

## **11 Poetics in practice**

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## Introduction

The poetic in practice has been referred to regularly throughout the thesis, as I have commented on different examples of intrinsic or expressive aesthetic inquiry. Now in this chapter I want to focus on my evolving understanding of the poetic in practice as a theoretical concept as well as through my work as it developed in Silver Street and elsewhere.

My aim in doing this is to,

- define how I am using the term *poetics in practice*
- explain the concept of negativity or the silent implicative double and apply it to my work
- similarly explore the concept of metaphor in relation to practice
- present and analyse an item of experimental fiction as a form of poetic inquiry into practice.

After a short introductory definition of ‘the poetic’, the first section of the chapter will be built around two fragments of imagery drawn from my journals. These are offered and discussed as examples of first person inquiry through the poetic, which I experience as being at the root of all aesthetic practice.

Referencing Linstead (2000) I will next consider the concept of negativity or the silent implicative double. This will be shown to be an influential ‘shadow’ or pervasive poetic presence within all communications. It will be argued that this negativity in poetic statements makes them more accessible to a shared sense-making.

This concept of the silent implicative double will be illustrated by reference to a journal item entitled ‘Black holes’. In this account of my conversation with a man called Tony, I notice levels of negativity in our dialogue and the Pinteresque quality in its dramatic structure.

In the next section I consider the function of metaphor as foundational process in all symbolic representation. I draw on the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Gadamer (1975) to show that metaphor also contributes to the development and organization of

concepts, as well as sensory and aesthetic knowing. Its embeddedness and pervasiveness in dialogue and other forms of representation is such that it is often below the threshold of conscious notice.

A consideration of an expressive mode of the poetic concludes the chapter. An experimental piece of fictional writing will be used as a means of exploring further my relationship with disability as it is poetically constructed in this piece of writing.

### **What do I understand by the poetic in practice?**

My understanding of the term *the poetic in practice* has developed as my inquiry has unfolded during this period of research. In particular I have questioned whether the meaning of the *poetic* changes when combined with *practice* and if so in what ways. Just as I have argued that play is purposeless, so too art, and within it poetry, is not created to serve a purpose; where it is, I experience it as losing a rich ambiguity and imaginal evocation, in trying to serve a functional agenda.

As Keats (1820) put it,

**'Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine –  
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.'** (Keats 1820, in 1999 edition, p. 229)

Levin (1988) also features the consequence of imposing too many propositional rules on the 'pursuit of aletheia',

**'when the truth that belongs to propositional discourse is allowed to regulate our poetizing, it brings the play of sounds and meanings, the interplay of words and experiencing, to a stop.'** (Levin, 1988, p.433. Cited in Linstead, 2000, p. 73)

As referenced in the working sketch at the end of Chapter 3, *A theoretical framework*, GM Hopkins also knew that, in experiencing the phenomenon of the rainbow, **'it was a hard thing to undo this knot'**.

I came across the following reference in Bachelard (1958), which I found very influential in developing my own understanding of the phenomenological potency of the poetic image,

**'To say that the poetic image is independent of causality is to make a rather serious statement. But the causes cited by psychologists and psychoanalysts can never really explain the wholly unexpected nature of the new image, any more that they can explain the attraction it holds for a mind foreign to the process of its creation. The poet does not confer the past of his image upon me, yet his image immediately takes root in me. The communicability of an unusual image is a fact of great ontological significance. ... In order to clarify the problem of the poetic image philosophically, we shall have to have recourse to the phenomenology of the imagination.'** (Bachelard, 1958, translated in 1969, p xvii to xviii)

In Chapter 8, *The expressive in practice*, I described how I had chosen to read a Frost poem and noticed how this had resonated with the group; I see this as an example of what Bachelard calls **'the phenomenology of the imagination'**. What struck me was the poetic potentiality of the moment of reading this particular poem and its capacity to elicit feelings and ideas in the group. In this case then poetry was not without purpose. So maybe it is necessary to look more closely at the meanings I am attaching to *purpose*.

With Bateson (1972), I would distinguish between 'human purposefulness' which might seek to use art for commercial, political or social purposes, and poetic *mind* in which the imagination of the artist and the responsive individual participate in co-creating new meanings. In this case, for example, I think of the extraordinary trail of participation between the Frost's original creative shaping of these words, and their imaginative reception at the moment of this time, place and context. It can in a phenomenological sense be claimed that poetry *uses* us, as much as we, it.

As Rich (2006) puts it,

**' I hope never to idealise poetry – it has suffered enough from that. Poetry is not a healing lotion, an emotional massage, a kind of linguistic aromatherapy. Neither is it a blueprint, nor an instruction manual, nor a billboard.'**

I therefore want to inquire into the poetic in practice not as if it were some form of tool but rather in the sense that it is both transformative and transformed as each individual

participates in it. The phenomenological moment of reading a poem re-creates it and is experienced by the reader as re-creative.

The term *poetic* I take also to be a wider aesthetic concept than *poetry*, although poetry is one of its most intensely expressive forms. Rather I have come to use the term *the poetic* to encompass all those processes of shaping imagination, whether spoken, written, dramatic, visual or kinaesthetic, whereby we represent our experiences through narrative, imagery and symbols. Inevitably then any consideration of the phenomenon of practice draws on the poetic.

There are other dimensions to the term *poetic* which need closer examination. Midgley (2001) problematizes the cultural divide between poetry and science as a form of epistemological schism. This is also expressed in the dialectical tension between propositional social science inquiry and a growing interest in ethnographic and action research inquiries. She explains that for Wordsworth and Coleridge the arts and the sciences were not seen to be in opposition.

**‘Here was the scene of the process of creation, both in art and science – not a mass of idle and delusive fancy, but a constructive faculty, building experience into visions which made both feeling and thought effective. A poet, said Wordsworth, had to be “a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply ... Our thoughts ... are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings”.’**  
(Midgley, 2001, p. 75/Wordsworth, 1802, [1936, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 935])

Wordsworth focuses on the creativity which is found in both art and science in a way which is still timely. Thinking in this way resists tendencies to marginalize either epistemological stance. He also reminds us that our thoughts ‘are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings’.

The relationship between thoughts and feelings in organizational life has been explored in Fineman (2000); he concludes that,

**‘Rationality is no longer the ‘master’ process; nor is emotion. They both interpenetrate; they flow together in the same mould.’ (Fineman, 2000, p.11)**

Huizinga (1938) claims a central place for poetry in the process of civilization,

**‘Poetry everywhere precedes prose; for the utterance of solemn or holy things poetry is the only adequate vessel.’ (Huizinga, 1938 p. 127)**

He illustrates his claim by extensive anthropological references including the fact that until 1868 the Japanese composed the weightiest parts of state documents in poetic form.

He continues,

**‘All poetry is born of play: the sacred play of worship, the festive play of courtship, the martial play of contest, the disputatious play of braggadocio, mockery and invective, the nimble play of wit and readiness.’ (ibid., p. 129)**

Linstead (2000) claims that it is through play in the spaces between the propositional and the poetic that meaning unfolds. He also connects poetic discourse with social science inquiry and in particular features ethnographic uses of poetry as a means of inquiry and of the presentation of inquiry. He describes ways in which poetry may be incorporated into research, ranging from encapsulating the aesthetic dimension of the ethnographic situation, thus creating a richer account, – to becoming a ‘voice’ which echoes across several works charting the development of the authorial ‘self’ over time.

This, Linstead sees, as a means of redressing the privilege that cognition and propositional structures are given in research writing.

(This is not to conflate two related but different ideas, – on the one hand, an intrinsic experience of the poetic in practice and on the other, aesthetic ways of representing this in research writing. It would be surprising though if there were little or no contingency between the two. As I write this section I can defend the propositional treatment of the poetic, whereas elsewhere it is equally essential to explore aesthetic concepts such as this through aesthetic means.)

Winter et al. (1999) see aesthetic processes as offering a complex but vital medium through which to understand the similarly complex and open-ended processes of organizational life.

To bring the focus closer to this present task of thesis writing, Heen (2005), in researching the place of feelings in action research, asserts how best they can be represented,

**'In a situation, body language communicates our feelings, but if we are to communicate feelings outside the immediate situation, it is usually more effective to use poetic language, an artistic form or other means of analogue communication, than analytical terms.'** (Heen, 2005, p. 273)

## Fleeting images

Having reflected on my current understanding of the poetic in practice, I now switch modes of inquiry into the poetic and consider two fleeting Silver Street images and how their perception and representation influenced my inquiry. In starting with them I want to show how the poetic springs from reflexive in-the-moment practice. What renders them poetic is the quality of participation between the moment and those who are open to it. As my inquiry has developed I can see how this poetic is enhanced by the process of representation, which in these examples is through writing. The discipline of doing this brings to the foreground of my attention other such moments as they occur.

I do not wish to portray this as some form of 'nectar collection' by an erratic butterfly, although on occasions it can have this sort of serendipity. The poetic invitation of the moment and the inquiry into it which follows holds for me the essence of the relationships with place, people and action that I am experiencing in practice.

These pieces do not therefore claim to be poetic because they have been shaped in terms of metre, line length or other conventions of poetry, as is the case in some of my other writing in Chapter 2, *The inquiring 'I'*. They are the fragmented residues of what occurred, a working note, written sparsely and as close to the experience as possible. Their poetics lie in the experienced moment. Their selection and description allows space for imaginative projection into the moment by others and myself.

## *j*ournal ... The bus stop

### Journal

As I was waiting for a bus on my way home, I saw Yannis, a young Greek service user, walking along the opposite side of the street, his arm tucked in that of his carer, a middle aged black woman. There was something moving in this seeing moment.

I was struck by the familiarity and intimacy of the white arm crossed with the black, an ethnic difference long since lost in the day-to-day process of shared lives. I had previously created in my mind's eye a fictitious Greek family for Yannis. Yannis and his real carer belong to a community, hopefully as least as caring as people's birth families. The fact that they are Greek and Caribbean is of no practical import to either.

This length of street, I thought, is part of his world, his familiar patch, as he walks, head slightly high looking ahead, unaware of me.

### Commentary

This fleeting encounter at the bus stop, I unseen across the road, but Yannis seen by me, is simply represented in my brief story.

The closeness of the couple arm-in-arm re-connected me to my childhood, my mother. It prompted some deep recollection of that sense of being at the end of the day after school and all those sessions as a small child spent with my mother walking between Sainsbury's and Mence Smiths in North Watford.

In making this link I also felt an empathy for the childish vulnerability, and the enjoyment of Yannis.

The language in the closing glimpse of Yannis is evocative, because of its sparse visual accuracy. This is my filmic record of the moment. It resonates with me in much the same way that a fleetingly held cinematic shot at the end of a sequence would. The bare words have an evocative potency of visual recall, which I experience, as poetic.



I notice the very different mode of representation in the two columns above.

The left column is my working sketch of what happened – the fusion or participation that I experienced in seeing Yannis as a self-presentation, a poetic phenomenon, expressive of so much my experience in Silver Street.

The commentary adds a layer of personal association and also introduces the extra framing of the closing sentence as a filmic cadence. As I wrote this last comment I found myself re-imagining this quality of the moment more deeply. The moment and the comment are held in an even balance, the one informing the other, neither dominating the other.

On the next page I move to a second fragment.

**j**ournal ... I have come to bring you life – don't miss out

I write now about a moment during a solitary walk I made one morning back to Silver Street after a visit to one its satellites.

#### Journal

I pause to look at an Anglican church, which displays on its noticeboard a large laminated photo of a happy and numerous congregation standing in front of the church. I am caught by the immediacy of the injunction to phone, rather than 'miss out' on life. The girl with the 'Miss Sexy' tee shirt forms a delightful sub-plot in this busy picture. The red and black text provides a static footing to the photo. The sun always shines on in the photo. The congregation surges towards the church gates – no dusty empty pews here. They appear within a dramatic narrative of a musical chorus line. Their arms are raised as if on the completion of a show and make us into their applauding audience.

#### Commentary

This description speaks about my reflexive relationship with the social context of my Silver Street inquiry. I knew that this image would continue to resonate with me. I see this as a sign of the poetic potency of the participation between the picture and me in this moment.



This combined aesthetic statement, the photo and the text, also connects with earlier references in this thesis to the depth and poetic potency of *place*. Place is one important factor which conditions and frames what is found to be remarkable or normal.

I also reflect on why this statement claims my attention in this way. Bachelard (1958) was referenced above in his comment on **'the wholly unexpected nature of the new image'**. I do not see this photo/text item as material for sociological analysis, for example, of ethnicity – although I can imagine how sharing it with a group could lead to an exploration of this issue. I see this as an aesthetic participation between an iconic photo and the 'me' who saw it. Its capture in word and picture leaves a trace which can evoke further imaginal re-creations. For example, it might prompt me to extend the angle of vision that is taken in and to include more of myself as the photographer. Either element, text or photo, in separation from each other would lose some of this poetic extension of meaning, although it could be argued that the act of taking and publishing the photo in itself constituted the original poetic statement.

Taking a step back from these two fragments, I notice how the addition of commentary has further layered their meaning. They become more complex in their mix of propositional interpretation. There is also something satisfying in their being contained visually in their two separate columns, just as the text and the picture are separate in the photographed image.

## Negativity and metaphor

To continue the inquiry theme of this chapter, I now give an account of how the literature has opened up two further dimensions of the poetic in ways which inform my practice. These two dimensions are the concept of *negativity* or a *silent implicative double* which is an intrinsic part of the poetic and the second is *metaphor* when considered not only as a literary device, but as a pervasive way of inquiring into and making sense of the experienced world.

Linstead's (2000) claims that the poetic can be seen as the source of other discourses. He cites Levin's view that **'propositional discourse arises from poetic, not the other way round'** (Levin, 1988, p. 437). He claims that it is out of the **'inescapable slipperiness'** of poetic discourse that we create our own meaning. Poetic imagery evokes associations through the richness of metaphor and narrative. To describe it as 'slippery' is to recognize that it holds open the potentiality of multiple meanings. Perhaps part of the metaphorical image of slipperiness is that of oils, which loosen meaning.

## Negativity or the silent implicative double

I want firstly to give some attention to the concept of the 'silent implicative double' and have found Linstead (2000) a useful guide to this concept. (Brief reference has already been made to negativity in discussing play in the previous chapter.)

The poetic may be seen as existing on the fringe of the unsayable. Linstead (2000) describes this quality in the following way,

**'All language carries with it a silent, implicative double, which supports it, carries it and allows it to do its work. The 'postmodern' theorizing of Lyotard and Derrida in particular has attempted to address this important area of the unsaid and the unsayable, the sublime, the *différend*, recognizing that the life without silence is unlivable.'** (Linstead, 2000, p. 61)

I notice in my work how I am developing more of a skill in listening for the lacunae which indicate the presence of what Linstead also describes as the 'underside' of dialogue. I think of a recent case where my attention was caught by the persistent use of the word 'colleague' in the narrative of a senior manager. It was so uniform in its use that it implied some spacing between her and her immediate associates sitting in the room around her. It was as though the manager felt less at home with naming people directly. The word 'we' seemed frequently to be suppressed in favour of 'colleagues'. I found myself speculating why this should be and I hypothesized that for her to have used 'we' might have implied a closer more equal relationship than she wanted with her team. It also carried suggestive indications about the importance of professional protocol that she wanted to model for her team in its dealings with the rest of the organization. In listening for the hidden or negative significance that it contained, I detected the controlling process which I felt was being transacted within this word 'colleague'.

The underside of dialogue may be actively denied; inquiry into its meaning may be suppressed by the prevailing propositional narratives within communities and organizations. In these cases its influence passes without conscious notice or challenge but it is none the less potent for that. A passing connection may be made here with Carter and Jackson (2000) and their concept of the 'an-aesthetic' in organizations, which I referenced earlier in Chapter 9, *Action research in Silver Street-2*.

However this concept of negativity relates to all transactional processes, not just those where organizational power is brokered. Linstead (2000) proposes that poetic language is more open to negativity and that this may offer access to 'aleatory truths'

**'...., we can become alert to the situation that the silent double, the underside of the text, carries with it its own form of truth – aletheia, or the aleatory truth of negativity. We might then be concerned with distinguishing between those forms of language that seek to become open to incursions of negativity, and those which tend to suppress it. By analogy, as we move to consider the underside of organization, we would need to consider methodologies which similarly allow chance, surprise and flashes of insight their legitimate place.'** (ibid. p.72)

I have come to see the poetic as a means of inquiry which offers up its own form of truth; this is to be found in the silent implicative double that surrounds what I say and what I hear said in practice situations. One of the tasks of reflexive inquiry is to acknowledge and make sense of this negativity, as far as it yields itself to reflection. I shall give an example of this process in the next section.

In talking about the conceptual functions of metaphor Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also make a link with the concept of the unsayable, or the silent implicative double which shadows speech,

**'Every true statement, therefore, necessarily leaves out what is downplayed or hidden by the categories used in it.'** (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.163)

I also find myself returning to Gaston Bachelard (1958) and his description of the concept of 'home'. In doing so he adopts the language of dreams and poetic images,

**'Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams: we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost.'** (Bachelard, 1958, p. 6)

This leads me to think that the 'poetry that is lost', shadows all our expressive acts. It is as though through poetry we approach the unsayable as an act of faith knowing that in these spaces which come into and out of focus, lie our dreams, passions and fears.

In Bachelard's terms, the purpose of my inquiry might be framed as the development of a certain kind of alertness to the emotions that form this lost poetry in my own aesthetic life and in live practice with others.

I include below a journal item from Silver Street in which I explore the potency of the silent implicative double in practice.

## Negativity, Tony and me

There were occasions in Silver Street where I felt myself to be 'in conversation' with profoundly disabled non-verbal service users. The nail painting session described in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*, was one such. With people with more moderate learning disabilities, I could communicate verbally, but the dialogue often took unexpected turns. A different set of narrative conventions about what might be of interest often moved the resulting dialogue onto a new level of eloquence. In the example that follows I can hear a quality of poetic drama in the encounter described. I will also try to explore the enormous penumbra of implicative double that surrounds the dialogue.

In a Silver Street satellite housed in a former primary school, the day opportunities service cares for a larger group of people with moderate learning difficulties. Here I met and talked with Tony. The context is that I am sitting in an art class chatting with people as they draw or paint.

### *j*ournal ... Black holes

#### Journal

Tony comes over and begins a conversation with me that is to go on intermittently all afternoon. He is in his fifties and very early on says the most remarkable thing to me. "I hope you can come here for ever." I am caught by the fact that I have never before received such a declaration.

#### Commentary

Now the story resembles for me one of those accounts of a delightful exchange that sometimes happens between strangers on a train or a boat. I was held captive by it as I tuned in to its conversational register.

He intrigues me in his need to associate and sadly I find myself wondering if this has ever got him into trouble elsewhere in a world that lacks his generosity of spirit.

He is sticking strips of paper round an inflated balloon, which will be popped once the papier maché is set. He comes over to Julie and I.

The conversation suddenly lurches onto death. "Both my mum and dad are dead", he says. Julie replies, "My brother died. My brother died. My brother died, he did." Trevor notices that she is getting upset at the memory. "Don't get depressed", he says in a very matter-of-fact way. We turn back to Julie's picture, where the small amount of her drawing which received all our praise is now being obliterated by her gluing a large piece of material over it, as she enters the collage phase of the afternoon.

Across the table Betty is drawing with a black pencil on a large sheet of paper. Her work unfolds as a more or less symmetrical pattern of flowers and scrolls. She seems very absorbed in doing this and smiles as she looks up. I am impressed by her skill, but gather from Melvin, the artworker running the session, that this may be what she always does, many times over. Later in the afternoon Melvin and Betty have a

The ambience of this satellite unit was reminiscent of the primary school, which had once occupied this '30s building.

Tony's effortless reading of Julie's impending distress was impressive; they obviously know each other well after many years of sharing in art classes and other activities.

I notice here that in the telling I want to capture the enormity of the challenge facing Melvin as he nips round the room trying to help Julie, and too many others, develop new ways of expressing themselves through drawing model-making and painting.

wonderfully messy foray with acrylic paint,  
as an extension of her drawing.

I am now sitting by Trevor again. He asks  
me if I know Buddy Holly. He's struck lucky  
here, because I am able to sing a few words  
from *Peggy Sue*.

It was here that our dialogic  
relationship began to take off.

As he moves on through a catalogue of  
knowledge about the '60s and astrology,  
fragments of his biography slip out. He spent  
time in a boarding school. He walks to and  
from the Centre and lives by himself,  
although I assume that this might be in  
some form of sheltered accommodation.

He is curious about me and as he questions  
me, he can offer a more or less matching  
anecdote from his own life, to make an  
agreeable conversation. Some of this is  
characterized by a quiz-like interaction, for  
example, "Do you know what sign I am?" I  
work my way clumsily through Aquarius,  
Cancer etc until we get to his sign.

"Do you believe in black holes?", he asks.  
There seemed something extraordinarily  
surreal about this moment as the two of us  
sat there, he with his fingers covered with  
glue, I helping Susan glue sticky-backed  
plastic pieces on to her collage because  
neither of us could get the backing paper  
off. To be contemplating the origins of the  
universe with Tony at this moment in Silver  
Street with the autumn settling down in the



damp fallen leaves on the playground outside  
was – unique.

When we prepared to go, he asked me if I would be here tomorrow. I said, “No.” He said he would be sorry. He set off to walk home. I waited at the bus stop and was roundly abused by the Chinese driver in front of a crowded bus for trying to get on through the off-door, his not having opened the on-door. The world can be a cruel place.

This is my sign-off; it was a silly incident, being made to look foolish on the bus, when my head was full of Tony and the afternoon. I fear far worse may have befallen Tony in his life.

Having shortly after this moment seen again Peter Hall’s production of Pinter’s *The Betrayal*, I made a connection between its rhythm of dialogue, its eloquent silences and repetitions, and my conversation with Tony. There was a poignancy about his wanting to connect with me, about the dialogic content which held us agreeably together at one level, but which teetered on the brink of the surreal at another.

This conversation highlighted for me the power of the unsayable, the phenomenological negativity referred to above. Behind the words runs another flow of meaning, an interpretative but unspoken dialogue. By definition I cannot express this negativity other than sketchily and in retrospect. At the time it was in full play as a dialogic process between us. From my perspective it might now be fuzzily sketched in as I explore my sense of deep curiosity about,

- Tony’s amassing of so many facts and his use of them as counters in a conversational game
- my not knowing the answers to a number of his questions but this not mattering unless it caused him to connect less closely with me
- my externality to the conversation, knowing throughout that I was the one, not he, who would be later getting on the bus out of town
- sensing and responding to his need for human warmth and contact. (His regret that we would not meet tomorrow, was touching. I also left with a sense of guilt at the ease of my departure and fixedness of his staying.)

- my sadness that a regular continuity of this conversation in the future would almost certainly be inappropriate to his needs as we might lock into a lifetime's iterative quiz game, with no way out.

I was struck by the way our lives had run in parallel with at least 45 years of overlap, of common memories of music, events, scientific discoveries that we could both share. At the same time I could only guess at the asymmetry of our lives, the different opportunities, pleasures, pains which would be harder to share. Yet in his and my content with the afternoon together we were connected.

I take from this a further reflection on the inquiry context and method which meeting Tony had created. In more structured and 'purposeful' facilitated dialogue the space for these experiences of the silent implicative double might have been squeezed out. The context of *being beside and with* has proved to be a creative one for me; the method of *having no method* other than an openness to what happens between us also deserves further reflection. I shall return to this in Part D.

I now consider the second of the two dimensions of the poetic in practice that I referred to above, that is, metaphor.

## Metaphor in practice

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) approach metaphor by placing it within what they refer to as an experientialist paradigm, which I take to have some link with my own understanding of phenomenological ontology. Meaning in metaphor is seen to reside between and within the disparate elements it draws together.

The relevance of their thinking to my inquiry into the poetic in practice is well pointed up in the following quotation,

**'New metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and therefore new realities. This should be obvious in the case of poetic metaphor, where language is the medium through which new conceptual metaphors are created.'**

**But metaphor is not merely a matter of language. It is a matter of conceptual structure. And conceptual structure is not merely a matter of the intellect – it involves all the natural dimensions of experience, including aspects of our sense experiences: color, shape,**

**texture, sound, etc. These dimensions structure not only mundane experience but aesthetic experience as well. Each art picks out certain dimensions of our experience and excludes others. Artworks provide new ways of structuring our experience in terms of these natural dimensions. Works of art provide new experiential gestalts and, therefore, new coherences.’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 235)**

In stepping so deftly, in these four sentences, across this territory of metaphor, they make connections which are very relevant to this inquiry. I want briefly to retrace these steps and also make connections with other aspects of metaphor as I go.

Firstly they distinguish between metaphor as a matter of language, which it clearly is, and metaphor as a means of creating conceptual structure. As they point out elsewhere, metaphor provides a conceptual meta-structure,

**‘... most of our normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured; that is, most concepts are partially understood in terms of other concepts.’ (Ibid., 1980, p. 56)**

The relationship between metaphor generation and concept building is also well defined by Gadamer (1975), when he claims that,

**‘Language has performed in advance the abstraction that is, as such, the task of conceptual analysis. Now thinking need only make use of this advance achievement.’ (Gadamer, 1975, p. 103)**

Metaphors influence our choices about how we conceptualise experience. Many concepts that appear to be espoused as rational argument, may also attract us because of their metaphorical clothing. As Lakoff and Johnson claim,

**‘The intuitive appeal of a scientific theory has to do with how well its metaphor fits one’s own experience.’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 19)**

They then identify that metaphorical conceptualization is not just ‘a matter of the intellect’ but includes all our sensory experience, and therefore inevitably also our aesthetic experience. The idea that sensory experience is ‘made sense of’ through metaphor is a powerfully poetic concept. In experiencing ‘dépjà vu’, or its equivalence in other sensory channels, metaphorical connections are made between the moment and other parts of our

lives. Lakoff and Johnson go on to refer to the metaphorical structuring of experience through artworks. In privileging certain dimensions, the artwork relegates others. This may be another way of understanding negativity within the range of artistic media. Their argument is also persuasive of the importance of working through more than one medium, as each relates to different senses.

Later Lakoff and Johnson claim that,

**'A large part of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives.'** (ibid., p.233)

Our choice of metaphors in everyday conversation becomes habitual and yet through reflection it can reveal some of the sense-making processes by which we live. I recall a moment when I said to a colleague who had been trained as a Gestalt therapist that I was curious about how to 'get off the hook of (an issue) that we were grappling with'. He drew my attention to the emotive metaphor of pain and entrapment that I had used. That was how I was feeling about the particular problem at that time and his intervention prompted me to question why.

I notice the extent to which in practice organizational language employs metaphorical structures to support the process referred to earlier in Chapter 9, *Action Research in Silver Street-2*, as a form of an-aesthetic, (Carter and Jackson, 2000). The expression *rolling out programmes across the organization* is intended, by those who use it, to convey orderly implementation which reaches all departments and teams. It shares a linguistic provenance with phrases such as *business process re-engineering* or *knowledge management*. In fact the *rolling* metaphor also has a counter association of flattening, crushing or forcing the crooked to be straight and 'the rough places plain'. Whilst it would be tiresome to point out to co-inquirers all such metaphorical usages as some form of linguistic corrective, metaphors do act as indicators of some form of denial and invite an exploration of how people feel about being in the path of 'rolled out' initiatives. The conversation about the perceived ownership of the *Different Days* programme described in Chapter 6 might be seen as such an example; even the concept of *owning* an abstraction called a *programme* has a metaphorical resonance.

Lakoff and Johnson's inquiry into metaphor provides insights that have direct application in working with individuals and groups. The authors take an eminently pragmatic view of interpersonal communication,

**'When the chips are down, meaning is negotiated; you slowly figure out what you have in common, what is safe to talk about, how you can communicate unshared experience or create a shared vision. With enough flexibility in bending your world view and with luck and skill and charity, you may achieve some mutual understanding.'** (Ibid., p. 231)

It is therefore through a web of these miniature poetic structures that we conduct dialogue with others or with ourselves in reflective writing. (The sensuous imagery of the last sentence was unpremeditated in any particularly conscious level as I wrote, but the architecture of a web containing small sub-structures had an attraction for me and has provided the imaginative space for me to articulate what I had in mind.)

## **The expressive poetic in practice**

Elsewhere in this thesis I give examples of expressive activities that I regard as poetic in their way of communicating. Specific examples include the Robert Frost poetry reading discussed in the Chapter 8, *The expressive aesthetic in practice*, and the reference to the use of fridge magnet poetry as a way of inviting people to experiment with poetic writing. However as this chapter makes clear, the poetic is not restricted to words and several examples of model-making and drawing which have already been discussed, illustrate the poetic in practice. In Chapter 12 which follows I describe the use of symbolic modelling as I complete the story of Silver Street-2 which has been threaded through Part C.

I now want to explore further how expressive poetic statements contribute to my inquiry. I start by returning to some of the literature on autoethnographic writing.

Sparkes (2002) in his defence of multi-voiced texts refers to the work of Brett Smith (1999) in which the writer provides a narrative of self as he undergoes severe clinical depression. I am interested in the way Sparkes comments on Smith's approach to its writing,

**'Smith's messy text, in the form of short stories and poetry, is intended to evoke the reader's vulnerabilities, ambiguities and ongoing struggles, as well as the gendered nature of his condition, by inviting the reader-as-bricoleur to rupture the traditional**

**pattern of scientific knowing and to “feel, hear, taste, smell, touch, and morally embrace the world of depressions.” ‘ (Smith, 1999, p. 275, cited in Sparkes, 2002, p. 219)**

Casting the reader as a *bricoleur* captures very well the more active participation that ‘messy texts’ invite. The propositional text of ‘scientific knowing’ sets up a different relationship with the reader, not so much offering a moral ‘embrace’, but keeping the reader at arm’s length. There are narratives where this may seem entirely appropriate. However the nature of inquiries which take an action research approach calls for a form of representation which mirrors the complex unfolding of the experiences described.

Fineman (2000) in writing on ways of researching emotions in organizations, endorses a multi-voiced fictional approach,

**‘Here, perhaps, we have something to learn from the poet, novelist and dramatist who have long explored emotions ‘in the round’. A social science of emotions is rendered no less systematic or rigorous by finding different voices, or expressive forms, to convey crucial experiences and meanings.’ (Fineman, 2000, p. 15)**

As my writing of this thesis progressed, I wanted to write in more experimental ways about the experiences of Silver Street and elsewhere. To end this section on the expressive poetic in my practice, I therefore include overleaf an excerpt from a story that I have written; it is based on my Black Hole conversation with Tony and an amalgam of other encounters. In this case I will reproduce the text as written and then offer some commentary afterwards.

## Tony's story

I'll go down to the centre today. If I don't go someone will be after me. They'll spot me missing and ring Gloria. On the other hand I could just stay here. I've got a magazine to do; I found it on the bus; there are pictures in the back of great big houses, some by a river and castles. What I do is slowly cutting round the edge, houses, flowers, the countryside and of course women. I've filled the notice board Gloria had put up for me, so now I stick them on the wall as well. I used to come back and find some of them, tidied into the bin. Now they've stopped worrying. I'm just working my way round the top of the window; nearly run out of wall, and Pritstick. I must remember to pocket one next time we have art.

But today I might lie on my bed with a breeze through the window and look at my mags. I'm lying on my bed, cutting them slowly out and around, pasting on a smear of white and getting up to put this one high next to Kylie, the wicked tart.

I can usually guess the time spot on; I could have been the talking clock. I once listened to it in the Centre office. Marleen was larking about on the phone imitating the voice and trying to sound posh – "At the third stroke, it'll be ten thirty two and ten seconds precisely, la-di-dah ..." I told her, "I could have saved you the call." She laughed, "Tony, what don't you know?"

A bit of sun today so I'll pull back the curtains, not too hard, otherwise the rail will be down on my head again like it did last month, a Tuesday, – it must have been the twelfth. Graham was duty manager and he got a bit steamed up when I told him, but not much, because I've been here longer than any of them, since my mum found it was getting too much for her. I'd only been here for a year and then she upped and died, without me. Don't talk about it.

I've been reading about black holes; not sure if I believe in them, or not. Sometimes I lie awake at night with the curtains open and let my eyes wander, looking for them. Perhaps there's too many street lights round here. Perhaps if I was by 'the converted barn' in the mag, I'd get a hint of them being up there, like it said.

I'm always just getting into reading about black holes in *The Mysteries of Science* in the day room or a Buddy Holly story, when Jenny or Hasan have a fit or start screaming. Those two, I think they fancy each other; they just have a funny way of showing it. Mind you when Jenny does fit, you know all about it. Gloria or Graham have to come and clear the furniture out of

the way of her legs thrashing about, and make sure she's no biting anything, like her tongue. Then it all goes quiet and she comes round and sleeps curled up on the sofa. "Don't forget to put that in her notes", I say to Gloria. She pretends to look annoyed at me, at least I think she's pretending. "Here, clever clogs Tony, why don't you do it?", she says, and stomps off back to her little office under the stairs.

So am I going to the Centre or not? Guess I will; I can always finish sticking tonight; well really I'll never finish sticking. There always be another mag. This wall is like my family album now – my mum had a proper one, in a book. I wanted that when she died. It had a picture of my dad in fireman's uniform; I never saw him for real. He'd gone by the time I could remember anything. But it did have my mum's wedding photos and all the relatives, most of them dead now or living somewhere else, most probably down Green Lane. I get a Christmas card from Aunty Glenda and I once had a visit from another one, can't remember who though now. Just before the funeral I went round to my mum's. I looked through the bay window and rang the bell; no one in. The place was empty.

Oh well I'll get my mac out of the cupboard, kiss Kylie goodbye on the you-know-where and be on my way. The 321 stops down the road and it takes me to the door of the Centre. Got my Oyster card? Yes ...

...

I walk home. Half way down Aster Road, a funny thing happens. I see a woman, she was about thirty, coming towards me. She stops to talk to another man in front of me; but I see him shrug her off. He doesn't want to talk to her.

"Can you spare some change for a cup of tea?" she says to me. She's standing blocking the path. She looks, well, dirty and washed out, as though she could do with a good scrub and a meal. What's she doing here in Aster Road at three thirty five in the afternoon? She makes me feel edgy. I avoid looking in her face; but she keeps on at me.

I always keep my money in a purse in my left pocket.

"You're not going to get a cup of tea round here", I say.



"Whatever", she says, "Give us a quid or two; I really need it. You've got a kind face; what's your name?"

"Tony."

"Well, Tony. Give us some money and I'll be nice to you."

"Don't need anyone to be nice to me, thanks. I'm nice enough as I am."

I'm not walking down Aster Road again; I'll run a mile if I see her again.

...

I like a front seat in the mini-bus to see where you're going; today it's Southend. I've been there lots of times, before and since the fire. We'll not be on the pier today, not with a great hole in the middle of it. Roger's up the back sitting by John; his wheelchair is belted down. You might think John doesn't know what's going on, but I know different. He sits there, his helmet on and his heading rolling a bit, but when we get out and catch a bit of sea breeze, he'll wake up. He can get quite noisy, he's so excited.

Ali's the driver today. He's younger than me and wears a lot of jewellery, gold chains and things. He's got his baseball hat on backwards.

"Hey, Ali!"

"What's that, Tony?"

"People will think you're driving backwards."

"Why's that?"

"Your hat's on the wrong way round."

"Oh, Tony; give it a break." He glances back with a quick smile.

We find somewhere out of the breeze to look at the sea. It's miles out, just lots of mud and water somewhere you can hardly see. People walking up and down the front; a lot of old people. Kids should be at school.

Roger has brought a digital camera; I love them. He takes our picture, all five of us lined up in a shelter, plus the other staff. Then he asks me if I can take a picture with him in it too. You bet.

It's all silver and covered in buttons. He shows me the screen on the back, everybody jiggling around as I move the camera. He tells me about pressing the button and then nips off into the shelter by John. Half of them aren't looking, but they never will. The rest all shout cheese too soon; I'm still sorting out the camera.

"Hang on a minute. OK now, cheese, again!"

I hold it steady and press and bingo. Roger shows me how to see the picture on the screen and it looks OK, oh, but John's gone to sleep.

We're all starving. We always have fish and chips at Southend; it's a real treat. We go to the same place on the front where you can sit outside and have a coke and a plate of cod and chips and plenty of tomato ketchup, and – if you're lucky, it depends on whose taking you, finish off with a cream bun and a cup of tea. Or maybe we'll have that just before we go home, which won't be long because we have to be back by three thirty.

A woman on another table starts getting friendly with us.

I think it would be better if she stayed out of it, but she comes over and starts trying to talk to John in his wheelchair. John is looking down at the floor between his knees, waiting for the next forkful of fish and chips. He couldn't care a toss about anything else at the moment.

"Can I give you a hand? Here let me feed this one; what's he called?"

Roger says, "That's very kind of you, but no. We're all fine."

She looks a bit miffed, chats about the weather for a bit, pats John on the knee and gets up and is off. I see Roger swaps glances with Ali.

On the way back in the mini-bus Roger and Ali start a bit of a sing-song. I get them to sing some Buddy Holly favourites – ‘Peggy Sue, Peggy Sue ....’, and ‘Not Fade Away’. Then we sing, ‘That’ll be the day ...’ Roger knows them all, but Ali just tags along. I look round and John’s not quite smiling but he’s moving his head from side to side.

I walk home via the High Road and tell Graham all about the day; he’s a bit busy filling in forms but he says he’s glad we had a good time and maybe yes some time later we can sing ‘Peggy Sue’ together, but not just now.

I go to bed early because there’s nothing on telly. I lie there thinking about the day. I wonder if a black hole is like the burnt-out bit in the middle of Southend pier.

### **Commentary on Tony’s story**

These excerpts of *Tony’s story* have been through a process of editing which in itself casts some light on the complexity of trying to explore how I am relating to this *Tony*. I gave the complete story to Beverley, the Centre manager, to read. She reminded me of Mark Haddon’s (2004) book, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, which is written in the first person from the imagined perspective an autistic boy.

I agreed with her that I had tackled a very complex job in trying to get inside the mind of an autistic person. She thought that although the incidents I had attributed to Tony have in her experience all happened or are credible as what might happen to this fictitious Tony, they were presented with too much reflexivity, too much awareness of other’s reactions and responses. This forced me to take a closer and more critical look at the text. I also read Haddon’s book and saw how far I still had to go in understanding the difference in how autistic people perceive other’s words and actions. I was attributing too much causality to Tony’s observations and comments. There was too much of *my* way of seeing things in Tony’s monologue.

I was also struck by the extraordinary discipline of containing what I wanted to say within the limits of his imagined first person voice. This at a stroke removed the writer’s reflexive voice that a third person account would have permitted.

Nevertheless I still felt that the exercise had allowed me to explore my relationship with Silver Street in a new way. The version which I have included above has been further stripped of what I took to be my voice which had inevitably crept in at every reflective moment. I have also removed some episodes which were high on pathos, incidents which showed Tony being exploited by the world. These I felt to be uncomfortably close to rendering his disability as an object of pity. I want to show him as worthy of respect.

Frank (1995) comments,

**'To think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyse it. Thinking with stories takes the story as already complete; there is no going beyond it. To think with a story is to experience it affecting one's own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one's life.'** (Frank, 1995, p. 23)

I am still thinking with *Tony*.

## Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with tracing how my understanding of the poetics in practice has developed. I firstly made clear that I was using the term *poetic* to describe a wider range of aesthetic process than that of poetry. I discussed the sense in which the poetic may be *used* in practice. With Bateson (1975), I would seek to avoid the 'human purposefulness' of using artworks and processes. Such use would involve a propositional stripping or translation of one form of meaning into another more functional one; as a consequence the poetics' essence would be destroyed. The quality of participative transactions that I associate with the poetic are more complex and serendipitous than this.

I referenced Bachelard (1958), Midgley, (2001), Huizinga (1938) and Linstead (2000) for their different perspectives on the distinctive presentational knowing that is achieved through the poetic.

Next I used two 'fleeting images' to illustrate and support this theoretical discussion. *Yannis by the bus stop* and *the Church noticeboard* were offered as examples of the intrinsic poetic in my first person inquiry into Silver Street.

The rest of the chapter was devoted to two topics, *negativity or the silent implicative double*, and *metaphor*. These were described as offering interpretative keys to the illusive nature of the poetic in practice. Linstead (2000) and Gadamer (1975) were referenced in a discussion

on negativity and the silent implicative double which lies around words and actions. Poetic texts render themselves more open than propositional ones, to inquiry into this negativity. This was explored through an analytic commentary on a journal entry entitled *Black Holes*.

Referencing Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work, metaphor was explored as a complex and pervasive process for cognitive as well as sensory and aesthetic knowing.

The chapter concluded with references to the more expressive use of the poetic. The function of messy texts in autoethnographic inquiry was discussed. I then included an experimental piece of writing, 'Tony's story', through which I have tried to use first person fiction to explore how I relate to disability in the imaginary persona of Tony. I described how the editing of this piece of writing had stripped it of much of my imposed voice and in so doing I experienced a deepening in my understanding of autism, as well as a confirmation of my relating to the people I have met in Silver Street.

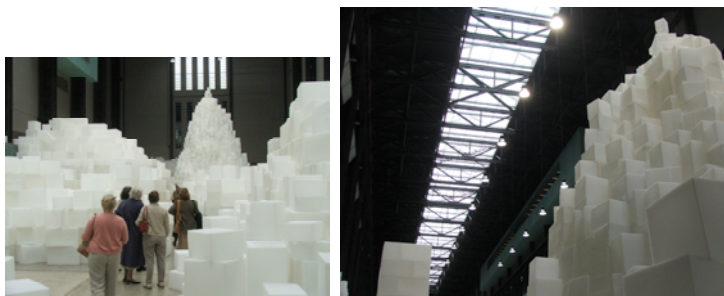
In the final chapter of Part C, which follows, I shall tie up the story of Silver Street-2, *Different Days*.

## Working sketch – Nothing and something, 10/10/05

I notice more and more how themes that I have been researching in my practice find echoes in other parts of my life. This should come as no surprise and merely affirms what I stated early on in this inquiry that the notion of practice would itself become an artificial constraint, if limited to action research and expressive media.

I have come across two recent connections with the theme of negativity – firstly, Rachel Whiteread who has referred to her work as 'minimalism with heart'! As a parallel to the negativity of the unspoken, she has found a spatial medium to express what is not normally seen by the human eye. Whiteread's massive new work, 'Embankment' has today been opened in the turbine hall of the Tate Modern, 10/10/05. (My photo does little to capture the scale and impact of this work.)

She produced moulds of the insides or negatives of a collection of different shaped card boxes and these were then 'transposed' into positives in pure white plastic and assembled into a mountainous landscape through which visitors were free to walk.



The second reference caught my eye when I was reading Lao Tzu (1963/D.C.Lau translation, [551 to 479 B.C.]).

Lau, in a note on his translation, suggests that 'nothingness' here means 'empty spaces'. I see a connection between this concept of nothingness and poetic negativity, both of which render what surrounds them meaningful.

Lao Tzu explores the concept in poem XI of this collection (Lao Tzu, trans. D.C. Lau, 1963) overleaf,

'Thirty spokes

Share one hub.

'Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand,

and you will have use of the cart.

Knead clay in order to make a vessel. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand,

and you will have the use of the vessel.

Cut out doors and windows in order to make a room. Adapt the nothing therein to a

purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the room.

'Thus what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of

Nothing that can be put to use.'

