

## **4 Inquiry methods**

## 4 Inquiry methods

### Introduction

In this final chapter of Part A I give an account of the methods which I have developed as my inquiry progressed. In doing this I continue the line of Part A which is to provide a theoretical framework and personal context to the subsequent reading of the thesis.

I intend therefore to,

- show how the nature of this inquiry influenced my choice of methodology
- describe and illustrate how I use my writing as the basis for reflexive analysis and sense-making
- describe and illustrate the place of photography as a complementary medium in this process
- consider the research design implications of making Silver Street the main location of my inquiry
- explain the main structural choices I have made in organizing the material within this thesis.

The relationship between inquiries and the chosen inquiry methodologies was touched on in a reference to Shotter (1993) in the working sketch that followed Chapter 1, *Introduction*. There he warned against the risk that the metamethodology or process of ‘socially constructing’ inquiry narratives may distract from the metatheory, or purpose of the research. I therefore preface my description of methods, by pausing to take stock of the nature of this inquiry and to focus briefly on the main pathways that emerge during it.

### The nature of this inquiry

I have been drawn to two central dimensions or themes of the aesthetic in practice; these are *play* and *poetics*. I now briefly refer to these two themes, as they have defined the nature of this inquiry.

#### *Play*

My interest in play grew as I began to think of the aesthetic as a dynamic and transactional process. My attention was drawn to the dramatic unfolding of engagements and the way this influenced perceptions and feelings, both mine and those of others in the group. This is an area to which many different theoretical lenses of group interaction might be applied.

However, from an aesthetic perspective, theories relating to play, both as games, (Huizinga, 1938 and Caillois, 1958), and as theatre, (Gadamer, 1975), opened up potential interpretative models for my inquiry.

Huizinga and Caillois see play as an experience that is pervasive in all human encounters. They substantiate this claim by drawing on extensive anthropological and historical evidence. From this, Huizinga (1938) identifies the central place of contest and chance in play. Caillois (1958) includes these in a set of four 'dispositions' or types of play in his own theoretical account.

The four types can be summarised as follows,

Agon, contest, is play in which the player wants to win by merit, under regulated conditions.

Alea, chance, is play in which the player wins by chance or luck, as in a game of dice.

Mimesis, illusion, is play in which the player adopts another personality in an imaginary universe.

Ilinx, carnival, is play in which the player desires ecstasy, unboundness, and freedom. (Ilinx is the Greek word for whirlpool.)

In making sense of the improvisatory flow of interactions, this typology of play proved to be invaluable. It helped me tap into the nature of the dramatic energy that I experienced in groups. Gadamer's (1975) incorporation of theatre into his commentary on play further extended the range of interpretative structures that I could bring to the analysis of what happens in the moment. (I will return to look specifically at these themes in Chapter 10, *Play in practice*.)

My purpose in making this inquiry is to become more attuned to this dynamic and unfolding dimension of the aesthetic in practice and in so doing to facilitate cooperative inquiries with greater choice and respect.

As importantly, the inquiry is also rooted in the poetic, which I see to be inseparably linked with play.

**The poetic**

'Poetics' I take to be a wider aesthetic concept than 'poetry', although poetry is one of its most intensely expressive forms. Rather I have come to see 'poetics' as encompassing all those processes of shaping imagination, whether spoken, written, dramatic, visual or kinaesthetic, whereby we represent our experiences through narrative, imagery and symbols. I argue that inevitably any consideration of the phenomenon of practice draws on the poetic. The main account of this area is found in Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice*, although as with play, the poetic is present in many other examples throughout the thesis.

The poetic is not only experienced intrinsically and expressively in practice, but can also be regarded, in itself, as a method of inquiry and as a way of representing this inquiry, (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Marcus, 1994, Denzin, 1997, Barry, 1994, 1996 and 1997, and Linstead, 2000). I shall return to the role of the poetic as a method of inquiry when discussing my own methodology below.

The significance of this poetic focus within this action research finds eloquent confirmation in Rich (2006),

**'Critical discourse about poetry has said little about the daily conditions of our material existence, past and present: how they imprint the life of feelings, of involuntary human responses – how we glimpse a blur of smoke in the air, look at a pair of shoes in a shop window, or a group of men on a street-corner, how we hear rain on the roof or music on the radio upstairs, how we meet or avoid the eyes of a neighbour or stranger. That pressure bends our angle of vision whether we recognise it or not. ... But when poetry lays its hand on our shoulder we are, to an almost physical degree, touched and moved. The imagination's roads open before us, giving the lie to that brute dictum, "There is no alternative." ' (Rich, 2006, p. 3)**

I now turn to a description of the methodology I used to open up the 'imagination's roads' with a view to discovering shared and better alternatives.

## Inquiry methods

Given my developing perception of the centrality of play and poetics within my practice, I needed to find methods which echoed and embodied these qualities. Taylor and Hansen (2005) see the future for research into the aesthetic in organizations as involving a greater use of artistic methods. At various points in this thesis I use writing and pictures in ways which are playful and poetic. Chapter 2, *The inquiring 'I'* is the first significant example where perhaps the Marinetti futurist poem was the most playful. In Chapter 5, *What is my developing aesthetic in practice?* I include a piece of autoethnographic writing which is an exploration of a significant moment in my life during the period of this research. In Chapter 8, *The expressive aesthetic in practice*, I offer through a fictional narrative, an exploration of the life of a person with moderate learning disabilities, and in so doing 'calibrate' my capacity to understand this through a critical discussion of the text with the day centre manager.

These are the places where I have chosen to work in a more multi-voiced way by switching to play-like and poetic narratives. I have done so because the propositional limits of the thesis narrative would otherwise exclude this aesthetic dimension, just as a written critique of a painting is not substitute for seeing the painting on the wall.

At regular intervals in the main flow of the text my method has been to build up the argument from material taken from my journal, sometimes short fragments, at others fuller accounts of meetings or visits. I also include photos that set off different but complementary resonances. I see the original writing or imaging of these 'capta' to be the beginning of an aesthetic process.

These then form the basis for a structured process which goes through iterative stages of reflexive analysis and sense-making. I now describe this process in greater detail.

### **Stage 1 Creating the journal**

Throughout the period of this research and before that, I have kept a journal, usually but not exclusively about aspects of work practice. More personal writing has also for the last ten years taken the form of poetry or more extended autoethnographic prose writing.

I see journaling as the first catch at what has drawn my attention, a working sketch; what I write needs to be evocative enough for me to recall the sensory and affective impact of the moment. Increasingly what leads me to write are resonances of play and the poetic in encounters. For example, I strive to capture some nuances of dialogue and action, as the

play of a session unfolds. I also find myself drawn to poetic imagery, serendipity and irony in the unexpected turns of what happens. Often too I scribble in those details of names, locations and turning points in conversations when some new insight surfaced, as the loss of these strips the story of its particularity. (I discuss journaling more fully later in this chapter.)

Throughout Silver Street I undertook to do this with even more discipline. I attached great importance to getting these journal texts written swiftly so that they could be available for reading by people in Silver Street. I placed each entry in a file in the staff room the following week, with an invitation for anyone to read and add comments. This writing and publishing of my journal short-circuited several layers of face-to-face social interaction, which would feel right in most dialogic connections.

These entries prompted discussion between staff and myself, usually characterized by their expressing feelings of being affirmed and valued by me, the author. These were not the usual sorts of report that people had written or read. I did not expect that people would follow suit in writing their own accounts, although I would still be delighted to help some do so, if they wished, either here or in future assignments elsewhere.

I did however have evidence in all three Silver Street assignments that people were drawn to this representation of our shared experience. In describing Silver Street-2, I shall show how this sort of record was thought by participants to be 'poetic'; they were keen to read more writing of this type. In Silver Street-3 we reviewed each week's journal together and people were attracted to the way it was written and commented on the breadth of aesthetic narrative which one person described as 'holistic'.

### **Stage 2 Commenting on the journal**

Reading through the journal at regular intervals in the weeks after it was written, I noticed the need for a second level of writing. I left the journal, as written, sometimes warts and all, and developed a commentary, which began to build bridges between the story of Silver Street and the story of my inquiry.

When I was considering how to select and sequence items for inclusion in this thesis, I hit upon the idea of the two-column layout so that I could add a commentary on the particular significance stories had for me, in parallel with the text.

This reflexive voice represented an initial level of inquiry into this material. It was a form of conversation between me as the journal writer and me as the person engaged in first person inquiry into what had drawn my attention.

I also noticed that the discipline of doing this acted as a filter for the editing out of journal material where it failed to generate very much commentary. Given the immediacy of the writing of items, it is perhaps not surprising that some of this material had become anecdotal or circumstantial and ceased to have much significance to me beyond the diarizing of the moment.

Equally it was clear that some episodes provoked me to write longer and deeper commentaries. They became the initial building blocks. In both columns of writing I noticed how much care they took to craft; they claimed extra attention. It was out of these episodes that the focus on play and poetry began to emerge.

One of the qualities that drew me to such episodes was the degree of sensory and affective resonance they set up in me. They evoked my imaginal response, often connecting with other memories and feelings. I became engaged in constructing the written item as an act of inner reflection, often in the process discovering more of the symbolic significance for me which lay behind my original intuition. This I would now see as an expression of the poetic nature of the inquiry.

Another quality which set up resonances was to do with action and narrative. An event turned out in an unexpected way, much as a story or drama takes on an unexpected turn. This too would have its roots in the sensory impact of what happened, but it was the narrative, plot and characters engaging in the play that drew me to produce a representation of it. Such engagements belong more to the play theme of this inquiry.

### **Stage 3 Making sense of the two columns**

In compiling this thesis, I developed a further stage of sense-making analysis below the two-column frame of journal and commentary. This was because with the benefit of reflection I needed to push myself further in addressing claims that were not fully substantiated. At this stage I often found much more depth in an episode. It was as though I had switched off my first commentary too soon and ran the risk of losing pertinent insights. I also noticed that the need to add this further sense-making layer was prompted by reading the literature, as my theoretical base became clearer and more established.

A further filtering of material occurred at this stage of designing and drafting chapters. Some episodes found themselves being moved from one section to another in different revisions, because they were so rich in material that they might have contributed to the development of a number of themes. Others may have attracted interest initially but were no longer earning their keep and were edited out, because their symbolic significance had been reduced or lost in transit.

I also found myself attending to the balance between on the one hand, propositional writing and theoretical reference, and on the other, the analysis of practice material. As the drafting process continued, I rejected any passages on theory, which had become disconnected from practice material. I tried wherever possible to interleave the two. If I could not do this, I found myself questioning why.

This stage was the most rigorous but valuable part of the whole thesis writing process. Through supervision I was repeatedly challenged to substantiate claims and to deepen commentaries, as the thesis began to come together.

#### **Intrinsic and expressive**

Early on it became clear to me that the aesthetic in practice had a reflexive and inner dimension and an expressive and outer dimension. I therefore adopted two terms, the *intrinsic* aesthetic and *expressive* aesthetic to describe these. Given their importance to the structuring of the thesis, I now briefly amplify how I am using them.

By an *intrinsic* aesthetic in practice I mean the sensory perceptions of participants and the related improvisatory flow of thoughts and feelings which are experienced and exchanged in practice encounters and relationships. Inquiring into the intrinsic aesthetic involves 'in-the-moment noticing' of this flow and subsequent reflexive inquiry into it. Given this as a research intention, I developed the three stage method, just described, for capturing, analyzing and making sense of this complex phenomenon.

The main inquiry into this sensory and affective arena is given in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*.

By an *expressive* dimension of the aesthetic I mean creative activities and artefacts which are consciously introduced into practice; these include games, story-telling, poetry, pictures, music, drama and other expressive forms. I have been concerned to find out what such activities and artefacts add positively to ways of knowing and acting, in the groups with which I work.



This dimension is considered in greater depth in Chapter 8, *The expressive aesthetic in practice*,

I also note that what I am describing here is a spectrum rather than two discrete categories. There is, for example, a territory in the middle of this spectrum where intrinsic awareness of an aesthetic gives rise to the structured expressive statements in the form of dialogue.

### **My method in practice**

I shall now illustrate the three-stage inquiry process described above, by including a short example.

On a number of occasions my eye has been caught by unexpected incidents or co-incidents, which frequently in journal writing reveal themselves to contain an element of irony.

These moments are transitory and ephemeral. It is as though they are there to work as a way of liberating energy, a protection against what Bateson referred to as 'conscious purposefulness', as if meaning jumps from the moment without being deliberately sought. Sometimes they can be captured photographically in the moment or in spoken or written words later, as in the example overleaf, which describes an incident during a visit I made with staff to meet a MENCAP group in a park. I offer it as a form of 'work-in-progress', as I discovered in incorporating it here that it triggered a further 'Stage 3' process of sense-making.

## **j**ournal ... The photo that never was

### Journal

'One of our group wanders off. He's wearing a protective helmet. He finds a park bench fifty yards away and lies down on it. A carer follows him to sit beside him. I have been taking a few photos on the throwaway camera that I bought at Heathrow before going to do a one-day job in the Czech Republic. I am aware of the strange juxtaposition, on the same strip of film, of my shots of the international bankers meeting in Karlovy Vari, formerly Karlsbad, and this MENCAP group in a municipal park in North London.

As I reach the park bench, I notice a remarkable photo waiting to be taken. I clutch for the camera in my pocket. Above the man's recumbent body, is a sign pinned on the backrest of the park bench, 'Warning - Wet paint'. In the second it takes me to think about the propriety of taking a shot, he has got up and moved away. Mercifully this is a 'stale' notice; neither he nor his carer have paint marks on their clothes.'

Now as I come back to this episode and my comments, I am struck by the 'avoidance' at work in the commentary column. Why did I think it necessary to explain about the Czech Republic and to whom was this addressed, – perhaps an audience whom, I would like to think, sees me as *Silver Street* and *International Bankers*? Certainly there was a resonance about the juxtaposition of these two assignments and their representation side by side on the undeveloped film. But this was more about my self-image as a consultant, than the man on the bench.

### Commentary

I notice how I have included this reference to this one-day trip. I was struck by the complete contrast that I experienced and enjoyed from one day to the next. I might now add that working on this assignment to assist a colleague, was little more than an exceptional jaunt for me, a useful income supplement.

The camera film seemed to form a symbolic link between these two disparate worlds.

I am reminded that my inhibition in taking the photo was a concern about the risk of making the service user an object of fun. Whilst I lost the actual shot, I gained this written one, which avoids this trap.

So if I now attend to the man himself and my seeing him, a different commentary is elicited. I can see that there were play resonances in this moment. It is the irony of this short sequence of actions, which engages my imagination. The observation of a potential mishap has something of visual slapstick comedy about it as though an audience should be shouting a warning, 'Behind you!' No sooner is this sensed than the joke bounces back on the head of the observer as the man gets up, unaware of the 'wet paint' and equally unaware of the dry paint he has lain on beneath the 'stale' notice. This adds a level of pathos; such a moment shows how someone who cannot read and is 'in a world of their own' can successfully take little or no account of the purposeful business of the organised world around them. Of course sometimes it would work to their disadvantage, but that would become a different story lacking irony, as vain attempts were made to rub the paint off.

I note too that it is only in revising this chapter that I have seen this clearly the distinction between an inquiry into the way I wrote the original journal item and an inquiry which returns to the nature of my engagement with the man on the bench. This connects again with Shotter's (1993) observation, referenced at the start of this chapter, to how a fascination with metamethodologies in research can take over from the process of developing metatheories.

In making this further cycle of inquiry I also demonstrate the process of the inquiry method in that it starts in the original noticing and carries through journaling or photography, a first round of commentary and then further sense-making through selection and connection with this text.

## Writing to learn

I now describe how I have written to learn, both through journaling and autoethnography.

### Journaling and autoethnography

The source material of my inquiry is principally my written accounts of practice, with the later addition of photos, – I acquired a digital still camera at the beginning of 2005.

Gadamer (1975) reflects on the possibility that all writing, not just fiction or poetry, can be seen as part of the same ontological process,

**‘Meaning and the understanding of it are so closely connected to the corporeality of language that understanding always involves an inner speaking as well.’ (Gadamer 1975, p. 153)**

The corporeality of language is expressed in many ways, including through fragments of language that become verbal mantras and refrains, in much the way that musical refrains can do. Meaning, and the understanding of it, plays out as spoken words in talking to yourself or sleep talking, or through the process of sub-vocalization, which occurs, particularly but not solely in children, as they quietly voice what they read.

He continues,

**‘Nothing is so purely the trace of the mind as writing, but nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind either. In deciphering and interpreting it, a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity.’ (Ibid., p. 156)**

This reasserts for me the potent influence that writing can have, when compared with other media. The life that Gadamer refers to is in the participative selection and shaping of the words by the writer and the imaginative re-evocation by the reader as they engage with the words on the page.

Journaling is the form of writing I used frequently throughout this inquiry. Journaling has received attention from a number of writers, [Van Maanen, (1988), Hunt and Sampson, (1998), Moon, (2006)]. Boud et al., (1985) see journaling as a powerful means of representing and supporting learning in study programmes. Students are encouraged to

develop a reflexive record of how they are learning. D Winter et al., (1999) describe the use of writing as a way of conducting reflective inquiries into health and social work practice. They offer examples of the use of creative texts which build from practice records.

What I have taken from these accounts, is the value of placing on the page inner perceptions and reflections about inquiry. The act of doing so involves imaginative and reflexive processes; it also requires a discipline and thoughtfulness as the writer engages in their own conversation with the unfolding text. Once written it becomes an artefact which can prompt further cycles of reflection, like a holding statement, which can be re-examined and developed further through commentary or dialogue with others.

In reading about autoethnography in Ellis and Bochner, (2000), Sparkes, (2002) and Gergen, (2003), I discovered that some of the choices which I had intuitively made about recording personal narratives, have already been explored by others. Sparkes, (2002) for example references Mykhalovskiy, (1996) in rejecting the criticism that autobiographical sociology might be a form of narcissism, by pointing out,

**'... how writing the self involves, at the same time, writing about the 'other' and how the work of the other is also at the same time about the self of the writer.'** (Mykhalovskiy, 1996, p. 133)

Sparkes' (2002) own work focuses on his experience of a serious sports injury that prevented him from fulfilling predictions of achievement in playing rugby at a national level. He represents and inquires into this trauma, by autoethnographic writing, using a multi-layered text; an important purpose in doing this was to understand better the embodied nature of his experience over time and to represent it in ways which others could relate to imaginatively.

He claims that,

**'when an autoethnography strikes a chord in readers, it may change them and the direction of that change cannot be predicted.'** (Sparkes, 2002, p. 221)

This is a claim that has also been made more generally for aesthetic inquiry and I shall consider its strength and relevance to my own work in Part D.

In my first person practice I have subjected journal items to cycles of analysis and sense-making to get a deeper understanding of my own aesthetic development. I have also used them as a vehicle to create dialogue with others.

## Audience

There is never an absence of audience. Sartre (1967) points out that all works of the mind contain within themselves an image of the reader for whom they are intended.

Fisher and Phelps (2006) also observe in a review of the process of thesis writing based on action research, that there is a narrative to the stages of discovery in this sort of inquiry, which needs to be respected,

**‘An action research endeavour is the story of individual and/or group change: change in practices, beliefs and assumptions. Personal narrative, and the notion of research as story repositions the reader as an active and vicarious co-participant in the research (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).’ (Fisher and Phelps, 2006, p. 153)**

It is though important to question who the audience is and how my perception of its identity and values is framing and influencing me as I write.

For example, I noticed how in my accounts I sometimes walk around the edge of issues such as ethnicity or sexuality. For me my perception that a staff member is Afro-Caribbean, in her fifties and motherly, is an important part of my recall of the moment. However, I notice on the other hand that I have not chosen to mention that Fiona is white; neither have I mentioned that I assume that one of her colleagues is gay. I acknowledge that I am inevitably writing to a self-constructed audience which is white and liberal, my internalised audience, and certainly an audience which would hate to be seen as discriminatory in what it found different or worthy of comment.

If I were working in video, audio or still photos, this specific level of representation would be there to see and hear, although still subject to selective emphasis. (In a moment I will describe my experience in making visual records as I introduced photography into my methods of inquiry.) Words impose a responsibility to strive for writerly authenticity as well as show respect for others; it is my choice to *make* someone white, black, straight or gay through my words, if I need you to see that.

As importantly too I show how I am imaginatively relating to this whiteness or blackness, this straight or gayness in the way I represent my experience. Being more acutely and regularly aware of these framings, my behaviour may change in one direction or another.

I contribute some different energy to others in the act of doing so.

In methodological terms this has meant regarding journal material as a first base in sense-making, a secure but temporary place from which to venture further. I have therefore left the text as written because even where on later reading it seems not to be saying what I now want to say, that is in itself a matter of interest. The news of difference between the journal, its commentary and its subsequent integration into a thesis argument offers, at each stage, a chance to reflect more deeply on issues such as the one just described. The metaphor of triangulation comes to mind, as material is seen and compared from at least three different perspectives.

In deciding to make my journal available it acquired a fourth perspective. My imaginatively projected audience was mirrored by an actual reading audience within the Silver Street community and this comparison gave me a further way of validating my reflective process. An example of this will be found in Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice*, in the commentary that follows the fictional story I wrote based on the life of Tony. I describe there how showing the story to the Centre Manager prompted a discussion, and a revision of the story, which would not have been otherwise possible.

The outcome here was not just a question of writing a better story although I think that did happen. Rather what I noticed in this dialogue with the manager was the extent to which my framing of the experience of people with learning disabilities still embodied areas of unexplored difference. I learned from this more about the silent implicative double that surrounded our participation.

One part of the evidence was in my noticing how I had projected my own reflective behaviours onto others. In this sense I was not aware until this moment where my identity, values and assumptions were blinding me to a closer participation in the experience of another. As an inquiry method this process, a form of recalibration, was as important as the resulting story. I see it as part of the development of my own critical subjectivity, (Heron and Reason, 1997). I was able through the writing and the discussion to locate more critically in what senses the subjectivity that I brought to the writing had influenced my understanding of

the experience of learning disability, and in a further loop, my engagement more generally with second person inquiry.

To conclude my thoughts on textual representation the following points are highlighted:

- My journal writing and the iterative reflection in writing commentaries have grown as a part of my Action Research methodology. They made it possible for me to understand better some of the otherwise intangible processes of play and poetry that are embedded in what I describe.
- Writing soon after the event captures sensuous detail and the immediacy of what was said and done, as well as, by implication, what was not said or done; reflective commentaries on the journals at some interval provides a meta-layer to the writing.
- The crafting of the words is heavily influenced by internalized readerships. The iterative cycle of reflection and commentary increased my insights into the way these imaginative participations affected the writing.
- Through returning the text to the arena from which it springs it becomes an artefact that promotes second person inquiry, by challenging recollection and stimulating further dialogue.



## Visual representation



I now turn my attention to my new-found inquiry method of photography and what I am discovering about it as form of visual ethnography.

Pink (2001) surveys the recent history of using photos and video as visual ethnography. She points out that from the '60s to the early '80s, there was considerable debate about the use of these media in anthropology. Some writers dismissed pictures as being too subjective; others tried to impose some objective routines on the way photos and video were taken and used, in order to conform to the criteria of textual positivist social science. Alternatively pictures were used as the illustrative material for the main text.

The turning point came when Clifford (1986) observed that ethnographies are in any case constructed narratives. Ethnographic truths are, Clifford claimed, '**... inherently partial, committed and incomplete**', (Clifford, 1986, p. 7) In the '90s, Pink points out, a paradigmatic change occurred which encouraged ethnographers to cease to try to fit pictures into scientific-realist approaches. MacDougall (1997) proposed rather that it was necessary to contemplate,

**'a shift from word-and-sentence-based anthropological thought to image-and-sequence-based anthropological thought'. (MacDougall, 1997, p. 292)**

Pink argues that it was the visual anthropologist, Chaplin (1994), who identifies a way ahead. She proposed that rather than regard the visual as 'data' which needs to be analysed verbally, it should be seen as a medium in its own right for the creation of new knowledge. This would be achieved by reducing the distance between the discipline and its subject of study. Pink distinguishes between theoretical approaches to the use of the visual in

anthropology, ethnography and cultural studies. As Pink describes this transition, I notice a similarity between these transitions and those that occurred in the development of action research, which also sees the researcher as a participant within the field of inquiry.

However beneath these related but different developments, she argues, there are broader theoretical trends. McQuire (1998) for example sees the promiscuity and ambiguity of the image as offering simultaneous appearances of the subjective and the objective. Here there seems to be a clear link with Heron and Reason's (1997) concept of the subjective/objective approach of action research. There are also links with Merleau-Ponty (1945) in that both make a case for attending to 'the thing itself' rather than a verbal analogue of the thing.

Barthes (1980) in his remarkable final work *Camera Lucida* asks what the photo is '**in itself**' and questions whether photography exists, '**with a genius of its own**'. (Barthes, 1980, p. 3) He remarks on the phenomenon of replicability, '**what the photo reproduces to infinity has occurred once only**'. (Ibid., p. 4) He then claims that it is impossible to distinguish a specific photo from its referent, from what it represents. In viewing a range of photos that he loves, he rejects any social or cultural narrative which might explain them, '**looking at certain photographs I wanted to be a primitive, without culture.**', (Ibid., p. 7).

I show overleaf a small selection of pictures to open up my account of the way photography is working for me in both first and second forms of inquiry. I shall include further material of this sort as I describe the development of the Silver Street work in subsequent Parts.



© Artscope

Eating features in a number of the photos I have collected at Silver Street. This one by Keith who runs the Centre's arts project was taken in a lunch break during my third assignment. George, the person shown, travels by himself from his hostel and has a part-time job working in a garden centre.

A number of people using the Service have more severe physical and learning disabilities and need support to eat and move. Eating is a communal activity, the food being prepared on a family basis by staff in small kitchens in each unit.



As I look at these photos I find myself seeing pictures within pictures. By cropping the picture above I have emphasised the reaching arm so that its focus becomes the strong limb connecting two mouths, one willing the other to accept food.

Although I am aware of the specificity and immediacy of the photos, I also notice that they communicate in ways which carry many other complex messages about the people and the setting. For me as a participant they also provide another first person lens, both literally and metaphorically, through which to reflect on the action and my relationship with it. For example, why is there a sombrero in the background? This prompts me to think about the number of latent resources which come and go in this environment, some actively used, some left on one side to be discarded, as in a home. Even if discarded, they represent efforts to introduce stimulating artefacts and activities into this space.

What does the overlaying of hands in the shot below say about the relationship between worker and service user?



© ArtScope

The picture is ambiguous; it could be that the whiter hands belong to a staff member taking a photo with some playful help from a service user. It could be that the hint of nail varnish belongs to the hands of a man. The picture prompts an evocative physical reconstruction of childlike warmth, of flesh on flesh. The picture elicits reactions, permitting a range of imaginative interpretations. This demonstrates in a specific way the complex relationship between the conscious and receptive 'I' and images such as this. It is a relationship full of creative ambiguity and negativity, (Linstead, 2000). (I shall discuss further this concept of negativity in Chapter 11, *The poetics in practice*.) Ambiguity can of course also lead to confusion or prejudice. However through critical awareness and reflexivity in working with visual and textual materials I hope to become more open to multiple aesthetic meanings in practice.

It is in working with this ambiguity that my sense of inquiry deepens. Pictures can also stimulate iterative cycles of questioning. So as I look again now at the photo, it is the meaning of the folding of one hand over the other that speaks more strongly to me than

other cultural or social meanings. Why is the little finger folded back? What did each person feel? Was the guiding contact of the hands absorbed into the sense of seeing what the camera might point to, and therefore largely unnoticed other than as part of this action? I think here of Merleau-Ponty's (1945) account of hands sewing cloth as embodied knowing in action. (This is discussed further in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*.)

Digital photography offers a tool for reflection and representation within action research. I have been struck by the differences between representations of the moment through a photo, or through text. I shall later explore these differences in a detailed commentary on my photo of a woman and her care worker at Silver Street, (see Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*.) A further methodological dimension of the visual is shown in Chapter 13, *The news of difference in Silver Street-3*, when photos, video and graphic images taken by people with learning disabilities formed an essential way of advancing our action research inquiry.



## Conclusion

The world that invites inquiry is not orderly or predictable. The unexpected synchronicity of virtually any mix of actions, words or images can gain new meaning in the moment. The occurrence of this serendipity offers further confirmation of a worldview where simple iterations and participations result in complex self-organising patterns, (Capra, 1997).

In this chapter I have described inquiry methods which strive to attune themselves to this complexity. They also needed to help identify what was significant and valid in my understanding better the aesthetic in my practice and how it influences my way of working with others.

I started the chapter by defining the nature of this inquiry as one that is rooted in a greater awareness of play and the poetic in practice. I referred to play theory and in particular the

four play dispositions identified by Caillois, (1958). The poetic was seen as a wider concept than poetry, encompassing processes of shaping imagination, whether spoken, written, dramatic, visual or kinaesthetic, whereby we represent our experiences through narrative, imagery and symbols. I forecast a more detailed exploration of both poetics and play in their relevant chapters in Part C.

I explained the distinction that I will be making, between *intrinsic* and *expressive* aesthetics. The intrinsic is there embedded in all encounters whereas the expressive, in the form of activities and artefacts, is introduced as part of the design of events.

The main section of the chapter was devoted to an account of my inquiry methods.

These were described as consisting of three stages. Stage 1 was the initial capture of material through journal writing and more recently through photography. This stage is the methodological baseline for iterative cycles of reflection and sense-making.

Stage 2 was described as the addition of commentary in a two-column layout.

In Stage 3 I select items for incorporation into the narrative of this thesis. At this stage further sense-making commentary is needed to connect with the context and direction of my argument.

Through these methods of iterative commentary and dialogic inquiry with others, I became aware that there were penumbra of tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958), in the writing. I noticed the silent implicative double referred to by Linstead, (2000); allusions and imagery hint at these lacunae. In Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice*, I will consider this further and show how poetic forms of inquiry attune more readily to an understanding of what lies beyond the edge of propositional definition.

I illustrated these methods in use by a short example, entitled 'The photo that never was'. This moment was drawn from the second Silver Street project. The news of difference in this partially enclosed world was evident everywhere, in adults who need feeding and changing, in their apparently random moving about, repetitive fixations on objects and in words and gestures which sometimes appear to come from nowhere. These encounters threw into sharp contrast the aesthetic knowing of my other day-to-day experiences which, through familiarity, become assumed and therefore partly or wholly hidden.

Under the title, *Writing to learn*, I described the place of textual representation in my inquiry through journaling and autoethnography.

I recorded some of my reflections on the challenges and potentialities of writing as an inquiry method. Referencing Gadamer I described how the corporeality of language is such that '**understanding always involves an inner speaking**'. Audience is always embedded in the texture of what is written. I considered how a sense of audience influenced what I write and how I write it.

Visual ethnography, which in my case is currently limited to the medium of photography, was discussed with reference to Pink (2001); it is seen as offering a complementary channel of inquiry with its own poetic potentialities. I included a short commentary on some photos depicting scenes from Silver Street, as a sample of the method I shall use later in the thesis.

This chapter completes *Part A, FRAMING THIS THESIS*. There follows a short working sketch and an interlude which leads into *Part B, THE AESTHETIC IN PRACTICE*.



**W**orking sketch – Day trips, 29/08/06

'Progress' is always governed in my story by such factors as the synchronicity between my discovery of personally relevant theory and different opportunities for practice. The notion of progress implies a journey, in my case the one I referred to in the opening lines of this thesis.

As Fisher and Phelps (2006) comment,

'... attempting to maintain coherence within a particular chosen metaphor may lead to being too identified with the metaphor itself and prevent disconfirming 'truths' being voiced.' Fisher and Phelps (2006, p.106)

So my 'journey' will probably be seen as a series of more and more purposeful daytrips with several more extended excursions, followed by staying at home to reflect on practice and relate it to relevant literature.

At this stage of revision of the thesis I am also aware of the courage needed to face up to 'disconfirming truths'. I feel most connected with my inquiry when I am excising the travel brochures that have crept in, as I try to confront more openly where I can now see the journey taking me.

