, Amanda Sinclair argues that there are four 'stages' in 'executive culture' development that organisations need to go through in order to deal with this hostility:

1. Denial - No problem
2. The problem is Women
3. Incremental Adjustment
4. Commitment to a new culture

Sinclair's view is that it is relatively (and lamentably) rare for organisations to progress to the latter stages, 'doing leadership differently, as she calls it:

*"These are substantial hurdles to doing leadership differently. They are deeply embedded in cultural mythology, in economic structures and in social expectations. And they are reinforced in, and largely unquestioned by, the substantial annals of leadership theory." (Sinclair 1998, 2005) p179*

This 'theoretical' narrative runs a fascinating loop through the story of my work with Esther. We had briefly 'touched base' on our common interest in gender over coffee break before the training. She had mentioned Amanda Sinclair's work and I had said that I had met her at a *Gender, Work and Organisations* Conference in 2005 (see Chapter Two). I was aware that this became a kind of shorthand, a coded reference to a discourse that added weight to the space between us; almost like a field that had been momentarily electrified. It was even (I hoped – I intended) a discourse of resistance, a 'hidden transcript' to use James Scott's term (Scott 1990). But I was also aware of perhaps embodying something else in this electrified space. In my rush to show my credentials, that I had met Amanda Sinclair, was I also in fact embodying a kind of dominance, playing the game of academic competitiveness? Was her hesitancy, what I perceived as a kind of nervousness, a *reaching out* (to a fellow subversive), a *withdrawing* (when met by a competitive male fellow 'academic') or just *her*? Ultimately, whether this was in the service of a nefarious political economy or not, my heart went out to Esther, as a woman leader struggling with the paradoxes that she herself would (bravely) front in her practice session.

As we embarked on this session, I reflected on my own cynicism: that I if I was with this group, practising in this way, I just 'wouldn't go there', on *this* question with *this* group of people. My fantasy is that something would happen that would 'trigger' me; usually somebody would say something overly prejudiced, or naïve and I would get

angry. I had done this type of session many times before, with men during my time with the 'Navigator' programme, and with mixed groups after that.

So was Esther brave or naïve? In truth I never made up my mind on this one. But as she began, I was aware of sitting in the group of 10 or so people, opposite her, and willing her on, silently cheerleading. My intention was to show her great support; this was a role that I had investment in as the meta-facilitator of this programme anyway, but with an added piquancy. But I wonder how my fear for her showed up? Anyhow, for the next fifteen minutes I was aware of having my teeth firmly clamped across my tongue.

Even when we don't speak, we speak. I am not the sort of person who easily hides their emotions anyway. I am sure my face and body betrayed a whole range of highs and lows during that conversation. On reflection though, above all my guess is that what emanated from me was energy of engagement; Esther would have known at the very least that I was extremely interested in what she was doing, and I hope and have decided that this cannot have done much else but encourage her. Was I encouraging her to do the right thing, using my private self in the service of 'good work', work that 'invites the development of craft-like skills and aesthetic judgment (whether in the realm of materials, relationships, or of language)'? (Fisher, Rooke et al. 2000).

She began her session by outlining the question: 'Why do women find it hard to get to the tops of organisations?' She invited the group to come up with reasons why this was the case which she outlined on the flipchart. Although this was a practice session, her colleagues entered into the discussion with enthusiasm and from what I could see, took it very seriously. At one point, one of them, an expert in 'business process management', said that he thought women didn't get to the top because you have to be 'mean' to get to the top and women weren't 'mean' enough. For me, this was a trigger moment: a moment of supreme (gender) naivety from someone highly qualified, a Professor, who 'should know better'. Now when I look back, I can see myself as arrogant and judgemental, as well self-righteous, in taking that position. In the moment, I was 'grabbed', but again I held my tongue. I watched Esther studiously. She seemed at that point to be avoiding my eye contact (with which she had been prolific beforehand). Her face seemed to flicker very, very slightly, and she stood, quite slowly and walked to the flip chart and wrote up the words 'women not 'mean' enough', with studied deliberateness.

My heart was beating. I said nothing (it wasn't in my remit to speak at this point) but I mentally egged her on. To what? I wanted her to let rip. Part of me simply noted that I must praise her (in my role) for *just writing up what the participant had said* - central to the core canon of good facilitation skills. I also wonder whether this was just facilitation practice session on some Friday afternoon, without very much moment to it, after all. But part of me saw this as a huge, defining, act of resistance and compliance, hand in hand, the overt transcript of playing along with this game and the hidden transcript of writing this phrase up, with a particular poise, pace, and mood; a body redolent with such irony that it seemed to drip off and pool on the floor at her feet.

*"Bodies and bodily performances – including physical stature, features, stance, gestures and voice – are central, yet ignored, elements in the accomplishment of leadership" (Sinclair 2005)*

And my own body resonated with her and part of me just wanted to laugh. And, perhaps unaware, I did.

For me, there was a field grace in the room (was it all hers? – did I in any way have a right to claim a role in this field?), an electric fizz, and the sun conspired (in my memory) to slant obliquely into the room at just that moment. And part of me knows that this group may well be an ‘easy group’ to work with around this question, and that an ‘executive group’ may be much more polarised and prejudiced in such a discussion. I felt a strong need to convey this to her; I suppose my intention was one of protectiveness – again a disposition fraught with dangers: was I being hugely patronising or a supportive brother-in-arms, or just teaching my grandmother to suck eggs, or all of these things, and more, that you can spot, which are currently blind to me?

Such ‘gender interference patterns’ as Judi Marshall calls them, (Marshall 1999) can have a paralysing impact – there is a danger that in considering all of these subjectivities we can fail to do anything. But I think what action research suggests is that we act whilst carrying the sometimes painful awareness as much as we can. It is in spite of, even because of these doubled and tripled challenges that we learn action in compassion. These intersecting concerns and considerations must galvanise us rather than paralyse us. It is, as I have described elsewhere, the making of an ‘edge’. We hold intention and intervention in an imperfect relationship and then do some more acting.

So in her feedback session, I said something like:

*“I really admire the way you kept your cool in a discussion that ranged over areas I am sure you have strong feelings about. And you may have to do even more of that with ‘executives’ because their position on these issues may be more naïve than this group.”*

In hindsight I’d like to think that I was *acting (speaking)* here with a view in my work to what Meyerson and Scully call ‘tempered radicalism’ (Meyerson and Scully 1995). I also think that there were other forces. When I look at these words I also observe an attempt at a politically astute register in our voices across the space between us. In Baddeley and James’ ‘political skills’ model, they talk about a spectrum a between ‘owl-like’ (wise) behaviour and ‘fox-like’ (clever) behaviour. (Baddeley and James 1987). The difference is the degree to which one is operating with an intention to ‘integrity’ (i.e. with an anchor in a value-base) or whether out of self-interest. This is another tension that I can see myself holding to; after all, my primary client (and her boss), the head of the business school, is in the room. How owl-like was I in my work with Esther, and how fox-like? I am conscious that this is just one possible account of the story, but what I have aimed to illustrate is the degree to which being a ‘good man’ is a process of ongoing, in-the-moment reflection with attention to espoused and lived values. I have been scant at the end of the account in showing about *how* I said what I said. My memory is that I may have aimed to mirror the studied, careful phrasing that Esther herself was showing. I intended a signal to her in this way. How it landed is harder to know. There wasn’t (has not yet been) a space of clarifying discourse between us. So often, there is indeed no such space. I would suggest that it may have landed as open-hearted, warm and helpful *and* may have been patronising, harsh, even a warning. Who knows depends on who’s looking. But I was *persisting*, acting in the face of conflictedness, and perhaps, momentarily, making a deeper connection, and rising above these tensions.

This amounts to what Wolgemuth and Donahue call an inquiry of discomfort (Wolgemuth and Donohue 2006). There are aspects of this account that leave me feeling this discomfort, in questions such as:

- Was I colluding with the system or challenging it?



- How does this account show where I 'persist or desist' as Judi Marshall describes our living in the action turn?

*"It may sometimes be appropriate to engage in wholehearted self-sacrifice in order to stand for, and so make possible, changes which require this kind of vision and courage. Alternatively, I would argue that staying in a situation beyond one's capacity for flexibility can be dangerous for both the person concerned and the system. The intending change agent becomes too much part of the system after a time and so loses effectiveness." (Marshall 1999) p167*

My sense of both my own position and that of Esther, and perhaps one we created between us relationally, had nuances of both persisting and desisting. It is in the nature of in-the-moment action and reflection to maintain attention to the discomfort, physical, psychological, emotional, that will be a *signal* of good practice. If you are uncomfortable, perhaps this is the price you pay for staying near the edge?

And, how does a political sensitivity in this way cross-cut the objectives of 'playing with' the nuances and body possibilities, as Amanda Sinclair calls them and playing *against* my espoused values of being a 'good man' (Sinclair 2005)? The attention to this question isn't a 'done deal', sorted in the process of action and the account of the action afterwards; it is an ongoing reflexive process, and it demands that we attend to these accounts repeatedly, in a cyclical, deepening process.

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- Ok, so I see you struggling with bringing your reflection into your practice, and my heart goes out to you, in the same way your heart went out to Esther. This is hard work, operating at lots of levels.

- Thanks

- But I'm not letting you off the hook.

- No I didn't think you would

- There's plenty here to inquire into here. For example, I am wondering about your 'discomfort', you know, as you talk about it, as a quality of your *mentshlichkeit*. Doesn't it just mean that you put too much weight by these nuanced, subtle 'moments'? I mean, part of me just wondered whether, to be provocative here, this isn't just a lot of fuss about nothing. It's like you said at one point: this could just be a facilitation practice session, on a Friday afternoon without very much moment at all'. How does discomfort here, staying on this edge of concentrated attention to the relationships, serve your work? Won't some people just ignore their discomfort?

- Yes they might, of course. But I am choosing not to, because it serves many purposes, at the core of this inquiry. I don't think *all* discomfort serves me; it is just a signal, a sign to go towards (rather than away from) what most people, dare I say most men, or at least people working according to the dominant (male) frame, might move away from. To say this is 'fuss about nothing' shows how easily we may disappear relational aspects of what we do and privilege...what else? 'Getting the job done'? What's the job? Who says? Usually 'the job' looks like something men usually do, and the 'fuss' is what women do. So to move towards this world, and to open it up, disestablishes the tendency to see these relationships as a by-product. They become the main focus. An inquiring masculinity is a masculinity that takes more responsibility for something women usually do, even if it looks a little 'queer'. It brings these relationships into the public sphere, working against the 'disappearing acts', as Joyce Fletcher calls them, intentionally attending to relational practice. (Fletcher 1999)

- But then who decides on the quality of these relationships; who assesses their quality?

- I think we have to work hard to constantly reassess these, and to *show* this work. It requires vigilance. Showing this vigilance is the quality of this work. I mean, in the light of what we were saying, I wonder now about my assessment of Esther
- How so?
- I do think she was complying, with some discomfort, but was I trying to engage her in my subversion, rather than the other way around? Maybe I am the naïve one here?
- It does seem to me that you are expecting quite a lot of ‘Professors’, as people who ‘should know better’, their moments of ‘supreme gender naivety’.
- That sounds awful doesn’t it?!
- What I am interested in is what did it lead you to do? How did you act, during Esther’s practice session, that may speak to your ‘expert masculinity’.
- I didn’t do very much during her session. It’s as I said; I sat at the back of the room, and tried very hard not to say anything. I really tried to hold my tongue. Part of me really wanted to jump in and say more about the terrible situation with women’s roles in organisations. Luckily, it wasn’t very appropriate, as the meta-facilitator, for me to do that. I was supposed to be focussing on making sure Esther was practising her facilitation skills and getting feedback. But I may have exuded a kind of superiority. As if I could see a subtext that it was unlikely anyone else was seeing (at least as clearly).
- Even Esther?
- Mmm. Ye-es, if I’m honest, even her.
- It’s interesting that you reference at least two theories and models in the paragraph after the one where you quote yourself praising how she ‘kept her cool’. Tempered radicalism...the owl and the fox...Almost as if all these theories act as a kind of justification of your own voice and position. But what comes through is that you *do* think she was naïve for raising this issue in this way, and her colleagues *were* naïve in their responses. As if there is a whole load of stuff about gender that you ‘know’ about that they don’t. And before that you make a really big claim, in the narrative, about organisations being ‘structurally hostile to women and other marginal groups’. That’s a really strong statement.
- But they are!
- There you go: making a claim to ‘know’ something that others might challenge!
- But it needs saying! I can qualify it!
- Rather than qualifying this, let’s *inquire* into it, in the context of this narrative. What does it say about ‘expert masculinity’, about what you did, and what else can be done towards *mentshlichkeit*, as you call it?
- Ok. So I need to pause and take a breath. I notice that now, I feel like I did in that situation with Esther: very fired up about it all. I want to fight you on it. I want to quote all the literature and statistics. That feeling is data in itself. I have a need to defend, to righteously point out how shitty the situation is for women, for black people etc. etc. It just *grabs* me
- Where does this come from? This ‘righteous need’?
- Good question. I don’t know. Perhaps it comes from being a Jew? After all, as a Jew, I am part of those marginal groups. Or maybe it comes from wanting to show, again, that I am *not* one of *those* men, who are oppressors. I am a ‘good’ man.
- And in your rush to prove it, you also seem to want to show how clever you are, how much you know about all of this stuff.
- Phew. Yes. That’s hard to hear.
- You know, as a woman, the impact it has on me is that it pushes me away from you. It has the opposite effect; I see you as less of an ally, because I feel less in connection with you. I see a man rushing to defend something (even if it is a feminist perspective) and I wonder – what’s all the fuss about? I mean, I *live* with it. I am acutely conscious of what women go through. I have to balance my job with looking after my child, doing all of that. But that’s it. I just get on with it. Why do you feel the need to fight this battle?

- Doesn't it need fighting? I mean inquiry is all very well, but don't we need to man the barricades every now and again?
- Yes, that's true. We need to 'man' the barricades every now and then, in a 'man's' world. But when you do, what I notice is that you move further away from me, not closer.
- So I'm in a real double-bind here. I can't protest because if I do I am haunted by the very ghosts I am trying to exorcise.
- Welcome to my world. It is full of double-binds.
- Yes, and what can I do about it? I feel a kind of despair here, a paralysis. There's nothing good I can do. But I have been here before. That fits I suppose. It is what I was trying to say about going from 'being' to 'becoming' in Chapter One. I take a position on things (even, no *especially*, on Gender) and then realise that too is a *performance* of a kind of expert masculinity. I spot it and have to pull myself back. That is *mentshlichkeit*: struggling, in the moment, with being a *mentsh*, rather than taking for granted I *am* one. It takes me out of the double-bind.
- Yes, and let's not get too black and white about this. That's a habit I have too. In your account, you quite clearly *do* things. You choose not to speak up. That's a good choice. I don't think it would have helped her for you to have joined in that battle. It may also have been fair to assume some of these things about Esther and her colleagues. But that's not the point here is it? This is about *you* in *your* practice. By doing this, now, you are recognising that in your work, and in the accounts you tell about it, there is a kind of heroic, crusading spirit that can creep in and catch you out. This dialogic process helps you to spot that. So what do you do, as a practitioner about that?
- Hmm. I am struck by not wanting to let go of the protest (will there be times when I need it?). But I see the impetus to fight this battle as a sign that a kind of expert, hegemonic masculinity starting to take me over. Looking at this account, it was there in the subtle way I framed it, as about their acquiescence and secret protest, when really it was as much *mine*. That's how it started, and then I am distracted by my own self-righteous crusading, which Esther may or may not have shared. By then this spectre has really taken hold. And only now, by inquiring into my story, can I start to let go of this and see it more nuanced. As I said to Jim in the café: my own defensiveness isn't useful anyway. It is about looking at how I do things, and think about things, about the way of thinking, of being, of moving towards, that the purpose of *mentshlichkeit* is served. It is a very subtle process. I start to claim this as my territory not by what I do, but how I do it. Now I feel sorry for trying to fight you back there!
- It's OK. You can come on a bit fierce sometimes. But when you let go of that, another side of you comes through, a more negotiable side, and then more of a conversation is possible. Surely that is growth-in-connection that Joyce Fletcher says is the essence of relational practice within a feminist epistemology?! (Fletcher 1998)
- Now who wants to show their expertise?!
- Ha! Yes. But I also wanted to show you that I have been doing some reading around your work, because I care.

\* \* \*

### **A Wide Practice - the Steel Client**

In looking at the example of Esther's story, as part of a 'deep' inquiry into my practice, I am conscious that it could be viewed as impractical. How can one sustain attention to such an edge of inquiry? This critique leads me to consider a 'wider' account: how can I track this edge over a longer period of time, in an ongoing client/consultant relationship?

*It was a long, long way down the motorway to the steel plant. Three hours of thoughtful driving. I knew the way well; it was one of those life-defining*

*journeys. These are the ones we have taken many times, not with the monotony of a commute, but more like the visit of a friend who we see from time to time. These journeys are markers; threading like stitches through our lives. They re-appear with a regularity that somehow defines us. The steel plant sits on one side of a wide bay by the sea, and when I was four years old, I remember setting off early in the morning and taking this drive across the country to visit the town on the opposite side of the bay, where my father ran a clothing factory. We'd sit on the beach whilst my father toiled over the mechanical noise. As a child I was mesmerised by the distant steel plant as it belched out its vastness and energy. You could smell the sulphurous smoke of this squatting dragon wafting over the sea. Did I know then that it would have significance to me now, forty years on?*

*This time however I wasn't going to the town. I was actually going to visit the dragon. As part of the new work I was doing, I found myself driving through the security gate and on and on and on, round this long low building that turned out to be the 'rolling mill'. It was so huge that it took many minutes to circumnavigate it. Outside it sat huge billets of finished steel, piled like the grey biscuits of some god. Round the other side, past this low, long seemingly sleeping beast was its contrasting brother, high and mighty indeed. I learned later learned this was the 'bos' plant, a place like you sometimes see in movies, where they play with big vats of molten metal. Flames leapt out from its vaulted roof a hundred metres in the sky.*

*It was all fascinating, exciting and deeply intimidating. As a consultant arriving at a place, I have developed a practice of standing tall, of physically, emotionally and mentally building yourself up to 'be' someone who can meet the expectations of this 'client', who is paying thousands of pounds for this person, this mind and yes, this body (although the latter is never part of the public transcript). I would watch my father do it in the car, when we dropped him off at his factory on the other side of the bay, those years ago. He would subtly shift during the journey. He would become more remote and formal with us. His body would stiffen up. It is a chameleon practice: if the company is bank, we become 'Mr. 'I'm all up for banking''. If it's a local authority, we become 'Mr. Public Service Incorporated'. But now what? I don't want to be 'Mr. Steel'. The last person I know of who had that epithet was a Russian dictator, the biggest murderer in history. So what to do? I will play another kind of game. I will be Mr. Interested, even 'Mr. Inquiring'? Or Just 'inquiring', with no 'Mr'. attached? Can I make that claim? Can I keep myself that loose and open, in this of all places? That is, after all, what I hope to be. I drive up to the portacabin by the sea, where I am due to meet my contact. She arrives: a smiling, round woman who instantly disarms me. 'Like a cuppa?' she says.*

An inquiry process begins with a process of orientation. How do we locate ourselves here, in this world? We are already in a kind of box, whose walls are made up of our history, pre-conceptions, prejudices and so on. Developing a practice of inquiry is about seeking to disestablish this box. In this way, it is commensurate in my view with the Jewish practice of *mentshlichkeit*. Both are about the ongoing performance and both are by definition, always unfinished; they are practices of *becoming*.

The practice of inquiry works in two directions, *into* the thing we are looking at and *into* ourselves as the seer, at the same time. There is a kind of symmetry between disestablishing this box and understanding something new and better about this world we are entering in order to act in it towards some kind of generative change (often as yet to be defined).

My intention with the story above is to give you an inkling of some of this box, as I took it with me down the motorway to meet this client in their main site of business for the first time. Part of the work of the consultant is the adept shape-shifting between different discourses about the worlds we move through, and intending to have some impact on these discourses as we travel through them. I see this as a tentative process though. My agency often feels liminal. The metaphor that comes to mind is of an interplanetary satellite that hopes to stir up the atmosphere of some planet as it goes spinning past it, rather than of an actor at the centre of a stage.

Another discourse we more often encounter is some kind of formal, orientating, 'business-case', about the 'official' reason I was there, doing this work, and indeed you might find this discourse helpful in orientating you with this account:

*I am a Senior Consultant at Roffey Park Institute, a management education institute in West Sussex, UK. Roffey Park was approached by 'Steel' [A pseudonym], to support them in the development of a 'Site Manager's Diploma Programme' ('SMD') an internally accredited general management qualification for personnel who run their steel manufacturing sites across the world, around 300 people in all. I was the Consultant who picked up this client lead and developed the relationship. Roffey Park was finally chosen out of a group of 4 or 5 business schools to work with Steel, in early 2008. Roffey developed the programme in collaboration with Steel's own internal 'Subject Matter Experts' ('SMEs'). - Roffey's willingness and flexibility to work in this way was cited by Steel as a main reason why it was chosen to do this work. The programme has 5 residential learning modules, each of 3 days duration, and these are jointly taught by Steel and Roffey faculty, in 3 locations around the world: Europe (at Roffey Park), Americas (near Steel's parent company's HQ, outside Pittsburgh, PA), and in Thailand. Five cohorts of 20 site managers go through all five modules together annually. In total, the contract is worth about £200K to Roffey Park per year, and was expected to run for around three years.*

*However, in November 2008 having suffered as a result of the global economic downturn, Steel asked Roffey Park if it could suspend the programme until the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2009, in the hope that the global economy would have picked up enough by then that global demand for steel will have increased - it collapsed to almost zero in only two weeks at the beginning of October 2008. Meanwhile, both Steel and Roffey have gone through a process of restructuring and cost saving which has resulted in redundancies in both organisations. However at the time of writing, Steel has approached Roffey Park to discuss a strategy for re-starting the programme. Global HR Director, Mr. B, expressed his satisfaction that the programme was restarting, as he saw it as key to a process of culture change and modernisation that the business needs to go through in order to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The current economic crisis only serves to demonstrate the urgency of this challenge.*

It is the type of discourse of everyday business and actually feels quite easy to write it. But my guess is it is less fun to read it. It may be at best informative but such texts can have very little emotional impact, or at least what emotional impact they have is designed to be very deliberate. There is a sort of numbness that creeps in when we talk this way, in my experience. We join the workings of a well-oiled machine, a mechanised process. We slip into this language with an unnerving ease. In doing so, do I become a kind of person that aims to give the impression of living a life of rational order and control? Yet underneath, there are bubbling cauldrons of emotion, but these

are kept private and where they do 'leak' it is with very clear demarcations of boundary.

*"[T]he formal rules that prop up an institution set limits to the emotional possibilities of all concerned. Consider for example the rules that guard access to information. Any institution with a bit of hierarchy in it must suppress democracy to some extent and thus must find ways to suppress envy and resentment at the bottom. Often this is done by enforcing a hierarchy of secrets." (Hochschild 1983, 2003)p53*

Yet you may like to notice what draws you in this 'rational account' – I know that part of me yearns to say more about the very rational process of 'cost-cutting and redundancies'. And of course, in the context of Roffey Park, I have been intimately involved in this story. I have said something of this in my work with Helena and Steve in Chapter Five. What is noticeable here is the work associated with occupying worlds associated with both these discourses, the public and the private, in inquiring what cost this may have:

*"This sense of emotional numbness reduces stress by reducing access to the feelings through which stress introduces itself. It provides an exit from overwhelming distress that allows a person to remain physically present on the job. Burnout spares the person in the short term, but it may have a serious long-term cost. The human faculty of feeling still "belongs" to the worker who suffers burnout, but the worker may grow accustomed to a dimming or numbing of inner signals. And when we lose access to feeling, we lose a central means of interpreting the world around us." (Hochschild 1983, 2003) p188*

In my role at Roffey Park, I am conscious that I am often complicit in managing these hierarchies and the relationship between the public and hidden transcripts (Scott 1990). We may argue that we do this to serve a wider cause of democratisation, and this may be earnestly felt, but in my inquiry about being a 'good man', developing an inquiring masculinity, there is a need to regularly foreground and explore the action implications of this. It is a particularly pernicious habit of men to lose the connection between these two sides to self. Remembering this connection is about staying human. Nevertheless, such public transcripts can be useful as orientation devices and yet we must notice how easily they trip off the tongue.

So an important question in this inquiry process is how we (my colleagues and I at Roffey) managed the relationship between the public and private transcripts and how far in doing so were we complicit in maintaining oppressive power structures and 'hierarchies of secrets' and how far we used this relationship for generative change.

\* \* \*

- I like the way you draw a parallel in your own story with that of your father. There is something there of the bodily experience of masculinity. The way you aim to stand tall, and yet there is that uncertainty and not knowing underneath. And then you juxtapose that with the account in the everyday language of business. But if that second account aims to manage the emotions in a particular way, then so does the first.

- How do you mean?

- I see it in it a jokiness, like your reference to being 'Mr. Steel', you seem to be finessing something...I am not sure what exactly but I feel like, again, your being 'clever'.

- But this is what it feels like. That experience of armouring up in a way to try and meet the client and impress them...

- Yes and you show how you were disarmed by the client being a woman who offered you a cup of tea. But it still feels a bit...managed.
- Isn't there always such management going on? I am trying to show the distance between the public and private experiences.
- And you do that to some extent. I just want to put down a marker that in a story, the story that you tell, there is still that management going on.

\* \* \*

## Defining Quality Relationally

I intended to widen this inquiry, considering how my own 'first person' inquiry becomes entwined in a kind of second person inquiry – what is the focus of inquiring attention for my colleagues? (Reason and Bradbury 2008). This is sometimes a complex, messy process, where levels of intentional, inquiring participation are often implied rather than fully stated. However, with one of my colleagues, Sabine, with whom I held joint responsibility for the client relationship with Steel, I have specifically invited co-inquiry and this has resulted in some of the conversations you will find below.

We had a series of conversations, in which we discussed what sense we could make together of the quality of our work with Steel, and how did we know we are opening up together a generative space of work.

In this sense-making discussion with Sabine, two key dimensions of quality inquiry practices emerged.

- Being unsettling
- Challenging the nature of knowledge – relational vs formal knowledge

### 1) Being Unsettling

*Sabine: The practical point is we're doing it because we need a client. Initially I thought: we need the money so let's get on with it. As it went on, I guess our slightly mischievous aim is to simply unsettle. The unsettling bit for them is that we're not giving up. When we worked on those three days with the HR group, we made some deliberate choices about when I would take charge. What I noticed is there was a real shift in M. from seeing me as irrelevant to finding some of my stuff quite interesting. To stuff like giving him a hug is for me - I am getting a slight mischievous joy out that. I'm thinking: 'It has at least rattled him'. Gentle persistence.*

*I made a decision that I wouldn't fall into any stereotypical behaviour, like being upset or sulking. Stereotypical in the gender sense but also because it would be an understandable reaction to have. Because of how they are treating me. They were just ignoring me. Dismissing and ignoring. Unconsciously I think.*

It strikes me that Sabine is describing something here that is very much in tune with what Meyerson and Scully call 'tempered radicalism'. (Meyerson and Scully 1995)

The challenge with tempered radicalism, with this edge of unsettling, is that it can be so subtle and carefully nuanced that one could argue we are hardly having an impact at all. We know that we find the culture of Steel somewhat of an unsubtle and hard place to be, akin to the commodity it manufactures. We know that this has a self-evidential impact of privileging a certain kind of person, a certain kind of masculinity. Steel has no women in the senior management team and none of the 300 or so Site

Managers who we are being commissioned to work with are women. Out of their internal 'design team' of approximately 20 with whom we have been working on the development of the programme, there were 3 women. Two of those were in HR roles, the 'people side' of the business, where women are more likely to be found. (One of these is the woman who met me in the first story I tell, above). None of this is surprising for a company with this type of culture.

Yet our proposition would be that they chose to come to us, at Roffey Park, because of something in our culture that they found attractive. In some way, were they looking for unsettling? This has not been expressed directly, but has it been invited, through the nuance, the private discourses that flow in the gaps between and around the formal, public transcripts? To consider this, and engage in a further cycle of action and reflection, I aim to reflect on my own experience of how we came to be working with Steel.

### **Unsettling the HR Director – the HR Director Unsettling Me**

*1) I am at a conference where I am running a breakout session on facilitation skills. It is in the early days of our relationship with Steel, when we have proposed a way of working with them and they are still weighing up the choice between us and other providers of training and development. My phone rings and I decide (once again, breaking my own agreement with myself), to answer it.*

*It is the HR Director of Steel, 'D', the key client and decision-maker. D is a big man with a powerful presence and a loud voice. I am slightly scared of him. He is very bright, bullish and sophisticated. I like him, and I find that dangerous – If I am honest I seek his approval. He is very charming, but my guess is he can also be a bit of a bully at times, and in his dealings with us and with 'M', his direct report, an HR manager and our day-to-day contact in Steel, I have seen evidence of this.*

*- James, have you got a moment to talk?*

*I hardly reply, before he continues. I know that he is on a ridiculously tight, international timetable. But I also sense this is a moment of truth. How do I know that? It is a rare thing for him to contact me and not leave this to 'M', so it must be an important moment in the relationship. He continues:*

*- It's about the SMD [Site Managers' Diploma]. You see we are considering this model of working with a business school, like you at Roffey, and well, to be honest, I just had a call with one of your competitors and it I am wondering about the whole thing. In short, do you think we're mad?*

*- That's a really interesting question! What do you mean by that, D?*

*- Well, they seemed to suggest that it is a foolish thing to do to go into partnership and there's a lot at stake here. I don't think we've got the internal resources to go it alone, not at the calibre of know-how we need for this, and I am wondering if you think this is a crazy undertaking? They seemed to be very reluctant to go into partnership like this. What I mean is, can you work with us?*

*- Oh D, I feel for you! It sounds like they might have been a bit harsh! Well, actually I don't think you are mad to think about this at all. I think far from it, that this is a really interesting, challenging thing, to develop a programme in partnership in this way.*

*- So you don't think we're mad then?*

*- No not at all. I think you are being very forward-looking. I do think there could be some real challenges. We have talked about the cultural differences between Steel and Roffey, but we said that's why you might be interested in us, because we major on the relationship stuff, what some of your colleagues*



would call the 'pink and fluffy'. But I am sure we can come up with a really interesting and useful programme that will do what you want it to.

- Thank you – I am reassured by what you are saying. I just want to be clear: is something that you want to do is it?

- Yes. D. Absolutely.

- OK thank you. I am sorry to take up your time. I will ask M to be in touch. James, I won't keep you. Good bye.

2) Later on, they have made the decision to work with us, and we are at Roffey, showing D around. It is a typical 'show off' tour, walking around Roffey showing off the grounds, the facilities etc. I am with D, the HR Director and our main HR contact, M. At one point, after lunch, D asks where he can go to get 'outside'. I ask him what he needs and he rather sheepishly says, 'Well, actually I need a cigarette!' 'I'll join you for one!' I say. He looks a bit taken aback, but quickly says, 'That'd be great, I didn't think anyone else in the world still so smoked apart from me!' 'I do like the odd one occasionally' I say. Which is almost true: my smoking habit averages about 2-3 a day.

So we stand in the courtyard at Roffey, smoking together.

- It's very beautiful here.' Says D. I wonder how our people will respond. I hope they behave themselves!
- I am sure they will. We're used to all sorts here anyway. [Laughter]
- So how will this design process work really? asks D
- There's no real mystery to it actually. We will give them a bit of background about learning theory and then it is really a case of our people and your people spending time together in smoke filled rooms, as it were! It is actually a good chance for them to get to know each other.
- Yes of course, that relationship will be critical [pause]. We'll be really relying on you, on the Roffey consultants, because our people, don't get me wrong, they're great people, but they don't really know how to teach. They are much more comfortable with a 'tell', you know, telling people the answer.
- Yes we are aware of that. But that's what the Roffey person is there for.
- Thank you. And I appreciate the company in my bad habit.

3) It is just before the first design event. Sabine and I are entertaining D. and M. at Roffey again. They are extremely anxious about the event. Over lunch, D. is in 'tell' mode, downloading his concerns:

- You must be aware that we are used to quite tight processes and procedures. They will expect things to be on time. They won't want to wait around. They also like to work hard. We are used to a long-day, hard-working culture. I hope all of your people are up for it. For example N. [Roffey person coaching the 'engineering & operations' team for the development of that section of the programme] – I mean don't get me wrong, I like him, he's laid back but will he be too laid back for our people? I hope you are coaching him to expect quite a demanding crowd of Steel people.

- I explain that we have every faith in N. That actually he is one of the few people at Roffey who comes from an engineering background himself, in the oil industry.

D. continues with his anxious download. Sabine and I sit, by and large quite still, listening, nodding, occasionally reassuring. Mostly D directs his talk at me. Sabine tells me later that she feels like she wasn't there, again. I feel like we are the mum and dad of an overgrown teenager worrying over the

arrangements for a big birthday party. Or are we more like 'yes men' in the war council of a Dictator?

4) During the first design event, D, M and I are in the corridor, outside one of the meeting rooms at Roffey, where the joint Steel/Roffey team are fulminating over the design of the programme. D and M are more relaxed. D especially. M tends still to focus on the details and all the things that can go wrong rather than right. D is slightly irritated with him: 'Honestly M, try and see the bright side for a change!' Generally, it is all perceived to be going very well. The Steel people like being at Roffey and are impressed by the Roffey people. (Even N!) They are beginning to pull together the shape of the programme and people are getting quite excited. I have explained to D. that, as we expected, we are finding it quite a challenge getting the Steel people to understand the difference between 'delivering presentations' and 'enabling learning'. He is fired up by this and we go into one of the working rooms. After about 5 minutes of listening to the conversation, D launches into a diatribe about how the Steel people need to **listen more** to what the Roffey people are telling them. 'It isn't all about powerpoints you know. There is a huge difference between people being told something and people learning something. You guys need to be more facilitative. Pay more attention to the Roffey Consultant working with you!' The Steel people listen. To me, they look slightly shame-faced, 'told off', with heads down. No-one argues.

Later, back in the corridor. D comes to me and M. and says:

- 'How was that? Did I go in a bit hard?'
- 'Hmm I say', now did you TELL them or were you facilitative of their LEARNING?' I say with a bit of a wink.
- Everyone laughs. I notice M especially enjoying the joke.
- Fair point! Says D.

5) M. has been in a bit of trouble with some of the Roffey people. He is perceived as brusque and aggressive. He definitely has a glass-half-empty style. Some of the women especially, like our administrative coordinator designated to Steel, S, finds him quite unpleasant to deal with. There is a joke going round Roffey that people turn down pointless corridors to avoid bumping into him. Sabine has kept her cool admirably with him, despite his dismissive behaviour. I feel a bit for M. I think he has an unfortunate manner but don't think he is conscious of his impact at all. I also think D. has come down a bit hard on him at times. But people are complaining about him at Roffey and it falls to me to do something about it. He is due to be at Roffey for a meeting and I ask him to come and have a chat with me. I take him into our Chief Executive's office, as it is unoccupied at the moment and is opposite mine, which has my roommate in it. I also do this deliberately because I want to unsettle him a bit. I explain that I need to see him because people are getting a bit uncomfortable about the behaviour of Steel people in Roffey:

- For example, S. is a little unhappy with that conversation you had with her yesterday. She said you were quite brusque. What you have to understand is that at Roffey, how we are with each other is quite important and I don't want people saying they don't want to work with Steel.

M is mortified:

- I didn't realise. I am sorry. It is just my way. I have been given the feedback that I don't listen at times, but it just that I have been working away on the detail in my head.

- Yes I can really see that in you - and you are very good at focussing I the detail. That is your strength I think. But you can perhaps overlook the people in that and your impact on them.

Later, our administrator, S tells me that M. came to her and apologised. She is thrilled with that.

S. says: - You know I really think he was sorry. He wasn't just saying it. It's just what they are like at Steel. They are all like that.

6) Sabine and I are talking. I say:

- You know – it annoys me so much that he comes to me all the time. You send him an e-mail and he replies to me. I keep having to make sure you are in the loop. I think I should push them on this one more. M especially should get the feedback.

- Sabine: I know. But it is really important for me not to respond, to react. In a way that's just playing the game. I think it's great that you want to fight them on it. I feel like you are loyal to me. Like a knight in shining armour. But it could also expose me. And I have my own way of dealing with it

- Me: So maybe it isn't helpful to you? I don't want to put you on the spot. It's interesting isn't it, but that in standing up to them on this I could be making it worse...?

- Sabine: In way, yes. You handle them and I'll handle the Roffey side and if I don't react and expect you to fight my battle for me, that might be better.

Later on, I am at Steels HQ having had a meeting with D and M. I chose not to mention anything about M, having talked with Sabine about it. D. picks something up from me though. Unusually, he sees me out of the building to my car. He says:

- You know, I want you to feel comfortable to come to me about any issues you have.
- Thanks D that's great
- I know for example, that M's manner can be a bit...off-putting at times. I have given him the feedback. But if he is causing any difficulties, then please do let me know. I'll have a word with him.
- No. D, everything is fine.

7) It is January 2009. We are meeting at their HQ. D, M and I are in the D's office. The programme has been suspended due to the credit crunch, which, as D put it, has 'sent our sales into freefall'. He shows me their profit and loss account for the last two quarters. It actually makes fascinating reading, because you can see the credit crunch hitting each continent in turn on its journey eastwards. First the U.S., then Europe, then the Middle-East and finally China and India, all the markets tumble one by one, like dominoes.

But, as D says, they are committed to staying working with us, to keep talking and 'find a way forward'. The programme was perceived as a success as far as it went and the Global CEO has said he is committed to it. We discuss a re-launch for 'quarter 2' of 2009. The times are grim but I get a sense of optimism in the meeting. At the end of the meeting, in the small-talk, I tell them that I am just about to go to Washington, to witness the inauguration of Barack Obama. D is animated by this and we talk about my reasons for going.

- For me he embodies a change. I am interested to see what kind of a man he is, up close as it were. It relates to the PhD research I am doing. I wonder if he is a good man.

I have only mentioned my research to them once or twice. I realise I have avoided it. It as if I made a judgement that they would find it odd, and me odd,

*being interested in 'men's stuff'. But D. seems really interested. And M. says he knows that I used to run a men's programme. He read about it in my biography. I wonder who has more of a problem with this. Me or them?*

*Later that week, D sends me an email, in response to a Xmas email, to which he had just got round to replying:*

Dear James

Just a short note to thank you for your greetings of the Season. I have enjoyed our partnership with you, Sabine and the Roffey team in the last year as we have put SMD on the map. At a personal level I have valued my contact with you including a little bit of coaching here and there which often does not happen at my level.

Finally you and the Roffey culture can take a good deal of credit from your pacy and flexible reaction to our financial turbulence causing the suspension of the program most regrettably. I hope that we can get things back on an even keel in Q2 next year.

Trusting that you have had a peaceful Xmas break with the family, and wishing you well for your trip to the U.S. for the swearing in of BO.

See you soon

D.

*Back at Roffey, later that week, I walk into the lounge and find M sitting there. He has his papers spread out and his laptop. He is dressed casually, in jeans and a sweat shirt. He sees me and jumps up.*

- *I hope you don't mind. He says. If I work here I can actually get some work done. It is so peaceful.*
- *Not at all M. Please make yourself at home.*

### **What do these scenes show – 1) About 'Settling/Unsettling'**

I am aware that this is just one telling of the story of settling/unsettling relationships between Steel and Roffey, but I see them as a 'good enough' account to show the tensions, ambiguities and in-the-moment challenges that I face when dealing with a longer term relationship, whilst holding onto my inquiry practice of *mentshlichkeit*, of good-man-ness.

I notice in this account a surfacing of the tensions I feel around my relationship with D. It is interesting that behind the 'formal contract' of a supplier/client relationship, involving the exchange of goods and services worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, is the private, hidden transcript of a relationship, in this case between two men. I actually really like D. I have come to like him in the course of this relationship, warts and all. And I think he likes me. I am drawn to him, and the relationship matters to me. In the course of doing work like this, the possibility of this kind of relationship as the hinge on which the world turns is an unsettling, generative prospect.

And in doing this 'relational practice', as Joyce Fletcher calls it (Fletcher 1998), questions are raised about the exploitation of the private in service of the public. How genuine, affirming, authentic of human flourishing are such relationships? And in the power dynamic of the relationship between D. and I, how far is it possible to push the authenticity. Is this tempered radicalism in the service of generative relational masculinity, of *mentshlichkeit*, or the harnessing of emotional labour in the service of industrial and commercial growth, 'blind' to its purpose and values, except in the

service of Adam Smith's famous 'hidden hand' behind free-market economics (Smith 1776, 2003)?

Is this 'growth in connection' as Fletcher would have it:

*"The basic tenet of relational theory – that growth and development occur best in a context of connection – is further delineated by the identification of specific characteristics of these growth-fostering connections. In other words, growth is conceptualized as occurring not in any engagement or relationship but through a specific kind of relational interaction. These growth-fostering interactions are characterized by mutual empathy and mutual empowerment, where both parties approach the interaction expecting to grow from it, and where both parties feel a responsibility to contribute to the growth of the other. The ability to develop relationally requires certain strengths: empathy, vulnerability, an ability to experience and express emotion, an ability to participate in the development of another, and the expectation that relational interactions will be sites of growth for both parties involved."(Fletcher 1998) p167*

I cannot guarantee that this is the nature of our relationship, and that at some level it isn't all held together by a commercial imperative that undermines the genuine nature of such relational practice. Or does it undermine it? As Sabine reminded us at the beginning of this section, 'Roffey needed the money'.

So I am troubled (usefully) by my own action/reaction in my relationship with D. I am aiming at unsettling, at a gentle nudging and also at being unsettled by the questions behind my own action. For example, am I brave or challenged by the idea that there are private aspects of my own life, like my work around masculinity, which I have tried to keep out of our relationship? Was this wise 'tempered radicalism', or a denial of authenticity?

I am struck by the way in which I challenged D. and didn't allow him to bully M on my behalf, as I suspected he would have done if I would have said more about M's behaviour and its impact on the Roffey system. Is this evidence of good-man-in-practice? Could I have challenged him more on this? Or was my jokey exchange with him (see 4. above) around his style, one example of the 'right' kind of unsettling that has enough (but not too much) of an impact to open up a genuine relational space of interaction, to enable him, and provide him with the 'bit of coaching here and there' to take us all towards a more generative form of inquiring masculinity/humanity?

*"The subtleties associated with gender often create different experiences of the same organizational situation and present many practical problems for the way men and women interact on a daily basis. Sometimes, the difficulties created are so significant that they give rise to conscious and unconscious strategies for "gender management". (Morgan 1986) p179*

It is interesting that both Sabine and I were actively engaged in such a strategy and I had to take my lead from her that fighting on her behalf for more recognition wasn't going to be particularly useful – that in some ways had I done so, I would have been acting out quite a heroic, 'knight in shining armour' role. Because I was so triggered by this, and because I am doing *this* action research, I could have been more willing to fight this battle and I catch myself (again) finding myself potentially acting in a way which has the opposite consequence to my stated intention and values.

Once again, it is being 'caught in the act' of such a transgression, noticing it in myself, in the moment, and choosing not to act it out, or to act it out in a measured way (was

my discussion with M. in 5. above so measured?) that might constitute quality in the work of *mentshlichkeit*? I could place myself as expert and suggest that I don't get caught this way because of all I have read, done and seen in this area of work. But that's not true. I do get repeatedly caught in the act; such is the deeply ingrained nature of the spectre of masculinity. I am almost glad of it in a way, because, like Jim Porter in the *Gender Futures* story, I have the opportunity to remake myself, moment to moment. Such is the relational nature of self in an inquiring masculinity. Such is *mentshlichkeit*.

## 2) About the nature of knowledge-in-relationship

I notice in these vignettes of our work with Steel how much they focus on the small number of core relationships that hold the wider project together. The lives of many people across the world, and the relationship between Roffey Park and Steel, is contingent upon the relational fault lines between basically four people, M., D., Sabine and I. Therefore the public transcript of the programme is held together by the private, hidden transcripts of our relationships. For Fletcher, one test of the validity of our work might be to subject it to her research questions:

1. *Is there evidence that relational practice exists in this organizational setting? What beliefs, assumptions, and values do these behaviors reflect?*
2. *What are the mechanisms through which relational practice and the belief system underlying it are brought into the dominant discourse and subjected to the sense-making truth rules of that discourse? (Fletcher 1998) p168*

Looping back to my conversation Sabine again:

*J: But I come back to the fact that they make steel in dirty and dangerous environments. You wouldn't expect them to be all playful and camping about - what do we expect? What do we hope for in our mischievousness, our unsettling?*

*S: I am not sure I am expecting a huge change. I am hoping for one. Yes they make steel and steel is a hard commodity not a lot of fun to it, but what you do with steel can be quite creative. Do people who work down coal mines, also dirty and hard, have no sense of humour, or community? I am not seeing that sense of community. I am not sure that is about what they do. I think it is about more than that. I think for me, these guys are meant to be leaders and I don't think you can lead without having a relationship. I think you lead through relationships. These guys aren't very capable of having a relationship, working at a level of relating to someone. They are OK to tell someone something, to bark orders, to have a talk with someone. But I don't think they are able to relate in the sense of really understanding someone, really hearing someone or putting themselves in someone shoes, because if they could, for example, they wouldn't have these absolutely awful accidents. In order to have a relationship with anybody you have to be able to notice what you notice about you, the situation and the other person. That is what I am hoping they will be able to do and relating that back into their business environment, making something out of that for themselves as leaders. I wouldn't necessarily ever say that to anybody there, because they would think I'm crazy.*

*But that would be my aim in terms of unsettling, because for me their learning is around the knowledge thing. For them it's 'give me a puzzle and I'll give you the knowledge and you solve the puzzle'. But I think real learning comes through reflecting and noticing and I don't think they do that.*

*J: That is the relevance of the hug – if you can really relate to someone you can hug them – it's an embodied connection - all pink and fluffy at one level but at another level it is very confronting.*

*S: Well if you work on the premise that all bad stuff happens because of bad relationships, then you can only undo that by having good relationships. Learning how to relate well is the basis of making change. I couldn't say this to them but that would be my hope.*

It is of course a big claim to suggest what Sabine and I are suggesting to here – that we are the arbiters of whether people in Steel can lead through the quality of relationship. But it was to a degree self-evident in a number of factors. Firstly, the evolution of the Site Managers Diploma was in Steel's requirement for a more formalised, coherent set of knowledge areas that, as we subsequently agreed, were about turning 'Site Managers into Site Leaders'. It was also evident in the discussions with D, which he subsequently helped us to relay, albeit heavy-handedly in the Design meetings to their own Steel Subject Specialists (see vignette 4 above). But the clincher in this argument was something that Sabine and I uncovered in one of our sense-making discussions:

*S: We are tickling them*

*J: Tickling them to be a bit more human. How do we know, we are doing that?*

*S: For me, the fact they are still with us means something. Because, they could do this all by themselves. If it was pure knowledge, it's all done, it's over. If you just want this to be about the material, they wouldn't need us anymore. The fact that they don't do that and that they want to change this into something different, a culture shift, it shows that we are doing something, if nothing else other than rattle them, there is more to life than just the knowledge. That's a real nugget there. There is something there that makes them curious. That is something they don't have and they need us for that.*

*J: They will still talk to each other in very instrumental terms but actually they are still talking to us because there is something more to knowing than knowing this material.*

*S: There is a psychological contract there that we need to tease out.*

*J: Paradoxically, we can't easily clarify it, because it is not cost-able and it would scare them.*

*S: It is out of their awareness*

*J: We need to have a conversation with them about something we can't really talk about.*

*S: Unless we could talk to them about it, but it becomes about how far you can tickle. Does it become bullying?*

*J: It is inferred - when D. talks about 'the odd bit of coaching you have given me' it is very unclear, there is no clear contract.*

*S: It isn't a contract*

*J: But there is definitely something important there. A relationship. We are in a shape-shifting place, talking about instrumental knowledge, about the module content, but at the same time talking about something else. About relating. That's fascinating. It has brought tears to my eyes!*

What's fascinating about this proposition is that there Sabine and I are naming a phenomenon that sets challenges in my inquiry process at many levels. We are in a sense naming something that we hadn't quite noticed ourselves fully before; the whole nature of the relationship was based on 'developing the module content and processes for site managers development across five knowledge areas':

- Safety
- Engineering & Operations
- Contracts and Commercial Practices
- Financial Management
- Leading People & Change

Apart from the fifth module (arguably) the programme was by the time Sabine and I sat down for our conversation, complete. There was no more design work to be done. Steel could in theory, say 'thank you very much' and get on with delivering it themselves, and detach themselves from Roffey. And not only were they choosing to stay in connection with us but also, a time of unprecedented financial constraints, are taking an opportunity by asking us to re-invigorate the programme for a more 'Senior' group of leaders, and paying for this service.

As an aside: another echo of the *Gender Future* story – how unpredictable events, in this case the credit crunch (a model offered by the ecological collapse in the story) offer up (ironic) evolutionary possibilities, that are in also unpredictable but have frightening phenomenal power, much more than our deliberate action for change ever could hope for.

Once again, the baseline here could be to acknowledge the political economy of an organisation simply wanting to stay ahead of its competitors. But again, to invoke the tension that I highlighted earlier, in this 'truth' there could be the germ of a possibility for more generative, relational possibilities. But also, subject to Fletcher's criteria above, the real test of this is how far we are enabled to foreground the relational possibilities here, how far we *bring this practice into the dominant discourse and find mechanisms to subject this relational practice to the sense-making truth rules of that discourse.* (Fletcher 1998) p168

In the vignettes above, like for example in the story of the email from D. (see vignette 7.) there are glimmers, glimpses of us bringing this practice into the dominant discourse, and glimpses of us managing this in a distinctly private space, and therefore colluding with maintaining the separation of public and private that is the hallmark of the dominant discourse. That is the nature of this work; always on the edge between working within, around and against that discourse in order to challenge it.

But first of all we have to notice this relational possibility ourselves, and bring it into our own discourse as practitioners: what I am really struck by is how it took quite a level of co-reflection between myself and Sabine for us to notice that we were still 'in there', as it were, and therefore having some kind of relational impact. We may propose it is out of *their* awareness but how much is it in *our* awareness!?

This takes me right back again to the story of Jim Porter. He is challenged early in the *Gender Futures* story about whether his knowledge *about* gender actually has any impact on his behaviour *in* gender. This is a fertile edge along which I walk in this inquiry. It is also highly relevant to the Steel story, because we are standing for a type



of relational (as opposed to 'formal') knowledge and for me there is a seduction in this that relates directly to the kind of masculinity trap that Jim Porter discovered for himself.

As I discussed with Sabine:

*J: That's really interesting because part of me feels like, in order to be in that [Steel] world, I need to hide a part of myself, from myself. I was conscious of standing in the room in the first design workshop, basically haranguing them and thinking 'My God! What kind of a man am I being right now?' But actually still deciding that is what they needed. We had so much to sort out, the testing, the programme, the material, and they were faffing around and not paying attention to each other, or us, and I had to say 'You've got to do this and that!' And they responded. They sort of bantered with me but I got their attention. I had a feeling then of being 'one of the boys'. You know, I had to shout at them! In order to do that and gain their credibility I had to hide part of myself away, a sensitive part.*

*S: You have to put part of yourself in a bracket*

*J: But that suggests it is easily un-bracket-able, but I am not sure it is.*

*S: That could be tricky, in terms of staying integrated*

Staying integrated. Staying whole. This was Jim Porter's challenge and indeed is mine. Another was that of the trap of expert: was he an expert in masculinity or an expert practitioner in an inquiring generative masculinity? Similarly with Steel, am I an expert in relational knowledge or in the *practice* of relational knowledge?

Was I hired by Steel to *show* them relational practice or *tell them about* relational practice? And more importantly, how can I spot when I am being seduced by the 'expert' role conferred upon me in the work that I do?

In my dialogue with Sabine, I am struck by my assumption that the relational practice of our work is 'not cost-able'; in other words, it is hard to calculate how much it is worth in economic terms. Arlie Hochschild talks about that the 'commercialisation of human feeling', and this is a challenge to our work. (Hochschild 1983, 2003)

Part of this process of commoditisation is in that 'bracketing' of self. The story I tell above reminds me of a colleague, Geoff Mead. At a conference on masculinity, he told a story about when he was a Senior Policeman. He said that when he went to work, he remembered putting away a part of himself just to get through the day. Then one day, a few years into the role, and already quite high up the formalised authority of rank, he was asked 'how he felt' and he couldn't recall. He realised he had forgotten where he'd left the key to that part of himself he'd hidden away.

In some way, in my own telling of the Steel story, I realise that I too have had this regular experience of self-partition, of hiding the key in order to get through, to be a certain way, to survive and thrive amidst a certain dominant, masculinity. But I do believe there is a subtle 're-remembering' that can be consistently recapitulated to enable both sides of this elusive coin to be seen. We can get 'in' through such partitioning, and if we are embedded enough in critically subjective communities of practice (thank you, my friend Sabine), we can 'stay out' enough to practice relationally, rather than just talk about it. I hope.

\* \* \*

- I notice two relationships here – one with Sabine and one with the HR Director. D. Like I was saying – who assesses their quality? You suggest that your and Sabines’ ‘truth rules’ prevail. I think this stands in some way, as an example of second person inquiry, but I also think it needs *working* further.
- Working further?
- Yes – I have a hunch that something else is going on here. As I said, I notice the management of the story. I notice the story-teller. If you notice the story-teller, it tells you there may be something more going on. Perhaps it’s just an opportunity for more ‘vigilance’.
- But I was looking at the Steel example, relationally, with Sabine.
- Yes, that’s fine. That works OK. But it also begs a question. A problem I have with Joyce Fletcher’s work is if we are judging quality by how we bring the ‘private’ discourse into the ‘public’ and subjecting them to the ‘truth rules’ of the dominant discourse, who judges which is the private and which the public, and whose is the ‘dominant discourse’? In *practice*? It means we can slip into black-and-white judgements if we’re not careful. In reality, these lines of demarcation may be very subtle.
- Do you think we’re being unsubtle?
- Perhaps a bit. In inquiry terms, is there more here going on that we can be *vigilant* to?
- How can we go about answering that?
- Rather than answering that – let’s take an inquiring frame. Let’s look at the two relationships side by side, and see what emerges. Tell me about your relationship with D. For example what does the ‘little bit of coaching here and there’ signify? It seems like a private discussion popping up in the public discourse (in the email).
- The example is in scene no.4. My coaching was just a little, *nudging*; teasing even. He seemed to appreciate it, so I nudged some more. I remember him telling me how he liked to nudge *his* boss. He said that you could gently tease him but not too far. His boss didn’t have that much of a sense of humour. I remember him saying ‘*Steel isn’t a touchy feely place, - we have to keep ourselves disciplined*’. I took that as a signal for the fact that he appreciated a bit of nudging from me, but also that I shouldn’t take it too far.
- What would too far have looked like?
- Good question. Perhaps if I had been too informal. Too relaxed. Perhaps even too open and ‘touchy feely’. That’s what it felt like.
- So what I notice is that there is a very subtle management of relationships going on, between two men. And it is brought into the public discourse in quite subtle, deliberate ways (like by that email for example), and then here’s you and Sabine making a very strong judgement: ‘People in Steel aren’t very capable of having relationships’.
- You’re right. I think Sabine and I are colluding there. I think though that that’s about our relationship. I have let her take the lead in sense-making there. I even noticed that at the time but chose not to challenge it.
- Why not?
- I’m not sure.
- And you make a choice, at one point, for her to manage the Roffey side of things and for you to manage the client. What was that about?
- That was strategy to help us manage the way in which she was feeling marginalised and ignored.
- Yes and at one point you say that this is about being ‘tempered radicals’. Although you do ask the question about whether this was really just another way of saying that you are hardly having any impact at all (what’s the difference between tempered radicalism and just being insignificant) - that’s good stuff, but in this strategy, how are you actually colluding with what Joyce Fletcher calls the sense-

making truth rules? You are just allowing her to fade into the background. How much is that about bringing relational practice into the dominant discourse? And isn't this just a strategy for managing your everyday work.

- It was a strategy that worked at that time. It helped her to manage her frustrations and now she is much more in the foreground. I notice that now, she has as much to do with the client directly as I do
- But there's something there, isn't there, about a kind of collusion between you? It's as if you think – 'because I am doing this sense-making with a woman, it is inherently more relational and therefore more critically subjective.'
- Phew. You've got me there! I think there is some of that going on.
- So tell me more about your relationship with Sabine
- We get on very well. But we didn't always. We came to Roffey at about the same time, and for a while, our relationship was quite unsettled. There was a stormy-ness between us. But we worked on it. It led to us looking at our backgrounds
- Howso?
- She's German and we talked about how our German and Jewish identities seemed to be a source of tension between us.
- So how does that play out now?
- I feel quite...protective of her now. Hence wanting to fight on her behalf. The knight in 'shining armour' role'.
- Yes you talk about being 'really triggered' by their treatment of her.
- It annoyed me that they were marginalising her.
- How were they?
- By focussing so much of the work through me. Sometimes, she would send them an email or something, and they would reply to me. So I wanted to challenge them on that, but then we had that conversation (see 6.), and I realised that if I had gone in there, guns blazing, I could have behaved in a way opposite to my intention. It was a good spot I think. I was glad I didn't do that because I think it may have taken away her power
- Her power?
- Yes, she needed to stand on her own there, not rely on the man to do it for her. It is a bit of a hall of mirrors isn't it? In choosing not to be her 'Knight in Shining armour', maybe I am being it. In giving her a lot of room to make sense of things, maybe I am also patronising her. And then there's the way in which our German/Jewish dynamic make me wary. And then how this has an effect on our relationship with the client. I have a sense of Sabine and I turning this into an 'us and them' – *we* are the ones who understand relationships and they don't. *We* are unsettling them because they need that from us.
- So what impact did this have?
- I don't know. Perhaps not any. No - perhaps this is just 'noise' that we create between us. It is something that goes on quite a bit at Roffey. We talk about working 'relationally', which means we spend quite a lot of time looking at our relationships, or managing strategies around them (like this one with Sabine) and meanwhile what happens with the client becomes, sort of, peripheral.
- So they are paying for you to have your noise together?
- Yes, but our noise is just a parallel of theirs. They've got their own noise. What comes up now is that I am conscious of negotiating myself between these different worlds. Firstly there's the world of Steel and my relationship with D. I admire him and how this work throws up the possibility of valuing my relationship with him. It creates a glimmer of a possibility for becoming more relational with him, as Fletcher defines it. But separate to that, there's another frame here, which is to do with my relationship with Sabine, That's about the working relationship with another colleague at Roffey. It is about inviting her into my inquiry. I am struck by a sense of living in quite a different world with her and with Steel people.
- So what do you do between these two worlds, relating to *mentshlichkeit*?

- Right now, it makes me feel tired! It is very tiring being these two different people. I relate to Sabine in an intense, complex, emotive world, the world of Roffey Consultants, and I relate to D. in a different register, more transactional, but with a kind of subtle play *towards* being a bit more relational (a 'little bit of coaching here and there'). It is exhausting shape-shifting between these two worlds.
- So what does that say about *mentshlichkeit*?
- I am not sure, but it says something about bringing all these different layers of self, types of self, shape-shifting between these worlds. That is a practice that this inquiry has thrown up. I really recognise that. I get home sometimes and I am exhausted, and I wonder if that is because I have had to live in so many worlds, being so many different people. Perhaps that is a sign of quality here. That working towards *mentshlichkeit* is about being prepared to shape-shift. Perhaps the dominant masculinity doesn't flex. It is as I describe in Chapter Three, the 'shifty, protean Jew' (that Otto Weininger hated) is another way of characterising what we all have to do to be 'mentshlich' - shape-shift and flex in innumerable relationships
- And isn't that just what your father was doing, as you drove down the motorway with him in the car? You watched him physically change as he shifted into work mode.
- Gosh. Yes. That's a surprise. It suggests that there isn't much difference between us, after all.

## Conclusion to Chapter Six

In the discussion with Sarah above, many new perspectives have emerged. Other portals of inquiry exist of course, which you may have spotted and I am open to this conversation. My intention was merely to invite another subjectivity, (in this case Sarah's), and I have found it consistently fascinating and surprising how 'storied' voices like Sarah's have found their own authority in this way. My hope is that they will be as real to you as they are to me. The above conversations with Sarah, interwoven with my practice accounts, have thrown a new light on relational practice at the heart of *mentshlichkeit*, and the need to work and re-work the sense-making, which is a vital practice in inquiry, bearing in mind a sensitivity to the relationship between knowledge, power and multiple perspectives. They help me disrupt my own voice of expert, a practice of critical subjectivity central to *mentshlichkeit*, being a good man.

There is no easy conclusion to this practice – it is by definition suggestive of a process that challenges the (complete) hero-narrative of self-made men that *showing* the restless practice of constantly re-making the self is in itself enough in the context of an inquiring masculinity.

But the final paragraphs of the conversation with Sarah brought into light a key perspective of this part of my inquiry, relating especially to my work at Roffey with clients. It was the tiredness I felt; the sense of exhaustion that came up as I reflected on the constant re-making of self, that I share (uneasily) with my father's. Is what we do so very different after all?

*"One of the most important basic processes in organizations and one of the easiest to observe, is how people communicate with each other, particularly in face-to-face and small-group situations. The process consultant must be aware of such processes because they are central to the establishment of his relationship with the client in the one-on-one situation, and they are likely to be the most salient aspect of the kinds of settings in which he will find himself early in the relationship."* (Schein 1969) p21

Compare this with:

*“What is new in our time is an increasingly prevalent **instrumental stance** towards our native capacity to play, wittingly and actively, upon a range of feelings for a private purpose and the way in which that stance is engineered and administered by large organizations.” (Hochschild 1983, 2003) p20*

My work as a ‘consultant’ occupies an interesting territory in relation to these above quotes, especially in the light of my own inquiry, and this sense of tiredness that arises in the conversation with Sarah.

Edgar Schein is a key figure in the field of consultancy and organisational development. He incites the Consultant towards what he calls ‘process consultancy’. This is a critical response to the more instrumental, pseudo-objective/scientific approach to this work, which draws on what Schein calls the ‘doctor-patient’ or ‘expert’ models of consultancy. In these approaches, the consultant offers a rarified, ‘objective’ analysis of the organisation, as if they are able to adopt a non-stance; one in which their mind is in Cartesian disassociation with their body. Schein rescues us from this calumny by invoking relationships and their exploration in the course of our consultancy work. In this way, the process consultant uses something more of *himself* [sic] in administering to the ‘improvement’ of the client’s world. I wanted to be one of those consultants who would be more ‘human’, using *something of myself*, developing earnest and engaged relationships with my clients.

What Hochschild is rightly pointing to in her work is the critique of this view as in some way a colonisation of the private sphere. It relies on the assumption that our private selves are free for use; our emotional meter is running in the operation of our role as consultants. Therefore, the private self is harnessed for ‘useful’ work, and even men can find a register of emotional expression more useful, especially if it yields earnings:

*“Gender is not the only determinant of skill in such managed expression and in the emotion work needed to do it well. But men who do this work well have slightly less in common with other men than women who do it well have with other women. When the “womanly” art of living up to private emotional conventions goes public, it attaches itself to a different profit-and-loss statement.”(Hochschild 1983, 2003) p20*

When I look at Schein’s work in the light of what Hochschild is claiming, I get a bit of a cold feeling. I can find no examination in it of the ‘he’ who might choose to use ‘his’ own feeling world, ‘his’ private self, in this service. For me, this represents a blind spot; a fascinatingly absent ‘body’ of inquiry into the ways and means of the emotional life we open up in this way, like another tool in our box, and even more, what price there may be to pay for self and others in this art? No wonder I feel so tired, sometimes, in the course of this work.

The conversation with Sarah has stopped me short. In my work, and my yearning to be a ‘Consultant’, I have played on this desire to be a ‘slightly less common’ man. I have skilfully (I hope) worked the edge of private, emotional expression, this ‘womanly art’. And yet, if it has been in the service of quite traditional organisational and personal profit motives, and therefore quite instrumentally wrought, how radical a shift does this managed heart represent?

I realise that my yearning to inquire into the public/private nexus is precisely to see if this art can be taken a bit further: can I stretch it beyond a breaking point? Will I make a break *through*, whereby I am no longer just being a ‘nice man’ in service of old

fashioned ends, but a truly *good* man, in service of the values I espouse: to go beyond, to disrupt, to *own* the post-gender campaign body and soul?

*A mentsh lives by a code of honor, goes against his self-interest to act with nobility and decency, and is more concerned with pursuing his convictions than success. (Blach 2000)*

So this brings me back to the starting for this chapter; in the inquiring space between the 'glamorous expert knower' and the 'not knowing', I have found a tiredness, a tiredness that I sometimes bring home to my children on a Friday night, an echo not of the *future* but of the *past*, of my own father's similar tiredness. This is surprising, and in many ways illuminating. It suggests to me that inquiry has some life in it, because it often throws up the unexpected in this way.

In terms of *mentshlichkeit*, of being a good man, this is a humbling experience. Once again, I am thrown into place of surprise, of genuine uncertainty, of *not knowing*; a subtle reification of my own performance as a father, compared to that of my own father, has been exploded. In some ways I am back where I started. This is not a bad thing. I feel liberated, and filled with wonder.

As Jim Porter wrote to his children (see Chapter Four):

*The real legacy I can leave you is my uncertain but persistent questioning, my inquiring 'What sort of a man am I?' In the end, isn't it their children who ultimately know the answer to this question of their fathers? Only you and Jenn will be able to look back and say with some authority: this is what he was really like. And so we may meet in the middle of this labyrinth one day. But it helps me to ask, so thank you for letting me. Gradually through this process I am letting go, of my pride, my vanity, my sense of self-importance and standing here hand in hand with you, naked and full of nothingness.*