

Part A

FRAMING THIS INQUIRY

1 Introduction

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Reflexive inquiries such as this one, are often described as a form of journey. I too have jostled along familiar and crowded thoroughfares; I have sought out green routes over the mountains and languished in foreign jails. At the outset I put together a tidy set of luggage, some of which I have now lost or deliberately thrown into the rapids as I crossed ravines.

But through iterations of action, reflection and writing, this inquiry journey has led me into a territory which still offers surprises but also consolations. It is a place where many issues, thoughts and feelings have come together, revealing meaning like sun or moonlight over landscape. As I write, I want to convey the freshness and particularity of this journey.

In this first chapter I will give some of the main co-ordinates of the thesis, its latitude and longitude. I will,

- define the two key questions that this inquiry seeks to address
- tell the *backstory* of how I came to pursue this inquiry
- introduce my theoretical framework
- explain my working definitions for the key terms used in the title of this inquiry
- introduce the organizational setting in which I conducted most of my inquiry
- explain my choice of an action research approach to this inquiry
- introduce the device of *working notes* as a meta-commentary on the process of writing this thesis.

It sounds a lot? Well be reassured that this is a brief route map, a series of markers. The fuller inquiry will unfold in subsequent telling.

Key questions

In this thesis I am concerned to address two main questions,

- What is my developing aesthetic in practice?
- How does working in this way support participative inquiry with others?

Put this briefly, the questions spawn many other questions, but there is at this stage something to be said for economy if it provides focus.

What is it about these two questions that attracts me? The first question is directed towards

my making better sense of my practice from the perspective of aesthetic knowing. My working practice is as a facilitator of groups who want to review their ways of relating and performing, and do better. I have also come to think of practice more broadly as a continuing process of reflexive experience in my life. Instead of *process* I am tempted to use the word *discipline* which is certainly a large part of it, but there is a point when discipline becomes invisible, an intrinsic part of living.

Through my inquiry and the writing and collection of material for this thesis I want to raise my own conscious understanding of the rich spectrum of the aesthetic in my practice as I examine what it is that draws my attention and how I reflect on it in the moment and afterwards.

My second question focuses on my practice relationships with others by asking in what ways my own developing aesthetic in practice supports a shared process of inquiry. I will describe this as an unfolding relationship with others, which has its sources in sensory and affective participation.

I will return later in this chapter to give a closer definition of how I am using some of these key terms; but for the moment I switch to a more autoethnographic mode to tell the *backstory* of why these inquiry questions matter to me.

The backstory

At the beginning of this inquiry my practice was changing significantly. I need to describe briefly this transition in my working life; it will be a theme which I amplify in different ways throughout the thesis. I see this transition as part of a more pervasive and far-reaching shift in my reflexive life as I continue to find new perspectives on how I relate to others and make better sense of my experience of the world.

In the mid to late '90s I was becoming less and less satisfied with my role as a management training consultant and fundamentally questioned the positivist framing of this work that I had adopted. I found myself uneasy with the role of expert tutor to managers. Whilst I strove to 'train' in a facilitative mode, I had a sense that, beyond the benefits of the immediate social ambience for the day, learning outcomes were unpredictable. Whether or not participants found them useful in subsequent practice was usually beyond any form of meaningful evaluation.

I found myself questioning how such complex life skills might be 'transferred' in the setting of a training room. As Strati (1999) points out,

'Explicit description of the practice of skills can indeed bring out some underlying features, and it can provide some guidelines for action, yet it is unable to tell us what an actor is doing, or to teach him/her to do it.' (Strati, 1999, p. 94)

Ragland (2006) describes how her colleagues ask her to advise them on the best way to foresee impending violence between young people in a juvenile correctional facility in Tennessee.

'Even if I could explain how I know what to do, I am not sure that it would be helpful to someone else. My knowing in the moment is based in large measure on my relationships with the others involved, as well as how I approach them.' (Ragland, 2006, p. 168)

I was increasingly problematizing the validity of training, particularly in the form it was conceived of by those who commissioned it.

Through my reading of Capra (1997), Skolimowski (1994) and Stacey (1996) I had begun to see organizations as complex adaptive systems. It therefore seemed difficult to engage with such complexity only through working with stratified enclaves of staff, often junior to middle in the hierarchy. Frequently the theories in use that such groups brought into the room were that their seniors, who were 'not in the room', were the cause of the 'problem'. Indeed these perceptions may sometimes have been justified, but with only half the data it was hard to know. If those with power, no matter how benign their intentions, decide on behalf of others what needs to be learnt, there is bound to be some slippage. However, I felt that my role as a trainer was often compromised by the limited scope available to explore such issues of power with those who wielded it.

Corporate 'rolled out' training programmes are often seen by participants, for what they are, – the implementation of management agendas. Whilst this may not present problems to some who can sign up to the message, others see things differently and feel manipulated. The corporate design of such events often takes the form of promoting today's solutions to yesterday's problems.

Even so I acknowledged that it is possible to try to work within the limitations of training programmes and still make some contribution to the well-being and efficiency of individuals and organizations. However in the words of Wheatley (1996) I was becoming aware of there being a 'simpler way', one which was more attuned to the processes of dialogue and self-organising, a more authentic way of inquiring into the complexity of organizational life. I also found myself increasingly experiencing a discontinuity between the values I was working from in different parts of my life. Literature in the form of novels, poetry and drama offered me more perceptive insights into the human condition than stereotypic representations of problems to be resolved through prescribed training solutions.

This led to my withdrawing from such work and trying to develop a new form of collaborative learning practice. At the centre of this new way of inquiring I was to re-discover the role of aesthetic knowing in my own day-to-day reflexive experience and learn more about how this influenced my working with others.

How this unfolding of a different kind of practice occurred, constitutes the main storyline of this thesis.

To conclude this *backstory* I would add that part of the liberation that I have experienced is that I now see practice as a wholistic process where every connection with others offers new reflexive and active possibilities. Marshall (1999) makes the case for living life as inquiry, validated by an iteration of inner and outer arcs of mindful attention to what is happening, how it is perceived it and what is noticed in others' responses.

As Torbert (2001) remarks,

'..one's whole life with others aspires towards a continual living inquiry.' (Torbert, 2001, p. 252)

Reason (1998) sees inquiry as,

'... a collaborative process whose purpose is practical: to contribute to the flourishing of individual persons, the flourishing of human community, and the flourishing of the biosphere of which we are part. In this vision, inquiry becomes more than the professional activity of academics, and becomes a central characteristic of a well-lived life.' (Reason, 1998, p. 419)

In envisioning inquiry in this way Reason not only confirms its centrality in a well-lived life, but points to the transformational nature of this participative relationship with the world. I will later explore this holistic vision further when I ground this inquiry in a participative ontology by reference to the work of Gregory Bateson.

The main organizational setting for my inquiry

Throughout the period of my involvement in CARPP during the last five years, I have been developing this new participative approach to my professional work in a range of public sector organizations and will draw on this to find insights into my growing understanding of the aesthetic in my practice.

A significant setting for much of my work during the period of writing this thesis has been in a day opportunities service for people with learning disabilities. I have disguised its identity by giving it the fictitious name of **Silver Street**.



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Engaging with both the individuality and the universality of this separate world became the trigger for a profound period of reflection on what practice means to me. I will explain as the story unfolds how out of this experience have arisen new personal perspectives on the development of my own aesthetic and ways in which I can work with this in my practice.

Learning disabilities

The world of care for people with learning disabilities is one which three years ago was more or less unknown to me but which I have been increasingly drawn into as the research continues. My confronting people's disabilities, economic constraints, lack of independence and restricted life choices, when compared to my own, has forced me to explore many of my

assumptions about *human flourishing*, a phrase which Heron and Reason (1997) use to describe the overall purpose of inquiry.

I have derived more sense of participation and joy from this connection than from most of my other assignments during the last twenty years.

My evolving method of inquiry at Silver Street

Working initially as a volunteer in the day opportunities centre, washing up, pushing wheel chairs and going on bus trips, I experienced a different kind of relationship, more akin to friendship, which developed over a period of time. I will expand on this new relationship later and reflect on its significance in my changing understanding of practice. (This stage of my work is subsequently referred to as Silver Street-1, for simplicity.)

Following this initial period as a volunteer I was invited to facilitate a project (Silver Street-2) for front-line staff in a participative inquiry¹ into ‘person-centred planning’ of activities for service users². This was later followed by a third phase to my collaborative relationship with Silver Street when I facilitated a participative inquiry into finding work and training opportunities for people with learning disabilities. This inquiry (Silver Street-3) involved the active participation of both staff and people who use the service.

My method for inquiring into the thesis questions defined at the start of this chapter was to generate a collection of journal notes and photographs from each of the three phases. I shared each week’s record with the people I had been working with. This publishing of my material in a loose-leaf folder in the centre staff room elicited further cycles of conversation and reflection on our working together. Latterly I have also experimented with taking and using photos as a further form of inquiry and a stimulus to dialogue.

Having selected the material to include in the thesis I have added another layer of analysis and sense-making as I relate what happened to my developing theoretical understanding of the aesthetic and its place in participative inquiry. (I give a fuller account of my methods in Chapter 4.)

¹ I use the term ‘participative inquiry’ [Reason, 1999] to refer to a form of action research. I shall define these terms later in Chapter 3, *A theoretical framework*.

² The term ‘service user’ calls for some comment. It is widely used in the Service, but people are, of course, more than users of services. It is hard though to find a better alternative. I have tried to avoid it wherever possible, except where to do so would be particularly cumbersome or confusing.

Introducing my theoretical framework

I locate my inquiry within what I refer to as a participative paradigm, (Capra, 1997, Bateson, 1972 and Skolimowski, 1994). Within this are many theoretical approaches, but they all share in common a questioning of a dualist epistemology in which a separate external reality is seen as the subject of observation and analysis from a detached and objective viewpoint by a rational empirical researcher.

In reflecting on my experience over the last decade I realized that I had been moving away from a positivist epistemology in many areas of my life and thought and, of most relevance to this inquiry, in those areas concerned with understanding of, and working with organizations. I now briefly sketch in some of the stages of this personal transition.

I was attracted to social constructionism because of the importance it attached to dialogue as a form of collaborative sense-making process; my having studied English Literature for my first degree may have enhanced this interest. Isaac (1996) describes dialogue as, 'the art of thinking together'. This echoed my interest in the reflexive linguistic processes of co-creation of meaning, (Gergen, 1999, Shotter, 1993), as I noticed more acutely what I and others brought to dialogic encounters. I am still persuaded of the usefulness of the concept of 'conversational realities' as developed by Shotter (1993) who subtitled his book, 'Constructing Life through Language'.

However I came also to see that the 'linguistic turn' provides only one of several lens through which to understand the co-construction of meaning. Heron and Reason (1997) describe an extended epistemology of four different types of knowing; I shall refer to this more fully below. However for the purposes of this brief overview I notice that one of these four ways of knowing, experiential knowing, is seen by them as original and *prior* to representation of experience in speech or art. Experiential knowing is a potent source of other forms of knowing. For example, the experiences I had on entering the world of Silver Street were often intense and I was compelled to engage with them in the moment as a vital connection with the people I met. I experienced the subsequent act of writing about them as a different way of knowing, a reflective inquiry, energized by, but different from, the immediacy of the experience.

Although social construction offered me a theory that connected with my interest in poetry and writing, I found it hard to conceive of a reality which is in some sense dependent for its being, on human articulation. The step beyond this involved exploring a participative

epistemology which engages directly with experiential knowing as well as other forms of knowing. As Heron and Reason (1997) explain,

‘Our work with cooperative inquiry, in mindfulness practices and ceremony, and our attempts at aware everyday living all convince us that experiential encounter with the presence of the world is the ground of our being and knowing. This encounter is prior to language and art – although it can be symbolized in language and art.’ (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 276)

Prompted by such insights, I returned to the work of Bateson (1972 and 1987) whose ontology is rooted in a participative worldview. His notion of ‘mind’ also recognizes the aesthetic dimensions of an unfolding and systemic universe.

Since my inquiry draws on the perception of the aesthetic in daily practice I have also begun to explore the diverse and complex field of phenomenology and in particular the work of Gadamer (1975) and Merleau-Ponty (1942, 1945 and 1964). Their view of perception as a participative engagement with the world connects with and extends my understanding of Bateson’s ecology of mind. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodied knowing relates closely to my own awareness of the inseparability of the physical, the emotional and the cognitive. I will later draw on this ontological and epistemological theory to cast light on how I perceive and respond to relationships with others in my practice.

Within this broad framework I have found another theoretical resource for my inquiry, in the literature relating to the aesthetic perspectives of organizational life and practice. Writings within this area of comparatively new research contribute significantly to my personal inquiry. The writings of Barry (1994, 1996 and 1997), Carter and Jackson (2000), Linstead (2000), Strati (1992 and 1999), Taylor (2000, 2003 and 2005), Taylor and Hansen (2005) and Winter (1999 and 2001), amongst many others, have helped me challenge and extend my own thinking about the connection between organizational and aesthetic theory.

I now want to return to Silver Street and the source material of this inquiry to keep it grounded in practice. In particular I want to show how the experiential and presentational dimensions just referred to will help structure my experiences.

Engaging with Silver Street

As I have mentioned above, one of the significant steps in developing this inquiry was my discovery of Silver Street, or its discovery of me. I shall also refer to other settings I have found myself working or being in, but it is Silver Street that has proved to be the most profound and challenging, as a location for my inquiry.

*j*ournal ... Lina's moment, 13/11/03

I arrive an hour early so that I can tune back into Silver Street. An unexpected contact with Lina plunges me straight back in. She is there in the entrance hall, shouting and very angry. A young woman in reception whom I have not seen before is coping in a good-natured unflustered way with Lina's indiscriminate anger. Elaine, one of the administrators, joins in as we try to placate Lina. Elaine explains that Lina came in distressed today. She had not slept well. I recall that Lina sees herself as being different. 'The others in there can't talk', she had said to me previously, of the other people in her Unit.

Today she is feeling very disturbed and suddenly turns and spits at me, fortunately missing. She shouts that she wants her hair cut very short. She then pulls her sleeve up and bites her arm hard. She looks at the deep teeth marks in her arm and has another go. Elaine tries to distract her by offering a cup of water, as she comforts her. I am back in this world where extreme need is played out so rawly and where my only naïve intuitive skill is to be a calming presence, trying to talk Lina out of the moment. Lina responds by shouting loudly in my face, 'You fat cow'.

The sensory impact of this short episode is there embedded in my mind, – the teeth marks, the saliva, and the wracked face. Also there is my momentary bewilderment as I try to make sense of her anguish, the anger and aggression and its unsatisfactory resolution – unsatisfactory because I cannot guess how to communicate with the unsmiling face, the darting eyes, the head turned away. I feel deskilled by the encounter and my resolution of this is to become no more than a calming presence.

I present this at this stage in writing, to indicate the kind of dilemma that pointed me towards an inquiry into the aesthetic in practice. How did the immediacy and vividness of

these sensory perceptions connect with me and re-shuffle other perceptions and feelings in my life? Was there any beauty in this encounter? What was the nature of my relationship with this extraordinary place as experienced in this moment? How does my written representation of it influence my understanding of Lina or indeed other relationships? What imaginative reconstruction does it trigger in others as they read it? I needed to stay with and make personal sense of such questions arising from this and many other experiences, not all as emotionally raw as my encounter with Lina, but still moving in their difference.

I discovered in Silver Street an aesthetic environment that was rich in sensory impact particularly for me, as a newcomer, and which often exposed me to a more direct expression of this aesthetic in feelings, words, actions, than in other more conventional settings.

In contrast to this immediacy of expression in some people, there was also the mystery of profoundly disabled people whose lives seemed locked into private non-verbal worlds which lay beyond my reach. As time went on I was to discover this impression of disconnection was relative; there were moments of connection and when they came they were all the more remarkable for that. I describe several such later in this thesis.

Whether in my relationships with the volatile and expressive or the inward and closed, I realised that this was a world of enormous difference from other life settings I had previously experienced. I needed to explore what sense I was making of the aesthetic perceptions and judgements that the place elicited from me. I also began to reflect on the extent to which I might come to see my other worlds differently through the lens of these experiences. Joy, anger, enclosure and disconnection were not only to be found in Silver Street, albeit elsewhere they were often cloaked behind a different cultural veneer.

Working definition

I propose now to offer a working definition of the terms used in the title of this thesis. It will be short enough to provide some clarity about my intentions in using it, but no longer than this, as the concepts will be explored and defined more deeply in subsequent chapters.

What do I mean by ‘the aesthetic in practice’?

‘Aesthetics, collective singular noun. The science of conditions of sensuous perception.’

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

I include in my use of the term *the aesthetic*, sensory perceptions of the world and the thoughts and feelings that spring from them. In their review of organizational aesthetics, Taylor and Hansen (2005) adopt a similar description,

'Broadly, aesthetics is concerned with knowledge that is created from our sensory experiences. It also includes how our thoughts and feelings around them inform our cognitions.' (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1212)

These thoughts and feelings are embodied in sensuous and narrative imagery as they are processed in inner reflection. They also find expression through embodied responses, gestures and words as we communicate with others.

Aesthetic knowing operates between sensory perceptions and the feelings, ideas and representations that emanate from them. It is embedded in the fabric of relationality and the mundane experiences of life which are,

'only mundane in the sense that aesthetic understandings are so profoundly ingrained and unquestioned that their maintenance through the reconstruction of aesthetic forms in organizations seems so routinely ordinary.' (Ibid., p. 1226)

Taylor and Hansen talk of 'connection' as being at the centre of their understanding of aesthetic epistemology. Citing Bateson (1979) and Ramirez (1991) they identify the limitations of studying connection in aesthetics for instrumental purposes. They rather choose to focus on,

'... aesthetic experience and aesthetic forms fundamentally because they are about our feelings of what it is to be part of more than ourselves.' (Ibid., p. 1215)

This innate and intuitive sense of the aesthetic can be seen as being closely associated with finding connection with existential purpose.

Strati (1999) captures something of the complexity of this evocative representation of our inner world to others when he describes aesthetic inquiry as it occurs in organizational settings,

'... the heuristic process of evocation involves knowledge-gathering about a particular organizational phenomenon on the basis of experience of that phenomenon. This experience occurs only in the imagination of the subject, but is lived experience nevertheless.' (Strati, 1999, p. 11)

Strati's understanding of the aesthetic encompasses these verbal, visual and sensory perceptions. He also focuses his discussion of the aesthetic as it is evidenced in *organizational artefacts*; within this term he includes,

'... any characteristic of an organization which is able to 'tell' us something about the organization.' (Ibid., 1999, p. 11)

As an example he describes the chair as an organizational artefact, as it is perceived by people in different aesthetic ways, depending on such qualities as its design, cultural references, position and use. He concludes that,

'... it became plain from examination of the relations among ontological, ethical and aesthetic characteristics that the latter are an important 'engine' of organizational life.' (Ibid., p. 49)

I found this extension of the term *aesthetic* compelling because it made an essential link for me between a pervasive sensory absorption of the world and the heuristic sense-making that we engage in an equally pervasive and often less than conscious way.

It is necessary also to consider the place, within a definition of the aesthetic, of works of shaping imagination, such as poetry, pictures, music and other art forms. Although they are less familiar a part of organizational life, they have a central place in the development of many people's inner lives. Although individual taste is infinitely variable, creative artefacts, whether i-pod downloads, sung masses or daily newspapers, give pleasure or pain and feed and shape the imaginal life.

Drawing on Heron and Reason (1997) and their use of the word 'knowing' as a way of describing different epistemological relationships with the world, I see 'aesthetic knowing' as a complement to a number of other forms of knowing, including propositional knowing. Gagliardi (1996) argues that aesthetic processes provide the source from which other forms of knowing, such as the intellectual, spring. I shall inquire into how these aesthetic

processes contribute to my own reflexive stance towards the world and influence my participation with others.

The term *aesthetic* is also associated with beauty. The OED ascribes a second meaning to *aesthetic* as, **'belonging to the appreciation of the beautiful'**. In perceiving the world, we make individual judgements about what attracts us and what repels us, what is beautiful and what is ugly to us. Aesthetic artefacts invite us to make individual judgements of this sort. As Strati (2000) points out, aesthetic judgements are also made about the comic, the sublime, the ugly and the grotesque, as well as the beautiful.

Strati (1999) further enhances the connection between organizational artefacts and theories of social conflict, by pointing out that they

'... do not constitute an imaginary terrain of peace, love and harmony. On the contrary I have repeatedly stressed that they are subject to social conflict in organizations, to the violence of corporate cultures, to the power of the dominant coalitions in organizational life.' (Strati, 1999, p. 75)

Taylor and Hansen (2000) suggest that in an organization, the stage of engaging with the other-than-beautiful aesthetic may be a necessary step towards change.

'The idea of having more beauty in organizations is intuitively appealing, but the aesthetic category of the grotesque may be the key to personal and organizational transformation.' (Taylor and Hansen, 2000, p.1216)

This reference to change moves my focus from understanding the aesthetic as a phenomenon solely to be experienced, whether as a scholar or an artist, and opens up a territory of action and intervention, based on aesthetic knowing on the part of a facilitator and an organizational group.

As the poet Adrienne Rich (2006) puts it, the 'aesthetic' can be defined,

'not as a privileged and sequestered rendering of human suffering, but as news of an awareness, a resistance, which totalising systems want to quell: art reaching into us for what's still passionate, still unintimidated, still unquenched.' (Rich, 2006, p. 3)

(There is some resonance here between the *news of an awareness, a resistance* that the poet, Adrienne Rich, describes, and Bateson's concept of the *news of difference*, discussed further in Chapter 3, A theoretical framework.)

These then are the main dimensions and processes I group under the term 'the aesthetic'.

Framing this inquiry as action research

Throughout this reflective inquiry I adopt an Action Research approach; I shall now briefly define what this means to me and in subsequent chapters I will explore further how this finds expression in my practice.

I started to learn about Action Research at the beginning of my study for an MSc in Organizational Consulting at Ashridge in 1998. I was attracted to its participative stance; I also appreciated the fact that its proponents openly declared an aspiration towards practical learning. I felt that I was building on my earlier reading of humanist texts by Rogers (1961) and Freire (1972), reinforced subsequently by Lewin (1967) and Schon (1983). I became aware of the ways in which such an espousal of participative ways of working might challenge and change my sense of role as a facilitator. As I describe the three principal Silver Street case studies in this thesis I shall explore the extent to which I have worked with greater commitment to this collaborative approach.

Action research encompasses a range of different approaches and methods, several of which I now have experience of, such as Appreciative Inquiry, (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2004), Future Search, (Weisbord and Janoff, 2000) and Open Space, (Owen, 1997). I have taken from these methodological approaches those elements that suit the needs and circumstances of particular groups.

Winter (2003) captures some of this pragmatism in describing his critical realist stance on Action Research.

'Narratives of reflexive critical evaluations of current practices and theories, describing collaborative negotiations among stakeholders with differing interests in order to agree and implement practical changes: this may not be the only way of contributing to the progress of human knowledge and certainly not the easiest. But, speaking philosophically as well as practically, it has much to recommend it. In other words, it represents a coherent and informed response to theoretical issues which have been identified, in contemporary

philosophy, as raising crucial questions of purpose, methodology and validity for social inquiry in general.’ (Winter, 2003, p.9)

Reason (1999) compares three types of Action Research, – Cooperative Inquiry, Participant Action Research and Action Science. The second and third pieces of Silver Street work described later in this thesis aspire to a form of Co-operative Inquiry. The main strand of my personal application of Action Research is closer to the type of self-reflexive inquiry into practice described by Marshall, (1999, 2001). Following her, I have adopted an iterative process of inner and outer arcs of mindful inquiry, as I notice my aesthetic responses to encounters and attend to the perceptions, thoughts and feelings that are represented through these inquiry processes.

I shall return to action research as the approach adopted in this inquiry when, in Chapter 3, I give a fuller account of the theoretical frame within which I am working.

Conclusion

This chapter was intended to open up the direction, scope and nature of the inquiry described in this thesis. It has done so from the perspective of my personal history, both professional and philosophical.

I offer a brief recap of what I have covered.

I started by defining two related key questions,

- What is my developing aesthetic in practice?
- How does working in this way support a participative practice with others?

In telling the ‘backstory’ which led to the formulation of these questions, I explained how my practice has undergone significant change during this period and I sketched in some of the direction of this transition from working as a training consultant to facilitation of participative learning through action research. I also referred to the epistemological shifts in my reflection on practice that led to this change.

I introduced the Silver Street setting for this work and gave a first account of my reasons for choosing to locate my inquiry in a day centre for people with learning disabilities. The story of Lina was used to illustrate the rich sensory impact of Silver Street and the provocation

that such moments offered to me to 're-story' many of my assumptions about human flourishing.

I then introduced the main elements of my theoretical framework at the ontological, epistemological and methodological levels. I gave particular emphasis to the participative paradigm and within that to action research.

Next I offered a working definition of my thesis title, 'The Aesthetic in Practice'. I touched on the dictionary definition of aesthetics as 'the science of conditions of sensuous perception' and I referred to Strati's placing of the aesthetic as 'an important engine of organizational life'.

I then raised the question of the other-than-beautiful as part of a broader spectrum of inquiry into the aesthetic in practice.

I concluded by explaining why I came to frame this inquiry as action research and began to sketch in what this means to me.

It would be wonderful if it were possible to say everything at once by shaking free of linear text and offering something akin to a big bang of meaning, an informative explosion where nothing would take precedence or be seen to be missing. In the absence of such a miracle I offer the subsequent chapters, where I hope to fill out the details and move the story forward.

An introductory note on Working Sketches

As a rider to this first chapter, I now introduce a writing device which I am calling *Working Sketches*; I also attach a first example overleaf. I shall at intervals between chapters include entries of this sort to plot the line of making this extended piece of writing. I want to use them much as an artist might, to make sketches and notes to record ideas and feelings about the processes of making an artwork. In so doing I shall often adopt aesthetic processes as the most appropriate way of presenting these reflections. They follow a broadly chronological sequence with one or two exceptions where they record later perceptions on my writing of a particular chapter.

The first working sketch overleaf is intended to step outside the text and look in on the process at the beginning of reflecting on and writing this thesis. In so doing it offers a meta-commentary on the iterative and unfolding experience of the inquiry process which, unlike text, does not move in a linear fashion.

This working sketch was written near the beginning of this thesis writing process. Through it I reflect on some of my initial sense of what Shotter (1993) refers to as the 'open and unfinalized' nature of both the inquiry I was setting out on and my ways of representing it at the end of 2004. At that stage, the task ahead was feeling to me like searching out something infinitely alluring but frustratingly elusive.

Working sketch – Open and unfinalized text? 29/12/04



As I write, I shall bear in mind the caution flagged up by Shotter (1993),

'... the production of an intelligible order in reflection, by construction of a narrative account, quite often distorts what the character of the situation was in actual practice: it falsely completes what was an open and unfinalized circumstance, whose very openness 'invited' and 'enabled' the action taken with it, as something finalized and complete.'
(Shotter, 1993, p. 15)

I wonder how far I shall be able to get to what Shotter sees as 'open and unfinalized' in the representation of my practice. In recognising the inevitability of things being lost in translation, I am simply putting myself alongside any other writer, film maker or thesis writer.

I therefore want to find ways of presenting the thesis, that retain some sense of unfolding and shaping, since I do not expect the process of inquiry to stand still while I write. Writing changes things in some way, as do all acts of representation. Turning reflection into words on a page imposes a selectivity and linear order to illusive non-linear experience. I wonder at this stage how far I can hold the freshness of thinking and feeling about what I describe, without losing coherence and structure.

I shall therefore explore the tension of working with aesthetic contents and process, whilst writing a propositional discourse. I shall at intervals work in aesthetic ways to offer the reader an analogue of experiences I describe.

Another issue – finding the true centre of this inquiry; Shotter (1993) reflects on the relationship between the search for 'objects' in inquiries and the chosen processes of searching.

'...our supposed objects of study are of less concern to us than the general nature of our investigatory practices. In other words, instead of metatheory, we become concerned with *metamethodology*; primarily, we become interested in the procedures and devices we use in both 'socially constructing' the subject matter of our investigations, as well as how we establish and maintain a contact with it ...' (Ibid., p.158)

Now as a further stage of sense-making on re-reading this sketch, I would add that the aesthetic nature of this inquiry inevitably means that metatheory and metamethodologies overlap. Occasionally I shall find that the aesthetic metatheory of my inquiry narrative fuses with methodologies in ways in which the essence of neither is diminished. An example may be found in the next chapter where I inquire into the personal context of my making this inquiry: this is done almost exclusively through aesthetic methodologies of autoethnographic writing, poetry and photos, briefly linked by propositional commentary.

Otherwise the thesis juxtaposes propositional theory with supporting evidence from Silver Street and elsewhere, in the form of expressive journaling and photos. Shotter's caveat will be borne in mind as I strive to tell the unfolding propositional narrative of this inquiry into the aesthetic in practice, whilst still attending to the aesthetic methods through which I come to understand it.