

MAPPING THE JOURNEY

Sharing the structure of my work

My work has emerged in the form of four major parts, each sub-setted as appropriate into chapters and sub-chapters.

The body of the research is constructed in Parts 1 and 2, their scope and structure emerging as an integral action of the inquiry itself. These two parts create the architecture of my work, a framework of persistent questioning that holds the research together and gives it meaning and form. These questions focus on the direct experience of my accounts, my narrative voice shaping a coherent sense of self from the nourishing spirituality of their living expression. I develop the ability to hold my 'being' and 'doing' side by side as one integrated sense of identity, one modulated voice forming the detail of my learning journey. The voice is sometimes shaped and sometimes simply affirmed by emails from my research community, and is constantly challenged by an eclectic mix of dialogues with other researchers. I stress 'eclectic' because that is the nature of my engagement in the midst of my inquiry process – a busy movement between the ideas of many as I search for individual form and comprehension amongst my own experiences.

Each part is formed around a core question:

Part 1 ***How can I make sense of this feeling of disconnection? Tracking the formation of my inquiry practice through the emergence of my aesthetic and spiritual connectivity.***

and

Part 2 ***How can I develop this art of dialogic inquiry as a form of learning and connective relationship?***

I start my inquiry in Part 1. Side by side I pursue conflicting themes of disconnection and connectivity, respecting the immense discomfort of images of fractionation and loss, and carefully balancing them with a growing sense of aesthetic consciousness as it intentionally moves into the centre of my life. I experience its expression as a new and living form, and begin to explore the boundaries of my language as I learn to share it in the pages of the thesis. As I become used to hearing it expressed, out loud, I begin to explore its possibilities within my practice, still aware of its fragile expression and careful to protect it from the driving questions of my own inquiring form. I am aware that it is an essential part of my development but I am also prepared to wait, to respect its natural pace and if necessary pursue it beyond the boundaries of the thesis and into the ongoing formation of my practice.

I start by sharing an account of the early construction of my work, a creative process that gives birth to the questions which ultimately form my thesis. I work within the loose boundaries of these two sub-inquiries:

Exploring the boundaries of my disconnection: working with a meta-image of healing and self-transformation

and

Re-tracing spiritual, aesthetic and musical images

I begin with the first uncertainties, the first evidential accounts of disconnection from a practice that either no longer belongs to me or to which I no longer belong. I make each step public, picking over the images of my journal and sharing the emergent questions as they define these first stages of the journey. I believe I must share both the confusion and the doubts as I wade through the mire of questioning that ultimately propels me forward, that I must share each defining step as I develop my own expectations and clearly make decisions that shape the thesis but never prescribe it. This is an integral part of the inquiry process.

I form a fundamental question about my own sense of disconnection, a sense of loss and misplacement which I cannot unravel with my normal questioning. I try to articulate it in alternative ways, collecting together images of those experiences which describe it for me and enjoying new questions of separate and connected as I search for potential meaning through the work of *Marshall* (1995, 2001), *Buber* (1965), *Gilligan* (1982), *Lyons* (1988) and *Mulgan* (1997). I am uncomfortable with each of their certainties and within the context of my current understanding experience their propositions of separate and connected as positions of duality. I am not sure that I agree with this certainty and search for a question that is better aligned to my current understanding. I find it more useful to ask ‘can I enhance my separateness with connectedness?’ and throughout the inquiries work with the conviction that as I form my own practice of ‘being’ from within the connective experiences of my aesthetic and spiritual awareness I am in fact developing qualities of attentive listening and mutual learning that in turn are re-forming the connectedness of my relationships.

I track my gradual realisation of the tremendous energy I derive from each of my aesthetic accounts, struck by the distinct contrast with the energy-levels of my current ‘practice’. I oscillate between the joys of celebrating this understanding and the feelings of sheer emptiness engendered by the contrasting accounts of ‘practice’ devoid of this life-affirming attention. I begin to form these questions. How can I continue to hold this “new” space in my life, beyond the thesis? How can I ensure that my consciousness is mobilised and sustained? How will this focus impact my search for work, my re-formation of ‘practice’? What do I have to do to put this critical consciousness at the centre of my life? How can I focus on my authenticity and strengthen its living form? Will it inevitably help me re-form a coherent, integrated ‘practice’? Will it enable me to become fully synthesized into the world? And how far can this ‘integrative consciousness’ go?

I begin to ask myself questions about the language I am developing, enjoying its aesthetic qualities but more importantly realising through its representation that I

am inadvertently opening up an exploration of yet another facet of my potential connection.

I am faced with a challenge of representing my experiences in such a way that honours and respects their ongoing 'truth'. I am aiming to share the experiential nature of my sense of connectivity, to make it clear that this is what forms the centre of my reality. I hope to invite some form of connection with you through the accessibility of my language, through the memory of similar experience, and to convince you of the authenticity of the energy and sense of personal renewal that this form of 'consciousness' engenders for me. Animated by the power of the experience and pushed through and beyond intellectual expression, I deliberately form an aesthetic language that becomes for a moment my music, an active, living and moving form that takes me for a while into another, more 'conscious' world. It is a form of expression that confirms my connected identity, my form of 'being' in the world. Through it my text becomes a living expression of the experiences I am attempting to understand.

I am also increasingly drawn towards the emerging concepts of poetry and poetic language, wondering where my own boundaries lie yet at the same time certain that my own limitations have just been lifted. I have begun to appreciate the implications of the interconnectedness of language and sensory experience. I ask if I should be drawing boundaries between the aesthetic images of a poet, the voice of an emotionally-charged dialogician and the vulnerable rememberings of an autobiographer, drawn increasingly to the differentiating response we typically assign to the poet. In as much as I am searching to reflect the quality of my 'being', through my research and my practice, through the synthesising quality of my creative and sensory language, I realise that I am in fact considering myself a poet. It feels right to be able to say that and I consider adding 'poet' to my practitioner-researcher identity, awarely using the aesthetic fluidity of my poetic expression to share the qualities of my new framework of consciousness.

I focus for a while on the aesthetic-musical images which have such a powerful sense of connection for me, introducing extracts from my personal Journal and reflecting for a while on the impact of the written images. I call this my aesthetic and spiritual consciousness, and begin to consider the rich possibilities of attempting to bring it into the heart of my practice. I suddenly realise that I am beginning to describe a very different kind of connectivity, a threadlike sense of belonging to something much bigger and much more difficult to describe. I can't yet articulate it. I am still trying to do that, throughout this thesis. But I do know that I have experienced it, and that I can write about it. I experience such a tremendous feeling of achievement that I need to express it out loud, sharing an account of my shouting it out into the wind without caring for once about the impression I am creating.

As I prepare to share the extracts I am struck by the accessibility of their images, transported by their immediacy to a quality of attention which I do not exercise elsewhere in my life. I push the realisation further and try to understand this difference. I begin to form my own concepts around an aesthetic consciousness, drawing clear and integrated links as I rely on musical analogy to focus on description of pace, balance and natural pattern. Increasingly I begin to appreciate it as a fundamental aspect of my 'being', and hold up my text for scrutiny as a form of living expression.

I stay with questions of 'being', and explore how this aesthetic awareness might enable me to weave together the dynamics of both my 'being' and 'doing'. I surprise myself with questions of an integrative, lived consciousness, an expression borrowed from *Bravette* (2001), and feel increasingly comfortable with a notion of aesthetic and spiritual consciousness sitting at the core of my practice.

I use the emergent questions to propel me rapidly through the nascent concentric circles of inquiry, seeking all the time to maintain my grasp on the reality of my world and holding the questions within the context of my own self-transformation and re-forming practice.

As I focus on the possibilities of defining and forming a new and integrated practice I return to the quality of the experiences and ponder the amazing sense of life-affirming energy they engender. Until now they were simply personal spaces of nourishment and renewal, private spaces of belief. What role do they play in defining the form and quality of my practice? Can I share them more widely, make them accessible within my practice? Can I work towards a concept of practice that integrates the analytic rigour of my intellectual capacity with the poetic and aesthetic expression of my integrative consciousness? Can I find the courage to stay loyal to this new and fragile awareness, to expose myself to the attentive qualities of my insistent inquiries? And probably more importantly, can I sustain the momentum?

I spend some time exploring my conviction that practice is not in fact a set of technical accomplishments or indeed the operational reality of an ethical code. It is instead a qualitative expression, defined and formed through the qualities of my own integrated frame of 'being', and made possible through its own tangible activities. I am no longer asking questions, no longer propelling the inquiry towards new uncertainties. Instead, I sense that I have reached a temporal certainty, a sense of meaning that will allow me to take time to reflect on the outcomes of my research, and pause to consider the final form of the thesis.

I turn my attention to the underlying inquiry practice of my thesis, evident as the concurrent cycles of action, reflection and understanding that both engender the insistent questioning and constantly move the work on. I refer to it in Chapter 1 as a 'self-defining' art, heavily dependent on an ability to recognise and value the questions that propel it forward into a state of inquiry. I am aware that I rely heavily on the permissive and generative space of its creative dialogues, and talk of the multiple possibilities of an increasingly complex spiral of experience, reflection and sense-making. I also know that the lived expression of my aesthetic accounts is beginning to merge with this dialogic creativity to create a form of aesthetic unity and composition that is both intuitive and improvisatory.

I begin to hold on to a notion of inquiry as an art, and begin to look more closely at my apparent ability to work creatively and freely within a defining framework of qualities that both respects and holds together the emergent form and expression of my inquiry. It is a framework that depends on a discipline of intention and purpose, a discipline that has emerged from an obsessive habit of inquiry, and one that is not always easy to maintain. I recognise that my thesis has emerged in part through the emergent form of my dialogic inquiry process, constantly forming and re-forming from the stream of questions which constitute my awareness. I acknowledge that I experience the world as questions, absorbing each one into a complex web of dialogues which jostle for space and attention, enfolding and unfolding each other in turn (*Bohm* 1985). The questions become both subject and objective of the dialogues, each one live and vibrant as I continue to pursue aspects of truth, integrity and meaning, prodding each one of them with a new barrage of questions as they vaguely come into focus.

I know that I differentiate between them, recognising those that I am pursuing with a pre-defined purpose, and recognising those which I pursue incidentally and because they have drawn my attention toward them. I explore my way of separating them out as my 'intentional dialogues' and 'attentional dialogues', similar to but also significantly different from both *Marshall's* notion of inner and outer "*arcs of attention*" (*Marshall* 2001) and *Bohm's* own intentional and attentional dialogues (*Bohm* 1985).

As I begin to look a little more closely at this habit of dialogue and dialectic I find it increasingly difficult to hold them separately anymore. If I try and draw boundaries around them I am simply constructing false limits to their definitions. If I try and apply them singly then I lose the full creativity of the process. More and more I am experiencing them as an integrated form of sense-making, a creative form that combines both my dialogic voice and dialectical framework. I tentatively label this integrated approach as dialogic inquiry, increasingly comfortable with a form of inquiry that allows me to hold on loosely to an overall

purpose while at the same time respecting the powerful intervention of new and persistent questioning. This notion of dialogic inquiry recognises both my habit of inquiry and my need for a disciplined approach, leading me to trust the generativity and improvisatory qualities of dialogic inquiry on the one hand but on the other respecting the authority of my own structuring role. Within this context I consider it an intrinsic part of my developmental behaviour, a behaviour that is central to my research process.

I want to share how it feels to inquire like this, to emphasise that this inquiring practice is an integral part of my behaviour, of my identity, of my 'being'. I begin to pay attention to the quality of my questions, to the pace of questioning and gradually begin to consider the significance of silent listening. I begin to think as a musician again, reminded of the concentration I once put into learning how to pause, silently and in the midst of music. I stay with this criticality of attention, the qualities so intrinsic to the creation of attentive space. I work with the potential qualities of 'good' dialogue as described by *Bohm* (1985) and *Isaacs* (1999) and take time to understand and review their suggested qualities of attention, authenticity, self-awareness and emotional honesty. I focus on the three and distinct languages that *Isaacs* (1999) believes sit at the core of dialogue at its best, his language of "*meaning, aesthetics, and power*", and gradually form my own notion of attentive space.

I recognise that I am starting to speak with a single, integrative voice, an aesthetic and dialogic voice developed and expressed through the pages of my text and which I can now track in its detail. In some places it articulates aspects of self embedded in the narrative expression of my accounts. In others it helps me distinguish between those aspects of self affirmed through relationship and those uniquely defined by my own self-determination, each time the same inquiring voice enriched by its own dynamic modularity. It is this integrated, inquiring voice that I now seek to express out loud in my practice, exploring its expression as an aggregation of all the aspects of my 'being'.

As I consider the defining qualities of this practice I realise that not only am I defining the creative art of my own thesis construction but more importantly I am also describing the enactment of my own aesthetic and spiritual qualities. I am beginning to understand that my art of inquiry can and does hold together my exquisite connectivity, my spiritual and aesthetic ways of 'being'. Together the defining qualities of my exquisite connectivity and the defining qualities of my dialogic art are beginning to form and transform the way in which I live my life, constantly holding me open to the exciting possibilities of new and connecting spaces.

This is fundamentally a living and creative process of research. As I frame the next question:

How can I develop this art of dialogic inquiry as a form of learning and connective relationship?

and from the structure of Part 2 I begin to ask questions around the particular nature of my participation in the world and know that I must now put the relational qualities of that participation at the centre of my inquiry. I move the inquiry on as I absorb the aspiration, shifting the qualities of my dialogic inquiry into a wider exploration of research methodology, but at the same time asking how I might be evidencing them in the enactment of my practice. I begin to form the next and inevitable question around my connectivity. Can this art of inquiry engender the mutuality and creative partnership of human relationship and mutual learning?

I attempt to answer the question by exploring a range of experiential accounts that clearly test out my ability to sustain the intention. As I consider my early attempts I am wary of some of the risks implicit in this habit of inquiry and openly evidence some of its degenerative influence. I explore the possibilities of dialogue as a counterbalance, holding together both separate and autonomous identities and engendering the affirmation of our interdependent meaning. I explore my own

quality of attention, my ability to maintain a place of respect which honours both our separateness and our ability to learn through listening, a silence of wisdom and of reflective partnership.

I then begin to look beyond the edges of my own self-dialogues and tentatively step out towards the potential connectivity of mutual exploration, towards the formation of connected and mutual relationship. I invite a group of fellow practitioner-researchers to help me enact this shift, specifically asking them to respond to Chapters 6 and 7 of my research from within a shared sense of my own affirmative and generative dialogues. I ask again if the qualities of my dialogic inquiry and my exquisite connectivity can engender a form of mutual learning and connective relationship, deliberately holding myself open to the challenges of my apparent autonomy and inward focus.

As I integrate their voices and dialogues into the ongoing formation of my thesis their questions propel me much further than I had anticipated. They encourage me to consider the purpose and potential influence of my work, pushing me not only towards the responsibility of my text but more importantly towards an explanation of my contribution to an understanding of the transformative power and creative art of inquiry. Their input is both generative and affirmative, and I acknowledge it as such.

The final two parts, Parts 3 and 4, then aim to answer these two questions:

How can I offer an evaluative framework for my thesis that honours, tests and explains its generative and improvisatory form?

and

How can I position my own distinctive form of dialogic inquiry practice as an original contribution to an appreciation of inquiry as a creative art?

As I move from the formative stages of the body of the research into these final and concluding chapters there is clear evidence of my movement from an obsessive habit of inquiry to the development of a practitioner-researcher with a clear methodology and authentic voice. I realise the full empowerment of my own confident authority as I develop qualities of critical judgement in my affirmative and generative dialogues with other researchers. I develop an evaluative framework from a reflective analysis of the underpinning qualities of my research, evidencing just how I have been able to explicate its living qualities from the creative development of the research itself. And finally, I am able to articulate the significance of my thesis, inviting you to appreciate both its evident value and the evident qualities of my originality of mind.

I invite you to reflect on the overall uniqueness of an account of an inquiring practitioner as she both constructs and engages in the creative art of her learning practice.

As I approach the post-doctoral stages of my work I am already pushing my questions beyond the boundaries of this inquiry and out towards the next. I am already beginning to re-explore *Bohm's* (1985) notion of dialogic connectivity, wondering just how I might now engender its connective possibilities in the broader context of my professional practice. I am increasingly drawn to a deeper understanding of my own emergent spirituality. And as I begin to pick up the pieces of my practice and examine its potential shape I am inextricably caught up in the continuing search for a clearer understanding of this mystery of connectivity and belonging and meaning in life.