

## 14 Conclusion and Coda

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## Introduction

I shall use one last journal item from Silver Street-3, – in a way which is called a segue in sound broadcasting, – to create a link between Chapter 13 and this concluding chapter. It describes a moment in Day 1 when we considered what dreams we had for our futures.

'We now talk about people's dreams; this was done in pairs, each pair containing a service user and a member of staff.

Below are listed people's dreams of what they would like to do or be. The activity raised all sorts of questions about the legitimacy of dreaming and the gap between dreams and reality. I settle for the simple formula that we need dreams to live.

Stuart, staff A scriptwriter

Yvonne, service user A florist or working in a clothes shop

George, service user Working in garden centre (which he is now)

Sharon, service user Working in a video or CD shop

Chris, staff Running a bike shop

Jacques, staff Running a coffee shop

Tulay, service user Helping in a library

Zahid, service user Signwriter or artist (already started)

Dean, service user A boxer or working in an office

Eileen, service user A cleaner in an office

Christina, service user A mechanic

Andrew, service user Pop musician or mechanic

Sue, staff Painting/making models

Ian, staff Doing what he does now.

Ian says that when he was in his twenties he dreamt that he would have so much money by 40 that he could retire. That, he now sees, is not likely to happen, but he's found something much more satisfying in this work with people with disabilities.'

This list of jobs towards which the cooperative inquiry members aspired, now acts for me as a metaphor or proxy, for all hoped-for change in lives, a lifetime's seeking out of purpose individually and with others in families, communities and organizations. It acquires a poetic significance for me through its selection and inclusion here. Arranging the text in a symmetrical layout creates a typographic image which gives it a reference to other poetic structure – I think for example of the wing shaped stanza design of George Herbert's poem, *Easter Wings*. This record of our dreaming together also reminds me of the listing of names on a birth or death certificate – 'Father: Charles Albert Finch George, Insurance Clerk'.

There have been other references to dreams earlier in the thesis, for example, the dreaming of my travelling companion on the M25, as he recited from memory W.B.Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium'.

'...

O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
Come from the holy fire, pern in a gyre,  
And be the singing masters of my soul.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
And fastened to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is; and gather me  
Into the artifice of eternity.

...' (Yeats, 1933, 1960 edition, pp. 217-8)

I also find myself returning to Gaston Bachelard (1958), referenced in Chapter 11, *Poetics in Practice*, and his description of the concept of 'home', as the store of dreams,

'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)

A greater alertness to the dreams that were lost or scarcely noticed is a poetic process, which has featured prominently in my inquiry.

In this final chapter I want to reflect on this dream metaphor for what it tells me about purpose in inquiry and the distinctive ways in which aesthetic experience brings depth and quality to this existential quest for purpose in lives, mine own included. In fact the most pervasive dream throughout this thesis is my own as I have discovered, with and through relating to others, my personal sense of the aesthetic in practice.

My aims will be to,

- take some final sightings on the value of aesthetic practice
- conclude the story of this stage of a journey into a changing practice.

In a short coda to this chapter I shall reflect on the future direction of my practice.

## **Aesthetic knowing for a change**

I shall now draw together some closing reflections on my reasons for taking this journey and the insights that I have acquired on the way.

My most pressing question concerns practical knowing, – how does this way of working benefit people and increase their ‘human flourishing’? (Heron and Reason, 1997). What changes occur? In my own changing to a practice which depends on a deeper awareness of the intrinsic aesthetic and which introduces expressive activities as a way of inquiry, what I am offering to others?

Returning for a moment to the Silver Street-3 aspirational list above, the fact is that at the end of the short project some of these dreams listed above were still dreams, or had morphed into other ideas that seemed more attainable. One or two individuals had actual or prospective part-time jobs, George in a garden centre potting plants, Christina and Andrew getting dirty in the auto-electrics garage, and there were several others who had found training opportunities. Later I discovered that staff members, Sue and Jacques, both on short-term contracts, had had to move to other jobs. The unexpectedness of life washes over

the best-laid intentions and plans. So what was the quality of this time together and what, in propositional terms, can be said to show something of its depth and value to people?

My answer takes me back into the central argument I have been developing throughout this inquiry. During our time together people were learning in a number of different ways, experientially, through expressive representation, propositionally in the main concepts of job searching and practically in their contacts with potential employers. We also used different sensory channels and media to do so. As facilitator to this cooperative inquiry, my function was not only to hold a focus on the agreed inquiry task, but also to relate with people in the light of the intrinsic aesthetic of the group as I experienced it. This as my journal extracts show rendered me open to a deeper level of receptivity to the play and poetics of what we were engaged in. This changed what I gave attention to amongst us and how I responded in actions and words. By making these journals freely available to all participants, I was also encouraging a wider and more reflexive receptivity to this aesthetic in other participants.

People voiced their wishes and needs. For the staff in particular, my written journal prompted a changed dialogue about the experience of collaboration. We discussed what we were noticing about the way we worked together. We formed brief friendships which gave us glimpses into each other's dreams and aspirations. The extensive use of expressive media offered us all the chance to create new reflexive images of how we are in the world. Through them people were able to externalize their thoughts and feelings about being in this inquiring community.

Through imaginative association with each other, we were re-storying what might be possible for all participants. In addition we were experiencing the 'surplus' of unexpected social and personal learning that occurs in and around expressive activities, often perceived in snatches of dialogue which were less likely to surface or be heard in other settings.

Accounts of the two cooperative inquiries described in this thesis, have provided material for an exploration of the balance and interrelationship between the intrinsic and the expressive modes of aesthetic experience and the pervasive presence of play and the poetic in practice. This exploration has been motivated by my wish to find a more reflexive and purposeful practice which has a reciprocity of benefits for all of us who participated in them.

Now I want to bring together these contextually specific insights in a more propositional overview of the changes that I notice occurring through attending more fully to the aesthetic in practice.

## The temporality of the aesthetic

Some interactions in practice acquire dramatic force in the moment. Gadamer (1975) refers to 'the temporality of the aesthetic' in his ontology of art. He defines that timelessness which comes over an enthralled spectator.

**'In fact, being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness, and to be a spectator consists of giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching. Here self-forgetfulness is anything but a privative condition, for it arises from devoting one's full attention to the matter in hand, and this is the spectator's own positive accomplishment.'** (Gadamer, 1975, p. 122)

Although Gadamer was writing about the participative timelessness of being absorbed in a play or artwork, a sense of timelessness and self-forgetfulness also accompanies intense engagement between people. To live really in the moment and give full attention to the other is an aesthetic phenomenon, whose timelessness is only subsequently framed in time through reflexive writing and other media. There are other experiences where we step out of time; I think of the balance between seeking and receiving sleep described by Merleau-Ponty and referenced earlier in Chapter 3, *A Theoretical Framework*.

Drawing on Kierkegaard's notion of the contemporaneity of dialectical theology, Gadamer compares this with his own conceptualisation of contemporaneity of the aesthetic experience of art works.

**'A spectator's ecstatic self-forgetfulness corresponds to his continuity with himself.'** (Ibid., p.124)

**'what rends him from himself at the same time gives him back the whole of his being.'** (Ibid., p. 125)

This sense of rising above the quotidian towards a transformative contemporeality is a consistent theme of my journalling of practice experience. I think of experiences of stepping beyond the current time frame and becoming absorbed into a transcendent moment, when language, actions and gestures create new metaphorical and symbolic meanings.

The related point that Gadamer is making is that in such moments we are 'given back' the whole of our being, by creating '**the possibility of being wholly with something else.**' His view of this imaginative union is that it offers a reciprocal sense of being more completely who we are. Taylor and Hansen (2005) allude to a transcendent purpose in focusing on aesthetic experience and aesthetic forms,

**'because they are about our feelings of what it is to be part of more than ourselves.'**  
(Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1226)

Some of my encounters with service users and staff in Silver Street gave me a sense of being more wholly in touch with myself at the moment of being wholly with the other.

Much of the language used to describe transcendence is couched in a rising or 'up' orientational metaphor, (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). There are other metaphorical directions to this participatory practice too. Sometimes I can imagine a sense of paradox when meaning is stretched in the group sideways and outwards till it hums like a taught wire, or it might involve one meaning being destroyed in anger whilst we look for a new meaning to rise from the ashes. Transcendence may feel more like lying with meaning and enjoying it, or laughing with it in what Caillois (1958) calls *llox* or vertiginous ecstasy.

Taylor and Hansen (2005) apply Strat's inclusive view of the aesthetic to the processes of organizational inquiry,

**'The idea of more beautiful action in organizations is intuitively appealing, but the aesthetic category of the grotesque may be the key to personal and organizational transformation.'**  
(Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1216)

Some transformative moments are not necessarily evidenced by extreme emotion or sense of dramatic tension. They could just as well be moments of resolution, being quiet with a group, saying nothing but feeling connected and at peace; I describe such moment at the

end of the dramatic encounter with Lucy's challenge in Chapter 10, *Play in Practice*. They are distinguished as moments of heightened awareness, which are 'out of time'.

Aesthetic experience is a continuous consequence of being a conscious and sentient human, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out,

**'Aesthetic experience is thus not limited to the official art world. It can occur in any aspect of our everyday lives – whenever we take note of, or create for ourselves, new coherences that are part of our conventionalized mode of perception and thought.'** (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 236)

New coherences in Silver Street-3 were explored through expressive media around what part-time work might mean for service users. For the staff there was a parallel inquiry in how to support the development of this new service. The evidence was being played out live through their interaction with service users on this question; we could see and hear what seemed to be working and what was not.

## **Imagination for a change**

Midgley provides another insight into the purpose and value of aesthetic knowing in practice, when she claims that,

**'Our visions – our ways of imagining the world – determine the direction of our thoughts, as well as being the source of our poetry. Poetry exists to express those visions directly, in concentrated form. But they are also expressed less directly in all our thoughts and actions, including scientific ones, where they often pass unnoticed and uncriticised. (Midgley, 2001, p. 2)**

The imagination is seen not only as being at play in the creation of artworks such as poetry but as an engaged reflexive and creative response to all perceived experience. It is for this reason that I have placed as much emphasis on inquiring into the intrinsic aesthetic in practice as I have in using expressive activities and artefacts with groups. I have also concluded earlier in the thesis that it is vital to find contingencies between the two, in choosing such activities. By contingency I mean the creative match of a number of factors, such as the readiness that I perceive in the group to step into expressive work and the

perception in the group that in doing so they are still pursuing the inquiry that matters to them. In some cases dialogic inquiry drawing on the intrinsic play and poetics of the group may be more than sufficient, without the potential distraction of more arts-based expressive activities. I have also found structured storytelling of the type described in Chapter 8, *The Expressive Aesthetic in Practice*, to be a natural but influential way of making a transition into expressive activities.

Rorty places the imagination at the centre of the process of reaching out to others; in so doing we also 're-describe' ourselves. It is through the aesthetic act of imagining how our lives and those of others might be, that we empathetically make greater connection and find new ways of acting together. I refer again to Rorty's view that,

**'This process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of redescription of what we ourselves are like.'** (Rorty, 1989, p. xvi)

## Expression for a change

This re-description, Rorty (1989) argues, is increasingly manifest through the use of expressive media, such as film or novels. Knowing in this way is not to be considered as an alternative route to the same destination. It assumes a different way of knowing which uncovers different areas of experience and these generate what Rorty refers to as 'human solidarity'.

In Winter et al., (1999), Winter argues that the product of artistic imagination has a general significance, over and above say, a report or other factual descriptions. Aesthetic statements connect with '**a background mythology of universal themes: patterns of comedy and tragedy; ...'** (Winter et al., 1999, p. 202). I was for example keenly aware of the potential comedy and tragedy of the 'condom' episode described in the summer walk in the park in Chapter 4, *Inquiry Methods*, and other poignant moments in Silver Street.

His second point is that, by '**embedding a concrete experience in an artistic structure, the imagination, as it were, converts it into a pattern of general significance, by revealing it as 'symbolic'....'** (Ibid., 1999, p. 202)

Through reference to Barry's work (1994) I have explored the role of symbolic representation in my own use of model-making. In the opening of this chapter I have imbued the job list with a level of symbolic meaning.

Rich (2006) argues passionately for the value of the poetic as a way of re-discovering a *future forgotten*,

**'What's pushing the grammar and syntax, the sounds, the images – is it the constriction of literalism, fundamentalism, professionalism – a stunted language? Or is it the great muscle of metaphor, drawing strength from resemblance in difference? Poetry has the capacity to remind us of something we are forbidden to see. A future forgotten: a still uncreated site whose moral architecture is founded not on ownership and dispossession, the subjection of women, outcast and tribe, but on the continuous redefining of freedom – that word now held under house arrest by the rhetoric of the "free" market. This on-going future, written-off over and over, is still within view. All over the world its paths are rediscovered and reinvented.'**

There is always that in poetry which will not be grasped, which cannot be described, which survives our ardent attention, our critical theories, our late-night arguments. There is always (I am quoting the poet/translator Américo Ferrari) "an unspeakable where, perhaps, the nucleus of the living relation between the poem and the world resides." ' (Rich, 2006, p. 3)

## Writing for a change

In Chapter 4, *Inquiry methods*, I referred to my chosen methods, which were writing and more recently photography. Another important feature of the methodology that developed was to return the material that I produced to the people who featured in it. Beyond this audience lies a further third person audience to whom this thesis is now addressed.

The influence for change in me of writing and reflecting on writing in this way has been significant. I have learnt to reflect in a more structured way but have also become more open to the creative connections that occur in the process of writing.

The influence for change on those who read what I have written has been felt in the informal dialogue and feedback which it generated.

As Sparkes (2002) claims,

**'This kind of writing can inform, awaken, and disturb readers by illustrating their involvement in social processes about which they might not have been consciously aware. Once aware, individuals may find the consequences of their involvement (or lack of it) unacceptable and seek to change the situation. In such circumstances, the potential for individual and collective restorying is enhanced.'** (Sparkes, 2002, p. 221)

Gergen (2003) describes writing as *relationship*,

**'Especially relevant to my present concerns are writers who have tried to foster a more richly laminated relationship with the reader. Rather than positioning themselves as fully rational agents, bounded, and superior, the effect of these writings is to generate a more recognizably human persona, one to whom the reader may sense a shift from the division of me vs. you to "the two of us." In terms of the Enlightenment conception of the person, such writing reasserts the significance of the otherwise marginalized domains of the psyche: desire, emotion, bodily sensation. Carolyn Bochner captures the spirit of such writing when she speaks of her writing on the mother-daughter relationship as "showing the connections among the seasons of a woman's life and encouraging readers to sense what I am feeling as well as hear what I am thinking. And to express their own feelings and think about their own experiences. (Bochner and Ellis, 1996)"'**

**(Gergen, 2003, p. 5)**

This transformational potential in writing for a change has already been illustrated in the conversations and feedback from staff in Silver Street and elsewhere. As I will suggest in the short coda attached to this chapter, I hope to use this way of inquiring to support change with other groups I work with.

Taylor and Hansen (2005) see artistic inquiry into aesthetics as,

'the real hope for organizational inquiry that aesthetics offers us. The use of artistic forms to look at aesthetic issues offers a medium that can capture and communicate the felt experience, the affect, and something of the tacit knowledge of the day-to-day, moment-to-moment reality of organizations. Not just the cleaned-up, instrumental concerns of "the business", but the messy, unordered side as well. In short it provides a holistic way to get at the whole of the experience, something that the intellectualization and abstraction of traditional organizational research often seems to miss.' (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p.1224)

## Conclusion

My description of the part of my life that I have spent in Silver Street is an account a journey of change. The scale of difference between a life with physical and learning disability and my own has forced me to imagine new connections. As Bateson points out the *news of difference* prompts learning from which memory and knowledge accrue.

In Chapter 1 I explained why the experience of being involved in the Silver Street world has proved so valuable to me. I am still in touch regularly and was invited by the Day Centre Manager, to join her on a series of interagency meetings to monitor and support the implementation of more person-centred activities and opportunities for people with learning disabilities throughout the borough. I go early and spend some time beforehand in the unit where I varnished Lorraine's nails, chatting with staff and feeding one or two people and by the way getting offered a lunch myself.

Although the intrinsic aesthetic processes of poetics, stories, image and play that I experienced at Silver Street, are found in all practice settings, they were much more evident to me in the bustle and directness of this different community.

Spending time with autistic people, raised important questions about the blinkered nature of my understanding of my perceived world. It challenged me to stop assuming that I can take anyone's experience for granted, as this may lead to the delusion that I know better than they, what they need. Unconditional positive regard seemed to be a given amongst most of the staff with whom I worked at Silver Street – I aspire to show as much generosity to others I work with.

Taking an overview of the three Silver Street projects, I am very grateful that the intuitions that took me there proved right. Silver Street became a metaphor and a reference point for the whole of my practice. Nothing that we needed to do together in learning how to develop our sense of community, is incapable of translation to other settings. There were differences in the pace of learning and ways of communicating, and of course the duty of care that people were owed. (But then what duty of care do I owe the youth workers, social workers or lawyers with whom I also work, or indeed my duty of care to myself?)

I opened this chapter with a reference to dreams. I often dream at night of journeys in cities, parts of which are known to me, but others, totally unfamiliar. I recently tried to capture on waking up, some of this paradox of *strange familiarity* in this short poem. I can detect memories of Singapore from forty years ago, blending with the dream of *home*.

**Who said, 'The end'?**

**The acacias burn along the street.  
Already there's tea on the terrace;  
some people must know me, I think.**

**Now the sun has gone fast into the ground.  
Round the next corner  
will still be Boogy Street  
and the bay where strange things happened.**

**I am off again  
sniffing the pot pourri night,  
driving the orchard into the sea.**

**Where is the home I used to own,  
my clutch of goods?  
Too soon to tell me it's enough  
and no space left to travel.**

**Who said, 'The end'?**

## Coda



Here are some of my closing semaphores from a hilltop, expectations, day dreams about what lies beyond this thesis.

I hope to build on the experience of being in Silver Street and seek out opportunities to 'befriend' one or two other organizations. As I have developed my skills in representing my perception of organizational life through writing and photos, I can imagine using these as part of my offer of engagement. One connection that I would enjoy now, would be with an orchestra, film-makers, or dancers, or a theatre company, in some way which is participative and mutually interesting.



I shall release my family and friends from the thraldom of waiting for me as I nearly finished my thesis.

I shall recognize that this whole thing ran the risk of getting out of hand and get back to attending more to their needs.

I shall notice theory continuing to inform my practice, practice informing my theory.

At least once and quite soon, I shall go by myself to S W France and not hire a car, (although you could fool yourself that you needed one when spending time there in a remote farm

house.) Instead I will do the last piece of the journey by bus, climb up the hill on foot, open the shutters and catch myself involuntarily sighing for a few days, occasionally walking five miles to the nearest village shop, and relying on the small stash of St Emilion in the cupboard from last Summer.

I shall go to Silver Street, having surfaced from the grubby underground and ring the front door bell to get access again to this community – and do whatever may be useful.



and do

I shall replace my ageing Apple laptop by an Apple Powerbook and fill it with photos and maybe some video, poems and excerpts from what I have written, my hundred top quotations from this thesis and other reading, as a resource to travel with and add to. Maybe also I'll set up a new website, to attract connections with others who are interested in the areas I research.

This is my message to



all I love.

I shall aim to reduce

the present predominance of 'events' in my practice. My first eight days at Silver Street were not events; I was just there taking part in the life of the centre. I can imagine the liberation that will follow for me as facilitator and for people with whom I consult, if working together meant just that, – a sort of residency with more time spent within the day-to-day business of organizations.

I shall try again to get some poems published and maybe write more fiction.

I shall see my drift into semi-retirement as a luxurious opportunity to allocate my working time with less need to charge for it. I want to exploit this new freedom to the full and happily set behind me the obligation to take on work, the only merit of which was to put bread on the table.



I shall deepen further my alertness to the intrinsic aesthetic in my life and work. I shall recognize that practice makes better, but perfection is the enemy of the good.

I shall continue to be captured by the serendipitous play of practice  
and the lost poetry in dreams,



and try to learn from the news of difference, that is the next day.

