

## Chapter One – Being the Change?

*“Weren’t you that guy who used to run those men’s programmes?”*

### Using Stories

I offer you the stories you will find in this text as a gift. It is my intention in writing them is to show my experience, living my inquiry questions around masculinity in my work and life, with an attention to different subjectivities; to disrupt the smoothness of the academic voice, and open up new possibilities in the search for *mentshlichkeit*, the art of ‘being a good man’, in these times, and in my locality. But, as I have learned, stories, and the characters within, once released into the world, have their own life. They cease to be mine alone. The research process becomes shared, in a space between the reader, myself and the characters in the story.

I see such stories as a type of ‘presentational knowing’ (Heron and Reason 1997), a form of knowledge that bridges experience and proposition, (or ‘theory’). I am attempting to ‘live life as inquiry’, as Judi Marshall calls it (Marshall 1999). How can I show this type of embedded, immanent knowledge, which is the signature of this type of Action Research? I chose to do so in a narrative.

My aim as an Action Researcher is to become fully immersed in the questions I am interested in, in a participatory relationship with the world, rather than creating a distinct and abstract research ground, separate to me, as in traditional social-scientific method. As I will argue, this inherently requires a consideration of how I live my life, mind, body and soul, rather than as an abstract thought-experiment, in which I am some impartial observer.

This type of research requires active choices about the framing and perspective one chooses. It is like painting a picture: we have to choose the angle, the perspective, the level of detail, the medium, the frame. The stories I show trace a particular picture, an arc of inquiry, between my relationship with my children and my current working environment at Roffey Park. The process of starting to write and show these narratives to others enabled active choices that, hopefully, reveal experiential data; that is, data in relation to a question researched in the course of living one’s life. This may then uncover practical choices, and in this way, the story can draw others into the inquiry. It isn’t an exact science. Following on with the picture metaphor, it is more of an art. So, how do we know if this type of picture is any good? It is a matter of perspective, even of taste, but also, at times, (even if we don’t like the picture), we can appreciate the technique, the work that went into it, the journey it takes us on, and ultimately, how it moves us. As with a work of art, I would claim a mark of quality in this research process is in how it is more than ‘just about me’; it may have the capacity to reach out to the experience of others, to draw you in, and relate your own experience to mine, so that you may feel like joining in the conversation around these challenging questions.

As they grew, these stories, and the characters within them, became more than a representation of my lived experience. They became an inquiry process in themselves, with new possibilities therein. Writing stories was like shaping the unknown, moving towards a darkness just beyond my outstretched hand. I relate this to what Barbara Turner Vesselago calls ‘writing fearwards’ (Turner-Vesselago nd). It is if this darkness represents a territory of evolving knowledge about gender and masculinity. I found an evolutionary process unfolding as I cycled through the ‘extended epistemology’, the wider ways of knowing that John Heron and Peter Reason describe: through the practice of being a father and working at Roffey Park (‘practical knowing’), to the theories and texts I read (‘propositional knowing’), to ‘representational knowing’ in

story, to lived experience ('experiential knowing') and back again (Heron and Reason 1997).

Unlike what I did in my first degree in Social Psychology, the methodology for this type of research has evolved in parallel with the content, rather than being decided upon as a separate thing, usually in advance. I set out to move towards a territory of inquiry and I have done different things in different places in this territory, as the need has required. It is more of a circular than a linear process, one quite specific to the journey I am on. The method is bound up with the worldview and the worldview in turn bound up with the life of the researcher and knowledge we are looking to develop, and indeed the thesis in which we develop it:

*The idea that we can think consciously about presenting and re-presenting the stories we tell proffers an enticing invitation to think reflexively and self-consciously – not just about the fieldwork we do, but also about the means we choose and use to relay our fieldwork tales to audiences. (Lincoln 1997) p38*

Each of us may find (or stumble upon?) our own methodology, relevant to our own subjectivity and temporal/spatial locality. This is an account of my tentative journey towards mine. This doesn't mean that it was an entirely haphazard process. I took with me some tools, like you do when embarking on any journey into the unknown. My dexterity with these tools, or 'practices', of inquiry also evolved. I spend some time in Chapter Two showing you which ones I took with me, and then in the rest of the thesis you can see how I learned to use them, particularly in the stories I tell, and the way these interweave with the main 'voice' of the thesis.

At the heart of this process is a proposition that there is an inherent relationship between knowledge and power, akin to what the 'Dr. Porter' is explaining in the excerpt above. In post-modern terms, this is about understanding that there is always a 'gaze', a way of understanding that is bound up with particular subjectivities. Those subjectivities aren't all 'equal' - they have different weight associated with them. The post-modern challenge is that traditional, 'positivist' inquiry is blind to its own gaze. My intention is to reveal and explore the challenges associated with the gaze of the white, male academic, (what one might call the 'dominant gaze'); and even the possibility of developing my own gazes, my different ways of seeing, as a developmental process, enhancing my capacity to relate to others, do my job, be a better father and a good man, what in Yiddish is called a '*mentsh*'. It is a worthwhile irony that this might include exploring my subjectivity as a young woman. To hold on to this subjectivity intends to deliberately disrupt the 'comfort' of a dominant masculinity.

In this sense then, with an inquiring approach, we are taking into account the challenge to a dominant worldview that post-modernism claims, and the resultant subjectivities we must consider, including our own.

Action research also suggests that we shouldn't be paralysed by the complex and difficult challenge to knowledge that post-modernism suggests.

As Yvonna Lincoln says:

*But within our partial and situated knowledges, we can nevertheless still move outward, inclusive in our orientation, thinking not first and last about our own research productivity, but rather about the selves we bring to our storytelling lives. (Lincoln 1997) p52*

This strikes a real chord with me. The possibility of bringing 'my-selves' to storytelling, as a research method, was a really exciting prospect, back in 2004, when I began this programme. Without it, I probably wouldn't have embarked on a PhD. This wasn't because (or with all honesty should I say *just* because) I am interested in my own story, but also because it felt like a refreshingly honest approach. I was always struck by the absence of the author in many 'academic' texts, and sometimes what appeared to be a disconnection between the author's 'theory' and their life lived in practice. I will suggest that this is a particularly an issue for men (as with the lecturer above). I do not claim here to have completely healed that rift myself, but I do at least make an effort towards it.

According to Peter Reason, in action research, quality is defined by our engagement with four characteristic dimensions, 'worthwhile practical purposes', 'democracy and participation', 'many ways of knowing' and 'emergent developmental form' (Reason 2003).

Ultimately it is to our choices that inquiry brings us:

*Thus in the practice of quality inquiry, researchers need to be aware of the choices open to them; to make these choices clear, transparent, and articulate to themselves, and to their inquiry partners; and in writing and presenting, to articulate them to a wider audience. (Reason 2003) p4*

I want to be as honest as possible in both the form and content of my writing; to try to unnerve the idea that might be presented through a required, linear text, that it was all 'just so'; that there was consistent, purposeful intention to present *this* knowledge in *this* way. This isn't a 'hero narrative', like the biographies of 'self made men' that I aim to transcend (see: (Mulholland 1996) or (Gergen 1992)), which I will say more about. Life isn't like that, so why should the texts that present 'experiential' knowledge try to fool the reader into thinking that it is?

Rather than pretending that I approached this research project 'just so' looking for a specific outcome, what I would rather suggest is that it has been about holding attention to a set of questions and about developing, finding or even stumbling upon certain practices to do so. For example, the evolution of a story set in the future was elicited by a persistent mulling over (or truthfully, worrying about) how this inquiry would have an impact in my life after this PhD was done.

Like Stephen King suggests, there was no 'plot' here:

*I distrust plot for two reasons: first, because our lives are largely plotless, even when you add in all our reasonable precautions and careful planning; and second, because I believe plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren't compatible.*

And:

*When during the course of an interview for the New Yorker, I told the interviewer (Mark Singer) that I believed stories are found things, like fossils in the ground. (King 2000) p159-160*

The stories grew into a central part of my research journey, in an evolutionary process, and in doing so, I found this offered me three important gifts:

- They enabled me to distil some of my experience of 'living life as inquiry', whilst holding in the foreground questions of gender and masculinity

- The process of writing it was in itself illuminating, in way that Laurel Richardson calls 'writing as method of inquiry' (Richardson 2005)
- As texts, stories, (particularly the one in Chapter Four, called 'Gender Future'), were useful to widen the research, involving and engaging others through their reading of it, and subsequent discussions and dialogue (see Chapter Five)

How did this work in more detail? Initially, this started with the heuristic of engaging in 'cycles of action and reflection', a central practice of Action Research. (Reason and Bradbury 2001). My own everyday 'action' was reflected in journaling, and this was further stimulated by reading relevant texts. This initial cycle provided raw material for stories, the writing of which constituted further action, which enabled me to further reflect, and indeed widen that reflection with others.

For example, I began to write letters to my children about my experience, as a journaling practice, about a year or so after my MPhil transfer in December 2006. These weren't letters I necessarily intended to send, or show to my children, at this point. There is of course a question here about whether one day they will read them, in the course of reading this thesis. Indeed, I hope they do, when the time is right for them, and that may set off another cycle of this inquiry. But for the time being, the impetus for this was to explore a particular subjectivity, relevant to an inquiry into masculinity: that of being a father. My intention was to head *towards* patriarchy, (an example of 'writing fearwards'). It was also because I wanted to learn to put things in more simple terms, and writing to my children was a practice that I hoped might help me find another, less 'academic' voice. Thirdly, it provided me with a way of inquiring into the gap between the public and private self that is characteristic of a male-dominated worldview. (I explain this further below). You can see some examples of this letter-writing reflective practice in Appendix One.

However the cycle of action and reflection in writing these letters opened a further door – the letters themselves provided the raw material and the imaginative impetus, through 'writing as inquiry', for the story that became what you see in Chapter Four. Once completed, that story could then be used as a research tool, to be shared with others, as further collaborative action and reflection. This story also offered the resources for a dialogic inquiry practice that you find particularly in Chapters Five and Six. And so on; the process is unfinished; you are also now invited into this widening conversation.

These cycles of action and reflection have been useful, with much growing out of them. After five years or so of this work, my experience is that I have started to live *within* these questions, embodying their complexity and the dilemmas they present, in my everyday thinking, practice and being. The stories enable me to show the evolutionary edges; nuances, paradoxes, discomfort, perplexity, danger. Most big questions in the social sphere, like those of masculinity and gender contain these edges. They might be the very things we are looking for in Action Research.

A story reaches out to the space between the author and reader. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury suggest that 1<sup>st</sup> person inquiry is 'an inquiring approach to [the researcher's] own life', whilst 2<sup>nd</sup> person inquiry is 'face to face with others' and 3<sup>rd</sup> is about 'the wider community of inquiry' (Reason and Bradbury 2008). This again is a useful heuristic. My purpose isn't to stay in 1<sup>st</sup> person inquiry but use it, through storytelling, to reach out to other's experience as well. My deliberate intention has been to play in the space between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person inquiry. Although I drew on my own experience in writing narratives, my intention wasn't to be 'confessional', as Judy Marshall suggests:

*I do not, however, what to tell “confessional tales” to no purpose (but there may sometimes be valuable purposes) or to make myself or others vulnerable. There is an edge which needs awareness, and when we write from inquiry, it requires appropriate signalling. (Marshall 1999) p160*

The stories aim to keep you, the reader, with me, offering an ongoing space of inquiry between us, in which the perils and possibilities of a man holding onto gender questions may be glimpsed. Clandinin and Connelly describe something like this in their explanation of a ‘Three Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space’:

*...in any particular inquiry, one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations, and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and future. (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), p50*

I also intend an added piquancy in writing a story that proposes itself as a work of ‘fiction’. That is, I deliberately chose to set the story ‘in the future’, as a further disruption of the proposition that this is ‘about me’ or about what has actually ‘happened’. I deliberately offer it as an expansive ‘dream’, set on a wider stage, a form whose scope is relevant to the content of gender and masculinity. These themes are huge and require a greater-than-individual canvas on which to portray the social forces at play. At the same time, I intend to use stories for practical purposes: inquiring into possibilities of action for individual players acting amongst these forces. Such a fictional account invites collaboration, or as Andrew Sparkes says:

*My hope is that the reader might think with the story and see where it takes them. For Arthur Frank (1995), thinking with stories involves allowing one’s own thoughts to adopt the story’s immanent logic, its temporality and its tensions and contradictions. When we think with stories, he suggests, the first lesson “is not to move on once the story has been heard, but to continue to live in the story, becoming in it, reflecting on who is becoming, and gradually modifying the story”. (p. 159). (Frank 1995) quoted by (Sparkes 2006) p29.*

This is also relevant to the political backdrop of my work. In being able to offer a ‘fictionalised’ account, but also one that draws on what is clearly recognisable as my experience, it has credibility as a text but without becoming *about* the relationships that provided models for it in ‘real life’. Playing along this edge between ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ is a deliberate strategy to draw readers in (for example like my colleagues at Roffey Park) without becoming a personalised critique of anyone in particular. There is an ethical dimension to this: it would be my intention to keep it real enough to work as a narrative but without making anyone feel in any way criticised. This is also pragmatic choice. If it were the central purpose of my inquiry to critique these relationships, then maybe I would have fewer qualms, but it was not. On the contrary, my purpose was appreciative; to draw these colleagues and friends *into* the story, so that they may become more curious about the questions it raises.

A future-framed story is also a form congruent with a vital question that grew in intensity through this inquiry: how will life turn out for me, once this PhD process is over? How will I keep the freshness of this inquiry alive? Like the character of Jim Porter, the Lecturer in the story above, and Sarah Jones, his student, (both of whom you will meet again) how will I continue to struggle against the dynamics that such status confers upon me, as an ‘expert’ in this field?

## Showing Up

I would like to explain why masculinity is an area of content relevant to this inquiring form. As far as I can remember, my masculinity has always been of interest to me. Its abiding relevance is a bit of a mystery. If I was gay, perhaps it would have been easier to figure out why. But I am not (well, not 'officially', although, I am sure I could 'help out if they were busy', to paraphrase a gay quip about people who seem sure of their straightness). This inquiry is a further turn in an ongoing journey.

In Chapters Two and Three, I consider in different ways the relationship between my Jewishness and masculinity; the proposal that, as a Jew I can never quite live up to being '*the main man*', the dominant masculine model. But on the other hand, why don't all Jewish men have this interest? (Perhaps many do, and I am just surfacing a 'hidden transcript', as James Scott calls it, a subjectivity that lurks in shadow for many?) (Scott 1990).

When I was nineteen, I wrote:

*One day I will achieve a dream: to find a friend, a man. He will love without fear  
and I will walk with him, hand in hand.*

*And soon after, all men will be freed from their fear. And we will walk and talk  
and kiss without being, 'gay', or 'brothers', or 'female', just men at heart, freed  
from thousands of years of needing to be superior.  
1/7/84*

The following year I wrote:

*My hand drops to my side. I glance down, notice its size; large, long-fingered,  
veins pronounced, a man's hand.*

*I go home, tear off my clothes, step in front of the long mirror. A figure stares at  
the image. Male, human, which? Which FIRST?  
26/11/85*

I am both uncomfortable surfacing this (somewhat naïve) transcript, and proud of my nineteen year old self for his sensitivity to these questions. Of course, this could be just a young man's struggle with growing up, coming to terms his own identity and sexuality. But it shows that early on, this profound inquiry was taking root in me.

I am sure I was not that unique as a young man troubling over this. Yet for it to be so embodied, in such an emotional key, finds relatively rare expression, at least in teenage, 'heterosexual' men. I think this is one of the few things that is genuinely unusual about me; the fact that I present to the world as an ordinary, white, heterosexual, middle-class bloke, who has persisted in foregrounding this thorny set of questions.

I will try to show that when I am writing *about men*, I am also persistently visible to you in this process, showing up as *a man*. This is important because I regularly experience men to be generally absent in the texts they write. It is as if a category of 'hegemonic masculinity', as Bob Connell calls it, (an idea I elaborate later on), is expressed by both men and women in the depersonalised, disembodied writing so often witnessed in 'the Academy' (Connell 1995). It seems to be a habit of disembodiment. I notice with

some exasperation that even texts about men and masculinity can feel dry and inaccessible, with the author curiously absent:

*Research on men and masculinity therefore requires the researcher to apply a certain amount of reflexivity to the authority bases of his or her research accounts in order to interrogate critically epistemological claims to gendered knowledge. (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003) p114*

Is there an irony here? I agree with what Chris (Haywood) and Mairtin (Mac an Ghaill) are saying (though if I have never met them), although it took me some time to understand it. Isn't their language suggestive of a certain type of academic dominance? Who are they talking about, and who is doing the talking? Where are *they* in this? And how do we know what constitutes a *certain amount* of reflexivity? I notice my discomfort: have I already shown you too much 'reflexivity'?

It is my contention that real authority for transformation in this work, and genuine 'interrogation' (a harsh, perhaps even macho word?) of gendered knowledge and its epistemological basis, will come through our trembling, stumbling but proud embodiment, our 'coming out' in our texts - our very presence (Right here! Right now!), which in itself is a valid challenge to the absent, 'pale, stale male' selves that we can so easily be (or disappear into) in our writing, our 'lecturing' and in our lives (Jacques 1997).

But this 'showing up' requires some skill. It is a challenge not to appear mawkish, overly sentimental, or self-absorbed. Could I be seduced into a heroic construction of some odyssey that in its perfect circularity of exile and return would perfectly answer all your questions and help you avoid the ones we all wanted to avoid? Somehow this ever-present form would become a trap, suggestive of a coherent self that is, I suggest, literally mythical. Instead the form I would like to adopt here is tentative, shaky. It is proud and determined to speak, but from a place of yearned-for honesty and nakedness; the type of openness that I should exude (but regularly demur) towards my own loved ones. This makes for a 'Dionysian' inquiry, as John Heron calls it, tentatively emerging from the private underworld, blinking in the light. (Heron 1996).

*The Dionysian inquiry takes a more imaginal, expressive, spiralling, diffuse, impromptu and tacit approach to the interplay between making sense and action. (Heron 1996) p46*

I am a shape-shifting entity. I experience myself in constant physical, mental and emotional flux, in the way the lecturer 'Jim Porter' describes in the story above. My suspicion is that finding a voice for this variegated range of private self in the public domain offers a generative possibility. To show you some of this range would be a useful contribution to this field, evidence in itself of the difficult road we tread towards being more present. This isn't for the sake of airing our pathology, or for a solipsistic wallow, but as a practice of escape from a kind of haunting, in the service of developing the practices to chase away a spectre: a type of masculinity that can and does persistently possess us. In that sense, how can the stories about our 'queer' (uncertain, colourful, fragmented, *honest*) private selves serve us?

We could all do with being liberated from the habits of dominance, at the core of which I maintain is a public presentation of self whose coherence incessantly mocks the private self that cowers secretly within. To invite this private, shaking creature to show up, or at least blur the line between these public and private selves, in the service of this liberation, requires a little more than a 'certain amount of reflexivity'. This is

because, (as many gay people know), 'coming- out' is a political process, and like any political process it needs careful management.

Paradoxically, to show you some of this private self requires careful selection, thoughtful choices and the application of an inquiring craft. To have some self-awareness towards a specific set of questions is one thing: to show it is even more of a challenge. So we need carefully considered devices, and in dry text, telling enough stories to break down the walls between us. The irony of this occurs to me: how *artful* I must be in the demolition of the masculine edifice. I can't just blurt out my private despairs, even if they are present. I need to be craft-y, 'dextrous' (right-handed) in print (as with a sword), to show my 'endearing fallibility'.

I am attempting an honest dishonesty; showing just enough of my incoherence as a generative possibility, opening up a space of inquiry between us. Such acts are indeed a challenge to the authority bases of established epistemologies, the 'ways of knowing' that suggest an author is a coherent, fixed and genderless thing, a dispassionate commentator of universal knowledge. So we make an artifice together, a three-way conspiracy between reader, author and text that would suggest this argument came out whole, seamless and even thoroughly spell-checked. It didn't of course, and you would know that in your heart of hearts, but how much discomforting honesty can you take?

I am writing to you along 'an edge' of inquiry right now, within this private/public gap of self. I wonder what private and public self-spaces you occupy, my reader? This is the edge that needs exploring, because in doing so we directly challenge a vital edifice of masculinity; that of the public, 'self-made' man, who is 'fully formed' and 'in one piece', as Sarah Porter discusses in the story above.

### **Finding Form**

Judy Marshall discussed the finding of 'form' as the meeting point between inquiry and literature, and this is what I am moving towards now, as a demonstration of how the writing form itself developed within my work.

*By form, I mean the shape of the writing – its pattern, style, flow and eventual structure. (Marshall 2007) p684*

and that:

*Finding form requires bypassing the censors, accrediting your right to write, identifying and dismissing internalized notions of 'standards' which are inviting your conformity or subduing your voice. Freed from such expectations you may then know how to write what is yours to write. (Marshall 2007) p690.*

In this section, I'd like to explore how I found my 'form'; that is how this writing as inquiry evolved in a way that enable process and content to emerge congruently with each other. There is a crafting dimension to this: using narrative necessitates an awareness of the story having artistry but not just for its own sake: it has to enhance the inquiry process. In my case, it was about showing the dilemmas of a man engaging in a lived response to feminism, in what I call an 'inquiring masculinity', and also to draw others into that inquiry for themselves.

Considering what such a narrative 'claims' is an important starting point:



*Despite the actual blurring of genres, and despite our contemporary understanding that all writing is narrative writing, I would contend that there is still one major difference separating fiction from science writing. The difference is not whether the text really is fiction or nonfiction, but the claim the author makes for the text. (Richardson 2005) p926*

So the issue isn't whether the stories are fictional or not, but what I claim to offer in developing them. There is a meeting point here, if you will, between inquiry, so-called fiction (or biography) and even manifesto.

It feels important to explain why this last one figure on my list. I would suggest that when dealing with challenging, politically complex subjects, like gender and masculinity, there is a need to enhance doubt by adding a spice of manifesto, in order to stand a chance of challenging the overpowering flavours of unquestioned assumptions. This is the 'appropriate contentiousness' that Judi Marshall suggests as a mark of quality in finding form (*Marshall 2007*).

A fixed, bi-polar notion of gender is centrally embedded in our culture. The expectation that gender is an essential quality of men and women in is so rooted, so 'rhizomatic', as it has been described at length elsewhere (Linstead and Linstead 2005) that perhaps we need a bit of polemic to incite a different awareness? Dry research texts that claim to challenge the essential 'differences' between men and women may lack the rhetorical power to make an impact. To really make that claim, maybe we need something more impactful, even emotive, and seemingly 'personal', such as a story, at the risk that it might come across as a bit of a manifesto.

As action researchers, we accept that there is an inherent link between power and knowledge. This link can be explored and shown, in practical terms, by our exploration of the 'gaze'. In short, how do we take account of, and use, our understanding of who is looking? Hence the above story is written through the gaze of a character who started off as a marginal figure in the original story that comprises Chapter Four.

So a story that can claim to be a deliberately ambiguous framing of my personal experience, or science fiction, or both, is such a play for both inquiry and advocacy. Indeed, a claim to 'play' with these ideas, using story that has deliberate ambiguities and paradoxes in it (as subject and form) is also useful as part of this disruption of things that are often taken as 'reality', like fixed genders. To quote Gregory Bateson:

*Paradox is doubly present in the signals which are exchanged within the context of play, fantasy, threat, etc. Not only does the playful nip [of playing animals] not denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands, but, in addition the bite itself is fictional. Not only do the playing animals not quite mean what they are saying but, also, they are usually communicating about something which does not exist. At a human level, this leads to a vast variety of complications and inversions in the fields of play, fantasy, and art. Conjurers and painters of the trompe l'oeil school concentrate upon acquiring a virtuosity whose only reward is reached after the viewer detects he has been deceived and is forced to smile or marvel at the skill of the deceiver. (Bateson 1972) p182*

A story uses these 'complications and inversions' as a tool. For example to deliberately frame it as a story that may or may not be 'about me' is part of the trick, to enable greater collective interest in my inquiry areas. Like a trompe l'oeil painting, the aim is to draw people into the scene. The fact that people who I wanted to take an interest in this inquiry process (such as colleagues at Roffey Park) often asked me:

'How on earth can you use a **story** in a PhD?', is an example of this play. Similarly, people would read the story in Chapter Four and then say 'Oh, I GET it now! – I get what you have been saying about gender!' Similarly I have had people who read this story say to me: 'It is about you, isn't it?' This has enabled me to have a discussion with them about whether this is fantasy or whether it is real; and whether things in the story can or will happen. This is all useful play, just like the kind of trompe l'oeil that Bateson is discussing above.

*Postmodernism claims that writing is always partial, local, and situational, and that our Self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it – but only partially present, for in our writing we repress some of ourselves too. Working from that premise frees us to write material in a variety of ways: to tell and re-tell. There is no such thing as "getting it right" – only "getting it" differently contoured and nuanced. (Richardson 2005) p931*

So, 'getting it', is the portal to a dialogue. This is an important quality consideration in choosing both to write a 'fictional story' and also in *how* to write it: to keep enough recognisable features in it (of me, or of Roffey Park, for example, the model for the 'Institute' in the stories that unfold) without it being necessarily *about* me or Roffey Park. This was an essential 'edge' to write along.

### **Staying on the Edge of Not Knowing**

In starting to explain how the story came together, I am reminded again of the above quote from Gregory Bateson. It is as if I am a conjuror asked to explain his or her tricks, and in doing so, does some of the magic get lost? Am I scared that in talking about my story I will be 'revealed' in some unfavourable way; that you will see the thinness of the walls; that you may discover there wasn't that much substance to this? These are edgy fears I feel as I write now, and I do so to serve as an illustration: writing the story was about staying in this sense of this 'edginess'.

I wonder whether this 'edginess' may become a mark of the quality of the kind of inquiring masculinity I am striving for? The concept of the edge has become an important marker of my developing form. Learning to recognise and work with that inner turbulence of 'not knowing' has been a useful counterpoint to the tendency for men to present themselves as 'fully formed'.

I am therefore incited to look closely at the inferences and patterns in my own thinking, being and acting. My hypothesis is that 'in the moment' goodness is enacted in some kind of awareness, not as a paragon but as a committed inquiry into discomfiting questions. This edge of discomfort, this kind of 'trembling' (as facilitation specialist Toke Mulder describes it), is an important mark of quality in this inquiry process (Mulder 2007), congruent with the mission of undermining the 'comfortable' mainstream position of men. When we feel this trembling, it acts as a kind of doorway to a greater questioning, a shift to another level of awareness and action. In an example in the Appendix, I use this edge of discomfort to question an assumption that I am a 'better' father than my own.

I intend that goodness (particularly in the context of exploring masculinity) becomes measurable in the way this edge of discomfort is negotiated. This is a useful heuristic – as both the reader and the writer, our awareness is raised, appropriately, by our own physical, emotional, *embodied* experience of discomfort. My intention isn't to make you uncomfortable for the sake of it, but to uncover the private disturbances that may be masked by the public discourses in this area of inquiry. I am attempting to walk along a useful, discomfiting edge, but not to push discomfort into dis-ease.

I am playing between a space with enough coherence to be able to make relationship with others but also enough uncertainty and 'not knowing', to stay true to the lived experience of uncertain times. As men (and as women living up to the patriarchal ideal) do we tend to hide our 'not knowing' behind a mask of supposed certainty, of expertise, particularly in the 'Academy', or in a business school, like Roffey Park, where, as the Lecturer in the previous interlude described, we are being paid 'lots of money' for it? In my writing process, I tried to actively explore this 'edge' as a creative, inquiring territory, between coherence and not knowing.

Naomi Raab may be referring to this when she talks about 'Becoming an Expert in Not Knowing':

*the terrible anxiety experienced by both client and consultant (students and lecturer) when forced to stay in the present and face their own unknowingness. (Raab 1997) p175*

Raab adds:

*Consultants need to develop more adaptive and useful ways of containing anxiety so that a space can be made for real learning. (Raab 1997) p175*

In this respect, writing as an inquiry process is about writing towards the *not* knowing, as if towards a kind of darkness, staying close to that inner turbulence. When writing, sometimes I feel this anxiety strongly. At times I would write a line or paragraph of story, sit back and panic: 'Ohmygosh! How will someone read THAT? What will they think about me?' I look back at what I've written and make a choice about whether it was too edgy, or not edgy enough. Using this edge becomes an active practice, in writing and in wider life.

Barbara Turner-Vesselago talks about writing 'fearwards':

*To discover where the writing really wants to take us, it helps to keep sensing our energy. If more than one path presents itself, we need to be able to ask, "Which has the most energy for me?", and follow that one. If the answer to that question is still obscure, my advice is, "Go Fearwards". The strongest energy will almost always be found in whatever we most fear to write about. It seems to gather where the ego's shell is the weakest, just as water seeks out the cracks in any dyke. (Turner-Vesselago nd) p11*

As I show in Chapter Five and Six, this 'edge' has use in my practice as a tutor/consultant/facilitator. I start to use this feeling of turbulence in my practice when working with a group, as a sign that what we are doing has some real currency and has the possibility of working to avoid what Raab describes a 'collusion against learning'.

I link this edge to Buddhist teaching. I recognise a resonance with this concept of the edge, and in this case why we might avoid it:

*It is the ego's ambition to secure and entertain itself, trying to avoid all irritation. (Trungpa 1973, 2002) p6*

What I illustrate here is the emergent and even messy way knowledge formation using these kinds of 'edgy' tools can happen. It is about using my personal experience and articulating it without becoming too locked into it. I think Ellis and Bochner put the

challenge here well, when explaining how traditional social scientists might be affronted by such a seemingly personal account:

*They think that if these personal voices can be silenced, then perhaps they can return to business as usual in the social sciences, protected against the contingencies of human experience, restored in their traditional belief in a transcendent position from which to speak (and interpret) with authority, freed of moral choices and emotional dilemmas, and inspired to champion control over fate, facts over meanings, and rigor over peace of mind. (Ellis and Bochner 2000) p747*

Laurel Richardson talks of a 'constitutive force' and this seems to describe best as anything what this edge felt like (Richardson 2005). The immersion in the questions, over a five-plus-year period seems to me to have been a vital nutrient for this process.

So the form I was looking for in the story as it unfolded was one that had congruence with the issues I have highlighted in an inquiring masculinity. Again I would argue that this form is perhaps easier to see afterwards than during the writing. The edge I was writing towards was emergent. As a colleague, David, pointed out having read the story in Chapter Four:

*At the beginning [of the story] I experienced you as more of an 'academicky' type person, who was professorial and at the end you were a real human being that kind of just got younger in being who you are." (Transcript of dialogue with David Lines, 16/9/08)*

What David was pointing out was that as in both the form and content of the story, as it progressed, there was an increasing congruence with the themes of the story, searching for that paradoxically fluid masculinity. When David pointed this out, it was a surprise to me. I wouldn't argue that I had deliberately intended this in the creative process of writing, but I would say that it delighted me to realise this aspect of congruence wasn't merely coincidental; it could even be considered to be a mark of the quality of the inquiry that this kind of pattern is discernable.

### **From Position to Performativity – 'being' to 'becoming'**

In search of *mentshlichkeit*, I intend to 'show up' in this work, because finding a way to be more present serves both personal and political ends. This aligns me with a type of liberation that feminist and 'queer theorists' seek, recognising that:

*The body becomes a peculiar nexus of culture, choice, and "existing" one's body becomes a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received gender norms. (Butler and Salih 2004) p28*

This thesis traces the recent turns in an ongoing journey. I conceive this as a turn away from 'being' someone to learning to 'become' someone. In my terms, 'being someone' was about resting in the status of a certain role. It was about the man who 'knew' things, was an 'expert' in his field. In waking up to 'who I was' because of this role, I found myself at odds with my espoused values. This was 'being' as in 'being someone important', who occupied a position of authority, even if this someone was doing something that appeared to be (on the surface) generative. 'Becoming' is about learning through inquiry to find ways to act in a more imminent, phenomenologically fresh way, coming back to the 'edge' of experience, and finding deeper, subtler ways of living according to these values, perhaps looking more towards the *not* known.

*James Traeger is a pioneer of men's development in the UK and beyond. He has over 15 years unique experience of leading the research, development and delivery of learning events specifically addressing the lives and choices of men in the workplace and beyond. (Traeger, Willis et al. 1999, 2006)*

In 1999 I became the published author and developer of a personal development programme called 'Navigator'. Navigator is a 4-day personal development programme, running over 3 months, with an accompanying workbook, of which I was the main author. The biography above is taken from the current edition of that workbook. Broadly, Navigator was supported by a pro-feminist alliance. It was backed by the UK's 'Equal Opportunities Commission' (now the Commission for Equality and Human Rights) and co-developed in partnership with a consultancy specialising in women's personal development, called 'Springboard'.

For ten years or so, Navigator was very much 'my baby'. Its aim was to specifically address some of the questions of masculinity in work in the light of the challenges of feminism, and the changing nature of organisations. The political economy of this work was simple: companies and organisations paid for it because through such a process of self-discovery, workers became more motivated and productive. For the sake of this project, I don't foreground my role with Navigator, or consider in depth whether it was founded on a sound ideological basis, but rather I focus on how this inquiry coincided with my choice to stop being 'Mr. Navigator' in 2006.

It was at this time that I bumped up against a personal dilemma which expressed the essence of 'being someone' rather than 'becoming'. I described it to a colleague in a research interview, and I offer it to you from that recorded transcript, to give you the immediacy another, spoken voice:

*The Big Man's Salad (27/2/08)*

*There is something about the paradox of this work is for me, one of the paradoxes of this whole inquiry is: being a man, doing this work is both a position. I am a man, who runs development programmes changing men, but also about who am I in that and whether I am the man that is the change I want to see in the world.*

*And, there is something about the Navigator story for me, which is why I got out of it, which is incongruent there. I did not feel that I was congruent. There was a sense in which I was going through the motions and that frightened me.*

*There's a story about this. I used to run the Navigator programme at Cambridge University. It was a very prestigious programme to run, for post-grad, PhD and university administrators. It was at Hughes Hall in Cambridge - a beautiful place, a typical Oxbridge College. We worked in this lovely room, with a big atrium. The University would book me in about June to run this programme in January. This happened every year. The programme would start in January, so it was, like a regular gig, between January and April.*

*So I know the place and there is work in my dairy, with a regular income. They paid well. One of the regular guest speakers on the programme would be Dr. Tim Mead, who was the head of University, which was one the reasons why it was happening, because he was the Chief in the University and he was really liked having conversations with me about 'who he was as a man', and he had quite an interesting story to tell and so he was up for it. It was something that I think he enjoyed contributing to. He was the top administrator of the top*

*university in the world (Cambridge) and yet he would define himself as a failed chemist, because he did a PhD in chemistry and could not get a post-doc job, so he went into university administration. He told this story with irony.*

*I'd put on a quite a bit weight between the ages of about 35 and 40. I put on nearly a couple of stone and this worried me a bit. So I went on a diet. The University would always provide a big sandwich lunch. So, I asked them if they could just make me a salad, instead of having all these sandwiches, which they promptly did.*

*The fascinating thing was that the following year, when the programme came around again, I wasn't on that diet anymore. But on the second Tuesday in the month or whatever it was, I arrived at Hughes Hall, to run that programme, and the salad was there again! A year later, without me asking for it, they had programmed it in!*

*This tells you something about Cambridge University: it took ages to change things, but once something was established in the fabric of the place, 800 years hence, the salad would arrive on that table at that particular Tuesday, and it was interesting, because at one level, I was really frightened by that. I was absolutely terrified, because there is a sense of habit in this work that this had become.*

*The Navigator Programme was all about you living your life, about being 'baked afresh', being real and true to yourself and living your values. The idea that I have gone into this pattern of ritual...it worried me. Funnily enough, my friend Chris Sharpe took over running the programme the next year. And, guess what? The salad is still there!*

I am not that interested in a critique of *Navigator* per se. It could be argued there was a fundamental challenge to the traditional patterns of masculinity in the very premise of the *Navigator* programme, which was about men providing for each other a nurturing, learning space. With women absent, men were relying emotionally, psychologically and physically on each other. To set this up as a regular, repeated practice was useful disruption in itself.

More importantly, though, in terms of my own development, I had a sense in which I was taking a 'position' in the role of the developer of *Navigator*, yet I wasn't all that clear whether this meant I had done the work of change on myself. Had I in fact become the sort of man that uses the instruments of feminism, and in particular the language of equality, to avoid changing myself?

*Men are said to study feminism in order to co-opt it and turn it towards their own interests (Marcus, 1988:100) or to approach it as a topic to 'get on top of' or as a terrain to be 'conquered' and not as a process to which to commit oneself (Sofia, 1993:36). (Pease 2000) p11*

How far had I allowed adopting the position of being the man who offers a deliberate programme of 'changing men' to allow me to opt out of considering my performances, 'becoming the change myself', to use Ghandi's famous saying?

This was crystallised for me in a powerful dream, which I wrote about in my first year of study at Bath University/CARPP. In the dream, I was driving an ambulance in a war, carrying the limbs of men who had to be reassembled. I was sitting in the cab of this ambulance, furiously driving, with an uncomfortable sense in my stomach that wasn't

doing anything very useful. In fact I was just part of a process of patching these men up so they could go out there again and 'carry on fighting'. This dream became a signifier of my frustrations with *Navigator*.

Working with the principle of 'going fearwards', I worked on this dream, through a piece of 'first person inquiry', in writing a letter to my children. This letter-writing was a reflective practice and in developing it, I was learning to find a new voice, a different and sometimes revealing subjectivity. I found that writing to my children in this way held me to an ethos of honesty. Below I offer an extract from this particular letter:

*"I suppose I saw men and masculinity, right back then, at the beginning as an opportunity for my own ambition. It always seemed important to me to be different. Even when I was young, I used to try and think of something that made me special, made me stand out from the crowd. I remember a sense a feeling like I was drowning of I didn't stand out in some way. It was a physical sensation, a clenching in my chest, a breathlessness, a need to 'come up for air', as if I would disappear if I wasn't 'special'...*  
*So another story reveals itself – Navigator not as a burning desire to do 'men's work'; but as an experiment in continued self –importance, or at least the primal struggle for differentiation.*  
*And so now, when I say to you that I miss Navigator (as I do) I wonder whether I also (as a greater part of this) just miss being a 'special one', who can do this special, unique work...that rather destroys this heroic image of a man 'born to do menswork' - the story that I usually tell people."*  
*(Fearwards on Navigator... to a 'grown up' Max 15/3/08)*

In this particular dream-letter-inquiry, then, I surfaced my own ambition around this work, and that one of the reasons I went into doing the *Navigator* programme was because it differentiated me as a facilitator, and gave me platform for my own work.

In this way I was confronted with one of those 'gender interference patterns' Judi Marshall describes: being a man who wanted to have an impact on masculinity, realising that this desire in itself (in its grandiosity) may partly have its roots in that very masculinity that he wants to change (Marshall 1999). At one level, such insight may lead one to paralysis; is there not 'clean' trajectory along which one can clearly act 'for good'? And yet curiously, developing an inquiring perspective, it becomes far from paralysing: I maintain that it becomes a fascinating, useful, liberating space, an inquiry ground from which then one does make fine-grained, useful choices in the world.

In 2006, I left the Navigator project, and went to work at Roffey Park Institute. I wouldn't argue that there was a direct causal link between the dream-inquiry and that choice, but it is reflective of a discomfort that built towards the decision. Broadly, Roffey is a business school, based on a set of humanistic principles. In Chapter Five and Six, I talk more about the place of this inquiry in my work here. There is a story I tell people when I am giving a traditional CV-account of my career which was that this shift to Roffey was deliberate, 'self made' move towards a wider stage where I could have a bigger impact. But in fact it could also be seen as grasping an opportunity to move away from this double-bind, and now "finding myself" at Roffey Park (in both senses of this phrase) using an inquiring frame *to be* this change, to embody a more inquiring kind of masculinity.

In the novel the *Life of Pi* by Yann Martell, the main character in the story, a shipwrecked boy, finds himself sharing a lifeboat with a tiger, an almost impossible situation, yet one with which he then finds an accommodation (Martell 2003). This is a great metaphor for the transition I made; in escaping from one situation, one can find

oneself confronted in the dangers and pitfalls of the next, the very aspects of oneself that one hoped to escape and are a lifetime's work to address. For me, the tiger represents a type of dominant masculinity that can haunt me from time to time. This inquiry is about how I accommodate it and develop practices to try and stay just beyond its grasp.

Roy Jacques articulates this dilemma well:

*How can I even dare to claim pro-feminist status when, after years of studying and trying to love feminist values, I can articulate the surprising amount of gender-typical baggage which my wife and I carry into our disagreements, but have little ability to change it? I know that portraying women as available sex objects promotes patriarchal oppression; why is my visceral response to sexist advertising inconsistent with my espoused beliefs? (Jacques 1997) p85*

In my own case, feminist friends and queer theorists, such as Judith Butler, have been a great inspiration in this shift from talking *about* gender, and being the expert in this (as *Mr. Navigator*) towards considering my own 'performance' of gender, what Judith Butler calls 'performativity':

*Beauvoir suggests an alternative to the gender polarity of masculine disembodiment and feminine enslavement to the body in her notion of the body as a "situation". The body as situation has at least a twofold meaning. As a locus of cultural interpretation, the body is a material reality that has already been located and defined within a social context. The body is also a situation of having to take up and interpret that set of received interpretations. As a field of interpretive possibilities, the body is a locus of the dialectical process of interpreting anew a historical set of interpretations which have already informed corporeal style. (Butler and Salih 2004) p28-29*

In my own story, my interpretive possibilities become the issue for research. We enter a more nuanced, problematic but potentially fruitful ground of research when considering the detail of this interpretation. This is about being someone who is an 'expert' in this work, to 'becoming' someone, in the moment, or 'in the nick of time' as Elizabeth Grosz would have it, (Grosz 2004). Rather than being a 'good man' as defined by what I *did* (i.e. Navigator), could I be a good man in terms of *how I am*? This is about moving from a comfortable position of 'being someone' to the discomfort of endless 'becoming'; about taking a 'position' to considering my ongoing 'performativity'.

Building on Judith Butler's notion of 'performativity', Elizabeth Grosz, a contemporary American feminist writer, suggests:

*The more we affirm the value of the nick, the cut, or rupture, the more we revel in the untimely and the more we make ourselves untimely. Political activism addresses itself primarily to a reconfiguring of the past and a form of justice in the present that redresses or rectifies the harms of the past. It needs to be augmented with those dreams of the future that make its project endless, unattainable, ongoing experiments rather than solutions. (Grosz 2004) p14*

In order to make this a research project, rather than just a memoir or confessional autobiography, I am interested in asking the questions about how I know I have the capacity to effect a nick, rupture or cut in the fabric of the kind of patterns around gender and masculinity that I am subject to and play out. Like Bob Pease:



*From this position, I can seek to continue dialogue with feminism as a basis for critical self-reflection. (Pease 2000) p14*

John Rowan calls the patterns that we may find ourselves acting out in respect to gender and masculinity the 'patripsych'. (Rowan 2005) He suggests that the only way to deal with the patripsych's deep hold on us is through psychotherapeutic means. But could Butler's performativity, and similarly Grosz's 'nick, or 'rupture' offer us more hope, in that we can proliferate new subjectivities, and performances of gender, rather than succumbing to their heavy and inevitable weight on us?

*Performativity is Butler's theory of gender that accentuates a process of repetition that produces gendered subjectivity. This repetition is not simply a performance by a subject but a performativity that constitutes a subject and produces the space of conflicting subjectivities that contests the foundations and origins of stable identity categories. ...And because subjects can subversively transform, refuse, parody, or rupture the laws of discourse, thereby reconstituting themselves, identities emerge from discourse and power relations as neither foundational grounds nor fully expressed products. (Jackson 2004) p675*

Jackson proposes that we learn to enact 'interruptions', as 'moments of grappling with' ideas (such as Judith Butler's). Such became the aim of my story-writing, as it evolved, to both be such an interruption, in itself, in the community around me, and also to demonstrate the problematic nature of such interruptions (in the narrative itself) and also in the writing process. It was to show the false basis of 'foundational grounds' in gender in my own life and also to express the unfinished products of such work in my own life and my wider community.

For Grosz, the nicks or ruptures we make are part of evolution's proliferation, in the Darwinian sense. I allowed my own story to proliferate, expanding into the possibilities suggested by the ingredients of journaling, letter-writing and so on. In a Darwinian context, evolution has direction but is blind. It doesn't have teleology; a future destination for its action. Its direction is provided by the motive force of simply growing, mutating in the present. This is the 'nick of time' as Grosz says (Grosz 2004). The natural variations (or mutations) of individuals are selected according to the environment they find themselves in, here and now. This is so-called 'natural selection'. I would suggest that in writing the stories you find herein, my own creative inquiry process was similarly 'blind'; it was moving towards the uncomfortable as well as the fantastical, a deliberate attempt to expand beyond my own limited horizons and take into account the wider, larger forces that may be at play in and around gender, but at no point did I claim to know the 'end point'. In the biographies of 'heroes', the urge to explain the present as if it was a series of inevitable choices in the past, towards a deliberate future, is always, according to a Darwinian interpretation, artificial and post hoc.

Elizabeth Grosz argues, along with Judith Butler, that, by its very blindness, nature provides us with an *opportunity* as gender activists. This opportunity is always 'in the here and now'. It was in this awareness that I was able to quite suddenly write the latter sections of Chapter Four, as a kind of futuristic dream where all sorts of possibilities could combine with my own story to configure a future which was quite fantastical, a possibility if not probability. The point wasn't to show what 'shall' happen but what 'could' happen; an intention to see the possibilities of gender going forward. It was about affirming *possibility*. As such, it was 'Darwinian', perhaps a surprising influence on a gender inquiry:

*What remains crucial and relatively unrecognized by feminists and others in [Darwin's] writings, is the reconfiguration of culture in light of the fundamental openness he attributes to the natural world. Culture – whether patriarchal, class-based, or racist - is no longer the extension and completion of nature, the coloring in of the contours provided by nature. Nature is open to any kind of culture, to any kind of "artificiality", for culture itself does not find pre-given biological resources, but makes them for its own needs, as does nature itself. (Grosz 2004) p72*

I feel a sense of minor triumph to be able to use Darwinian and biological arguments in the service of a pro-feminist cause. All too often, the 'biological' case is cited as grounds for the foundationalist, 'natural' arguments of bipolar gender difference, and social policy that proposes a fossilisation of gender roles. In a misunderstanding of Darwin, people look *backwards* and, proposing that gender norms and roles have evolved thus far in this way, suggest this is what is 'natural', going forward. On the contrary, a Darwinian perspective suggests the future of gender is highly *unpredictable*.

The clarion call of populist works such as Allan and Barbara Peases': '*Why Men don't listen and women can't read maps*'. (Pease and Pease 1999) is that '*men and women are different, because their bodies and brains are different. It's natural.*' To be able to argue that on the contrary, a biological/ technological evolution is likely (and indeed happening) that could fundamentally transform gender relations, (for example, by separating reproductive biology from its dimorphic history), feels very much like hoisting these populist authors by their own petards. I cannot hide a sense of delight I feel at this opportunity.

My thinking was stimulated by other texts, both fiction and non-fiction, including, for example Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto". (Haraway 1991). Haraway's message of gender possibility was irresistible:

*Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves...It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories, Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. (Haraway 1991) p181*

Such reading lent itself to a fictional account as an attempt at cyborg imagery helping me (and hopefully inspiring others) out of the 'maze of dualisms'. It helped me to crystallise the manifesto of my own. I was prompted in my writing to answer some of my colleagues at Roffey Park, who, for example, might say that gender 'isn't an issue' or that they just 'don't get it'. This isn't, I believe, because they were being deliberately obtuse, but perhaps because they had spent less time than me thinking about the possibilities. And why should they? But could other possibilities be revealed, by something more than just a polemic? Perhaps a cyborg-inspired story might be something attractive enough to draw them in, and to participate in something else? And shouldn't a good man, a 'mentsh', learn to tell a good story, a cyborg-story, one fit for the times he is in?