

## **7 The Intrinsic Aesthetic in Practice**

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## Introduction

In this chapter I will,

- explore what the concept of the *intrinsic* aesthetic in practice means to me
- explore how sense-making through writing and photos deepens my awareness of the *intrinsic* aesthetic
- show how this deeper awareness influences my working with others.

I have selected for review and analysis material that illustrates my growing awareness of the intrinsic aesthetic and its contribution to my reflective practice.

My use of the terms *intrinsic* and *expressive* has already been explained in Chapter 4, *Inquiry methods*. However I will briefly restate here that by *intrinsic* I mean an aesthetic that is an essential part of the fabric of all encounters, as it is embedded in the way we perceive each other and the world. As I referenced in Chapter 1, Taylor and Hansen (2005) claim that,

**'... aesthetic understandings are so profoundly ingrained and unquestioned that their maintenance through the reconstruction of aesthetic forms in organizations seems so routinely ordinary.'** (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1226)

The intrinsic aesthetic is pervasive in human connectivity; it is as essential and taken-for-granted as air, something that gives life shape, colour, sound and texture, without our often being consciously aware of it. Rendering it more conscious both in the moment and through reflection after the moment, is a discipline that I have been engaged in through this inquiry. My purpose in doing this is to be better equipped to participate in a facilitative role with others, particularly in action research processes, but elsewhere in my life too. I also realize that my capacity to notice and represent such a rich profusion of experiential knowing is always constrained by the cultural selectivity and framing that I bring to it.

At the other end of what I have come to think of as a spectrum, lies an *expressive* aesthetic. This involves the use of consciously fashioned aesthetic statements and artefacts, ranging from informal expressions such as story telling, to more structured activities such as writing poetry or making drama. (I consider the expressive in detail in the following chapter.)

It is the facilitator who claims responsibility for introducing expressive activities into the existing intrinsic aesthetic of a particular encounter. The decision to work expressively with artefacts and arts-based processes requires both a heightened sensibility to this intrinsic aesthetic, as well as the capacity to anticipate the evocative and reflexive potential of expressive work as it unfolds. The two skills go hand in hand and their development will be the subject of further inquiry as I continue to examine situations where I felt this matching of intrinsic and expressive aesthetics to be happening.

I also notice and accept the paradox of inquiring into the intrinsic, through the medium of my own expressive writing. However as I will illustrate, the act of writing this current analysis not only imposes greater rigour on my inquiry, but also makes the process accessible to the examination of others.

The examples that follow are drawn mainly from consulting assignments other than Silver Street, that I undertook during the period of this research. (In fact, many of the Silver Street examples so far included in the thesis position themselves towards the intrinsic end of the spectrum.)

I have grouped them under the following headings,

- place
- artefacts
- relationships.

These headings suggest themselves, because place is the containing aesthetic environment within which organizational and personal artefacts are located, and where relationships have their own dynamic aesthetic which is intrinsic to all interactions. I see place and artefacts as predominantly poetic and evocative in the way they engage with my imagination; relationships express themselves more as a form of play through their unfolding narrative. However as I have earlier remarked poetics and play are not mutually exclusive and I have found it helpful to see aspects of each in the other.

## Place

Arriving at a new venue involves a phenomenological participation with place as well as people. I consider the setting of events to be a significant part of the intrinsic aesthetic of what happens in them.

### *j*ournal ... Gasometers, Part 1

#### Journal

'We met in a 'regenerated' building that had previously been a coffee warehouse. It now contained a large Indian Restaurant where we would have lunch and a drama studio cum disco where we were to spend the day, fortunately with some daylight and access to a yard. Outside there was a striking view over the rooftops, of the cream painted framework of two deflated gasometers.'

#### Commentary

The sparse but specific detail I have used in writing about this place, may have left space for the reader to construct their own impression of this setting. The *Indian restaurant* or the *deflated gasometers* may have evoked connections which fill in this space.

I frequently write about venues and my journey to them; a more extended example, describing a funeral procession, was given earlier in Chapter 5 under the title *Terminal solitude*. This present example briefly sketches in some of the main features of this environment in which I was to work for a day with a group of local authority equalities staff.

The perception of 'place', the physical setting in which I work or live, has more than a topographical significance. Bachelard's (1958) pointed to the imaginal potency of the space that we call *home*, in his seminal work, *La poétique de l'espace*.

In describing this potency he identifies,

'... the original fullness of the house's being. Our daydreams carry us back to it. And the poet well knows that the house holds childhood motionless "in its arms":

Maison, pan de prairie, Ô lumière du soir  
Soudain vous acquérez presque une face humaine  
Vous êtes près de nous, embrassants, embrassés.

(House, patch of meadow, oh evening light  
Suddenly you acquire an almost human face  
You are very near us, embracing and embraced.)' \* (Bachelard, 1958, p.8)

\* This extract is originally from a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. Bachelard is quoting here from a French translation by Claude Vigée.

This aesthetic consciousness of place, which Bachelard understands as the profound imaginative reference to 'home', underpins the play and poetics of working with people in particular settings; they sense the familiar and unfamiliar in the environment and relate to it in different ways. I enter a strange room and breathe in what it has to offer, as actors do when walking onto a set. A sense of the transition of the day is marked by the sun's passage across the surrounding landscape. The furniture and other artefacts are imbued with associations and feelings.

An example occurs in my journal of a two-day event I facilitated with a group of lawyers.

## **j**ournal ... Enlightenment

### Journal

'In preparing the ground floor hotel conference room before the first participants arrived, I had adjusted the Venetian blinds, to let maximum light in, but also to obscure as much as possible of the kitchen delivery area and car park outside.

### Commentary

I notice on re-reading this item my aversion to the anaesthetic of conference venues, so thoroughly 'concierged', and drained of all personality – a room for all occasions.

On Day 2 after the coffee break the room visibly darkened and there was a noise of a lorry parking. I rotated the blind a bit and looked up. The view was obliterated by a lorry side with the word, 'SUNLIGHT' emblazoned across it, with a token yellow sun and a wavy blue landscape.

Maybe the DARKNESS lorry came after dusk, but I wasn't there to see it.'

This excerpt reminds me that the aesthetic of place is not static but changes in a systemic way with the flow of activity in and around the event. It also features a delightful serendipity in the arrival of the 'Sunshine Lorry'. This unexpected spotting formed a playful interaction with what was emanating from the place. The brief intervention that it made produced spontaneous laughter. The Alea of it falling into our shared consciousness was pleasurable. In some light way my own noticing of it and my permissive response to it was in line with that of the group, as we acknowledged the irony of its coming. In that sense it added some further definition to how we saw each other; it confirmed that we were people who would share playfulness together. It became part of the shared aesthetic of our working together.

Perceptions and feelings about the physical environment of any new encounter with a group or an individual, form part of the phenomenon of the incipient relationship. This sense of place is potent both in cases where I am moved by what I sense to be beautiful as well as when I am conscious of what I consider drab or ugly.

Place lives on with us in the very fibre of our language. Lakoff and Johnson, (1980), noticing the strong element of place in metaphor, state,

**'There are few human instincts more basic than territoriality. And such a defining of territory, putting a boundary around it, is an act of quantification.'** (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 29)

Amongst what we are enclosing in doing this is our aesthetic connection or disconnection with place.

Our relationship with place is therefore dynamic and the place is influenced by our noticing it, sometimes in quite practical ways as in the following continuation of the 'gasometer' example,

## *j*ournal ... Gasometers, Part 2

### Journal

'Inside the studio we had almost too much space. I moved the rigid oblong of tables and chairs into something resembling a horseshoe. I felt the group might prefer to have tables, as they provide some spatial security, perhaps because this layout is associated with work, by contrast with just a circle of chairs which may suggest to some a more intimate or informal agenda.

However I also set out two other circles of five chairs each in another part of the studio. I connected my Walkman and mini-loudspeakers and put on the Buena Vista Social Club CD, aware as I did it that several of the marvellous octogenarian Cubans who perform on it, have now died since making their extraordinary comeback from anonymity in the '90s.'

I have included this short passage because it shows a transition from an awareness of an intrinsic aesthetic of place to my conscious choice to re-imagine and re-construct the space, which begins to become an expressive aesthetic act. The shifting of furniture is like a symbolic possession, which erases to an extent other people's presence in, and use of, the room. The further adaptation of the place by my choosing to play music in it is an expressive contribution which probably has a cultural reference to film or television programmes which rarely start without music. (I discuss this question of contingency between a group aesthetic and my own, more fully in the following chapter on expressive aesthetics.)

I now turn to the second of my three types of intrinsic aesthetic, – that is the artefact.

### Commentary

The choice of Buena Vista Social Club became my aesthetic 'visiting card', my best opening shot at connecting with people as this multi-ethnic group began to arrive. Of course not everyone accepts or keeps such cards.

## Artefacts

Strati (1999) defines an organizational artefact very inclusively as,

**'... any characteristic of an organization which is able to 'tell' us something about the organization.'** (Strati, 1999, *Organization and Aesthetics*. London: Sage, p. 11)

Whether at the individual, group or organizational level, people choose and use artefacts which carry an intrinsic aesthetic significance. If artefacts are consciously chosen, they become an expression of taste, which 'tells' others what the owner/user wants to portray about themselves.

The extract below is from a journal entry in 2003; it follows on from the description of the funeral cortege included in Chapter 5. The excerpt needs some brief contextual explanation. The interview described in it was part of a day of preparatory research designed to equip me better to facilitate the annual board meeting of this community safety project. Mr Savindra is a well-established member of the local community and sits on many such committees and boards. My working theory in doing these interviews is that it will help me facilitate the event if I can have some prior experiential knowledge of the people who will attend and some provisional *sketch* of the community with which they are concerned.

During a round of interviews I visited Mr Savindra. (*A substitute name.*)

**j**ournal ... Mr Savindra plays his card

### Journal

'I find myself let in anonymously through the steel covered security front door; he has been watching for my arrival on the monitor. In the hallway I wonder where to turn; the place is milling with people; there's a large dimly lit bar full of men drinking.

"Hallo Alan!" a voice calls from a little office – Mr Savindra sits me down in front of his desk in a tiny office packed with an accumulation of his life's business.

### Commentary



He hands me his gold visiting card, which includes his photo and his multiple designations ranging from financier to collector of coins, banknotes and stamps. It also announces that he is a school governor, a President of the local E African/Asian Welfare Society, Managing Director of the Croesus Investment Company as well as Director and Treasurer of this Community Centre.

On the wall behind his head is an array of photos of him with all manner of VIPs, Mrs Thatcher, the President of India and Tony Benn. (I am to divert our conversation later to this collection of trophies when we seem to have got into an impasse.) He starts to tell his story; ...'

Already taste has intervened as I make judgements firstly about the card – 'it is overly concerned to promote the man', – and then by association I am soon also making judgements about the man. 'His taste in cards is different from mine – what else might I find problematic about him in these opening minutes of our encounter?'

My experience of both artefacts and place is always that they are relational phenomena; I participate in them and add meaning to them by doing so. The place is always a place observed and perceived from a field of memories and relationships. The artefact likewise carries the traces of the person or persons who chose it, made it, handled it, placed it; in my seeing, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling it, I am connecting with this.

The skill that I am learning to develop in such moments is that of holding the aesthetic capta and noticing how they are influencing feelings and opinions. At a meta-level though I need to notice too that I am noticing, because the judgements that are beginning to form are improvisational and extemporary, and might otherwise be taken by me, as read.

In the process of further interaction I shall be engaging in an Agonistic play which has begun to define my brief relationship with Mr Savindra and is not without effect on my own sense of purpose in the moment. Wrapped around this is the issue of how he and I maintain some openness towards each other for the period of our working together. All this was embedded in the poetics and play of this moment of encounter. The reflexive discipline is now to try to unravel these strands. In doing this I strive to achieve a participation with the moment from a position of critical subjectivity.

Places and artefacts can be thought of as being 'peopled', even in the absence of people. The relational engagement of practice with others becomes a narrative of which these places

and artefacts form a part; they become the *mis-en-scène* and props of the relational play. The actors' interaction also has its own intrinsic aesthetic – what unfolds mutually in the moment. It is to this third area of my exploration of the intrinsic aesthetic that I now turn, – relationships.

## Relationships

In this section I want to consider two relationships which I describe in different parts of my practice journal. In doing so I want to give particular attention to the intrinsic aesthetic that I was aware of in their making. The first of these is the remainder of my journal of the Mr Savindra interview. In the second I return to Silver Street and an encounter with a service user and her member of staff at Silver Street.

But first Mr Savindra; the scene has been set in terms of my analysis of the place and the artefact, his card; what does the unfolding play of our encounter add to this account of the intrinsic aesthetic in practice?

My reason for including this excerpt here is to add to the participative awareness of place and the artefacts in it, an in-the-moment awareness of the live action of practice. In doing this I draw on concepts of agonistic play and the telling of the incident begins to acquire features of dramatic dialogue. I am also aware that the example begins to position the discussion we were having, towards the centre of the intrinsic/expressive spectrum. Mr Savindra and I are not passive observers of the intrinsic aesthetic between us; in perceiving, we also express dialectic responses based on our perceptions.

As I sat down in his tiny cramped office, I have made an aesthetic judgment. I am aware that I initially do not like him, yet I am going to have to work with him.

**j**ournal ... Mr Savindra shows his hand

### Journal

'He starts to tell his story; everyone is on the make and therefore they need to be checked up on by the few honest people that volunteer for such roles, such as himself. I glance for a moment through the window which rather like

### Commentary

I notice how my engaging with the strangeness of this setting pushes me to write sensuously. I want to participate in the sight and sound of this moment.

a TV production gallery gives a silent overview of the bar. A pinched looking man sits with his mates, their pints never long out of their hands. He has a Jack Russell terrier sitting on his shoulder as he talks. People on other tables all look as though they had settled in for a day of steady drinking; it's three in the afternoon. The world roars by this place on a raised motorway and only the canal loiters imperceptibly like brown tea.

His theories are Micawberish, hinging around the balance between income and expenditure. 'Those people in there drinking' have less income than expenditure, he explains, and are therefore always trying to cheat him. It's only by his sitting here from 8 a.m. till noon and checking up on them that he has been able to make the Centre viable. They all want money from him. But, he explains, he has made the Centre self-sufficient and he keeps people off the streets. The more he talks, the more total seems to be his vision of a corrupt world in which he is the only innocent. I feel that early on he has lumped me in the category of those on the make, through taking on this assignment and exploiting access to government money, 'Who are your friends who have asked you in to do this?', he says and I notice my hackles rise.

Half way through, I reassure myself of the impossibility of holding on to the role of independent

sound of this moment.

I people it with characters which might have been drawn from a Dickensian novel.

The movement I describe here of traffic and even the slow passage of water affirm the fuggy fixedness of this interior. No one is going anywhere, Mr Savindra included.

This play had become serious in a few short steps. The Agon of our encounter was barely concealed, but not yet antagonistic. The intrinsic aesthetic I experienced was that it had become a sparring match or perhaps more a form of elegant rapier work.

interviewer. I tell him that I totally disagree with his views, evenly voiced, no aggro, but no collusion. I don't see the world like this. I ask him what's in it for him to 'volunteer', what motivates him? When he says that he can size people up on first meeting, I ask him what he thinks about me, am I crooked? He wriggles out of this one by grouping me with him - 'we are OK, we know what is going on'.

The interview has turned out in a way he does not want, and I hadn't expected; he gets up to answer the phone. Then he says that he may come next Saturday for an hour or two to see what it's like. I say again firmly but I hope not angrily, that I would prefer him either to commit to coming or not come at all

As I open the door to leave, a young woman with a pushchair and three children is trying to come in. He will be watching the monitor; does he want them in? I hold the heavy door back and they enter; I leave.'

He did in fact come to the workshop on the next Saturday and stayed all day. He listened and made no inflammatory contributions. He participated and the few words we exchanged in the intervals suggested that we had both found a way of bridging the differences that we had uncovered. By noticing the tenour of his comments as much as what he actually said, I was able to hear some level of conciliation and preparedness to join in.

In attending to the physical location of the encounter and the personal artefact of the business card, I have tried to show how the roots of my noticing the intrinsic aesthetic lead on to a wider and more relational encounter with the man. I experienced this encounter as a form of agonistic play, a mutual sizing up. My perception of it in the moment was heightened; I felt at risk and challenged. In this I strove for an improvised performance which was authentic, but which shared some qualities of enactment of a stage role, including seeking an internal consistency of persona and engaging energetically with the unpredicted flow of the dialogue.

There had definitely been a cry of 'touché' after which Mr Savindra bailed out and I left, before too much blood was drawn on either side.

I now turn to a second example of the intrinsic aesthetic dimension of relationships, but this time in Silver Street. By contrast with the location of the last example, Silver Street was growing into a familiar environment. The place, artefacts and people engendered in me a developing sense of participation. As well as using my writing to explore the intrinsic qualities of this relationship, I was from the beginning of 2005 able to use photography as an expressive form.

## *j*ournal ... Making up

I spend an afternoon with a group of physically disabled women with profound learning disabilities; most of them are in wheelchairs.

### Journal

This afternoon is to be a makeup session for the women service users who are left (the men having gone out on a trip in the mini-bus this week). The wheel-chairs are arranged in a row by tables and a series of cosmetics bags are produced, each with the name of a service user on an attached sticky label. The first task is to clean old nail varnish off and then replace it with fresh varnish and a quick-dry spray.

I offer to do a pair of hands and am tutored in this by a young woman worker who is already rubbing her service user's nails with cotton wool and cleaning fluid.

I do one person as an induction and it looks OK. I then ask Lorraine, if she would like me to do her nails.

### Commentary

There are issues of gender and intimacy which hover all around this experience. I notice on occasions how carefully I have picked my words in describing it. This afternoon I felt as though we were reaching across a gap to be beside each other. Part of that gap was gender, which on this occasion proved a source of fun and happiness; part was a gap in the usefulness of words in this environment.

Having noticed this issue about communication in a largely non-verbal community, it helps me see that in all interactions elsewhere we

She is slumped in her chair, her arms awkwardly folded beneath her. I had already been caught in her bright gaze while I was waiting to see what I could do. Although she is physically very constrained by her disability, her eyes are lively and limpid. She appears to be taking everything in.

When she realises, that it is I who will do her nails, she stirs in her chair and her face melts into the most delightful smile, whether because of the novelty of me or of having a man do her nails, I cannot tell. Her smile reveals a mouthful of much-filled teeth and gaps. I wonder how people with such disabilities cope at the dentist.

There is general merriment about Lorraine's response amongst the women workers around the table. As I settle down to do the nails, I concentrate on not getting the varnish on her fingers and to keep it as smooth as possible. I look up and Doreen, the key worker, looks across and gives me a thumbs up.

As I re-read this piece and its associated commentary written not long after the event, further insights into the aesthetic dimension of it come to light.

My language in the left hand column is comparatively free of metaphor, sparse in its description. It is in the later right hand column that I introduce propositional and allusive interpretations.

Yet what now comes through for me between these two views of what happened is a glimpse of the ritual of the action itself, the painting of nails; it connects with the washing of feet, the

live with, guess at or unaware of, the gaps in our capacity to communicate. I explore Linstead's (2000) concept of the silent implicative double in Chapter 11, *The poetics in practice*.

I referred later in my journal to the female coterie of this event to which I had been temporarily admitted. This was a remarkable connection in providing a basic service which brought me literally 'in touch'. The flow of emotional energy from both sides of the hand contact was life affirming for me and I am fairly sure for her. It was as though the purpose, – to varnish nails, – valued and affirmed a service offered and received with pleasure. It was beyond words and primal in its physical connection. There was something playful about it, hence the laughter and smiles. It was unexpected and therefore had not become deadened by habit.

plighting of troth, the handshake of world leaders on the signing of some treaty, the simple act of sitting hands folded together – connection.

It arose spontaneously in the moment, carrying the resonance of many other more ritualised moments in its shadow. The play of the nails had at the time a poetic essence which defied elaboration; it was there in the improvised moment which led to a phenomenological knowing which was only possible in its embodiment and its spontaneity.

Merleau-Ponty (1945) describes the relationship of body and the perceived world in the moment of action. He gives an example of the act of sewing, an action that is carried out without our having to examine our fingers, the scissors, thread and material. What we experience, he argues, are the *potentialities* which are already mobilized by perceiving the scissors and needle; for the person sewing, they become **‘the central end of those ‘intentional threads’ which link him to the objects given’**.

He continues,

**‘It is never our objective body that we move, but our phenomenal body, and there is no mystery in that, since our body, as the potentiality of this or that part of the world, surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them.’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 121)**

This nail painting connection expressed the potentiality of our phenomenal hands, as in our differing ways we became aware of our action together.

On a subsequent visit I had the opportunity to use my new camera and took the picture overleaf of Lorraine and Kuldip, who was helping her prepare for lunch.



Lorraine with Kuldip, her care worker, preparing for lunch, no nail varnish on today.

### **C**ommentary ... Lorraine and Kuldip

Although at the time of taking the photo I had only had a brief chat with Kuldip, her care worker, I feel the picture draws me into a closer connection that will influence me next time I meet them both. It captivates me by the warmth of the relationship between the two.

There is also a sense of the aesthetic of the place in the semi-privacy of the room emphasised by Kuldip's supportive arm, with only a glimpse through the open door of the larger space of the unit beyond. As a capture of a spontaneous pattern of limbs, heads and bodies, it has serendipitously created a remarkable icon of caring love. I would compare it in this regard to the video art of Bill Viola, (Kidel, 1996) which, with the added dimension of movement, imbues facial responses and gestures with transcendental significance. The image of Kuldip and Lorraine belongs to an iconography of maternal love or the protection of the vulnerable against a hostile world. In their direct gaze at the camera they seek recognition and connection.

As I pointed out in Chapter 4, *Inquiry Methods*, Barthes remarks on the phenomenon of replicability, 'what the photo reproduces to infinity has occurred once only', (Barthes, 1980, p. 4). The aesthetic of visual representation offers a potent way of externalizing thoughts and feelings and I explore some of the impact of this in the third piece of work at Silver Street, the description of which can be found in Chapter 13, *The news of difference in Silver Street-3*.



At the core of this example is a process which is both dramatic and poetic. I have never heard Lorraine speak, at least not in words which I might understand. Yet in her acceptance of me in this domestic encounter she has given me something unique, the most valuable part of which is beyond speech and therefore essentially poetic.

The significance of this discovery cannot be underestimated. It taught me that the poetic could be experienced in such heightened gestures and interactions whether or not they were voiced. It was to be found in the fusion between a simple domestic act and multiple metaphorical and symbolic meanings that resound in its subsequent telling.

Primarily though, it happened; we were alive to it as an action. I have shown in my commentary above how this relationship set off in-the-moment references and connections with other dramatically charged clasping of hands.

Her life is proscribed and supported by the care and love of relatives and the staff at Silver Street; her smile radiates energy. In writing about our meeting and the photo of a later moment I am adding my images that point towards the essential poetic in this encounter. In your reading this, Lorraine now has a form of evocative extension of her life in your imagination.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused particularly on exploring what I mean in using the term, *the intrinsic aesthetic of practice*. My method in doing this has been to use fragments of journal relating to the aesthetic inherent in place, artefact and relationships. My opening proposition was that the intrinsic aesthetic is continuously available to be experienced in the moment, as distinct from those expressive activities and processes which are consciously introduced into practice. I suggested that it is helpful to think of *intrinsic* and *expressive* as two ends of a spectrum.

The intrinsic aesthetic of place was explored through two short journal excerpts and I referenced the work of Bachelard on the poetics of space. I then considered the artefact as an expression of the intrinsic aesthetic that we assemble around us and which may, like Mr Savindra's business card, speak volubly. However I recognised that this 'voluble speech' is co-created and also imbued with values by the observer, a manifestation of our participation.

Then I moved on to consider relationships as a dramatic narrative within which these intrinsic aesthetics play out. I noted that whilst the examples of place and artefact were primarily poetic in nature, the relationships examples which followed were more usefully understood as forms of play. In completing the Mr Savindra story, I observed that it took on the form of agonistic play as we sized up each other's values around his proposition that the world is full of people 'on the make'. Beneath this surface was a deeper suspicion of me, the researcher/facilitator 'on the make'. This may have been dispelled at least to the extent that he subsequently decided to join the forthcoming workshop.

The Lorraine nail painting description and the photo of Lorraine and Kuldip offered an example of embodied knowing and the sense of connection that springs from this unspoken encounter. I commented on the dramatic dimension of the evocative account of the nail painting and the iconic impact of the picture, both of which I experience as having their roots in a poetic narrative.

All the evidence of the intrinsic aesthetic in the examples used in this chapter contributed to the way I perceived and related to people and places as I worked. In noticing them, I was more attuned to the improvisational process of practice and more able to build on this reflexive attending to them, as I chose how to respond.

The direction in which I sensed my practice to be moving at this time was to relate the intrinsic aesthetic that I was learning to 'read' more subtly in practice, with exploratory uses of expressive aesthetic statements and processes, and to do so in as contingent and artful a way as possible.

It is this expressive end of the spectrum to which I turn my attention in the next chapter.

**W**orking sketch – Snow break, 10/2/06



As I walk over a field of frozen snow, my next footfall produces the most amazing sizzle; tiny shock waves run out across the white. I hear the snow crust fracture in all directions radiating out to the edge of the field around my footfall. Its brief frisson also runs through me as I look and listen, then walk on. The snow comes alive in the bright sun.

This is the moment that offers itself to me as I write. It is an unsolicited recall of an experience in my twenties. Some connection between this snow image and a sense of sudden shifting, a loosening of an impasse in writing has called up this memory.

Reflexivity is decked out in sensuous imagery and is profoundly metaphorical.