

**“...he found himself at the end of the
most magnificent bridge he would ever see.
He thought of it as the bridge of self-discovery”.**

BEN OKRI, *Astonishing the Gods* (1995: p.30)

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.**

Chapter 1

Introduction

The first four chapters of this section are presented in the form of a live inquiry, their images and questions and dialogic sense-making raw and un-edited as I seek to understand the sense of connectivity I instinctively hold at the centre of my emerging future. I share the power of this growing awareness in the Journal account, “Emergence of a Researcher”, in Chapter 5 before moving on to appreciate the creative form of my first-person inquiry practice in the final three chapters.

I find it useful at this early stage to hold on to a notion of my research practice as a self-defining art. By that I mean that it is heavily dependent on an ability to recognise and value the questions that propel it forward into a state of inquiry yet at the same time demanding a discipline and overall intention that both respects and limits its intrinsic freedom. The notion feels comfortable, a natural outcome from my own experience. I take time to look at it in greater detail, and within the context of a wider body of thought, in Chapters 6 and 7.

As I have developed this understanding of my research practice I have become increasingly intrigued by questions of purpose and motivation, and by the huge amounts of energy needed to pursue the unanticipated breadth of inquiries that can and do arise from its persistent questioning.

I take time to stop, and consider my own drivers for inquiry.

I began my inquiry simply because I wanted to understand, to understand an increasing sense of disconnection with my practice, with the people and the tasks within it, and with the identity that seemed to be inextricably bound up within them. Inquiry offered me an exclusive opportunity to step into the permissive space of my own creative dialogue, to explore the multiple possibilities of an increasingly complex spiral of experience, reflection and sense-making. It encouraged me to constantly add to the scope of my understanding, to work with a new and conscious intent, all the time returning to the pages of my Journal to re-trace the original intensity of the experience and to try and make sense from a growing perspective.

I wanted to give myself a context within which I could explore my own meaning and purpose, to try and work with the heart and soul so eloquently described by so many of today's management gurus. I was hooked by *Jaworski's* theory of synchronicity (1996)¹, and his ability to make fundamental shifts in his professional focus. I sensed a kindred spirit in the work of *Wheatley* as I absorbed the photographic illustrations of her recent work (1996)². I applauded *Chappell's* account of his spiritual journey (1993)³ and its integral role in the formation and

¹ Jaworski, J. (1996). In "Synchronicity: the Inner Path of Leadership" he is speaking from within his firm belief that he has both the freedom and capacity to be himself, his "highest self". As he tracks this journey of self-transformation he becomes increasingly aware of his changing level of consciousness, of changing the way in which he thinks about himself, and his growing awareness of the potentiality of relationships to become the organising principle of the universe. It is this certainty, and this sense of something 'other' that affirms my own emergent understanding.

² Wheatley, M.J. & Kellner-Rogers, M. (1996). I am referring here to "a simpler way", an aesthetically presented text in which the authors both express out loud and illustrate their belief that we are all poets, with the ability to open ourselves up to the possibilities of the moment and step lightly into the fundamental consciousness of our 'being'.

³ Chappell, T. (1993). In "The Soul of a Business, Managing for Profit and the Common Good" Chappell talks of the "inseparability of human dignity and human utility", setting his account

management of his company and felt uplifted by his belief in the possibilities of the people attracted to work as part of such a company. I began to reflect on my own true gifts, my own beliefs, and disappointingly found myself with a frustrating list of competences and forgotten dreams.

Intent on cracking the problem I picked up a copy of *Nick Williams' book "Learning to do the work you were born to do"* (1999)⁴ and assiduously carried out each of the exercises in the hope that they at least would move me forward. In his development of a concept of the self endowed with personal gifts *Williams* refers to "a journey of growing awareness of our own being" (*Williams* 1999) and focuses on the development and growth of "self-worth". He appears to believe that there is a part of our selves which is intrinsically aware of its own purpose, a part of our selves capable of defining our capacity for fulfillment in life. For him it is a question of listening to this inner voice and freeing ourselves from the constructed realities of compromise and mis-alignment. This proposition initially had a profound effect on me, hitting me at a time in life when I was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the implications of the success of my commercial career and the attendant erosion of my sense of self. I was vulnerable to ideas of authenticity and expressions of 'self-worth' and temporarily played with the options of personal gifts and fulfillment through their realisation.

I am aware that my choice of fellow researchers at this stage of my research may appear eclectic and inquisitive, lacking some of the clarity and depth of intent I evidence in Parts 3 and 4. It is though significant in its impact on the rapid and instinctive development of my work.

within his belief in interdependence and interconnection, in the integration of 'being' and 'doing', and with a certainty that he has in fact begun to achieve it.

⁴ Williams, N. (1999). Possibly a strange choice of work but meaningful to me as I began my research and needed help in articulating its scope. Williams's work does border on the genre of the popular self-help manual but does at the same time express some confident beliefs that our 'work' can and should be an expression of our self-worth, of our authenticity. The influence I acknowledge here is the encouragement to stay with my early notions of 'practice from the inside out' and subsequently track my thinking development towards a certainty that I can in fact form my practice as the embodiment of my connectivity.

It is intentionally a 'pick and mix' approach, driven by a need to challenge every one of my preconceptions about research and intentionally extending the scope of my reflection as I try and detect the emergent patterns of my inquiry in the apparent confusion of my constant questioning. It is a learning methodology that suits my dialogic style, enabling me to pursue a multiplicity of themes as the questions arise and then carefully move their instinctive form into the robust and well-founded inquiry questions that will help propel my research forward. In this way I do change my references as the themes mature, demonstrating both the improvisatory nature of my research practice and the inevitable movement in both its focus and understanding.

Turning back to questions of purpose and motivation, one fundamental question continues to challenge me. Just how much of the inquiry do I make public? Just where does the research begin?

I believe it begins 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.

As I start to define the boundaries of my inquiry, intentionally holding open the possibilities as each sub-inquiry takes form but at the same time developing a sense of censure around its overall scope, I have come face to face with a set of questions that I had not predicted. Unsure about the impact of simply putting them to one side and allowing them to develop as an intrinsic part of the overall inquiry I have carefully lifted them out from the main body of my notes and laid them out singly on several sheets of paper. I have pinned these to the wall of my study,

instinctively knowing that I need to address them before I can complete my thesis with any feeling of certainty.

The questions are fairly simple:

- Why do I want to make these inquiries public?
- What use or impact do I envisage them having?
- Who will decide if they are worthwhile?

I am not particularly expecting to find the answers at this stage. I know that will not be possible. But what it does do is highlight a fundamental set of beliefs that will either underpin or destabilise my research if I do not pay them due attention. I return to them in much greater detail in Part 4, integrating them into a broader question of my own original contribution to a practice of creative inquiry and using them to track the pattern of my emerging certainties.

I do however hold on to this notion of ‘use-value’, constantly validating the temptations of tangential trains of thought with a forthright “so what?” In the early stages it is relatively easy to ask the question, shored up by the reassurances of an apparently well-defined professional practice. And then I lose the certainty of that practice. Suddenly I find myself standing alone, in an undefined space. And I am scared.

In September 2000 I gave up my position as Head of Organisational Development with a major pharmaceutical company and prepared to dedicate myself fully to my inquiries. I expected to reach some sort of tangible end-point within six months. My academic supervisor, Dr. Jack Whitehead (University of Bath) reassured me that I could do it. I intended completing the necessary reading, writing up the cycles of action/reflection I had diligently recorded during the previous four years, and expected to form some kind of theory of improvement for my practice by the time I would need to return to work.

It has proved to be an irreversible turning point in my life, every aspect of my identity destabilised by my own unchecked questioning. I am not as calm as my text might suggest.

Once I had voluntarily separated myself from the defining context of the company I began to doubt the certainty of my 'practice'. I expressed the doubt out loud by shifting it into parenthesis, finding it easier and certainly more useful to hold it there while I paid more attention to the growing uncertainty. I shared the doubt with Jack, needing some form of recognition of the vast and negative abyss that was opening up for me and the reassurance that I was not in fact alone. I needed some form of affirmation of the questions that I was trying to hold together, affirmation that this wasn't simply a form of mid-life crisis but a very real and emotionally-laden shift in the balance of my world.

We do not and cannot share the same sense of loss or sheer panic. Jack is comfortable in the reassurances of his own well-documented 'practice', and tries to encourage me to re-define my perspective from within his own comfortable words. He is insistent with his suggestions, constantly returning to the fundamental questions of his own thesis: "*how can I improve my practice?*" and "*how can I live my values more fully through my practice?*"⁵ I respect his certainty, acknowledge that it appears to work for him, but instead of feeling encouraged simply feel an increasing sense of disconnection with anything that has previously defined my own certainties.

It is from within this context that I return again and again to my three questions, increasingly thinking of them as a form of aspiration towards use-value, influence

⁵ Whitehead, J. "How do I improve my practice? Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry", Ph.D. 1999. Throughout our four years of supervision sessions Jack has generously shared his own developing thesis on the rights of individuals to create their own living educational theories as an embodied and disciplined form of knowing. I acknowledge the immense encouragement his insistence on individual viability has had and continues to have on my work. However, I do find that his continuing perspective expressed in questions such as 'how can I improve this practice?' limit my own ability to question the very formation of my practice and so I choose to re-form the question and ask instead 'how can I form this practice from the inside out?'

and general applicability. I re-read *Reason*'s⁶ definition of action research, focusing carefully on his criteria of personal, organisational and social value. I systematically work my way through thirty or more writers, disciplining myself to read at least two volumes a day in an attempt to find some echo of familiarity or even similarity. My own uniqueness or originality of mind is not my priority at this stage. I simply want to find some sense of connectivity, some sense of belonging through a network of similar thoughts and intentions.

I think I may be trying too hard. I am probably looking for a reassurance that in time will simply absorb the creativity that initially motivated me to start the research. I realise that this is not a useful way for me, that I need to define my own research 'practice' just as I need to define my own professional 'practice'. Each has to have meaning for me, to be an extension of my own perspectives and identity, and as such has to grow from a realisation of my own certainties and the courage to express them out loud. The word 'courage' has begun to take on new significance for me, and constantly absorbs me in challenging the worth of my research.

Three strands of inquiry have sustained my research for over four years and I feel I need to give each a brief introduction here before I go on to share their development in the following chapters. One centres on the work I was doing as an OD (Organisational Development) practitioner. In the early stages it gave me the opportunity to record much of my work in the form of journal accounts, to focus on their implications and of course constantly learn in such a way that I could reform my actions and move forward with new insights and intentions. More recently though I have discarded these accounts and begun instead to concentrate on the last year or so of my 'practice', probing particularly the relationships that have held me there and trying to track the ways in which I believe I have begun to

⁶ Reason, P. "Participation in Human Inquiry", 1994, and the "Handbook of Action Research", 2001. Although I do not align my work specifically to a framework of action inquiry, I do however use it critically in the validation of my own emergent methodology. I specifically acknowledge the influence of Reason's imperatives of human flourishing, practical issues, knowledge-in-action and participation and democracy when challenging both the behaviours of my research practice and the potential use-value of its outcomes.

change. I focus in on a growing sense of unease with an identity that no longer feels real and start to re-tell some of the accounts of my early 'practice' to try and track its source.

The second strand is more of an instinctive one, an emergent sense of something 'other' that I can only share through my writing. I have begun to need a different form of language, a way of writing that will give me a sense of living expression as I develop a growing awareness of the aesthetic experiencing of my life. Instinctively I know that it is this experiential sense of connectivity that is driving me on. It is this promise of connective space and the ability to develop and sustain my own 'being' that is uppermost in my thinking as I patiently learn to pay attention to the world from a place that has meaning and purpose for me.

The third strand has been motivated by a growing determination to develop my own learning and research method. As I have reviewed my writing, returning to the original notes I have collected and then tracing a complex pattern of dialogue and questioning through its formation and reformation of my thesis I have begun to appreciate the significance of my own form of knowledge-creation. Jack has encouraged me to recognise my own very certain approach, at the same time tracing it beyond my research 'practice' and looking carefully at its embodiment within my professional 'practice'. I do this, sharing accounts of dialogic encounters within my professional environment and clearly detecting issues around qualities of questioning and the ability to hold an attentive space.

As I share the early development of these strands in the following chapters I am prompted to ask "Am I making progress?" I pause and consider the implications of the question before trying to answer it.

I have been satisfied to hold the strands separately for nearly four years, sharing my attention across them equally. It seemed the right thing to do. But now it seems wrong. The more I keep the strands separate the more disconnected I become. The more I concentrate on the overall meaning and purpose of my

research the more the aesthetic images of my ‘other’ experiences seem to matter. The more I explore the potential value of my dialogic approach as a form of first-person inquiry, and later as a form of second-person inquiry, the more I become aware of the qualities of attention that are taking my focus back to my aesthetic images. I struggle to hold on to this new perspective, gradually shifting the focus of my research to the immense potentiality of a living and connective consciousness, an integrative consciousness that sits centrally in my life and seems to hold together both my identity and purpose.

It is this movement that begins to define my thesis, new questions around the possibilities of re-forming my ‘practice’ from the inside out echoes of similar questions I had posed nearly four years ago. The difference now is that I know why I am asking the questions, and I have both the courage and authority to express them out loud.

As I gain confidence in my own certainties I will move closer towards this re-definition of my ‘practice’, recognising that it will form part of the pragmatic outcome of my research. But for the moment I must account for the emergence of that certainty, track its development through the pages of my Journal and share the sense-making of my own dialogic approach as I expand the text around this movement in my understanding.

The next chapters track this defining process in detail but just before I start to unravel the themes, I want to share this Journal entry. In some way it gives me the reassurance I need to keep on going, in my own and right direction.

JOURNAL

A church in Place

We gave ourselves a week off last month. It was exactly a year since I had last worked and earned an income and we were rapidly talking ourselves into a depressive state. We needed to feel the energy of the world again, to absorb ourselves in its pattern of beauty and aesthetic balance. We took a cottage in Cornwall, a remote spot towards the tip of the Roseland peninsula. We chose the isolation deliberately. We just needed to be there. We had been walking most of the morning, silenced by the absorbing beauty of the intermingling colours of the sky and sea and simply content to follow the contours of the path around a small inlet. It was unusually hot for September and we were rapidly losing momentum each time the path pointed upwards. We appreciated the shade as we took a detour through a small wood, sunlight barely filtering through in some places. We knew there was a small church somewhere amongst the trees but weren't quite sure just where.

We found it easily. It was simple, painted white with a wooden roof. Scaffolding had been erected around the bell-tower and there were signs of recent work in the debris that had fallen onto the pews and not been cleared away. It didn't matter though. As the transept crossed the nave an amazing quality of light illuminated two stained glass windows at either end, daubing the walls in massive splashes of red and green and blue. We walked into the colour and simply stood there, absorbed and a part of it.

It was September 15th, just four days after the terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York. I wrote a brief entry in the visitors' book, urging anyone else reading it to reflect on the meaning of being human. It felt

appropriate. A week later we returned to the same church, this time simply to share a quiet and meaningful space. Over thirty new entries had been added to the book since my own, each one responding to my original message. There were expressions of similar reflection, of appreciation of the sanctity of the place, and probably more significantly recognition of the need for new qualities of attention in our world. I felt part of an invisible and silent dialogue.

Chapter 2

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

Although the overall driver for my research is located firmly in a fundamental sense of disconnection from the core essence of my identity, a very real sense of disconnection from my 'practice' provides a tangible and contextual starting-point.

I need to try and encapsulate these experiences within a reflective frame, instinctively aware on the one hand of their formative and de-formative influences but unaware on the other hand of how I might integrate them within my emergent research process. Although I want and need to develop my writing as a form of self-understanding I am incredibly anxious not to stray into the potential mire of writing as therapy, and spend a long time discarding drafts that appear either too introspective or indeed too shallow. While I was searching for a useful way in which to include the accounts I came across the work of *Denzin (1997)*⁷, *Eisener (1997)*⁸, *Lincoln (1997)*⁹ and *Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992)*¹⁰ and felt that a whole new aspect of research had been opened up to me. I both appreciated, in the guise of pupil, their propositions on the extending boundaries of the written form and, in the guise of a fellow-researcher, discovered resonance in their development of autobiography as an integral part of the research process.

I take several guidelines from their work:

- First, I try to achieve a biographer's respectful distance, a stance that allows me to include the detail of the activity without becoming hopelessly embedded

⁷ Denzin, N.K. "Interpretive Ethnography; Ethnographic Practices for the Twenty First Century" (1997)

⁸ Eisener, E.W. "The Promise and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation", Ed. Researcher Vol.26, No 6, pp. 4-10 (1997)

⁹ Lincoln, Y.S. "Re-framing the Narrative Voice" in Representation and the Text, Tierney, W.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1997)

¹⁰ Rosenwald, G.C. & Ochberg, R.L. "Storied Lives; the cultural politics of self-understanding" (1992)

in the unresolved pain and anger, giving me a calm place in which to question and reflect.

- Second, I try to take the role of story-teller, presenting the facts in their correct chronological order, including sufficient detail to maintain your interest but avoiding the temptation to recollect fabricated or mis-represented facts.
- And third, I aim to write with the emotional honesty of an autobiographer, opening up aspects of the stories that I might normally prefer to ignore and taking the courage to plunge directly into those unresolved spaces which are causing this growing sense of disconnection.

The result, I hope, is a multi-dimensional voice expressed with growing clarity and evident authenticity.

As I share the accounts I hold on to the challenges of this question from ‘*Storied Lives*’ (Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992):

“Can a person by telling her story rescue her understanding from both accidental and formal self-misunderstanding and inadvertent self mis-representation? Can life stories be opened up, as well as cramped, in the telling?” (1992: p.196)

This first account represents a journey through the construction of my ‘practice’, a factual account that becomes increasingly surreal each time I read it. I watch the decisions being made, hear the rationale, and stare in amazement as a ‘practice’ is constantly formed and deformed around me. It is a long account. It spans the major part of my working life, fifteen years in fact, and it feels inappropriate to omit any sizeable piece from it.

JOURNAL

Whose 'practice' is it anyway?

I first joined ICL in April 1982. I had a choice - I could become an Administrative Assistant in the Dean's office at Newcastle University or I could become a Computer Programmer in Reading. ICL were offering more money. Newcastle sounded a bit dull and northern.

It all seemed clearly logical and sensible.

I soon gained a reputation for taking on and delivering excessive workloads. I could code three programmes in one week and at the same time write a test suite for the system. I established a reputation. I worked long hours. I worked at weekends. And when they decided I should work in Luxembourg I went – for six months. I took on the responsibilities of a Technical Consultant overnight. I received written accolades from the Belgian office for my French fluency.

After two years I left ICL to join BT as a Team Leader. I had never managed a team before but assumed it would work with the right direction and discipline. George appeared to resent me from day one, smirking at me across the desk as I attempted to manage him. He would arrive late, produce very little and spend most of his time organising his busy social life. My own manager appeared not to notice. It didn't seem fair but I carried on, trying my best.

At his annual appraisal George called for an appeal and my appraisal of his performance was re-assessed by a board of senior managers. My manager still said nothing. George got his appraisal amended. I failed my next promotion panel.

A voice shrieks out at me across the shadows. I hear its accusations of collusion and gasp with the pain of understanding. I see myself with outstretched arms, straining to clasp the cold fingers of an alien system...and wonder how and why.

I returned to ICL, this time as a Training Consultant. I was invited to take part in a half-day selection process. People were kind and supportive and genuinely seemed interested in helping me succeed. I was genuinely surprised. I distinctly remember Alan, a huge man in his late fifties, sitting at the back of the classroom nodding furiously in support, and Ken sleeping softly in the front row. They both became great friends and mentors over the next year. I cried when Ken had his first heart-attack and was forced to retire early. As his then manager I wondered if I had helped cause it.

I worked hard and earned a reputation as one of the best Training Consultants the team had. Customers would write in to the General Manager to call attention to my talents, and many would ask specifically for me when they booked in-company events. I was totally dedicated to my teaching. I carried on in the classroom despite an increasingly debilitating cough. I carried on as the pain in my chest caused me to sit down and speak breathlessly from the front of the room. When I could hardly move or breath any more I took time out to visit the doctor, and was forced to take even more time out as I recovered from a collapsed lung.

My one-dimensional presence in an uncaring world is confirmed, my physical and emotional breath stifled by the engine of my cognitive power. How consciously have I chosen this identity? How consciously have I accepted this role?

Not long afterwards ICL again took charge of my career. Our unit manager was taking maternity leave, and had been told that her job would not be kept open for her. She worked up until 2 days before the birth, but it made no difference. I was promoted to take her place. A year later I was promoted to manage the whole division. I moved into an office on my own and set about systematically learning the job.

I was recognised by the local newspaper as “Young Business Woman of the Year” and assumed that this must be success.

Not long afterwards ICL began the first stages of an immense restructuring and re-profiling exercise. Priority was given to the creation of a five-year plan and supporting change programme. A job specification for a Strategic Marketing Manager was drawn up and internal interviews held. This role would lead the planning and change implementation. Another Ken was heading up the division.

We had begun to spend a lot of time together. He appeared to value the external PR I had established for the company over the last few months.

He wanted to interview me for the new role. The panel was set up for the following week - Ken would chair it and be accompanied by the other members of the board: Steve, Les, Scott and David. David was a newcomer to the team, an old colleague of Ken's and apparently brought in to boost our sales capability. I prepared my presentation carefully, attentive to the brief and to Ken's expectations.

The panel was scheduled for 4.00, in Ken's office. I arrived early as usual, closely followed by Steve and Les. By 4.30 the rest were nowhere to be seen. Steve and Les were embarrassed and angry. I think they felt professionally compromised. I just felt compromised, as usual. David wandered in some time after 4.30, closely followed by Scott. Just before

5.00 Ken joined us.

I remember trying to control the anger and hurt. I wanted them to feel as devalued as I did. I wanted them to know how much they had hurt me. But instead, I smiled and laughed reassuringly at their jokes.

I started the job the following Monday, working for David and not Ken. I was puzzled but said nothing. David made it plain that I wasn't his choice. He asked if I always wore a navy suit and white blouse. I stared at his own navy suit and white shirt and silently wondered why. He launched into a pointless debate on the difference between tactical and strategic planning. He wanted me to produce an outline paper by the end of the day on the major components of the plan. It was two days before Christmas and the day of the staff lunch. I worked solidly on the framework. I handed it in to David's office just before 4.00. He had already left, for a pre-arranged half-day break.

How much longer will I play this role of tough self-sufficiency? Where is the voice of my humiliation and anger? Where is my voice of pride and power?

The new structure demanded six Directors on the board. Ken appointed me, without interview, to the position of Director, HR Consultancy Services. It absorbed me fully for about four months.

One afternoon Ken invited me to join him in a meeting with the corporate HR Director. I distinctly remember sitting in his office and wondering why I was really there. His secretary came in carrying a tray holding a china teapot, four cups and saucers, a milk jug and sugar-bowl and a plate of biscuits. I remember it distinctly - it seemed odd, surreal even. Nobody else served tea and biscuits, and certainly not in china cups. She was followed by a man who introduced himself as Steve. Steve was in his

mid-thirties, supremely confident in himself and practised in his introduction. In less than five minutes Ken and I were appraised of his achievements, his determination and his future intent - almost.

I never felt I was actually part of that meeting, I'm not really sure whether Ken was. A knowing conversation seemed to go on between them all, excluding me from the proceedings. It never occurred to me to ask for inclusion. I just assumed my exclusion was intentional. I was used to it. Ken had obviously involved me for a reason but seemed unable to share it with me. Even when we drove back to the office together I still didn't ask. I trusted him.

A few weeks later Ken came to reassure me that Steve didn't want my job after all. He had been appointed as HR Director of one of the major banks. I could continue my role. I thanked him, stunned - and betrayed.

Next day I left for a two-week holiday in Canada. Ken seemed overly keen on persuading me to take a later flight but never explained why. I left as I had intended. Two weeks later I was told that Ken had gone. He had been made "redundant".

That was on the Wednesday. On the following Monday our new General Manager invited me into his office. There was already a tray laid with the now familiar china. He offered me a cup of tea. I accepted. He offered me redundancy. I accepted that too and left. It only took a few minutes. I don't think I even finished my tea. As I packed my briefcase, after eight years with the company, I think Elizabeth asked me where I was going in the middle of the day. I didn't really know. "Nowhere" I guess would have been the appropriate answer.

I never went back. I sat out my ninety-day notice period alone, sitting among the unopened packing cases which the previous week had

accompanied me to my newly bought house. Nobody called, nobody asked if I was ok. I simply disappeared.

I am angry at the betrayal, abused by its assault on my sense of fairness and trust. I am alone. I am adrift in my own vulnerability, desperate in my search for identity. Is the sacrifice never adequate? I am slowly articulating the sense of my re-written experiences, each word stepping closer to today's perspectives. I am becoming aware of a story of repression and power, of a feeling of loss and betrayal. I hear a voice, silent in its collusion, try to scream out in loud defiance. I am bruised, in every inch of my mind and body. I have been betrayed and rejected. I have given everything and everybody to my work – and have received just empty rejection in return.

Five days later I am still sitting in the same chair, watching my first woodpecker hop about in the dampness of the garden. With my back to the room I have wiped out my view of the confusion, and instead turned my attention to the natural order outside. I am spellbound, my eyes drawn to the hoops of white rope where optimistic spiders leapfrog the corners of the house in the general direction of the garden. Do they have pattern? Do they have purpose, other than to weave a new web of intricate design and function?

How dependent I have allowed myself to become – my whole identity wrapped around the amorphous mass of a corporate body. I struggle to form a sense of clarity but only the paralysis of confusion emerges from the depth of my mind.

After six months of despair I was offered a post of Training Director. Six months later I received another plain brown envelope. I stopped trying. My common sense told me that this was an OK thing to do. The subsequent days are vague.

I need space to breathe - to stretch the paralysed limbs of an incumbent child. The coiled spring is relaxed, the jaw slightly apart, as I sit back and feel the power of the reflection. I can hear the faint melody, feel the rhythm which lives and gives meaning and flow to my life, binding the black and white extremes in a counterpoint of meaningful dialogue.

I am a musician cloaked by silence.

It is strange how silence constantly interjects onto my thoughts. The power of silence in an organisation's turbulence, space for connection with others, for shared reflection. I try and concentrate on Thomas Merton's words "If you love truth, be a lover of silence" (Merton 1949) but am unable to sense his usual reassurance.

In January 1995 I was appointed Assistant Vice President of HR for a US finance company. It was a grand title and I felt I deserved it. It felt good to see it written on my business cards and to see it inscribed on my office-door in the morning. I had an assigned parking-space. The caretaker valeted my car every Friday morning. I had been given an identity.

Dick was to be my mentor for the first year after which he would return to Australia and retire. I would automatically become Vice President. This was my "year-in-waiting". It seemed a long time to wait but I accepted the constraint.

After only a couple of months Dick and I were scheduled to attend the company's international HR Forum in Toronto. I was project-managing the UK's implementation of the worldwide change programme and had a slot to present our update. I had already received a Quality Award for my contribution. The company chauffeur picked us up on time and chatted amicably all the way to Heathrow.

My bags were searched as I passed through Customs. Dick stood by attentively. I began to find his caring attention oppressive. We slept side by side on the flight out. Despite the first-class seats he felt stiflingly close.

Toronto was the first time I'd met the full team. Bill was our Senior Vice President. He wore his initials embroidered on the outside of his cuffs and constantly reminded me of Frank Sinatra. The atmosphere was polite, moderately paced and tempered with respect and duty.

I felt out of place. It didn't feel real.

In the UK everyone agreed that I was eminently capable of the job. They were full of praise for the way in which I had implemented so many changes in such a short space of time. They were overawed by my intellectual capacity. But they couldn't relate to me. Dick likened me to a Rottweiler. The CEO mourned the fact that I could never be his confidante in the way Dick could. He felt I would always be his critic. In a meeting the previous day I had upset a salesman with my questions. I did not have the sensitivity to work in their organisation. I would have to go. Another plain brown envelope slid across the desk.

In January 1996 I returned to ICL just one more time. I was employed as an HR Consultant on a one-year fixed term contract for a ridiculous amount of money. I was asked to develop a system to handle a major programme of redundancy. I was an outsider, a contractor, putting together a system that would determine the lives of hundreds of people I would never meet.

My contract finished on February 18th, 1997, the day of my forty-second birthday.

I pause before I feel able to make any comment or move my dialogue into its familiar habit of sense-making.

I am struck first by the lack of purpose and personal intent in selecting each of the roles. I am tempted to allow the voice of retrospective reasoning to take over, to let my professional editing voice take over the facts and re-present them in the form of a rational and dynamic career path. I remind myself that I have deliberately created this questioning space to avoid doing just that, to give myself the opportunity to face the facts without embellishment, without the sales pitch intended for prospective employers or head-hunters. I intend to start to learn and grow from them. I am fully aware that I am leading myself into a period of instability, that I run the risk of deconstructing the apparent successes of my career precisely at the moment when I feel most vulnerable.

I have not been employed for many months now, and constantly find myself in a scary, undefined place. I constantly question whether it is in fact a healthy place from which to inquire and cannot ignore the potential comparison with the subjects of *Marshall's* work "*Women Managers Moving On*" (1995). I am initially struck by her common themes of 'lost' personal identity and an inability to 'connect' in a mutually nourishing way, feelings so strong that in several cases the individuals appear to need to leave their organisations to both recover and re-define their authentic identities. They appear trapped in a self-sustaining condition of duality, home and family represented as places for rest, recovery and revival, their organisations places of marginalisation and low self-worth. I remember reading this text for the first time on a flight to Paris, destined for a business meeting in which I was to try and persuade the HR Director in France to consider a major redundancy programme. As I read the first few chapters I felt a high degree of empathy, easily identifying with stories of compromise and limited achievements. It would be easy for me now to slip into the relative comfort of its excuses, to claim that I had to leave the restrictions of my organisational role in order to pursue my inquiry into authenticity and integrative consciousness, to re-

claim that part of my identity that has become mangled and manipulated. Reviewing the above account I could even begin to evidence those tensions.

But that would not be honest and it would ignore the tremendous distance of the journey I have already covered. Quite simply the issue is that I am not entirely convinced that I have even tried to develop and sustain my own uniqueness, not until now that is. I have spent over four years focusing on my inquiry, constantly subjecting both my practice and myself to the glare of inquisitive questioning. During those four years I have neither set aside any of the themes nor have I reduced the scope of the inquiry. I am exhausted with the instability that has caused, confused by the lack of clarity it has introduced into both my life and my partner's life but none the less determined to see it through to a meaningful and valuable outcome. It is for that reason, and that reason only, that I felt compelled to put aside my professional role and concentrate full-time on my inquiries.

I value *Marshall's* work as a tremendous inspiration towards achieving fundamental changes in life and as such will return to draw parallels with it. However, its main value to me at the moment is as a reminder of the over-arching purpose of my own research, to achieve a fundamental self-transformation through the re-formation of my practice from the inside out. It is with this certainty that I can turn to my reflections on the account, fully aware of the influences of this meta-theme and fully conscious of working from within its context.

According to the account I selected my first role on the basis of a perceived return on investment, intuitively choosing the one that possibly had better financial prospects and which turned out to be part of a growing skills market. It was a choice that stood me in good stead as I recovered from the financial losses incurred following a three years stint in Australia. Positive feedback from a selfless commitment to the company encouraged me to give increasingly larger portions of my time to them and very quickly the tasks of the role became the central axis of my life. I do not remember asking about the outputs of our work or

querying the expectations of me. I assumed that this was the serious nature of working and dedicated myself fully to it. I do not remember enjoying it, do not remember feeling any sense of achievement from it, do not remember being inspired by its opportunities. I simply trusted the faceless company infrastructure to increment my salary each year, to pay the appropriate amount monthly into my pension fund and to treat me fairly.

I detect a gradual loss of ground as I allow the definition of both my identity and my 'practice' to sit firmly in the hands of others, apparently unable to ask for help. I put increasing amounts of pressure on myself, taking responsibility for a colleague's illness, ignoring my own physical fallibility, and seemingly oblivious to the unfairness of a system that made my own manager redundant as she took her maternity leave. As I re-read the accounts I recall feelings of increasing numbness, of a coping strategy that required me to let go of my own sense of the world and slowly insinuate my diminished identity into an amorphous mass of corporate persona. In a ludicrously ironic way it probably represented a form of integration at the time, an initiation into the membership of a bigger 'practice', but in reality it signaled a gradual invasion of my dreams and aspirations and firmly, without my permission, took control of them.

As I now learn to understand and value my uniqueness, as I focus daily on strengthening the living form of my own authenticity and hope for the emergence of a coherent, integrated 'practice' I am brought up short by my own collusion. As I explore the potential form and power of my voice throughout the thesis I am reminded constantly of the silence I have been prepared to adopt, of the lack of confidence in an authentic adult voice. I look for colleagues in the accounts, look for their support and help. I listen for the voice that should have asked for help, that should have had the courage to speak up but at some point became too scared of the consequences. I am not even sure that it was an intentional silence. I think it simply became part of the role. It was written in the script.

Where are other people in these accounts? The majority appear to represent a controlling infrastructure, a body of individuals exercising a degree of control over my career that I appear unable to counterbalance. One by one I allow each of them to define the boundaries of my inclusion and exclusion, to curtail or extend my employment, to decide just where and when I will do whatever it is that they have defined for me. I do know that I am responsible for this imbalance in our relationship. I do know that I, and only I, can and must redress the balance but I feel overwhelmed by the immensity of its challenges. I panic as I try and visualise the change, as I try and imagine a 'practice' based on respect and friendship, a 'practice' nourished by the mutuality of learning partnerships. I am certain that in the last four years I must have made some progress.

I continuously return to the loss of drive and energy I detect as my 'practice' develops. I have, over a period of time, begun to re-introduce an element of choice into my work, concentrating more and more on aspects of change and renewal within organisations and in some ways able to exercise a level of choice in the roles I take on. But this only serves to enhance the growing gap between the strength of my professional commitment and the diminishing enthusiasm I feel for the work itself. I am increasingly distracted by notions of a fundamental consciousness that will both define and refine my world, of a critical consciousness (*Bravette 2001*)¹¹ that will re-locate my identity in its natural and instinctive surroundings and from there engender a sense of personal energy and belief. It is a huge expectation, I know that. Reading through these accounts I do not believe I even knew of its possibilities in the previous years of my 'practice'.

Still intent on better understanding the autobiographical sources of my disconnection, and wanting to place my 'practice' in a broader context, I have also re-traced some of the preceding years in the following account. The account is emotionally painful for me, charged with remnants of bereavement and loss. It has

¹¹ Bravette, G. (2001). At this point in my research I am simply borrowing the expression of her 'critical consciousness'. I need a way of containing the intentional scope of my work and after reading extracts from her Ph.D. dissertation ("Towards Bicultural Competence: Researching for Personal and Professional Transformation") sense that the overwhelming empathy I feel with her journey will allow me to sit alongside her expression until I can develop my own organic form.

been difficult for me to present it in a format that can both share the embedded feelings and respect your own need for an edited and meaningful text. Admittedly it has been a cathartic experience for me, an opportunity to stand back from the images of a twelve-year-old child. I was at first stunned by my own image, remembering so clearly the cold calmness, the quiet loneliness. A practical voice in my head pushed me on, avoiding questions that would hurt people and proud that I could cope.

JOURNAL

Learning to ignore my self

In recent years my mother has begun to speak to me with new clarity of the lives immersed in my father's devastating illness. At the end of 1998, just a few days after Christmas, we were talking generally about families and parental responsibility. As usual the conversation focused on moral and educational responsibilities. I tentatively steered the conversation towards the needs of children for emotional support within families. The honesty and simplicity of her response stunned me: "I didn't have anything left for emotional support...your father's illness took it all". I smiled at her and touched her hand, reassuring her at 78 that I finally understood.

I had been just twelve years old at the time.

I struggle to find the words – and inevitably the page is still blank. There are so many sounds when the dialogue is direct, but this reflective forming of sentences and paragraphs somehow slows the very thoughts it is meant to express and exposes the gaping chasms of my uncertainty.

I peer into the blackness of my conscious thought and see nothing. I close my eyes and listen to the silence, the ebb and flow of natural rhythm; I

wait expectantly. And gradually one by one the images drop into place, splashing the page in their raw form. I must not scoop them up into buckets of placid pools. I must trace the outward flow of the concentric rings they form, in ever-increasing spans, following their natural reflection and deriving from their constant movement the richness of my creativity.

I was brought up in a family of five girls. The family was self-contained. Life was mapped out. The rules were clear. It took no thought. It had its own rhythm of study and learning. We were meant to be strong, resilient and separate.

And then my father was ill. One minute he was talking to me and the next he was in the throws of an epileptic fit, brought on by an aneurysm. My mother was paralysed by fear, my father by blood seeping into his brain.

I have used the word aneurysm here because I can spell it. How can I forgive the cruelty of a teacher who forced me to spell it out a hundred times? I remember writing about it in my weekly 'news story' - I was twelve years old at the time. I tried to write the word haemorrhage but spelt it wrongly. The teacher made me write it out a hundred times. And I watched my father convulse a hundred times over.

I remember that I was the only one who moved or spoke. I remember calmly describing the symptoms to a doctor over the phone. I remember the silence of the house once the fit had subsided.

I didn't see him for another year, not really. He stayed in hospital for most of the time, with the occasional visit home. My uncle would sit him in a wheelchair just outside the back door, nearby but just far enough away. He was just a body.

He survived another twenty-four years, oscillating between periods of

frightening decay and amazing feats of apparent normality. Just seven years before he died he and my mother embarked on a cruise to Australia. It seemed a safe option – my father couldn't get lost on a ship.

I will never forget the clarity he brought back from that experience. He recalled sharp memories of places seen, people met. He even stood up at a Rotary lunch for the first time in seventeen years and shared the images. I went along, to make sure he was OK.

Who was actually disconnected? Was he in touch, with his own living world? Were we the ones no longer connected? As he retreated into the secret confines of his music, hidden for hours in the uniqueness of Callas and Tosca, was he really lost?

My sense-making is constantly alive with shifting shapes dancing across the canvas. My knowing bounds along in cascades of discovery and understanding, to fall suddenly silent as I pause for breath, sweaty from the freneticism of the dance.

I need to allow the images to fade a little before I can work with them. I take a few minutes to pause and reflect.

There are many similarities between this and the previous account, each one a representation of my own readiness to subsume my identity into the overwhelming priorities and expectations of others. I am aware of the similarities and strongly resent their evidence. But I also value that same evidence. I know instinctively that the qualitative dimensions of my emerging form of awareness are embedded somewhere within these images and simply need time and attention to find their own articulated form.

As I have moved through my reflections on these two autobiographical accounts I have begun to form other, very clear images around the nature of my relationships. These are images of an identity subsumed into the overwhelming priorities and expectations of others, a source of loss and frustration that is constantly driving my inquiry forward into questions of affirmation and authenticity. For the moment this feels like a very separate and scarcely populated place. I wonder if in some way I have deliberately held on to this distinct separateness, believing it to be the only way in which I could protect my right to think and act autonomously. But there are no answers at this stage.

I stay for a while with this apparent choice of 'separate' or 'connected' and wonder just how deliberate it might have been. Have I really needed to hold on to a separate space to explore and nourish my sense of purpose, to define and defend its uniqueness? Is it possible to 'be' within my 'practice', connected to its community in some way, without feeling that I have to subordinate the qualities of my own reality to a universally held truth? Does it help more if I envisage it as a state of temporary uncertainty and fragility rather than a permanent state of inevitable separateness? Can it simply be the starting-point for a concept of relational space, closely linked to notions of dialogue and prompting me to push my questions towards the potentiality of a new and different form of connection?

I do return to the question in Part 2, through the detail of my dialogues with fellow-researchers, but for the moment I am focusing on the questions as they arise now. I detect parallels in the potential risks of exclusive first-person research, its self-defined boundaries precariously balanced between the exploration of an internally focused inquiry and the limitations of sheer introspection. The first I hope can engage you in its questions, turning the personal focus of its inquiry outwards and ultimately towards a connection with your own particular questions. The second, I am certain, will simply exclude you and hold me firmly in its isolation.

As I have progressed through my ‘practice’ I have become increasingly aware of the lack of relationship and friendship evident in the accounts. I detect the stance of an interested observer, perceptive in observation but inept in participation. As I have stepped further and further towards my inquiry into the source of my own affirmative sense of ‘being’ the feeling of disconnection has grown. I have retreated into a solitary place to reflect and write and make sense, intending to plunge myself into a re-formed ‘practice’ as soon as I feel confident in the formation of a sustainable and meaningful thesis. It is this deliberate separation that has given me the space in which to ask my questions, to challenge my assumed stances and understanding. But it is also from within this space that I am now beginning to feel uncomfortable, to question the nature of my connective participation within my ‘practice’ – and ultimately question my own assumed stance of ‘separate’ and ‘connected’. I need to focus on a more useful and robust understanding of ‘connectivity’ in this context.

Mulgan (1997) puts forward a proposition of “*connexity*”, a form of connectivity which he believes should bind us together across our global differences. His context is one of responsibility and freedom, an exploration of the potential integration of both reciprocity and interdependence. He is careful to point out the innate dangers of allowing autonomy to take us to the edge of separateness and the potential isolation of our own moral justification, and puts forward a balancing principle of “*responsibility and power, means and ends*”. This he sees as instrumental in the integration of business into society.

I previously read it in the context of my role within a global business, seeking to understand the developing nature of the relationships required for successful operation within a new cultural infrastructure. But increasingly I have begun to apply its questions to my own singular existence, with the intention of then tracking back from there to the realities of my ‘practice’.

Mulgan appears to be advocating a form of connection that relies on an ethical framework of responsibility and accountability while at the same time respecting a

definition of the self as individual and separate. He invites me to consider, and inevitably challenge, my own imprecise options of 'separate' and 'connected' and to start to integrate them with questions around relationship and the possibilities of a different form of connection. I put together four accounts of significant relationships in my current 'practice' in an attempt to tease out the real issues. Three of the relationships are with managers senior to me; the fourth one is with a member of my own team who reported to me as her line manager. Each in turn causes me to question the nature of my own identity within the relationship, asking if I am in fact allowing the relationships to define me, and inevitably inviting me to start to draw comparisons with earlier accounts of my 'practice'.

The four accounts follow, the names changed and the positions of the individuals omitted to respect their confidentiality.

An Account of Relationship

Anne

Anne is lively, laughs embarrassingly loudly and wears eccentric clothes – or at least compared to me she does – usually something knitted and down to the ankles. She loves opera and red wine. She is always ready to talk, sometimes ready to listen. She cares deeply for the company – although it probably doesn't care as deeply for her.

We had just kicked-off a new transformation programme. Anne was in charge of the launch plan. I was in charge of the overall planning and infrastructure of the programme. I had the definitive view on scope and timescales.

Anne co-opted me temporarily into her team. We selected a substantial PR company to work with us and we met Judith, the managing director.

Anne had her own views and expected to work with her own process and choices. The CEO knew exactly how he wanted it to look. The more he pushed, the more she took an entrenched position. He asked me to take over the project, without changing Anne's role.

Judith now found herself working in a triumvirate of indecision – Anne had the creative experience and authority of role, I had the responsibility and input of the CEO. I was without doubt a conduit, with all its attendant connotations, a “significant person” in terms of my position but an increasingly insignificant one as I began to take a clear position against Anne.

Like the CEO I pushed and prodded. Anne responded calmly and never changed. I felt trapped by the tightening tensions of friendship and professional responsibility. I felt trapped by my own opportunist ambition and confusion over duty.

Our meetings were threatened by the combustible energy of our determination and growing frustration. I began to ache as I tried to hold on to my usual reassuring smiles. I screamed silently at each excuse and obstacle, calmly coaxing and persuading her to conform to the plan. I worked hard to keep us on track, running constantly between her and the CEO to keep the pieces joined together.

And then I just let go. I was too tired and too angry to play the part anymore. The two of us were in a meeting together, in Anne's office. Anne was talking, I was listening. I had something to achieve, she had the final sign-off authority. We were playing with reality, stuck in the pretence of making our own decisions. I tried to listen but knew I was losing control. I could literally feel the imprisoned anger pushing against its familiar rational boundaries. I suddenly realised that I didn't even want to conceal

it anymore. I wanted Anne to know I was angry and frustrated. I wanted to be honest for once. I don't think I even chose the words – they simply chose themselves. I ran out of her office, oblivious to the amazed faces in the outer office as I ran across the Atrium back to the confines of my own office and slammed the door. The walls shook as the entire department stared at such an emotional display. I attempted to hide behind the vast expanse of glass wall, angry and relieved that I had allowed myself to lose control – but also scared that I had broken the rules of organisational behaviour.

Anne appeared at the door, apparently calm and concerned. She sat down although I continued to stand. She started to talk – I couldn't. She continued to talk – I still couldn't. And then she put her arms round me and we cried together.

Nobody ever mentioned this very public incident to me, probably to neither of us although I can't ever be sure. Just two months later Anne was diagnosed with stage two breast cancer – she was seriously ill. She was amazingly calm as she started her treatment, coming regularly to see me and talk about it. She approached it rationally, in control and with an extremely clear plan. I found it harder and harder to ask her how she was and could simply hug her and wish her well.

In November Judith and I had lunch together, partly to belatedly celebrate the successful launch of the completed vision and partly to say goodbye. She too had been ill throughout the year and now planned to relax and enjoy herself. Her fiancé was a musician in Australia and she intended taking a few months travelling in that general direction. Her final advice to me was “Decide where you're heading and then feed that dream. Surround yourself with friends and colleagues who will help you nourish the dream daily. Find people who will keep you on track.”

An Account of Relationship

Andrew

From day one Andrew made it very clear that he intended to be open and direct with everyone and made a deliberate point of sharing explicit details of his family life at his first staff address. There was some obvious discomfort in places as staff heard about the death of his first wife but it did appear to convince most that he was in fact genuine and very different.

He announced his intention to restructure and refocus the UK organisation by October. I became project-manager for the programmes.

In October I successfully launched his vision to the sales force at their annual conference, in Athens. I spent three days and nights in a hot auditorium with the production crew and various members of the Leadership Team as we put together the final touches and rehearsed the “show”. I sat through each run-through, smiling my usual encouragement and re-writing their scripts for as long as they needed me. Karen thanked me afterwards for being there – always in the front-row, always attentive.

The show was launched on the Tuesday, the first official day of the conference. Video followed music followed presentation followed applause. We had chosen James Brown’s “I feel good” as the theme music. Andrew and Karen received a standing ovation. Andrew was ecstatic, feeding on the hyped atmosphere we had created and insisted on drawing me into the applause. Two weeks later we launched the vision in the UK, at Ascot race-course. It wasn’t appropriate to stage the last scene with the same level of hype. The audience clapped in their seats.

Andrew acknowledged their response, turned, hugged me tightly and thanked me for making it all happen. He said he felt good, “really, really good” but a professional mask had been drawn over the animation.

I don't think I actually felt anything. I should at least have felt pleased. I had successfully facilitated a major transformation in just six months, I had picked up full responsibility for its communication and launch at a critical stage in the project and had set up the project infrastructure that would implement the plans. Maybe I was excited but just not as excited as Andrew? I doubt it. It simply did not mean anything to me, except the achievement of a set of project milestones. I heard the hype, I watched the sales reps become wrapped up in its promises and gradually felt less and less a part of its formation. I had returned from Athens with a sense of a job well-done. I returned from Ascot with a sense of failure.

I decided to take some time out of the organisation in October 2000. I needed to stand back from the deconstruction I was engendering within my 'practice', to concentrate on my research and try in some way to shift the energy I had located in my aesthetic accounts into the forefront of my 'practice'.

On the day of my departure, Andrew held a sort of surprise celebration for me. He'd invited all head office staff and had put together a presentation based on the alphabet, each letter prompting two or three descriptors of me. For “L” he had written “Learning...thank you!” For “Q” he had written “Question and Challenge”. For “T” he had written “Trust and Integrity” and for “V” he had written “Values”.

The photographs of the event show me smiling, a genuine smile of relief as I was finally able to drop the mask and acknowledge such a clear representation of my own 'being'.

An Account of Relationship

Christine

When I write about Christine I sense a momentary dryness of stuck lips as I search for another voice. The account is precious to me and I am almost tempted to put my arms around its images and cradle them separately and secretly. Working with Christine gave me permission – to care, to feel out loud, to sense a value in other relationships and to take a deep breath and admit that I too had a voice. I think I shared it with Andrew just once, when his mother died. Otherwise it remains unheard in my ‘practice’.

It felt like an odd partnership at first. I was constantly re-negotiating her perceived value as she became more and more obviously pregnant and colleagues around us assumed that her attention would be distracted. I started to feel increasingly responsible for her. I remember feeling distinctly uncomfortable each time a senior colleague patted her stomach when he met her but I didn’t know what to do. I half hoped she didn’t mind – but I’m sure she did.

She was constantly but unknowingly challenging my entrenched views on people, organisations and professional ‘practice’. Bit by bit she exposed parts of me that I didn’t recognise. I made no attempt to cover them up. She shared her pregnancy with me, open and direct in her excitement and anticipation. I defended her right to work flexibly, in tune with her body. I couldn’t have anticipated my response. I had expected to become impatient and intolerant of her lack of focus on the job. I think colleagues thought I was “soft”. To me it felt right.

In the eight months we worked together we talked, talked at length. One

by one Christine re-introduced me to people in the organisation, connecting me to the people behind the roles. I met Linda again, our Facilities Manager, and learnt about her plans to retire to Spain. We shared a passion for design and outside space. I met Martin again, and was struck by his amazing capacity for compassion and gentleness. His small, caring voice went unheard in the organisation. He was approaching his fortieth birthday and wanted simply to retreat to a cottage in Pembrokeshire, near St. David's, and spend a few hours absorbing the special tranquillity of the coastal path. We talked for hours about a shared sense of spirituality and of a deep aesthetic response to the beauty of the place.

Just for a moment I could step forward into a different part of my life.

An Account of Relationship

Karen

Karen is several years younger than me and had just had her fourth child when she took up her role. She had a reputation within the close confines of the industry for being focused and single-minded. Other rumours carried accusations of a tough and ruthless management style. I guess it depended on which side of the desk you viewed her from.

I introduced myself to her as soon as I could. I wanted to ensure that she used me to project-manage the department's restructure, overdue by at least a year, and wanted to make sure that she had sufficient support and

a sounding-board during the transition period with the existing incumbent.

Our first meeting was in the foyer of a hotel. Regional meetings were taking place there and Karen and I had agreed to take advantage of the gaps in the timetable. I had carefully put together a detailed plan for the re-structure but was anxious about presenting it in its complete form. My assumption was that Karen would want to show early evidence of her competence in the role and that she would need to feel that she had constructed the plan herself, to feel totally in charge. It was therefore better for me to work alongside her to define the requirements of the plan and then re-construct it together. That way we would work in partnership, Karen would feel in control and I would get the opportunity to validate my prescribed plan.

This was how I created an unintentionally explosive start! Just a couple of minutes into the meeting Karen slashed across my words and accused me of trying to sell to her. She didn't want the preamble – she just wanted the proposal. She didn't want to discuss it with me – she wanted to hear the suggestion, take it away and review it. She didn't want questions – nor presumably did she want to answer any - she just wanted my answers. This was delivered in an exceptionally strident voice, with the occasional expletive thrown in, and raised to such a pitch that the interest of an amused group of colleagues was aroused. I hope they were suitably impressed. The other guests in the hotel I hope were able to ignore us as a couple of eccentric friends.

I was extremely hurt and angry. I had carefully taken an approach that I believed would be empathetic to her situation, and hopefully avoid any threats or implications of greater knowledge. I had deliberately minimised my own expertise to reinforce Karen's. I didn't deserve to be punished for my generosity. And I was embarrassed. I was the one who was being minimised and in front of most of her team. But I didn't feel I had a great

deal of choice. I could retreat, and lose even more credibility, acquiesce and probably still lose credibility, pursue the approach and risk even more abuse or try some sort of combination of them all and try and keep the potential for connection intact. It was the connection that was important to me. I wanted to work with her. So, I immediately endorsed her frankness, calmly and with a smile. I hoped she would understand why I had taken that particular approach and committed to try and work differently with her in future. I suggested we meet in her office in a couple of days' time when she'd had time to review the proposal. She agreed and we rejoined the rest of the group, smiling and chatting amicably and with our positions publicly confirmed.

A few weeks later Karen suggested we have an agreement over "frank talking" – stressing that it must be confidential. She wanted to give me some feedback on my style, privately this time.

She suggested that my consultative style might be a bad thing – it left people thinking that I had the answer but was waiting for them to 'catch up'. Conversely it could also appear weak. I thanked her for the feedback, focusing on maintaining composure and confidence. I was in fact extremely disoriented by the feedback, thinking of similar feedback during a supervision group meeting at the University of Bath and then remembering the anger I had felt at my exposure in the hotel foyer. I felt that something fundamental about my certainty was being picked over, carelessly and coldly, and without any inquiry into how I might feel or even think.

I resorted to the defences of a betrayed silence, with an encouraging smile.

But there was also another side to Karen, a warm and open 'being' that she rarely exposed. I valued these rare moments of immense human

frankness and regretted our constant oscillation between this reality and that of respectful distance. I had a strange sense of working with my own reflected image. I remember clearly the day she was exhausted from working away from home for several weeks and suddenly began to tell me about how she longed for the smell of her baby's skin and how she simply held him close when she finally did get home. It was a very rare moment – a brief but privileged glimpse into another and very separate part of her life. I can always see Karen's immense smile when I think of her, a genuine expression of her very real delight in her life. And just sometimes I remember the times when the smile was simply a mask. I think we learnt to work together in a sort of mutual duping, sharing personal stories of frustration and aspiration but always selective in the boundaries we put around our honesty. I remember when we spent a whole evening talking about where she might go next, about the likelihood of her getting a CEO post one day. And then suddenly she was talking very differently, about her husband who was ill, about the baby she missed so much when she was away, about the sheer exhaustion she felt always climbing and clambering over others or pushing them out of the way.

The next morning she was unsmiling and politely distant. She made it very clear that she had simply been tired the previous evening, that we should not spend so much time talking. She thought we should concentrate on the process of restructuring. I wondered whether I had really been responsible for her personal insights – but respected her secrets. I felt I understood.

In an attempt to make sense of the accounts I deliberately collected together the work of a number of researchers, looking not for a particular position to share but for the creative generation of the type of questions that would help me draw out my own sense and intention. I therefore refer freely to some of the individual ideas of *Lyons (1988)*, *Gilligan (1982)*, *Gilligan in Gilligan*, *Ward*, *Taylor &*

Bardige (1988), *Friedman* (1997), *Mulgan* (1997), *Laing* (1960), *Kegan* (1982), *Buber* (1965), *Whyte* (1994), *Attanucci* (1988), *Goleman* (1996, 1998) and *Marshall* (1984, 2001) – with tremendous respect and appreciation but without a structured format or argument. I engage instead in a form of creative dialogue that allows me to move forward with my research but at the same time acknowledges the nature of their contribution.

As I review the four accounts of relationship I find it increasingly difficult to maintain a firm position around the ‘separateness’ which I have until now taken as my assumed stance. I know that as I begin to engage one by one with notions of give and take, reciprocity, agency, and then cross over the dividing-line into notions of interdependence and communion, I am already moving on.

I start with the definitions of ‘separate’ and ‘connected’ selves put forward by *Lyons* (1988), meticulously attending to the detail of her description as she develops it from *Gilligan*’s studies. I am unfamiliar with this use of the word “*reciprocity*” and want to be very careful that I have fully honoured both her and *Gilligan*’s intended meaning (*Gilligan* 1982). At this stage of my inquiry I take it to mean relationships of mutual respect, maintained through a sense of duty and commitment and by a sense of fairness, and recognise that in these studies these are qualities attributed to the separate/objective self, autonomous in relation to others. I am drawn in by their apparent promises of individuality and self-sufficiency and suspect I might find resonance in definitions of autonomy and agency. In an attempt to tease out the definitions still further I turn my attention to *Lyon*’s contrasting tables of “*relationships of reciprocity*” and “*relationships of response*” and compare my own behaviours to their detail. I score heavily in favour of reciprocity and am not surprised, recognising familiar descriptions of duty and fairness. I then do similarly with her definition of the ‘connected’ self, an essential element of her “*relationship of response*”. I rely on my own understanding of her description as a focus on notions of interconnectedness and interdependence, qualified by a concern for the welfare of others. I start to feel

concerned by my attendant reflections on self-abnegation and subordination and try to let go of their limiting perspective.

I re-focus on *Lyons* and wonder if I have in fact fully appreciated the depth of meaning implicit in her studies and look for further explanation.

In his study of “*connexity*” *Mulgan* (1997) develops both reciprocity and interdependence as key notions in the development of his position on responsibility and freedom. He appears to put reciprocity forward as a balancing principle, as a way of reconnecting “*responsibility and power, means and ends*” (1997: p.15) and positions it as instrumental in the integration of business into society. He warns of the potential risks of autonomy as it takes us to the edge of separateness and threatens to isolate us in our own moral justification. He does however warn that

“people do best when they are cautious reciprocators: that is to say when they are predisposed to trust and cooperate, but will retaliate against people who take advantage of them”. (*Mulgan* 1997: p106)

He therefore appears to be advocating a form of connection that relies on an ethical framework of responsibility and accountability while at the same time respecting a definition of the self as individual and separate.

Friedman (1997) appears to develop a similar position, suggesting that the autonomous self is a relational conception and stressing the role of social relationships and human community as central to its realisation. Both *Friedman* and *Mulgan* are causing me to look more carefully at the full possibilities of reciprocity and I realise I must open up my questions around the boundaries of the definitions and start to ask just how meaningful they are for me.

I pause and check whether the questions appear to be taking me in the ‘right’ direction, benefiting both the inquiry and my interim understanding. I decide to continue in the same direction for a little longer. I am curious.

I am reminded momentarily of the development models which depict a linear track of each individual life passing from dependence, through independence and then finally to interdependence. It is in this final stage of interdependence that we appear to achieve some form of relational wisdom, probably as part of a natural maturing process. I have from time to time found these models useful, primarily as illustrations within one to one coaching sessions, but within this extended context find them increasingly limiting and one-dimensional. I am not sure I am looking for this type of linear explanation and re-focus instead on *Laing’s* certainty (*Laing* 1960) that

“A firm sense of one’s own autonomous identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another”. (1960: p.44)

I hold on to this position, sensing that it might give me a new track for my inquiry and drawn by the notion of relating from an autonomous identity rather than relating as an autonomous identity.

I hold on to this emergent notion, fascinated by the difference inferred by the choice of the word ‘from’ rather than ‘as’. I form a question in my mind, ‘can I be both separate and connected?’ and re-read the accounts to try and start to address the question from this new perspective.

I start with the account of Anne and immediately an animated dialogue starts up in my head. I hear my own voice claiming on the one hand that I was right to take the organisational stance, to focus on ‘doing’, but on the other making me increasingly aware of the abnegation of my own ‘being’. As I coax and persuade the Anne in the accounts to conform to our organisational norms I become increasingly aware of my own imprisonment within a role that has been defined

for me – a ‘significant’ role which appears to confirm my ‘insignificance’. I am reminded of *Marshall*’s conclusion on women managers (*Marshall* 1984) and her suggestion that each is under pressure

“to mute her female sense of self and instead to display her abilities to do and act, and be cognitive” (1984: p.174)

but am not fully convinced about the apparently binary option. I express out loud in the text the huge tension I feel when faced with two different irreconcilable opposites – friendship and professional responsibility. I mention the word ‘duty’, talk of acceptable behaviour and organisational rules, and even now as I review the account still feel strongly the pull towards my stance at the time. I can hear the voice in my head reassuring me that ‘I was right’. And then in complete contrast, towards the end of the account, I share a sense of connectivity as Anne and I hug each other after my emotional outburst and she in fact gives me her full support. And finally Judith shares her notion of personal nourishment

I try and understand the account from within the pre-defined structures of autonomy and interdependence of my fellow-researchers and face up to the challenges presented by *Marshall*’s notion of a dysfunctional “*communion strategy*” (*Marshall* 1984). As she describes the possibilities of a woman manager considering it easier to accept or go along with a stereotyped role rather than resist it I am forced to question my own evidenced choices. Do I in fact seek harmony within a particular environment at all costs, is this my real motivation in taking an ‘organisational position’? *Marshall* appears to imply that this could be a form of self-distortion and suppression, resulting from interdependence. I am startled by this implication of interdependent behaviour, and stare silently at its image for several minutes. I try to hold on to the possibility that this might simply be the reflection of an autonomous and independent professional acting as self-appointed guardian of the rules, appropriate in the circumstances of my professional ‘practice’. I try to maintain a belief in my own separate decision-making, aware that gradually my own doubting questions are beginning to take over. But I am

still sure. I do make a deliberate choice, I stand by my values of order and efficiency.

I decide to suspend any further reflections and decide instead to pursue *Marshall's* notions of 'agency' and 'communion' a little further (*Marshall* 1984, 2001), sensing parallels in my own concepts of 'doing' and 'being' but needing to be certain.

Based on *Bakan's* original thinking *Marshall* explains 'agency' as

“an expression of independence through self-protection, self-assertion and control of the environment” (2001: p.435)

and 'communion' as

“the sense of being ‘at one’ with other organisms or the context, its basis is integration, interdependence, receptivity”. (2001: p.435)

As I sit back and try and absorb the significance of her definitions I realise that I have already started to loosen my tight hold on notions of autonomy and self-sufficiency. I have become increasingly aware of the fundamentalist risks of complete autonomy and am gradually moving my thinking towards the possibilities of connecting from my autonomous identity, just as I understand *Laing* (1960) to be proposing. However, as I begin to consider this connectivity, to consider the parameters of its relationship to the independence of my thinking and sense-making I again look to *Marshall* (1984) to help form the appropriate questions. I focus on her notion of *“enhancing communion with agency”* and believe she is encouraging me to form questions around the potential for a balanced tension and complementarity between the two positions – between an independence-seeking agency and a union-seeking communion.

I pause and carefully consider the implications of her position. I am uncomfortable with it. Within the context of my current understanding it feels like a position of duality, assigning my independence only to my 'doing' and assuming that I can develop and sustain my connectivity simply and solely through my 'being'. 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 resolve to stay with its implications of integration until a new question challenges its utility. It is a question that gains significance in Chapters 6 and 7 as I consider the emergent qualities of my practice of 'being' and then re-emerges in Part 2 as I re-consider the relational qualities of my inquiry practice.

I am reminded of *Kegan* (1982) when talking of the work of Jean Piaget and referring to

“an equilibrium in the world, between the progressively individuated self and the bigger life field”. (1982: p.43)

In a study of human development *Kegan* develops a framework which defines five stages of determining self and its relationship to others and the wider whole of community. Stage five of the model is *“interindividual balance”* (p.103), described as an ability to co-mingle in such a way that distinct identities are guaranteed. I focus in on this emphasis on *“distinct “* identities and am reminded of its centrality in my own thinking – yet limited in its evidence in my accounts of relationship.

I sense I am now moving away from the distinct self-sufficiency of a separate self, and sense I should begin to explore the possibilities of a dynamic interplay between separate and connected definitions. I question whether this inevitably means giving space to notions of dependence and interdependence. *Buber* (1965), in talking of the tension between living from the recurrent impression one makes and maintaining the steadiness of one's being, encourages me to consider both the

disabling and enabling possibilities of ‘affirmation’ and ‘confirmation’. I am uncertain at this stage about my ability to hold them constructively side by side but continue to listen attentively. He implies that in fact we need aware relationship to complete the self, describing it as

“the mutuality of acceptance, of affirmation and confirmation”. (1965: p.71)

He sees it as an intrinsic part of identity. He does not however ignore the potentially dependent nature of confirmation and disconfirmation, and in fact makes it very clear that this can mean part of our identity being in another’s hands.

I take the opportunity to reflect on his words. I am beginning to appreciate a huge difference between the warm feelings of respect and acknowledgement which come through affirmation, and the potential manipulation and disempowering behaviour which emanate from a need for confirmation to provide completeness. I must inevitably ask “can affirmation help develop and sustain identity?”

I remember Judith’s comment to me at the end of Anne’s account, the connection it engendered with my ‘being’ and think I have probably understood the full power of affirmation. For the moment affirmation gives me courage, gives me ontological security in the guise of self-validating certainties. I can track it in my engagement with the work of other researchers in this thesis. I am immensely protective of my own individuality of thought, running the risks of remaining covert in the formative stages rather than expose fragile debates to the argumentation of traditional learning. But as I develop the firm autonomy of my stance in the world I am able to re-connect in my terms, seeking above all resonance in the works of others and the mutuality of a starting-point which will continue my development and growth.

I am inevitably drawn into the account of my relationship with Christine and the profound effect her own connectivity continues to have on my thinking. Working

with Christine I have the clearest evidence of my own changing awareness of relationships, of a new ability to connect with the people behind the roles. I feel exposed as my own aesthetic consciousness begins to find a place for expression. I detect a crack in the cognitive resilience of my mask and consciously run the risk of appearing 'soft'. I take a few moments to consider the implications of my own warning, and detect questions of courage and authority starting to form in my own silence. I realise that I may not yet have developed the appropriate 'public voice' and will constantly return to questions around its expressive form and precise language. But I do know with certainty that I have already taken the first steps towards what *Whyte* calls

"the path of courageous speech". (1994: p.123)

He posits the voice as one of the most important aspects of our identity and I find great resonance in his suggestion that the voice forces us to ask 'who' and 'what' is at the centre of our ability to live the life we choose. He describes it as

"a powerful arbiter of our inner life, our power relationships with others, and a touchstone of faith in the life we wish to lead". (1994: p.143)

Simply by making this text public I am already giving my own voice a new and public form. I am certain about that now.

As I stay with this first clear evidence of my 'being', emergent in my professional 'practice' albeit in a very patchy and haphazard way, I start to pursue my inquiry towards questions of the possibilities of hiding behind the masks of a "*false self*" system (*Laing* 1960) and the need for a certainty of self before sharing it through relationship (*Kegan* 1982). I pick up the suggestions of 'mutual duping' and 'confirmed positions' in the account of my relationship with Karen and begin to focus on the striking difference between the two parts of the account.

In the first half of the account we met each other in a cognitive, role-defined place, each one of us mindful of the relativity of the positions we were negotiating. As positions were confirmed I settled into a comfortable pattern of mutual support, but always with a concern that I might in fact have been over generous in my acquiescence as I concentrated on maintaining our connection. I try and remember just how this felt, and use *Attanucci's* article on the incongruity between self and role (*Attanucci* 1988) to push myself towards a clearer view. She appears to be proposing that there is a potential incongruity between first-person and third-person perspectives on self in relationships, her analysis appearing to assume that our experiences of self emerge through interpersonal relationships. I consider her position for a while, wondering if in fact she is suggesting that we absorb aspects of ourselves as images in a mirror held by someone else. I remember my own impressions of a reflected image as I observed Karen oscillating between her public and private identities.

It is tempting for me to claim disempowerment and minimalisation as I deliberately choose the apparently non-critical voice of confidante and supportive partner. It is relatively easy for me to blame Karen and the political constraints of our organisational infrastructure for the tentative nature of our relationships, to hold up my hands and claim it as inevitable. And it is easy for me to claim that I acquiesce to power positions in organisations and accept their definition of me. But, as I force myself to peer even more closely I realise that my experience is in fact very different. With both Andrew and Karen, and with Anne to a lesser extent, I awarely chose the roles I played as a very real expression of myself. I do not experience myself as a composite of Andrew or Karen's defining perspectives. I do not experience a tension between "*being-for-myself*" and "*being-for-the-other*" (*Laing* 1960) but instead experience what *Laing* refers to as a reciprocal recognition of mine and their identities. I am aware, through my reflective practice, that this is in fact the authentic frame from within which I am operating.

If I am right in interpreting *Laing's* position as meaning 'me as I see me' and 'me as you see me' then I do not believe I have incongruity. I may only be sharing a

part of me, a fraction of my 'being', but I can with certainty now claim that this is an expression of my autonomous identity and not the result of the interdependence and confirmation I had at first assumed. This may include deliberate concealment of other images but it is a conscious concealment and as such feels honest at this stage. It is the fractionation of my 'being' that is significant and new for my understanding, giving me the certainty of a partial identity and leading me to focus increasingly on the uncertainty of a 'lost sense'.

I am struck by this movement in my thinking and push it a little further. I consider *Laing's* suggestion that

"our relatedness to others is an essential aspect of our being, as is our separateness, but any particular person is not a necessary part of our being"
(1960: p.26).

I begin to look for evidence of this in my 'practice' and return to the accounts of Christine and Anne. They have each enabled me to realise a part of my 'being' through their relationship. I am astounded at the disclosure Christine encouraged both in our partnership and in my developing partnerships with other colleagues. I will be continually grateful to her for the human feeling and emotional honesty that she helped me engender in my 'practice'. Anne had a different effect. She caused me to clarify the choices I consciously make and to face up to my own reasons for doing so. She has made me aware of a strong, cognitive focus that until now has lacked the qualifying qualities of a more human consciousness. I recognise the potential to integrate these two, to merge them into a form of sensory acuity, and move my emerging questions into the inquiry in Chapter 3.

I look again at Karen, this time in the second half of the account, and see a mirror image of my own development. I hear her express out loud the courageous voice described by *Whyte* (1994) and am immediately struck by my response. I care and want to protect her, just as I did with Christine. I realise her need to appear eternally competent, to remain in control of the identity she shares in her

‘practice’ and respond cognitively. And I know with certainty that my analytic, cognitive response is not impersonal but is in fact beginning to reinforce the nature of my empathetic being.

I move on to questions of emotional honesty prompted by *Goleman*’s claims (*Goleman 1996*) for “*emotional intelligence*” and think carefully about the evidence of my own authentic expression.

In each of the four relational accounts I clearly record experiences of anger, frustration, fear, betrayal and finally relief. I talk of screaming silently at excuses and obstacles in my account of Anne and the ‘combustible energy of our determination’. I suppress disappointment in my account of Andrew as animation is veiled by a ‘professional mask’ and then contrast it acutely with a description of pent up emotion expressed through a massive hug. I share a warmth of openness and trust in my account of Christine and the exhilaration of being reminded by Martin of my aesthetic consciousness. And in my account of Karen draw deliberate contrasts between the explosive start of our relationship, my controlled response and then glimpses of a personal honesty that engenders vulnerability and its immediate suppression.

However, despite the clear expression in the text, very little of this emotion is actually expressed out loud – and even then is quickly suppressed for fear of judgement and reprisal, or because it simply just doesn’t feel right. In his work *Goleman (1998)* defines “*emotional intelligence*” as

“managing feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively, enabling people to work together smoothly toward their common goals”. (1998: p.7)

He goes on to talk about self-regulation and adeptness in relationships, and shares a notion of influence as the artful handling of another person’s emotions. As I consider his words I am left with an uncertainty about the amount of deliberation

and control inferred in his position, and realise how strongly I am reacting to the language he uses. Yes, I agree that there is an appropriateness that needs to be considered within any specific context, that almost becomes part of our social framework. But to agree with a notion of “*effectiveness*” then I believe I would have to consider that element of choice that I am now in fact challenging. I certainly chose to withhold my expressions of anger and frustration in my accounts, and I may well have been effective in the achievement of my goals by doing so. But how effective is that strategy for the development of my own sense of self, and for the development of mutually beneficial relationships with colleagues? How genuine are we if we continue to withhold aspects of ourselves and continue to work as mere fractions of our whole selves? I am not proposing that we freely vent our feelings without due consideration of the circumstances, or of our (moral) responsibility towards others. I am though suggesting quite clearly that emotional expression is an intrinsic part of my ‘being’ and as such I will give consideration to its ‘public voice’.

I pause for breath and briefly re-consider the themes as I have addressed them, reminded again of the starting-point for my inquiry. I am sure now of the need to integrate rather than polarise my notions of separate and connected, to explore the potential outcomes of a dynamic rather than schismatic interplay between them. I am adopting *Laing*’s notion (*Laing* 1960) of relating from an autonomous identity rather than as an autonomous identity and look forward to its implications in my exploration of a dialogic voice. I am aware now of my partial identity, its fractionation evident in the suppressed voice of my accounts. And I am becoming increasingly confident that as I continue to allow my research to form from these personal insights I am already beginning to shape a coherent sense of my ‘self’ from their living expression.

There are two more accounts of experience that I need to examine before sharing the power of this growing awareness. These accounts share recollections of the impact of meeting certain ordinary people, the de-stabilising effect I experience

through sharing the very different realities of their lives and the unfamiliar strength of generativity I sense in their identities.

The first one is an account of two elderly people I met about four and a half years ago, just before I began my research work. It is an account of the unexpected influence they had on me, of the confidence they gave me to challenge my life with questions. They shared just two weeks with me, an amazingly generous yet unintentional gift of their own aesthetically-centred lives. Together they taught me to value my own instinctive decisions, to look around and absorb the very special and sensory qualities of my environment and probably most importantly inadvertently instilled in me an absolute determination to re-align the core axis of my life.

The second account is slightly different. It shares the detail of a conversation with a total stranger. It was a simple encounter, a gesture of friendship, but its impact penetrated deeply. It has caused me to return to my questions of belonging and to look even more closely at my anticipation of a 'critical consciousness'. I focus on my reaction to the values he freely shared, to the evident certainty of his decision to readjust his family's life and the evident success of having done so. If I could meet him now I would probably ask him just how he had achieved it, and what he had learnt through the decisions. I would know why I was asking and what I would do with the answers. But instead I have to be content with the way it highlights the great chasm I have already stepped into, the loss of identity as my stability has bit by bit been eroded by questions previously suppressed. It has given me courage, a working example if you like of another human being making fundamental changes in their life simply because their human values tell them to. I take courage from his evident delight and warmth, from his genuine expressions of care, and feel that maybe I can begin to make changes in my life.

I need this affirmation, and rely heavily on its reassurances as I move forward in the following chapters to explore Journal images that so clearly place my own changing sense of the world at the centre of my inquiry.

JOURNAL

Three aging adventurers

Three weeks before I was made redundant from ICL I took a two-week holiday in Canada, with my mother. It was a strange choice, to travel with my mother, but maybe in retrospect quite appropriate. I needed to re-frame my relationship with her in free and adult terms. But I doubt whether either of us could have anticipated the process of renewal it in fact engendered.

We set out to visit relatives neither of us had seen for many years. They are both in their seventies and live in a log cabin they have built themselves on Galliano Island, British Columbia. Sylvia and Ken are simply alive, backpacking their way through their lives and filling their home with the images of their memories. They moved to the island over forty years ago to find a small piece of life they could call their own, built their cabin, brought up a family of three children and funded their dream with a small restaurant of just six tables.

They have shared most of their lives together and live with goals so simple that they challenge all the assumptions on which I base my own.

But the challenge wasn't initially a direct one. It emerged from a re-connection with my own physical being, with the same sensory experience I keep trying to grasp in the later accounts of my Journal but which I have so carelessly allowed to fade from my reality. In the mornings of the first week I awoke looking out onto the bay, the corner of the cabin extending out and over the water. A bald-headed eagle sat in the huge tree that overhung the deck. Raccoons appeared outside the door each evening,

looking for scraps of salmon skin and bone. Sylvia put flowers on the breakfast table every day. She planned our meals carefully. We could look forward to mangoes as we picnicked on Bodega Ridge, fresh salmon from their own smokery, wild mushrooms if we could find them. We anticipated each meal with genuine and simple delight.

In the second week we left for an inter-state camping trip. There were no planned comforts - just the open air, remote campsites by rivers and lakes and a hope that we would be in time to see the wild purple lupins. One evening Sylvia and I decided it was too warm to just sit around. It had been hot all day and the lake stretched out calmly for miles. We decided to go for a swim, careless now of anything or anybody around us. It really didn't matter.

The lake enveloped me as I waded in. I had never bathed naked before. The water touched every fragment of me. I felt a new awareness. And I knew with such clarity that the existence I had been calling 'life' was simply a husk, cast aside unneeded by some other living being.

I was engulfed with anticipation.

JOURNAL

A Transformative Encounter

May 11th, 1998

We met a very special, ordinary family on the beach today.

We had spent most of the afternoon watching five children playing together. They appeared quite close in age, between about four and nine we thought. We don't usually spend our time near playing children - we're more likely to move to a quieter spot, resenting an intrusion into our adult space. But these children were different. They were too busy sharing the shells and seaweed to make too much noise. They held hands, jumped in the waves together and constantly ran up and down to their parents, sharing their delight and stories.

There was a tangible thread of connectivity between them all. The smallest of the group was a boy, with blond curly hair. He managed to appear serious and content all at the same time. He was oddly self-sufficient in his playing, smiling to himself as he jumped the waves, but never far away from the rest of the family. He was being watched, carefully, by us and by his family.

As we watched, unobtrusively but carefully all the same, we became aware of the care and concern with which the other children watched their brother, and of their father distantly focused on him. They never interfered with his solo games but nevertheless were present in the space around him. There was a strangeness yet an amazing closeness in this little family group that held us to the beach for the rest of the afternoon, much

longer than we had originally intended to stay. We finally shifted when the evening breeze started to cool the beach.

As we passed him their father spoke and stretched his hand out to shake. He thought maybe we had been disturbed by the children's games and wanted to apologise. We were amazed and told him so. We described the pleasure his children had given us, embarrassed but genuine. He seemed genuinely pleased and began to talk. He described how he and his wife had moved to Cornwall to bring the children up by the beach. They had both changed their working practices to support their decision. He talked of daily picnics after school. He talked about being there for his family, and for his little boy who was terminally ill. I think we simply listened.

He introduced his wife and invited us to join the family for a BBQ. We declined, overwhelmed by his offer of inclusion. We shook hands, and in silence resumed our journey back to the car. We were overwhelmed by their obvious friendship and stunned by our own inability to respond. We knew we were emotionally paralysed.

Chapter 3

Re-tracing spiritual, aesthetic and musical images

As I absorb the connective qualities of these two Journal accounts I start to pick up other vague remembered images, images of music and sensitivity. I distinctly remember the first time I tried to share them with fellow-researchers. It was about three years ago, and I had intentionally introduced them as part of the background to my motivation for research not then realising that they were in reality an integral part of the research itself. The stories became incoherent, choked by twenty years of suppression and the pain of gradual understanding. I held on to some fragments of understanding as I tried to make sense of the jumbled memories but the emotional charge of the unexpected remembering clouded its articulation. In just a few minutes of recall I began to reform years of emotional confusion, starting tentatively towards this ongoing and intensely personal journey of healing and self-transformation but also in the process defining a clear starting-point that was embedded in an overwhelming sense of loss and disconnection.

This was very much an ‘attentional’ dialogue, its format and focus organically shaped by that particular moment but at the same time limited by my ability to properly share the qualities of tension and struggle that ironically were holding me back.

The two related accounts follow.

JOURNAL

Sounds of Music

I was 21 and living in France, working as a teaching assistant in a lycee about 35 km from Toulouse.

Somehow I had become part of the Grizaud family. Paul was a fellow teacher at the school and had introduced me to his wife Ginette and their two children. Alain teased me like a brother, Sylvie copied the way I held my fork at the table. I imagined we were like a family. We travelled together to watch Alain play rugby for his school. I spent weekends in the country, hugged and kissed by elderly members of the family. We ate, drank and laughed together.

And with them comes such a rich glimpse of life that the vague feelings of emptiness and lack of direction are immediately overwhelmed by a flood of rich belonging and sensory depth. How important these chance meetings are in my life, critical glimpses into aspects of myself that can so easily be missed. I panic and commit to nurture them.

I became a part of their lives, enveloped by their natural warmth and fundamental connection with life. We talked, we listened, we shared, always in a language that echoed the richness of our friendship. It's strange how the choice of French or English can still keep the two worlds apart.

Sylvie was learning to play the piano. Paul had rented a piano for her, a stately upright instrument that started life in the hall and quickly progressed to the grand dimensions of the landing. There was no

pressure for her to play – the rental agreement was for one year only. Paul simply wanted to let her try. She started weekly lessons, quickly learning the basic notes and form of the music in front of her. I sat with her as she picked out the simple tunes with a heavy hand, her enthusiasm undaunted by disharmony and shortsightedness.

We sat together for hours, side by side on the same mahogany stool. I taught her to play with a lighter touch, connecting through closed eyes with the unwritten imagery of her music. Together we painted imaginary pictures in notes. She accepted my gift. The rented instrument was replaced by a wonderfully tuned grand piano, Paul's gift to his daughter. Years later Sylvie successfully applied for study at the Lyons conservatoire and she now teaches her own pupils.

We draw pictures in the sound, the imagination of a young French girl, secure in the love of her family, releasing the flood of images compressed by an over-developed intellect. What emptiness that fills. What happiness. What warmth. I wonder if I have ever felt the same before, but lost the memory in the cacophony of my adolescence. Perhaps not. I share a new way of framing my music - I play for hours, Paul or Ginette sitting in the shadows in silence as if they understand.

My gift is affirmed.

I had also become a regular guest at the home of a family near Montauban, the Vignoles. I knew their teenage daughters through a colleague at the school and at the end of my secondment was planning to take the eldest girl to England for a month or so.

The youngest daughter of a colleague was to be confirmed. There would be a formal party for both family and professional colleagues, a celebration of a child's development. I was included as a family friend. I

was asked if I would play the piano for their guests after dinner.

The audience mumbles as a very small girl walks towards the stage. I am four years old. I sit down, legs dangling from an over-large, leather stool, canopied by the black wing of the piano. My knees jerk uncontrollably. I see the faces. I feel the force of my father's belief. And in the silence I play. Music in silence, separate, apart. The applause is an intrusion, a reminder that I am being watched, and finally judged.

I return to sit with my father.

I felt engulfed by the warmth of the invitation, embraced by the sincerity of their family and friendship, and agreed.

I chose the voice of Schubert's 4th Impromptu.

I sit down at the unfamiliar instrument and touch the keys. My friends are silent, breathing softly around me. I feel a tremendous sense of warmth as I prepare to share something of myself with them. I remember their smiling faces, their attentive gestures. The moment is precious in my memory – and the applause deafening as the full force of the emotional tide slams into me.

JOURNAL

A Sales Training Event

In May 1993 I arranged for a small management consultancy firm to work with myself and my team of OD/Change Management consultants to develop our sales skills. The programme was divided into three modules – ordinary modules that would probably make up the core of any sales training programme. The first module went well, enabling us to form supporting learning partnerships and to explore some of our more basic inhibitions in a “cold-call” environment.

I was looking forward to the second module. I knew the two facilitators, Des and Paul, very well and enjoyed working with both them and my team. I felt extremely supported by them all. I had worked in the same company and in the same building and with the same people for several years and had no sense of an alternative way to work. This was my ‘practice’ and I was thoroughly embedded within it.

We were sitting in a plenary session (there were ten of us, plus the two facilitators) exploring potential ways to prepare ourselves, internally, for a sales-pitch. Paul was writing bullet-points on the whiteboard as Des explained the exercise. I remember the heading distinctly, so clearly written in innocuous black letters: “List ten golden moments in your life”. I was working in partnership with Elizabeth at the time, ten years my senior and a close friend since she had facilitated my induction training in 1986. She was now a consultant on my team and we were enjoying the ironies – and challenges - of this organisational juxtaposition.

The object of the exercise was to work together to identify our top ten

golden moments and then learn to access them with all their attendant energies at pertinent points in the selling process. It was meant as a simple but powerful exercise. I recalled powerful images of France and friendship and music.

If I close my eyes and stop their current images I can sense again the sheer panic as it explodes inside me, triggering an inconsolable after-shock of tears and sheer horror at the magnitude of the loss. I try to get out of the room. Elizabeth following me, concerned and silent. I run somehow to the large expanse of space in our Bar cum meeting room. I realise there are people there, people I work with, people I work for, people who work for me. I sit in a large dark green armchair in one of the corners of the room, Elizabeth next to me – still silent but amazingly protective against inquiring eyes. Des and Paul join us a few minutes later, concerned for the impact on their client and determined to pick over the aftermath. Elizabeth asks them to wait awhile and they join her in the silence.

I flounder in their public gaze, struggling with levels of emotional consciousness which threaten every word I try to form. The voices in my mind desperately try to remind me of who I am, where I am and what I should be. I try to tell myself that I should not be behaving like this, publicly and out of control. I try to breathe, to straighten my face from its embarrassing distortion. I try to create words that will take over, calmly and normally. And all I can do is cry – cry for seventeen-year-old images.

These are intensely personal experiences, experiences that are part of me and which are allowing me gradually to find form in their lived expression. I need to stay with these particular accounts for a while. I need to try and understand the sense of loss they engender, to derive some understanding from the depth of feeling they still stir up. What is this sense of something ‘other’ that just

occasionally comes fully into focus – and then disappears, leaving a bereft space of memory and anticipation?

I am increasingly sensitive to its possibilities. Just occasionally I can write from deep within it, still connected to its energy and aesthetic form. If I try to extend its images though I can only form pale echoes in the pages of my Journal. I cannot construct it or re-construct it – I can simply feel it and try and live it. There are very few words I can use to describe it. I use the word ‘deep’ and refer to the inside place it touches, a silent, increasingly confident place. I talk of connection and re-connection and mean a sense of balance and integration between my inner and outer worlds and the aspects of voice that express them. It has something to do with a fundamental connection with my own innate ability to form and share music, my responsiveness to a natural, aesthetic world and the formation of relationships which both respect and honour the gifts and fragility of each one of us. It is about creating attentive space in my life, and in my ‘practice’, as a way of ‘being’ in that life that keeps me open to the possibilities of these new connecting spaces.

I have a sense that I am on the edge of my own experience – peering sometimes too closely with the focus of a researcher yet at the same time inextricably immersed in a sense of emergent meaning. I include the following two Journal entries in an attempt to understand even more – to somehow review what it is that has propelled me so far and which is now shrieking out for attention. I wrote the pieces to try and hear out loud the questions which are forming in my mind, to hear how I am starting to answer them and to see just how far and in what form I can extend the dialectic into a fully-formed inquiry. I hang my optimism on these words by *O’Donohue*, author of “*Eternal Echoes: Exploring our Yearning to Belong*” (1999)

“The question is the place where the unknown becomes articulated and active in us. The question is impatient with the unrevealed. It reaches forward to open doors in the unknown” (1999: pp.238-9)

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First Glimpses

The climb is steep down to the beach, loose rocks and boulders constantly moving underfoot. It's still early morning but the sun has already reached the immense bluebell patches, their vivid blue clinging perilously to the cragged cliffs. The air is clear to breathe. The breeze is cooling in its presence. There are no birds, no people. We are enveloped in the surround sound of the air we breathe and the constant movement of the sea below us.

The beach is hard and flat underfoot, the rocks immense as they rise up around us, jostling for space in this tiny cove. Water pours freely through their hidden gaps as the tide retreats. There are no secrets here.

I cautiously step into the black shadow of an overhang, one hand still feeling the warm sunlight as it holds me back. As I push my head forward into the darkness I momentarily lose balance. I let go the rock and reach out both hands to steady myself. Both feet touch wet, hard sand. Both hands sense empty air. For a moment I am blind - the blackness of the cave swamping all my awareness. I panic in the silent emptiness.

And then gradually, one by one, I become aware of each sense returning, each one stronger than before. First I feel the warm patches in the cave's atmosphere, patches of air warmed by some unseen energy. Next, I feel a drip of water touch my shoulder and then dissipate into a damp trickle. My feet are heavy in their leather walking boots, the socks softly rubbing my ankles. I can hear the echoes of the sea. I can smell the dampness of the rocks. I can hear the rhythm of my own breathing.

I know that I am alive.

JOURNAL

Amroth

I sat facing the sea today, feet dangling over the edge of the wall. I was alone. A couple of oyster-catchers balanced on one leg while a squawking group of sea-gulls ran in and out of the incoming tide like young children on their first summer holiday. The sea was rough, thick white lines banding across the horizon and I tried my voice out loud. It was inside my head at first, a familiar sense of words forming within a vacuum. I looked round to make sure nobody was listening – only the blank boarding on the houses waiting for the next rough tide. I tried again, this time managing a sort of seagull sound. I tried again and then again, forcing myself to articulate the words clearly and deliberately. It somehow felt right to do so in front of a clear sky and an empty sea. “I can feel it! It’s here, it’s in my life”.

I sat for a bit longer, making sure no-one had heard me. I waited for the tide to recede but it kept on coming. I gave up waiting and walked back up the path towards the house.

In the first of these accounts I simply describe the sensory reality of an experience that moved my consciousness away from my intellectual processing and pushed it increasingly towards a sense of connectivity with a natural, real world. I track the parallel journeys as I both physically make my way across the beach and pick up the steps of my progress towards something very different. Yet increasingly as I re-read the account I begin to understand more. I start to pay attention to the sounds, to the colours, to the cool and clear air. I pause to consider the

implications of the constant ebb and flow of the tide and easily sense again the sheer panic of finding myself in an unlit and silent blackness. I know that on that day I began to feel a certainty of connection that was different from the certainty I had thought I would find.

In the second account I had deliberately set out to try and move my thinking forward. I was spending a week on my own in a remote cottage in Wales, with the sole intention of giving my full attention to my thesis. It was intended as a sort of retreat. So far I had spent three days in utter silence, desperately trying to organise my thoughts into some sort of structure but failing miserably each time I tried to draw some sort of boundary around it. I was surrounded by flip-charts and yellow post-it notes, my creativity reduced to a neat ordering process. Each time I approached the discipline of my own format I felt I was suffocating. I needed to stretch out, to breathe freely, to simply be. So, I went for a walk. It was about two miles down to the beach, following a path that kept parallel with the river from the garden down to its escape at the base of the cliffs. As I walked I intentionally made myself aware of my physical being, the way in which I walked, the feel of my feet in my boots, the noise my coat made as I swung my arms. The more I walked the easier it became. I began to listen, to listen not only to my walking and to the sounds in the trees but also to the quieter voice that was beginning to form a new quality of thought. I was still thinking about connectivity, about its real meaning for me, impatiently pushing the earlier debates on autonomy and interdependence out of the way as I tried to listen to the new inquiry.

As I reached the beach, deserted because of the imminent gale and high tide, I suddenly realised that I was 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 couldn't articulate it. I am still trying to do that, throughout this thesis. But I did know that I had experienced it, and that I could write about it. I experienced such a tremendous feeling of achievement that I just needed to express it out loud, shouting it out into the wind without caring for once about the impression I was creating.

At that moment I experienced such an intensity of awareness that it pierced through the paralysis of my cognitive uncertainty and instead propelled me unremittingly into a new place of energy and living form. That remembered sense of confidence is still with me and I know with certainty that it is this quality of connective space that I am attempting now to live out as my living 'practice'.

I am sensitive to the sounds of my own voice tentatively searching for expression and detect the same emotional fragility that engendered the original response. As I stand back and try and view the text with a practitioner-researcher's critical eye I see the living expression of the vibrant images of an emergent aesthetic awareness, an affirmative space in which my reality seems to gain a new substance. I feel that I belong within this expression of my identity. I experience a tremendous sense of relief and delight as I articulate this new certainty. I need to pause and appreciate that certainty.

I know that I face the challenge of representing my experiences in such a way that you can appreciate this emerging 'truth'. I am aiming to share the experiential nature of my sense of connectivity, to make it clear that this is what is now forming 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 have deliberately formed 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 share *O'Donohue's* sense of language when he writes:

"Language has a secret life, an undercurrent murmuring away, audible in rhymes and rhythms, ambiguities and assonances". (1999: p.125)

Throughout my thesis I am aware of attempting to hold together the tension of my own rational and structuring role as a practitioner-researcher and the creative nature of my own emergent understanding. On the one hand I am intent on producing a coherent, explanatory text and on the other am allowing a meaningful and fluid structure to form which I hope enables you to share the reflective nature of my own developing understanding. I find it particularly difficult to hold the two side by side in this part of the work. I am tempted to dive straight into the richness of other, similar accounts, enjoying their life-affirming images and firmly positioning my attention from within their reality. But I know that first I must understand them more, be clear in my expression of their meaning and significance, explore their potential resonance in the work of fellow researchers and look for those questions that will challenge each word of my articulation. This is part of the robust and ongoing validation of my research process and a discipline that holds together the emergent form of my writing.

When I look at the form of this rational and structuring role in my professional 'practice' I hear it in the form of a strident voice, a cognitive and analytical capability that leaves very little space for the qualitative depth of my 'real' consciousness. This is my 'thinking mind', that aspect of my presence that projects itself through a mix of analytical capacity and cognitive acuity. It relies on the constant habit of questioning, creating only an illusion of certainty, of truth and of temporal relativity. I have until now referred to it as my 'conscious self', that part of self that creates an 'ordered, cognitive world', but now find it more useful to refer to it as my 'thinking mind'.

It is a capability that apparently creates order and reassurance in an otherwise confusing world. It is a processing capability that I have deliberately and carefully

developed as I have sought to make sense of my life. It has above all enabled me to remain resilient and cope with life's unanticipated dives and turns and I do not have any intention of diminishing its value as I explore this other, aesthetic source of meaning making. My intent is simply to redress the balance, to carefully shift this energising source of my identity from its occasional awareness and to re-place it at the centre of my consciousness. This is not about conflict or dealing with irreconcilable tension. This is about the richness of harmony and integration and balance.

In terms of its ability to assemble elements in a usable and useful format this analytical capacity may well have similarities with the "*focal awareness*" of *Polanyi* (1962). He defines "*focal awareness*" by differentiating it from "*subsidiary awareness*", using his assessment of a pianist as an illustration. I find this particular choice of example extremely pertinent. He appears to be proposing that the two are mutually exclusive. The pianist makes some form of choice depending on whether he is practising or performing, intentionally learning a skill and the detail of composition and then presenting it in the form of a gift of performance with a very different sense of awareness. *Claxton* (1997) uses the word "*intellect*" to describe a way of knowing that relies on reason and logic, referring to it as "*deliberate conscious thinking*". Like *Polanyi* he borrows his illustration from the arts, quoting the sculptor Henry Moore as saying:

"The artist works with a concentration of his whole personality, and the conscious part of it resolves conflicts, organises memories, and prevents him from trying to walk in two directions at the same time". (1997: p.95)

In as much as he is talking about a deliberate process then I think I find his differentiation useful. Again he is talking of an ordering, organising capability, and introduces the suggestion that constantly living under the "*bright lights*" of such a consciousness may in fact become overwhelming. I have some empathy with this.

It is though that ‘other’ consciousness that I am now attempting to name and nurture, that experiential sense of connectivity forming vaguely at the centre of my reality but still not in focus. I have begun to refer to it as a ‘lived consciousness’, an ‘integrative consciousness’, drawing parallels with *Bravette*’s (2001) use of “*critical consciousness*” as a description of her ability to look at the world from the centre of her reality but as yet not looking much beyond that affirmation.

I begin to sense a resonance with the “*subsidiary awareness*” of *Polanyi* (1962) and find it extremely similar to *Goleman*’s description of “*flow*” (*Goleman* 1996), a “*state of self-forgetfulness*”. “*Flow*” appears to describe a state of positive, channelled, energy that transcends the self-conscious acts of organising and thinking and absorbs the individual in the sheer pleasure of the act itself.

I play for a moment with the notions of *Husserl* (1965), *Claxton* (1997), *Abram* (1996) and *Berman* (1984) but without any intention of probing any one of them beyond their superficial description at this stage. It is sufficient that I am simply aware of their differences and similarities. *Husserl* appears to use the word to define a consciousness of a higher order, a “*transcendental consciousness*” which implies a disembodied, transcendental ego. *Abram* uses the term in a similar way (*Abram* 1996), implying an ability to absorb and become immersed in a sensuous world. The “*participatory consciousness*” of *Berman* (1984) is situated within questions of knowing and belonging, seeking to give meaning to the context in which each one of us can achieve wholeness. *Tolle* (1999), a ‘new-age’ thinker and writer on cosmology is clear in his differentiation of thinking and consciousness, situating thinking as “*a small aspect of consciousness*” as he pursues his argument in favour of a deeper and truer source of “*self*”. *Claxton* develops a notion of the “*undermind*” (*Claxton* 1997), coming close to a definition of intuitive or instinctive knowing. Through his imagery of the mind living in the “*shadowlands*” he manages to convey a sense of “*lost awareness*”, of an ability naturally placed in each one of us but ignored or de-valued as we rely on “*deliberate conscious thinking*”.

I have also tentatively looked for potential resonance in the spiritual awareness of *Redfield* (1997) and the “*spiritual intelligence*” of *Zohar & Marshall* (2000). I am cautious as I step into this vast field of belief and ritual, carefully holding on to my original intent of looking for resonance and explanation of a quality of awareness whilst remembering the context of my overall inquiry – my professional ‘practice’. It is for that reason that the dialogue I include here may seem limited. It is not intended as a critique of popular spirituality, but rather an inquisitive dialogue into those aspects of ‘other self’ and ‘other knowing’ which may or may not help interpret my own realities. It is simply an example of letting go of the intentional track of my inquiry and allowing my attention to be drawn towards other questions that I have not pre-defined. I find it useful to continue for just a little while longer.

In the context of his belief that we are only now realising the cost of a limited cosmology *Redfield* talks of a repression of our “*higher spiritual perception*” (*Redfield* 1997), suggesting that it has inevitably narrowed our human experience. It is this repression that he encourages us to break through, challenging the contemporary world-views which may be holding us back. It is this notion of repression that particularly interests me, carrying with it implications of something lost or something denied. It has certain resonance with my own sense of lost connectivity, of a sense of disconnection from something precious and meaningful, and I find it useful for a while to borrow its focus on an intuitive recognition of a suppressed quality of perception.

Zohar and Marshall (2000) appear to develop their notion of “*spiritual intelligence*” in the context of a search for meaning, for an overall context for our lives. They talk of being brought into

“*dialogue with the centre of the self and its special way of knowing*” (2000: p.112)

and begin to develop a notion of the integrative capacity of this form of the self. As I look more carefully at their integrative claims I am drawn into their imagery of music and promises of human potential and stay with their text a little longer. They talk of transforming ‘consciousness’, of discovering deeper layers of self than we are used to living. They talk of finding some grounding in the self for “*meaning that transcends the self*”, of a fuller self which possesses a “*deep sense of the interconnectedness of life*”.

I am overwhelmed by their promises and pause for a moment to consider the possibilities.

I have no doubt that we share the same intent – to realise a powerful sense of connection and deeper, conscious self and place it irrevocably at the centre of our lives. I have no doubt that we are each searching for a way to express our innate sense of belonging, to grasp the potentiality, and inevitably the limitations, of an ‘other’ way of knowing which seems to have the power to integrate all our other forms of awareness. But I am left wondering just how they will move their intention forward, just how they are founding it on the experiential realities of their own lives.

Whyte takes the discussion a stage further and into an applied reality as he develops his unusual role as a poet writing about the “*life of the soul*” in corporate America (*Whyte* 1994). He introduces the concept of the “*soul*”, that part of ourselves that has been forced underground by the repressive and suppressive tensions of our very separate work lives. He explains his view:

“soul...is the indefinable essence of a person’s spirit and being. It can never be touched and yet the merest hint of its absence causes immediate distress”. (1994: p.9)

He again is talking about a source of uniqueness, of a personal source of artistry, creativity and meaning, and stresses that it must remain as an integral and present part of our selves.

Rowan moves me on much further (*Rowan* 2001), developing a compelling argument against any possibility of a permanent “*real self*”. Having put forward the position that there can be no fixed, consistent self he then qualifies it by considering three alternative models. He considers the possibility of a relational self, a self that can only be considered real in a particular context, and suggests that this self can only be the sum of current truths. He then considers an alternative model, of self as a holon – a whole in relation to its own sub-parts but still only a part in relation to its bigger context. Aspects of both make sense for me – the inherent uncertainty in trying to re-claim a fundamental, authentic self and the unavoidable interconnectivity of both my whole self and the separate parts of my self. It is his third model though that pushes my own thinking on, resonating with my own notions of the experiential nature of the aesthetic and spiritual awareness I am trying to understand.

Rowan proposes that the “*real self*” would be better described as an experience rather than a theoretical construct. He describes the experience as

“the feeling of being in touch with my own centre, my inner identity, my true self, my authenticity – that self which lies behind or beyond all self-images or self-concepts or sub-personalities”. (2001: p.115)

I pause, and realise that this is the resonance I have been searching for, a description of a rich sense of self held in the organic fluidity of a conscious experience of living in aesthetic and spiritual connection with the world. As I reflect on the full impact of the resonance of *Rowan*’s meaning I reach out and lightly touch the words “*centre*”, “*identity*” and “*authenticity*”, recognising the goals that hold me firmly focused within the dialectic of my own research and celebrating their familiarity.

It is this notion of self, and its description in experiential terms, that now begins to form the focus of my research, propelling me into new questions of language and the full implications of the experiential and sensory nature of this 'other consciousness'. This is the integrative, lived consciousness I have been trying to understand and articulate. I am grateful to the breadth of dialogue that has brought me this far and reflect for a moment on the richness of such an eclectic mix of writers. More and more they are becoming an integral part of my research and learning process, enabling me in these early stages to clarify my strands of thought before moving on to develop the increasingly challenging dialogues of Part 2.

I now feel that I can return to those other accounts of my experience and share more of the brief images that have caused me to stop and stare. These are the images that have helped me move forward, each one approaching a new and deeper understanding of this awareness I am calling my aesthetic and spiritual consciousness. As I recall each of the experiences I am at the same time overwhelmed and enriched by their sheer immensity, encouraged to push away the boundaries of my language as I try and create a living and shared expression of the moment.

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Further Glimpses

Image 1

The cliffs are hot today. The stonechats are singing in the gorse, their orange chests puffed out beneath their black caps. The sea is still. The wind is quiet.

We trudge on in the heat, five undulating miles. We are tired, cross and bereft. There is no magic. We must cross a road, follow a detour, pass close by people's homes.

We are silent.

We reach the cool shade of trees and wonder whether this is our destination - the dusty remains of an ancient castle crumbling close to the cliff-edge. We sense there is more and push our bodies on. We reach the hard, hot streets of a large town. People stare at our booted, dusty appearance. We step out of the way of cars. We trudge on.

And then a sound - a single sound. We turn a corner. The world is changed.

A small band of children, neatly dressed in rows of white and blue, sit in the middle of a cobbled square, a crowd of people grouped around them. The living voice of the harbour hums the tune of yachts and boats in the undulating breeze. We stand transfixed as the first notes fill the air, rich brass harmonies perfectly in tune. They play melody after melody, their leader holding them together in his own belief and energy. One small boy and a trumpet stand up to play, alone. I cry as the notes silence the crowd in their talent, a shiver creeping over my body.

The magic is broken as the crowd applauds the gift they have been given, each one of us bereft by our own enrichment as the concert comes to an end. Within minutes the gleam of brass has disappeared into bulbous black cases, folded chairs lie in neat piles and we are simply two dusty people in an empty square.

Slowly we return to our scorching cliff, silent and cool.

Image 2

I know that as I open the door a new world will be revealed.

This moment is precious. I must open it only slowly - releasing nature's notes one by one into the green space around me. A blackbird reaches for its harsh top-notes; a distant echo reassures him he is not alone. Two doves flap their wings clumsily in a nearby tree, their faint dialogue soft and rhythmic on the air. I push the door a little further and sense the warmth of a wren's song, my body penetrated by its purity.

Suddenly I feel fear. I am aware that I must make a choice - I can stay with the door slightly ajar, absorbing only filtered sounds into my starving body or I can push the door wide open, stretching my entire being towards the arching sounds.

I pause only for breath as I fling the door open and step out into the evening sun, nourished by its warmth and promise.

Image 3

The path descends into a small ravine, water pouring from its side in bubbling jets. A house clings to the edge, one side flattened against the grey granite of the cliff. We turn towards the path and climb.

My eyes connect with the beauty of the mist, the veiled outlines of yellow gorse and pink specks of ling emerging with new brightness. I am hypnotised by the easy flight of the gulls, struck by their trust in hidden streams of air. They have no questions. They have no limitations.

The mist clears as we step out from the gloom of the dripping, shrouded trees, their faint smell of pine tingeing the air. A single thread of sunlight draws a direct line from our path to the bottom of the ravine, feathered with palmed shadows. Our eyes are drawn along its straightness until they rest on the white walls of the cottage, only partly concealed in its green secrecy. As the path of light broadens and the mist quietly disappears nature's sound drops its notes one by one into this suspended time. As the notes join and echo across the valley the scene takes on colour - the green lightening and darkening with emerging leaf-shapes, the flowering shrubs warming with their pinks and yellows and reds. A meadow of uncut grass gently curves into the distance, carrying with it the bent heads of fritillaries. We cannot speak. We cannot move. We are absorbed.

Image 4

The scent of azaleas pervades the air, overwhelming every pore. We stand and stare - the white glint of the distant sea a beacon on the horizon.

We stand and stare, familiar now with the wordless energy pouring into our stillness. We breathe in unison. The sound of dripping water punctuates the air.

We both sense it at the same time – quietly and softly at first, faint clouds of sweetness in the breeze. We struggle to breathe it in. It grows in stature, its power expanding on the wind. Our awareness shifts. Our minds are still. We stand open.

We are saturated by its presence.

Chapter 4

Sharing the emergent qualities of my aesthetic and spiritual connectivity

4.1 Celebrating the life-affirming energy of my own 'exquisite connectivity'

As I gather together these living images of my Journal, tentatively embracing the authentic power of my own form of belonging, I sense that I can now bring each fragment of understanding together in the certainty of a new and meaningful ontology. I take time to consider the possibilities.

I believe that through my inquiries I am forming and articulating an ontology that is founded on my own aesthetic connection with the world, the embodiment and enactment of my own spirituality and sense of belonging. Over the last five years of my research it has gradually emerged from the inquiring strands of my search for connectivity, from my search for meaning in life and from a search to understand my own spiritual sense of the world. As I have become increasingly familiar with its articulation I have begun to experience a new quality of awareness, a new sense of reality previously obscured behind the confines of my cognitive structuring and balancing. Much of the time I have felt frustrated with my limited ability to grasp and value its potential generativity, pursuing sometimes a very lonely path in order to protect and understand my own fragility. But it has also allowed me to take my time, to listen to all the attendant anxieties and then gradually find my own form of expression in the recollection and creative account of my experiences.

I have tracked 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 a 'practice' devoid of this life-affirming attention.

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, and move outwards from there to re-define my ‘practice’? 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?

The questions are frightening in their implied expectations. I know that I need to limit their scope, at least for the moment.

In the introduction to my thesis I describe my inquiry as a transformative journey, attempting to give it some implied progression and sense of direction without excluding the possibilities of unanticipated diversions. I have already explained that the main purpose of the research is to try and understand, grow and share my own emergent sense of connection in and with the world. It is a journey of ‘intentional’ and ‘attentional’ dialogues taking me into related issues of voice, dialogue and relationships. I have already shared some of the experiences that brought me to this place, accounts extracted from my personal Journal and each with a valid and meaningful place in my developing understanding.

I now have the qualities of my aesthetic and spiritual awareness at the forefront of my consciousness, clear in its experiential nature and distinct in its sensory containment. I can sense its energising spirit, trace a line under its defining features and know with certainty that I can now awarely try and place it as a new framework of consciousness at the centre of my life. I understand the need to balance my ‘being’ and ‘doing’. I appreciate the contrapuntal harmony of my cognitive and sensing awareness, and am beginning to enjoy their integration in my new and fragile knowing.

As I carefully lift out each theme as it emerges in the text and re-place it within my inquiry framework, I begin to form two streams of thought around these certainties:

- the affirmation of my connected ‘being’
- the life-affirming energy of my own aesthetic consciousness

I need a way in which I can share and sustain the power of this combination, a unity of belief and purpose and expression that is enabling me to live my life more fully and from within a sense of coherence and integration. It is a constancy that flows through my life, a quality of awareness and connectivity that sustains me through the cacophany of my life, filling me with a calm sense of belief and a certainty of belonging that now allows me to turn my attention to my relatedness to others.

Together these are now forming what I can only express as my ‘exquisite connectivity’, my own empowering sense of ‘being’ gently held within a particular place of belonging in the world. And slowly I am learning to enjoy it.

As I move forward with the certainty of my own perceptions, I find myself increasingly alert to what *Abram* (1996) describes as “*an intuition of beauty*” and become increasingly certain of my own reality through the shared accounts of my own subjective experiences. As I re-read *Fox*’s description (*Fox* 1983) of beauty as an “*experience of cosmic wholeness, of harmony*” I wonder if in fact I am defining my own cosmology – a cosmology centred on an aesthetic connectivity. But I leave the question unprocessed, avoiding the temptation to label my own fragile knowing.

For the moment it is sufficient for me to deal with the vulnerability that my vacuums of unknowing inevitably cause me and move forward into the new experiences of relationship and the musical nuances of an authentic voice in a shared world. I read this quote from *Chappell* (1993) out loud:

“goodness is not only a beautiful sunset but an invisible energy that, when harnessed, can bring people together” (1993: p.215)

and am content for the moment to stay with a sense of anticipation.

4.2 Developing language as a living expression of my aesthetic and spiritual consciousness

Both the form and the formation of my language play a complex and intricate role in the creative development of my inquiries. On the one hand I am held strongly aware of its presence through its unity of composition and aesthetic balance while at the same time I am reminded of its prominence as the subject of my thesis as I explore its living expression as the embodiment of my fragile spirituality.

I constantly return to my own intentional musicality, finding clear echoes of my own sense of rhythmic flow in *O’Donohue’s* description of language as *“audible...rhymes and rhythms, ambiguities and assonances”* (1999: p.125).

Language and its expression through written text represents an emergent sensibility to the music of the living world for me, carrying with it a very personal promise of new forms of music in my life. I am above all endowing my writing with a very particular and significant role, pre-empting a detailed exploration of this understanding of language as a living expression of an emergent sensibility to a connective world subsequently developed in Part 3, Chapter 15.

I am fully aware of the arguments that could and do challenge my position on this. How can I justify a dependence on language as my sole representational form when I am emphasising above all the sensory nature of the experiences at the heart of the accounts? How can I explain my choice of the written word and the integral role I give to my use of language and aesthetic expression? How can I explore my ability to take written language beyond the boundaries of presentational form and re-form it as an extension of the experience itself?

I am aware of some of the arguments that might dissuade me from trying.

In his essay on language *Heidegger* (1971) asks what it is to speak, warning that in many cases we hear only the residue of previous words. This would seem to imply a limited ability for a reader to let go of the confines of personal experience and step forward into new and exploratory spaces accompanied simply by the novel expressions of another's experiences. *Maslow* (1970) expresses an equally sceptical view. He starts to hint at the limitation of language when he suggests that it is primarily an excellent means of experiencing and communicating "nomothetic information" or as a form of rubricizing. Others have hinted at the need for visual image to compensate for language's inadequacy, searching for alternative presentational forms that for them represent an extension of their linguistic expression. I both admire and respect their choices.

I do not however share their satisfaction and over and over again return to the possibilities of language. In his work on separating out the qualities of our thinking processes *Claxton* (1997) draws my attention to the different quality of response we exercise towards the words of a poet, describing the initial response we each of us have to the literary expression of a poem. He puts forward the notion of an un-critical respect for a poet's words. I stay with this idea for a while, struck by the implied differentiation between the response to a writer as a narrator and the response to a writer as poet. I look around for other views. *Derrida* (1992) presents style and art as inseparable from his philosophical concerns, encouraging the boundaries between philosophy and literature to become fuzzy in their distinction. In his development of poetic language *Merleau-Ponty* (1992) consistently describes in an active voice, speaking of each phenomenon as an active, animate entity with which he is engaged. In this way he affirms its living nature, honours rather than represses the direct experience and allows his words to emerge directly from within. *Fox*, in his description of spiritual awakening (*Fox* 1983), suggests we should let go of our overdependence on words as we allow

images, symbols and pictures to emerge and express them in multiple creative forms. Poetry though he sets aside as different. Of poetry he says

“poetry is more than words, it is the retrieving of language and of the symbolic energy that words ought to possess”. (1983: p.194)

As I step back from each of them and consider the implications of their views I am increasingly drawn towards their 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 read more of *Abram*'s work and begin to appreciate the resonance of his implications of the interconnectedness of language and sensory experience. I find these words of his greatly encouraging:

“our task, rather, is that of taking up the written word, with all its potency, and patiently, carefully, writing language back into the land. Our craft is that of releasing the budded, earthly intelligence of our words, freeing them to respond to the speech of the things themselves – to the green uttering-forth of leaves from the spring branches”. (1996: p.273)

I pause to think for a while, careful about the implications of aligning my approach to his stated intention. Am I claiming to be a poet? Should I be drawing boundaries here? 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, then yes, I am considering myself a poet. It feels right to be able to say that. As I continue to focus on developing my written expression as an integral part of my research I can review it in much the same way as I would assess the words of a poet, looking for qualities of sensory perception and natural fluidity. I consider adding 'poet' to my researcher identity.

I form new questions around the generative power of this expression of 'exquisite connectivity', and specifically ask just how it is helping shape my understanding of my emergent knowing. I take the question forward into Chapters 6 and 7 as I

begin to explore the creative process that has now evolved as my creative art of inquiry. I begin to focus on its defining qualities, consciously deriving them from within the integrative consciousness of my 'exquisite connectivity'. And as I begin to sense that I am in fact describing an art, an art of dialogic inquiry, I form the next and inevitable question around my connectivity. Can this art of inquiry engender the mutuality and creative partnership of human relationship?

I pause to absorb the generative power of this 'exquisite connectivity' and share its embodiment in the following Journal account.

Chapter 5

JOURNAL

The Emergence of a Researcher

Today I have turned my back on the view outside the window. I plan to assemble my feelings and thoughts into some ordered form. A stream of questions, dialogues and propositions lie on my desk, their themes clearly visible through their transparent plastic folders. The familiar pile of pencils lies sharpened and aligned to the square edges of my notebook. I am impatient to start, to rush headlong into the frenzy of a familiar and paralysing path, like a moth batting into the dusk illuminating lamp.

I close my eyes and wait for the first words to form. I anticipate a rich dialogue, the multiple voices of my conscious knowing jostling for hearing space. I remain motionless. I strain to hear their familiar counterpoint.

And one by one they each respond with silence.

I feel momentary panic. The noise of silent questions floods my conscious thoughts. I must breath. I open my mouth to utter the silent "Aaagh" of my Alexander training and become conscious of the tension wiring together my body. As I continue to breathe the tension releases. I hear the words of my teacher: "let go of the weight of the head" and sense its true meaning. A smile spreads across my body, the only movement its natural ebb and flow.

I realise how tired I am of constant struggle. How tired I am of clinging to rigid form and expectation. I imagine a weightless sensation, absorbing sounds, smells, images - a warm smile spreading from within. I am

shocked at my reluctance to let go of the very ties that choke me - crying out for the nourishment of rich reflection.

I sink into the silence gratefully.

I move my gaze very slowly from the channels of my mind. I feel the slowing of my breath as I rest my awareness on the natural, gentle flow of my body's natural rhythm in its new physical presence - one of balance and painless movement.

Gradually I hear the repeated echoes of two questions: **“Who am I as this researcher?”** and **“What is this research?”**

In the faint distance I hear the return of the familiar voices, their chatter incessant. One by one I reach and switch them off. Next come the images - dear faces amongst the censure - and one by one I cause the pictures to fade.

I am left with the impact of a familiar image - large, sad eyes shining out of a tiny frame waiting patiently but with the same reproach. I want to cradle her in my arms, to envelop her thinness with my own. I want to match my heartbeat to hers and feel the strength of the beat. I feel kindness towards her yet am intimidated by her quiet energy. I want to embrace her and feel our combined forms emerge in the strength of one.

I feel I am ready to make a tentative reply to the first question: “Who am I as this researcher?”

When I began on this journey I announced my departure as “a search for non-linear forms of planning”. I believed it - it appeared logical, the words were not dissimilar to those heard around me, and it sounded sufficiently impressive. This journey after all was about impressing - about accolade

and approbation. It would stamp me with a giant label of “approved”.

I feel embarrassed that I have written that but will not delete it. My naïveté and desperation flood me with hot rivers of shame. I cannot delete that either.

Do I see the world with any deeper clarity now? Perhaps. I have a sense of an emergent power, calm but passionate in its essence. I have a sense that I am on the edge of Knowing. It is both me and my research. It is the way I live, and the way I connect to living. It is no clearer than that. My conscious mind would seek to pursue a greater clarity. Deep down I am content to live the uncertainty, cut adrift in a world of unknowing, sustained by an unseen energy.

My research has become an integral part of my life, a permanent way of being - the presentation of papers an incidental in a lifelong journey. I need to feel a passion and exhilaration that will propel me to do more than poke into corners. I need to feel that I am sustained by my own life-affirming energy - yet at the same time I yearn for the deep breath of contentment, the warmth of a knowing sigh as I spread my limbs out in the world and feel the warmth of nourishment penetrate my skin.

The power of incessant questioning floods my thinking. Why am I being covert? What purpose, value is there in my efforts? And why does that matter to me? What does it all mean? What if my voice were to remain silent?

I know I have time to find the answers - however transient they may be in their meaning. I will take that time.

The voices continue. What am I about? Is my intention to make a better world? Have I really set out to do this? Am I deceiving myself? Is there

incongruence in my life? Or in the way I live it? Am I living authentically? With integrity? Is the Apollonian discipline of my driving intellect taking over? Could I live and breathe in the same environment with my Dionysian spirit alive? Could we dance in joy and freedom?

I know I will hear the same questions a million times over, continuously cycling until I peel back enough layers to reach the truth. I know that as soon as I frame an answer a new question will emerge. I have made this choice consciously.

I am strongly aware that my familiarity is breaking down, sometimes fragmenting into panic and self-doubt but held together with a new, indescribable energy. I can no longer reach for the “grand plan” - and no longer need to.

I now know that I must invite myself to step into the vacuum of unknowing, taking each question as a step along the way. I invite others to journey with me, trusting that the unknown destination will be theirs too. The overriding purpose is not to reach the end tomorrow, sweaty and exhausted from our efforts. The purpose is the journey itself - liberated from all assumptions, navigating with questions and dialogue, resting in places of joy and anxiety and sharing the transformation of our lives in parallel journeys.

There are days when I am overwhelmed by the sheer terror of it all, the open door a gaping hole in my reality. I grip the present in fearful tears, encapsulated by the grey walls, and I grind my feet into the floor to stop my escape. I fight against my own energy and its consciousness, against the emergent power of my own fragile knowing and the moment of folly passes. The newly bright globules of passion subside and re-take their shriveled places inside the ordered labyrinth of “me”. My conscious self breathes a sigh of relief and order is regained - the closed door just

slightly ajar as passion and courage leave behind their shadows.

I hold on to the image of my breath - of invisible space entering and leaving my body, flushing out the torrent of images which constantly jumble and jostle in my tired mind. "Be still" I want to say to them. "Give me a chance to speak with my own, familiar voice" but the machinery drones on, relentlessly pursuing a new form of truth.

"It's something about natural energy and expression" I hear myself say.

"What is?" I ask, somewhat irritated at this voice that will not obey the imposed silence.

"You're looking to articulate that inner sense of unique gift".

I pause and spare a few moments to enter the dialogue. "Am I?" I wonder.

"Yes. You're always talking about discovering what it is that each one of us uniquely brings to the world".

"Am I?" I repeat dumbly.

"Yes. Just think about your speech to the supervision group last week. You convinced Jack and Eden et al that this was your genuine belief..."

I interrupt quickly at this point, incensed that this limbless voice should even imply that my passion is not authentic. "I don't need to convince anybody - I have always held that belief. I have so often wondered how many talents have been lost to our world through lack of nourishment, love and care. I have watched my own be dissected and picked over, cut and shaped to fit a pre-defined form, its raw energy and passion transformed by the rigours of discipline and practice into a mere

representation of another's gift. "I have to stop. The images are still too raw, too bitter. The anger will not transform into generative power. I wonder if it ever will.

"Why did you allow your own prostitution?" I hear myself ask.

I am stunned by the image, my body flooded by a sticky feeling of intrusion, repelled by the feelings of violation. I find it difficult to speak, and can only find a small child's voice with which to answer. "I didn't understand" I said simply.

"And now that you do?" my voice persists.

"I'm not sure I can do anything about it. It happened. It dictated the paths my life took. I can't change it". Even as I say it I realise that I am contradicting my own beliefs. I am shocked at my own betrayal.

My writing has become stilted and constrained. Something has happened as I pursued this dialogue. The pencil moves but the words are sparse. I have re-sensed that amputation. But unlike the amputee can no longer feel what I have lost. I am bereft and frightened. I search in my memory for ways to hold on to and protect the life of the images. I must cradle them carefully - they are my only link.

I shall try again to pinpoint this voice and challenge it face-to face. What or who is this choking feeling? Who is it who is silently crying within me? How can I give them voice, allow them to tell me their story? Am I at risk of being devoured by my own uncertainty? What feeds this feeling of heavy loss, of being overwhelmed by the sheer immensity of the question?

What is this voice? Can I reach out, feel the outline, focus the image with

screwed-up eyes? Is this the same identity which holds me back when I strive to reach out and grasp the image of the future, only to feel my arms pinned to my side, their weight driving like knives into my own body?

I momentarily re-frame this huge weight that is sitting in my space - and immediately I smile. I feel happy. I recognise me. My body lets go of the tension that has been gripping it in an unnatural posture - and I feel light breath begin to move in and out again.

I open my mouth and hear the words of new voices re-form the familiar questions.

The first voice is challenging, clear in its questions. "What does your research mean to you?"

"It represents a focus in my life - a rich, energising space in which I can release my emotional identity" I reply.

"Release? That's a strange word to choose" responds the voice, clearly intent to fully understand my true meaning.

"That's right, release. I want to step outside the ordered, cognitive world that holds me neatly in my allocated space. I want to work with passion and conviction. I want to connect with the people and space around me. I want to stretch my arms in front, behind, beside, below and above and feel the gentle pressure of living space. I want to..." I stop, suddenly aware that my voice and posture have changed, my face flushed with the energy of the anticipated experience.

"How will we know you are doing just that?" the voice asks gently.

I turn in its direction and smile. "You and I will both feel it" I say simply.

Silence takes over the space. I think about my last answer, and remember Eden's words. He talked of the "generativity" of my words and described his own reaction as a "fuzzy warm feeling". Jack asked me how I would know the impact of my work - I searched for the answer on a blank ceiling until he directed me to sense the connection I had generated in the relationships within the room.

Another voice, softer and sometimes difficult to hear, begins to speak. "How will others benefit from your work?"

I am silent for a few moments, thrown momentarily into the familiar doubts and confusion of an ordered, rational world. "I would like to think that they would become part of my work, defining their own journeys rather than becoming part of mine. It's something about creating personal space in terms of nourishment, belief and renewal - it's about each one defining their own capsule of energy, learning to sustain it and experiencing the power of their own connectivity".

I stop suddenly, aware that I have tried to express perhaps too explicitly the purpose of the journey. I quickly correct any misunderstanding. "That is not to say though that the path is pre-defined. We will not be limited by an assumed purpose. Questions will constantly form and re-form our actions".

"Who is 'we'?" the voice asks, interestedly.

"Ah" I answer reluctantly "I'm not quite sure". As I pause to reflect the voice pursues its questioning, sensing my uncertainty and concern.

"How important is it that you work with your colleagues?" the voice asks.

"I'm not sure whether it's important or not. The problem is, my research so far has been covert - only two or three people have consciously participated in it and even then only in part. I've justified the choice as part of my methodology.

"Can you continue to be covert?"

"I would love to be open and expansive in my research - to invite a rich mixture of colleagues and friends to collaborate with me in their own re-definitions. But for that I need identity and I need credibility. Why else would these individuals..."

The voice interrupts me. "Identity and credibility? Don't you have an identity?"

"Well yes, of course I do - but maybe it's the wrong one. It's wrapped up in the layers of preconceived notions which define my current role..."

The voice interrupts me again. "Whose preconceived ideas? How can your colleagues have such notions about a role that has only existed since you took it on?"

I am stunned by the obvious untruth, and at the same time the obvious truth. If the voice is right then I must ask why I have chosen to hide behind this inadequacy. The voice senses my hesitation and interrupts gently. "Maybe you should take some time to think about it".

I nod in agreement, suddenly aware of the enormity of what I have said and of what I am trying to do. The voice moves on. "What about your question of credibility? Is that linked to your questions of purpose and value?"

“Yes, I think it is” I reply, glad to be resuming the flow of our dialogue, but wondering with some anxiety how long this voice will stay within earshot. “I need to feel that what I do is worthwhile, is valued - that I’m making a unique contribution”.

I hear the voice acknowledge my answer before it fades away into the silence.

A new voice enters the dialogue.

“Have you considered remaining silent?” it suddenly asks from out of the stillness.

I am momentarily shocked by the question - but only momentarily. My response is fast and fluent. “I have certainly questioned my ability to finish the journey, even start it some days. But I have never imagined locking it away in silence - the very act of writing is an integral part of my own knowing. Each dialogue is another piece in a complex puzzle, the picture constantly changing. It provides the momentum in my life. Writing is my nourishment and healing. It is the voice of my energy”. The pitch of my voice has risen and I’m aware of my heart beating faster. I almost shout the last words. “You can’t take that away from me!”

I am aware that the voice is taken aback by the strength of my response. The responding tone is measured and calming. “Nobody **can** take it away from you”. The voice pauses, allowing me to sink into its reassurance. It continues. “Healing is an important part of knowing....a first step towards renewal....”. The voice fades away, to be quickly replaced by another, kinder sound.

“Have you experienced renewal?” it asks, probing in a quiet way.

I close my eyes before I can answer, searching for the familiar warm images. "Yes, I have" I answer quietly but with certainty. "I have been surrounded by the music of nature, enveloped in the comfort of its green silence, and I have felt renewal".

"Do you have a name for it?" asks the voice, its sound hardly audible now.

"Yes, I do" I answer calmly, warm in my new certainty. "This is my spirituality".

I hear the voices sigh in relief, the tension is broken and I am once more in silence.

Chapter 6

Forming a notion of inquiry as a creative art

I have just finished reading *Zeldin's* short work on conversation (*Zeldin* 1998) and particularly like this quote:

“conversation needs pauses, thoughts need time to make love”. (1998: p.88)

I smile at the imagery and reflect on this stage of the journey.

I have spent a great deal of time considering and questioning the underlying inquiry practice of my thesis, evident so far as the concurrent streams of attention, intention and dialogic sense-making that both engender the insistent questioning and constantly move the work on. I have begun to experience it 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 rely 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 generative questioning. The lived expression of my aesthetic accounts merges with this dialogic creativity to create a form of aesthetic unity and composition that is both intuitive and improvisatory.

I am intrigued by this emerging art of inquiry, and want to look more closely at an 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.

So far I have found it relatively easy to share my progress through the detail of my journal, my accounts of practice and my dialogic sense-making, quite openly sharing the voice of my ongoing thinking and conceptual framing. It is true that I

have been prompted to re-draft some parts over and over again, attentive to the need for explanatory and descriptive account, and in some cases have even had difficulty in knowing when and where to stop. But with each iteration, however small it might be, I have remained alert to the possibilities of change, carefully watching for occasions where I might be precipitating new possibilities and noting others where I might simply be recording past realities. I am aware that my language and its arrangement in my writing is becoming an extremely complex area for me, a mix of formative process and instinctive expression. As I write I can sense the emergence of something new even as I form the words to write it. It might only be a slight nuance in my language, it might only be the faint expression of a new question, but I know with certainty that my reality is changing.

I sense a resonance with *Shotter* (1993) when he describes language as having a role in constructing our thoughts, sharing a notion of the act of writing as a formative experience. I think I share his perspective when I share out loud the creative dialogue around my experiences and through my text draw out new possibilities, unanticipated threads of understanding, and even new glimpses of what I have already learned and simply forgotten. I am increasingly experiencing the act of writing as a creative art, an inherently intuitive experience, and put it forward here as the developmental expression of my inquiry as I move closer and closer towards the possibilities of presencing my 'being' through and within my practice.

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'. As I try and describe this voice, and the nature of the 'being' it is expressing, I am reminded of *Marshall's* description (2001) of the qualities of her own inquiry practice. She describes it as

"inquisitive, curious, fun, engaging, interesting, playful" (2001: p.434)

and I take a moment to enjoy the lightness and enjoyment with which she is able to share these descriptors. I think again about the nature of the experience I am trying to share, pausing for a moment to enjoy a sense of fluidity, of cadence and phrasing, and to hear the contrapuntal threads of harmonies as they weave in and out of my awareness. It is tremendously important to me that I describe my inquiry practice here as an experience rather than a process, that I try and fully articulate the musical assonance that increasingly defines its qualitative presence, and cast about for a suitable illustrative image.

A couple of nights ago I found myself unintentionally absorbed in a recorded performance by Craig David and Mark Hill, performers and song-writers of a very distinct pop idiom. I was mesmerised by their unique musical dialogue, willingly drawn in by their form and voice, and propelled along by their ability to merge rapid rhythm changes within one sweep of notes. It was unexpected, it lasted only a few minutes, but as the audience expressed their appreciation I felt I had just witnessed the enactment of my own innate practice. There was something in this merger of words and music and flow and even physical expression that just seemed to engender for me, in that moment, the qualities of consciousness that I am gradually recognising as the defining parameters of my own practice.

I tentatively offer this practice here as a unique and uncertain art, an experience of living and changing understanding that both forms and transforms the way in which I live my life, and one which constantly holds me open to the exciting possibilities of new and connecting spaces.

As I begin to look a little more closely at this art of dialogic sense-making, generative questioning and the living expression of my accounts 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 the embodied qualities of my 'exquisite connectivity'.

As I think about them as forms of sense-making, and return to some of *Schon's* (1991) work on reflective practice, I am drawn in to another dialogue, one that encourages me to try and pinpoint just where and how my knowing occurs. I start with his description of reflection-in-action, his description of a

"reflective conversation with the situation" (Schon, 1991: p.268)

and consider both its implied immediacy and its potential similarities with my own dialogic form. Through the practice examples in his work on reflective practitioners he clearly demonstrates how the observed practitioners can draw on some element of their familiar repertoire, re-frame a problem or evolve a new and generative metaphor to propel their knowing forward. He appears to be presenting a reflective practice as an ability to build useful knowledge, to connect various ways of knowing through a framework of reflective conversation. I understand that he is focusing on a sort of self-aware process, one that is both observable and in some ways predictable. It lacks the exploratory and creative power I am trying to articulate in my own practice, focusing more on an ability to apply a theory of knowledge to a new and unfamiliar situation rather than the ability to re-define this theory of knowledge from new and emergent experiences. I am not entirely comfortable with these implied limitations and look for a much more fluid and dynamic explanation.

In his work on dialogue *Isaacs* (1999) draws a comparison between the behaviours of dialogue on the one hand and conversation, dialectic, controlled discussion and debate on the other. He clearly differentiates between an ability to listen with an exploratory intent in the first instance and with defensiveness and argument in the second. I am not sure I align completely with his notion of dialectic, which he describes as the tension and synthesis of opposites, but I am drawn in by his differentiation between 'reflective dialogue' and 'generative

dialogue'. His concept of 'reflective dialogue' relies on a belief that we use it to think about the rules underlying what we do, the reasons for our thoughts and actions. It seems in this way to be a notion of retrospective and conscious explanation in much the same way as *Schon* (1991). However, his notion of 'generative' dialogue appears to have more resonance with my own sense of creative unpredictability, representing an experience of stepping into entirely new possibilities, new insights and engendering new levels of interaction.

I need to acknowledge that he does in fact describe these qualities of dialogue within the context of a shared experience, and particularly within the context of a connective experience that he witnessed first-hand during an evening of dialogue facilitated and recorded by *Bohm* (1985). There is no evidence in his work to suggest that he might believe that these same qualities can be achieved through self-dialogue. That is my own transposition and my own challenge. But his position is important to me in the differentiating qualities it articulates, in the clarity with which he holds his notions of dialogue, dialectic and conversation separately. It causes me to check the robustness of my own stance, to challenge the certainty with which I still hold on to this notion of self-dialogue, and more and more to wonder out loud about the emergent possibilities of my inquiry practice.

I find it useful to reference some of the qualities of the models of *Torbert* (2001) and *Reason* (1994), holding *Reason's* model of participative action research in the one hand as a cyclic pattern of noticing, reflection, sense-making and then more action, and in the other *Torbert's* model of consciousness in which action and reflection interpenetrate. In *Reason's* model I clearly hear the constructing voice of the researcher, carefully forming the questions through democratic process and looking after the boundaries of the inquiry as both a social and political responsibility. In a recent publication of the *Handbook of Action Research* (2001) he describes this as the

"emergent and reflexive sense of what is important" (2001: p.447),

appearing to combine the unanticipated outcome with careful facilitation and structuring. I respect it as a model that honours both the pre-defined and the undefined, open to the creative possibilities of the reflective group. But I do also have a strong sense that in the end it will be the political intent of the practice, its use-value in democratic and social terms, that will have overriding impact on the extent and shape of its boundaries and form. I realise that I will need to respond to this challenge in an examination of the pragmatic outcome of my own research in Chapter 25, paying attention here to its implications for the fluid boundaries of my inquiry practice.

Torbert's (2001) model moves me on a little, providing a structured framework of a clear, initial purpose, followed by a strategy, committed action and then the assessment of its impact in both a particular and general context. I feel some resonance with his notion of action and reflection interpenetrating in a form of consciousness, and can, if I try, fit some of my own inquiry activity into the outline of his model. I evidence a clear purpose at the outset, exploring in some detail my intuitive interest in wanting to locate and work with my own growing sense of disconnection. I share a mix of journal accounts and reflective dialogues as they help move forward my meaning and understanding, and then look forward to new action and experience as I re-form my practice from the inside out.

But it feels too neat, too constructed, and ignores the immense sense of intuition and instability that actually permeates the inquiry. There is a human element missing, the acknowledgement that 'I' as a researcher can be immensely fickle, gullible to a multitude of influences and amazingly inconsistent in focus and intent.

I need a more fluid and creatively honest model. An integration of the work of *Marshall* (1999, 2001), *Bohm* (1985) and *Isaacs* (1999) appears to offer a dynamic alternative. Their combined model is one in which the flow and focus of the inquiry appear to emerge from a personal mix of aware filtering, reflection in

the moment and an intuitive sense for the significant and generative. I stay with their promises for a moment and try to use them to tease out my own perspective.

My own thesis has emerged in its present form through an organic, dialectical architecture which represents the embodiment of my creative process, constantly forming and re-forming from the stream of questions which constitute my awareness. 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)¹². 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. As the dialogues form they increasingly absorb my awareness and energy, exhausting in their demands but rich in their possibilities.

I have therefore learnt to differentiate between them, to recognise those which I will choose to pursue now and with defined purpose, and to recognise those which I will pursue incidentally and because they have drawn my attention toward them. I have learnt to separate 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).

In her description of inquiring through ‘inner and outer arcs’ of attention *Marshall* (2001) describes how, through her ‘inner arcs’, she begins to notice a multiplicity of issues that clamour for her attention. She shares a description of the multi-dimensional frame of knowing that enables her to select or de-select those issues worth pursuing and clearly evidences it holding her inquiry practice together. She describes it as

¹² I find *Bohm*’s concept of ‘folding and unfolding’ particularly evocative of the constant and fluid movement of understanding, and use it here in the same way as I use my own descriptor ‘emergent’

“acknowledging and connecting between intellectual, emotional, practical, intuitive, sensory, imaginal and more knowings”. (2001: p.433)

I compare this with the description of my own frame of knowing as

“a non-linear synthesis of passion, intuition, aesthetic consciousness, memory, dialectic and story, held in balance by the acuity of my own cognitive ability”

and pause to appreciate the similarities before focusing in on the difference.

In her description of ‘inner arcs’ I find a very clear certainty of the craft of inner attention, of an ability to merge the personal experiences of perceiving, meaning-making and framing within a quality of awareness that preserves both balance and integrity. I detect a certain resonance in this combination of cognitive sense-making and aware inquiry, sharing my own sense of the balance between the two. But I do also perceive a difference, one that raises for me a question about balance and the apparent contradictions of construction and creativity. In my own description I carefully separate out my intellectual framing as a counterbalance, personifying it in my text as the voice of the rational and structuring practitioner-researcher. I deliberately draw attention to it as the antithesis to the voice of an emotionally-charged inquirer, the aesthetic images of the poet and the vulnerable rememberings of the autobiographer. I am actually quite comfortable with this balancing act, for the moment anyway, and still intend to enjoy its persistent dialectic as I work towards a quality of integration within my professional practice. It is through this dialectic that I open up the boundaries of my inquiry and intentionally allow my focus to be stretched towards unknown spaces. *Marshall* however appears to have achieved an integration in her knowing that allows her to put intellectual knowing alongside her other qualities of knowing, embodying a lightness of touch within her practice that I have experienced first hand. I admire her practice, and have learnt a great deal from its observation, but I am still content to stay with my own balancing act and to enjoy its incessant challenges.

As I examine her description of the ‘outer arcs’ of attention I find great resonance in her description of deliberately creating these outer possibilities, of extending her inquiry beyond the boundaries of her inner arcs. She appears to be accessing an ‘outer world’ as an extension of her inquiry practice, connecting possibly through questions, testing out ideas or possibly forming new and intentional action, and choicefully seeking collaboration in the formation of her knowledge only when it is appropriate for her. I am comfortable with this notion, reassured even in its resonance, and believe I come close to part of its meaning as I share my own notion of affirmative and generative dialogues later in the chapter and define my own way of contextualising my work. I am also confident that I share her intention of enjoying the interplay between the two frames of attention.

But there are differences, particularly in my emphasis on the structuring role of my intentional dialogues, and I try and clarify this difference by referring to *Bohm*’s (1985) work on dialogue.

In his account of a “Weekend of Dialogue” *Bohm* (1985) clearly differentiates between intentional and attentional, referring to “*intentional*” as an innate tension to do something and by referring to “*attentional*” as a temptation to stretch the mind toward something. I discovered his use of the words after I had begun to use them to differentiate my own dialogues and was forced to consider the implications of his emphasis on ‘doing’. Do I in fact ‘do’ anything as a result of my dialogues? Are there evident cycles of action and reflection and then further action? As I carefully consider the questions I sense a confident ‘yes’ emerging, certain in the changes I have experienced as I have lived through the creation of my thesis and equally certain in the evidence of that experience being present throughout my text. More importantly, though, I realise that it is in fact these deliberate dialogues, the ‘intentional’ ones, which continue to form and re-form my dialectical framework, driven on by my focus on new action and a constant search for clarity and explanation. It is in the creative space that forms between them that the ‘attentional’ questions emerge, opening up new and improvisatory

possibilities. I appreciate *Bohm*'s challenge and feel more certain in my own definition as a result of the discussion.

I can of course move between the two kinds of dialogue as my interest shifts or as new questions reach the boundaries of my dialectic. The intentional dialogues constantly engender new, 'attentional' dialogues, some of them interdependent, others stand-alone in their significance or currency. Sometimes the voice is too loud and inquiries are de-constructed without any apparent purpose – but I continue to trust my process, enjoying the dynamic fluidity of its shifting boundaries.

It is this fluid and emergent process that is so fundamental to my work. My texts are iterative, re-visited as new understanding casts light on previous actions, the experience new in today's transient perspective. I construct meaning with new perspectives as I tell and re-tell my accounts, awarely balancing their "accuracy" with the new "truths" of my constructive memory. I acknowledge the influence of *Rubin* (1996) here on my understanding of memory and the construction of accounts from memory. I understand him to be putting forward a belief that this construction is a formative process, one that is able to present data as 'true' in the context of its impact on understanding and knowledge. This 'truth' though also has a fictional quality in terms of the accuracy of the exact recollection of words and events. I awarely form my own notion of generative coherence from this understanding, recognising how the intricate patterning of my personal stories and my dialogic inquiry process demonstrates an ability to juxtapose the emotional glimpses and living expression of my journal with the developing awareness of a narrative dialogue. It is a creative process, born out of a determination and an ability to move beyond the cerebral disciplines of traditional teaching into the fluidity of a new and dynamic experience.

I inevitably find myself in a divided place, negotiating on the one hand for pre-defined purpose and pragmatic outcome in research yet on the other hand content with an unfolding sense of knowing. I do though have one certainty - an

intentional search for healing and transformation of ‘self’ through the re-connection and possible integration of my external and internal worlds

As I move forward in my understanding of these qualities I begin to construct them into a description of my own creative art of inquiry, six critical behaviours explicated from the experiences of a clearly evidenced transformative inquiry. I develop the detail of this description in the next chapter, extending my own understanding of this art of inquiry by working within the context of fellow-researchers. I begin to look with greater interest at the potential richness of combining the inquiry model of *Marshall* (1999, 2001) with the qualities of the dialogic models of *Bohm* (1985, 1992, 1996) and *Isaacs* (1999). It is a combination that challenges every aspect of my practice. I find myself concentrating on issues of intention and attention, carefully defining a precarious counterpoint of natural fluidity with the deliberate tones of my own authoritative structuring. I face questions around the validity of ‘self-dialogue’, wondering just how I am defining the boundary between self-therapy and self-understanding and carefully respond to concerns of emotional honesty, exposure and risk as I accept the turbulence of transformational uncertainty. I look more closely at my ability to hold open a generative space of wondering, attentive to the creative possibilities of emergent questions and able to work with their natural flow. And I appreciate the qualities of listening inherent in my practice, recognising in *Isaacs’* (1999) work the resonant qualities of listening and suspending that engender the emergent knowing of my aesthetic connectivity.

Chapter 7

Clarifying the defining qualities of the creative art of my own dialogic inquiry practice

I pause for a few minutes, held in a sense of expectation, and confident that I might now be able to articulate my own position a little more clearly. I carefully shape the following concepts around my certainty and tentatively begin to articulate them as the formative qualities of my art of inquiry.

7.1 Valuing the transformational uncertainties of self-dialogue

First, I am energised by a notion of dynamic self-transformation, an ability to heal and regenerate through the qualities of a critical consciousness that constantly challenges my certainties with its living self-dialogue. I depend on the authenticity of my voice, listening to it forming and re-forming the realities and truths of my practice through its persistent questioning. I am becoming increasingly aware of the dynamic uncertainty of my identity, concentrating instead on the temporal certainties of authentic representation, on the ability of language to hold the counterbalancing weights of the impermanence of my knowing and the certainty of my aesthetic expression. I am happy to stay with the constant and incremental doubt that my dialogues generate, encouraged by *Marshall* to work with temporary truths (*Marshall 1995*) whilst remaining awarely and open to review. I am fascinated by the temporal relativity of my truths, by the ability of my cognitive mind to lay out in some sort of order the incremental creation of a new truth, logical in its apparent development but unlikely in its linear progression. I know that as I develop my knowing it is tempting to present it as finite and carefully defined, complete in its description and experiential grounding. However, I know it is only part of an organic, living framework of knowledge-creation and as such can only ever be my truth in action. I remain open to its newness, to its constant flux, always expectant and changing. I am learning to enjoy the sense of renewal it engenders, to look forward to its possibilities, and

remain constantly attentive to the free-flowing questions and doubts that dictate its pace.

I acknowledge the challenge *Buber* (1965) puts against this concept of self-dialogue, stressing that we can only ever achieve monologue if we do not have

“the otherness, or more concretely, the moment of surprise”. (1965: p.113)

He purports this ‘otherness’ as the basic ontological given of conversation, relying on a fundamental belief that we cannot be genuine partners to ourselves, that we cannot truly ask questions and provide answers without accessing a pre-programmed response that we must find embedded somewhere within ourselves. I appreciate that this is simply an extract from his broader notions of knowledge creation, and need to respectfully acknowledge it as such. I am also aware that he is not alone in his challenge. My own research group continually stresses the integral role of public communication in the development of my thesis, and I am positively encouraged to share the raw state of developing ideas within their broader dialogue.

I am acutely aware that I run a very real risk of appearing to put forward a notion of dialogic inquiry as something that is separate, something that is exclusive and a challenge to the collegiate and participatory expectations of my fellow learners. That is clearly not my intention. Nor does it represent any intention to either avoid public communication or miss out on the challenges of shared learning. Self-dialogue is simply a way of describing my own behaviour of reflection, my habit of generative questioning, the creative space in which I play with the dynamics of sense-making. There is no deliberate attempt to keep it private, either within my thesis or within my everyday work. I believe that is evidenced throughout my thesis.

I also need to stress that this ‘internal’ and personal process is constantly balanced by the affirmative and generative dialogues of my conversations with fellow

learners and researchers, implicit in some of my footnotes and more obviously explicit as I share my critical engagement out-loud. I do continue to live a connective and relational life throughout the transformative experiences of the thesis, and in Part 2 share my most recent accounts of starting to explore the potentially changed place of my belonging in my own research community. And, as an integral quality of the inquiry process itself, the voice of my self-dialogues is itself held constantly in critical dialogue with my own overriding dialectic.

What is important is whether or not I provide sufficient evidence of the rigour of my self-dialogue, of its robustness, of its self-propelling energy. And of course whether I evidence clearly and fully its creative potential within my thesis. I offer the evidence of my own authenticity as my response, an ability to hold the self-dialogues out loud and freely and to be genuinely and openly surprised by the questions that emerge. I offer the detailed journey towards my own transformation and re-formation as strong evidence of the capacity of my self-dialogue to move fluidly and freely through imagined possibilities. And I do I believe evidence clearly the ability of my cognitive sense-making to sit comfortably alongside the improvisatory uncertainties of my generative questioning.

7.2 Trusting the generative and improvisatory qualities of intuitive questioning

I trust the creative potential of my dialogue, rich in its unpredictable conversation and defined by its constant oscillation between intention and attention. I refer to parts of my inquiry practice as ‘dialogic inquiry’, looking closely at the ability of my dialogues to catalyse reflection on both past and continuing experiences, intuitively creating and sometimes even imagining, new and possible futures. ‘I’ can be both subject and object, an out loud counterpoint of different and challenging perspectives that subtly change as the dialogue emerges into unforeseen territory and outcome. It is habitual, almost addictive, and very often is triggered by the focus of today’s sphere of attention. But it has the capacity to reach beyond the linearity of logical and cognitive thought, to transcend the

limitations of cyclical learning, and to leap haphazardly into the generative realms of poetry and aesthetic consciousness.

I am increasingly aware of the qualities of this generative questioning, a voice that engages in creative formation, in creating links between discrete aspects of my knowing. This is the voice that frames the accounts of my experience, the voice that both expresses intention in its engagement with the accounts and is able to pay attention to the intuitive possibilities of the thesis.

I still find it hard to be selective in my focus, to know when to lay an experience or an idea aside. I panic when I sense an image or notion slipping away from me, concerned that I have either misunderstood it or dismissed it too early. I have though begun to appreciate the huge power of my own cognitive balance as increasingly it enables me to stay with the multiplicity of the dialogues engendered by the dialectical framework of my thesis. And probably just as importantly I have begun to learn to trust my ability to form those questions that will be both generative and connective. I find strong resonance in *Isaacs* notion (1999) of “*mining*” for the questions that will engender a dialogic way of being, an instinctive ability to empathise with the connective possibilities of the dialogue and to subsequently recognise and form those questions that will both articulate and generate new, shared knowledge. He puts this capability at the centre of his dialogic practice, proposing that

“To mine for questions is to cultivate the suspension of answers and to open the way for the dialogic way of being”. (1999: p.150)

7.3 Respecting the authority of my own structuring role

As I take time to understand and appreciate my dialogic voice I also become increasingly aware of the role of another voice, an encompassing dialectic that is gently forming a dynamic interplay between intention and attention, a counterbalance of construction and creativity. I begin to refer to this as the

authoritative voice of my practitioner-researcher role, and create an image in my mind of a focused and constant awareness. I start to appreciate the subtleties of its deliberate questions, its intuitive sense for the significant and generative, and its ability to create an enabling structure around the instinctive reflections of the emotionally-charged dialogues and aesthetic images of my autobiographical and poetic expression. I do for the moment still hold the concept separately, a cognitive busyness molding and shaping the structure of my inquiries while my human qualities of fickleness and inconsistency are allowed to enjoy their creativity.

Throughout my thesis I engage in a process of ‘learning out loud’ – of pursuing unexpected turns of inquiry into unfamiliar and sometimes vulnerable places. I have deliberately kept in play all the inquiries as they emerge, developing some more than others as their interdependence or increasing resonance becomes evident. I have felt a growing tension as I have held the emergent and messy nature of the thesis in the one hand while holding the structure of its complex pattern in the other. But I have learnt when it is appropriate to shape and when it is appropriate to allow the form to emerge, and in this way do admittedly intrude into the overall structure of the work but never enough to inhibit its improvisatory growth.

I have developed an ability to define the shape and movement of the thesis, a live and dynamic voice of intention and attention, of first-person research in action. It is a self-aware and emotionally honest voice, constantly forming a sub-text of learning and understanding, writing new dialogues of awareness and knowing as the focus becomes clearer or the view more stable. It is through this voice that I am able to present my writing as action, to claim its creative contribution to the disciplines of first-person inquiry. This ‘I’ is constantly present throughout the inquiries, evident at the centre with my perspective, memory, sense-making and decisions of intention and attention. This ‘I’ is present both in its self-aware dimension and in its conscious structuring role, constantly exploring the possibilities of new action whilst focusing on the careful development of

understanding and coherence. It very clearly helps constitute my 'aware and critical subjectivity' (Marshall 1995), (Reason 1994), responding specifically to Marshall's call to evidence critical awareness of my own perspective, and shows how that affects my sense-making and action.

This is my authoritative voice, the one that knows with certainty that particular events and their chronology did take place, in a specific way, and at a certain time. It is similar in character to the authoritative voice embedded within my practice, the one that manages certain procedures and activities within a framework of commercial objectivity and measures its success through the coherence of its output. It is the 'I' both within my research and practice that separates out the detail of the action from the parallel and dynamic cycles of experience and learning.

Initially I am struck by the pervasive nature of my authoritative voice throughout my writing, recognising its insistent sense-making and pleased in many ways to hear it forming as part of my public practitioner-researcher voice. I particularly value its ability to pose questions, to form doubts or feelings of curiosity that push me to probe and explore beyond the original experience, while all the time holding on to the overall purpose and intent of the inquiry. My questions are never meant as critical, nor are they meant to imply an evaluative stance. They are simply the core activity of my reflective process, the drivers of my first-person research practice.

This is a familiar voice, the voice of my own silent dialectic stepping into a very public context. As it locates purpose and meaning in the text and presents it back to the world as legitimate knowledge it copes with its own and separate challenges:

- To acknowledge and protect its vulnerability
- To cope with its own transience as its understanding shifts and turns with experience

- To be heard in a form that is both improvisatory and certain in the moment
- To find a catalytic connection in your own awareness

7.4 Developing an awareness of attentive space

I value almost to the point of obsession the fragile and attentive space that enables the conversation to form and hold its own shape. I envisage the silent listening of musical pauses, the full beat of mutual attention that each performer freely gives to the formation of a virtual and relational space. It is a space in which I constantly try to ignore the interference of premature images or assumptions, try to suppress the limitations of my assumed pre-understanding. *Isaacs* (1999) stresses the criticality of this quality of attention when he says

“to listen is to develop an inner silence” (1999: p.84)

and I am reminded of the incessant tension I experience as I try to disconnect from the constant voices of my own dialectic in an attempt to listen openly to emergent new truths. Even as I focus on it I am bombarding it with suppositions and intentions, and resolve to try harder and harder to hold on to those images of aesthetic consciousness that just occasionally override it with their musicality.

As I have continued to develop the form and content of my thesis I have become increasingly aware of the balance I am achieving between the creative expression of my ‘being’ and the structuring and formative role of my ‘doing’. I have begun to differentiate between creative qualities on the one hand, and authoritative qualities on the other, tracking their growing influence on the action of the thesis as I allow the interplay of dialogic sense-making, emergent knowing and generative questioning to be heard in their own dialogue. These strands are simply the modulated expressions of one integrated voice, shaped by my intentional and attentional questioning and expressed with the courage and emotional honesty that is integral to my true sense of ‘self’.

I originally focused on the clarity of my accounts, the honesty with which I was able to express myself through narrative autobiography and personal journal. I developed a voice that could share both a mix of critical incidents and recorded accounts and those moments of pure attention when I have been engulfed by the natural world around me. I carefully shaped this voice to achieve a level of communication that would share the reality of the experiences, share the sense of music and balance which they sometimes engender. It is an aesthetic and musical voice which both experiences and relates the story and clearly situates a form of 'I' in the accounts. It is this voice that has emerged with such certainty in Part 1.

Senge and Scharmer (2001), writing a chapter on community action research in the Handbook of Action Research, inject a new level of energy into my thinking and I begin to form new questions around the power of this emergent knowing. I am drawn in by their concept of

“‘presencing’ emerging futures” (2001: p.246)

and feel excited about the prospect of

“becoming still, and allowing inner knowing to emerge” (2001: p.246).

I realise that they explicitly draw comparisons between this practice of emergent learning and the practice of reflection on present realities, and it is this difference that I find so exciting. It is exactly this emergent quality that I am trying to define and evidence throughout my thesis, this quality of creative and generative dialogue that can form new, transformative shifts in my life. It is a kind of dialogic inquiry that can create new forms of knowing simply by engendering the right conditions for attention.

I find it useful to cast around for further examples of this criticality of attention, for examples of the qualities so intrinsic to the creation of attentive space. I return to 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.

In his introduction to “*Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*” *Isaacs* (1999) sets out the three and distinct languages that he believes sit at the core of dialogue at its best. He describes them as the language of

“*meaning, aesthetics, and power*”. (1999: p.13)

His focus is on appreciating and improving the effective outcome of dialogic participation but as I consider my own qualities of attentive space I reconsider his definitions, perceiving in their breadth the aspirational qualities of my practice. He talks of the sense of beauty, of rhythm, and of timing that we have in our conversations, and stresses that how we feel deeply impacts what we think. He then begins to develop his notion of building capacity for new behaviours and separates out these four behaviours as core:

- Listening
- Suspending
- Respecting
- Voicing.

As I consider each one in turn I sense a comfortable resonance, staying for the moment with a balancing act of considering each of the qualities within his own context of participative dialogue, while at the same time extending their potentiality towards the context of my own first-person dialogue. He describes ‘listening’ almost as a lost art, drawing attention to our propensity to talk and plan and do, with very little effort made to simply giving up the frenzied activity and to listen. ‘Suspending’ and ‘respecting’ appear to be an integral part of listening, helping develop the capacity to quieten the pre-judgements, to suppress the suppositions and to let go of the tendency to binary argument. By loosening our grip he offers us new perspectives, enabling us to open up the possibilities of new

questions rather than restrict them through our insistence on answers. I find his descriptions evocative and familiar and feel particular energy in his description of listening as

“quieting the inner chatter of our minds...calming the surface of the waters of our experience so that we can see below to the depths”. (1999: p.101)

As he stresses our need to interrupt habitual patterns of needing answers, to develop the capacity to stay with the messy uncertainties of dialogue, I sense that I have already made significant progress. Even as I develop this part of my understanding I am already forming my own notion of emergent knowing, an ability to form a quality of awareness that is present within us but which is unvoiced as a future possibility by the over-active busyness of reflective structuring. *Senge & Scharmer* (2001) are developing it as a new source of learning, an ability to learn from an experience that is barely forming, and as I consider the significance of my own ability to sustain this quality of attention in Part 1 I clearly place aspects of my work alongside theirs.

7.5 Speaking with courage and emotional honesty

I realise that I am relying increasingly on notions of courage and emotional honesty and that they may well be taking me to the edges of a boundary that needs clearer definition. Throughout my thesis I am constantly aware of the risks of therapeutic wanderings, of first-person inquiry as a self-indulgent past-time and do address the issues as they arise. As I focus more intently on my inquiry practice I am also becoming much more aware of the political impact of my dialogic behaviour, and realise that I must pay increasing attention to its implications as I extend my focus outwards and into a community of practice. However, I do also believe that emotional honesty, and the courage to express it out loud, are essential characteristics of a dialogic practice and as such need to clearly outline my position here. Much of the power and motivation for my continuing inquiry is sustained by the sheer exhilaration of learning, and the

tremendous sense of anticipation as a dialogue is precariously balanced between reflective sense and emergent possibilities. The emotions are not all positive. There is confusion, there is frustration, there is anger and even embarrassment. There are moments when the tension of unknowing and lost certainty intrude beyond the boundaries of the current inquiry and threaten to destabilise the comfortable certainties of my professional persona. And there are times when I become so totally engulfed in the complexity of the incessant voices and changing truths that I simply want to escape their glare and intensity and retreat to an unthinking world. But I consider them an intrinsic part of the inquiry experience, allow their expressive voices to develop their own critical and emotional edge, and gradually allow their audible debate to creep into the awareness of the current dialogue.

I am aware that I have made myself vulnerable through the research process and in the texts. This continues to be my concern as I move from the private expressions of my journal to the public pages of my thesis and the construction of what I hope *Denzin* would describe as a “*responsible, reflexive text*” (*Denzin* 1997). I have needed to understand the filters through which I perceive the world, sometimes exposing my vulnerability to reach further levels of meaning and connection and constantly making careful judgements about the fine distinction between writing as action and writing as therapy.¹³ I have learnt to collect the data of my experience, both explicitly and implicitly, and from its reality form a combination of thought and feeling which at that precise moment in time defines the limits of my sense-making. And I have shown how that knowing shifts, re-writing the data in the context of new experience, learning to read the gaps in my own autobiographical accounts and acknowledging both their formative and de-formative potential. This judgement is clearly heard in action in Chapter 2 as I form my own clear guidelines for the inclusion of autobiographical accounts based on the texts of *Denzin* (1997), *Eisner* (1997), *Lincoln* (1997) and *Rosenwald & Ochberg* (1992).

¹³ I acknowledge the influence of Lincoln, Y.S. (1997), Berman, M. (1984), Behar, R. (1996) and Goldberg, N. (1986) in enabling me to consider the possibilities of a personal, emotional voice as part of my research.

I am also fully aware that self-reflective practice can become self-absorbed or self-indulgent and intentionally pull back from its approaching edge. *Marshall* (2001) reflects on the potential limitations of awareness and its public expression, and the inevitable selectivity in her reporting. She warns of over-reporting becoming not only impossible but also “too self-absorbed”. I am encouraged to reflect on my own reflective propensity and to challenge the generous boundaries I have chosen to draw around my own text. I do, I believe, address these issues of risk and exposure, and their usefulness in self-dialogue. I recall a late-night dialogue with a fellow-researcher around our concerns for meaningful and worthwhile research, and some of the personal issues its elastic boundaries had caused each of us. She subsequently sent me this quotation from *Rogers* (1961):

“What is most personal is most general...what is most personal and unique in each one of us is probably the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to others. This has helped me to understand artists and poets as people who have dared to expose the unique in themselves.” (1961: p.26)

Reading *Rogers*' words my first response is to recall my sensitivity to the risks of exposing personal data as an integral part of my inquiry and to admit that where appropriate I do mask the identities of certain individuals. This is in respect for their privacy and their right to interpret the data differently and for their own purpose. But I cannot mask my own identity. By its very nature self-dialogue will and does expose me in all my uncertainty and fantasy. I have considered this issue of exposure and risk very carefully as I have constantly re-drawn the boundaries around the scope of my inquiry. As I have reviewed my commercial activity I have become increasingly aware of the political impact of my dialogic behaviour, and realise that I must pay increasing attention to its implications as I extend my focus outwards and back into this environment.

7.6 Engaging in affirmative and generative dialogue with others

I have inevitably extended my dialogic inquiry practice beyond the self-dialogues of my development to include other fellow-researchers. As I have done so I have become increasingly aware of the values that are significant to me as I form a sense of respectful partnership with their work. These are:

- A spirit of co-creation and fresh insight
- Resistance to direct and de-constructive criticism
- An attitude of respect and learning
- A focus on their catalytic potential

Together these have helped me form my own notion of affirmative and generative engagement, a creative and exciting experience of working across the barriers of segmented thinking and writing and simply opening myself up to the catalytic potential of an eclectic mix of fascinating writers. I do select from within the mix but I do so for their dialogic possibilities, for their creative challenges, relying on an intuitive response to their language and style and ideas. I rely on *Winter* (1997) to support the flexibility of my choice, thoroughly endorsing his view that the theoretical resources of our research are inevitably drawn in by the process of the inquiry itself. I do differentiate in my engagement depending on the state of my own inquiry and find it useful to frame that difference as either affirmative or generative. As I pick my way tentatively through my inquiry and need help in its articulation, or need a confident frame for its expression, I openly borrow the courage by seeking a creative resonance in other work. These are my 'affirmative' dialogues. As I form my own confident and informed position I am able to engage with the new creative possibilities of the dialogue, exciting in its imagined futures and totally improvisatory in its emergent meaning. I refer to these as my 'generative' dialogues.

Chapter 8

Concluding Thoughts

As I articulate my inquiry practice in the form of the six growing certainties detailed in the preceding chapter I can confidently re-frame them as the embodied expression of my ‘exquisite connectivity’, their defining qualities moving me forwards to a much clearer understanding of my own living and creative art. It is the formative role of this inquiry practice and its integral role in the re-formation of my practice ‘from the inside out’ that I need to understand in the next part. I consider just how I might enact and share and engender my ‘exquisite connectivity’ and begin to live out these dialogic qualities as the basis of connective and learning relationships. The structure is part reflective, sharing journal accounts of my past practice, and part experiential, inviting fellow practitioner-researchers to engage in generative dialogue with me as I share the contents of this current writing. Both the remembered images and the concurrent dialogues allow me to squarely face the actuality of my practice. On the one hand they help me learn from the reflected images and on the other they encourage me to move on and outwards and towards the new possibilities of my re-forming practice.

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 their degenerative influence. These include:

- Lack of authority
- Unclear outcomes or expectations
- Constant inquiry inhibiting decision-making
- Frustration of options-oriented clients
- Collusion in my continuing separation
- Implied political power of asking questions without offering a range of solutions
- Fluid knowledge open to criticism

- Vulnerability where pragmatism is enacted as high activity and tangible outcomes
- Political implications of dropping the mask of certainty

I know with certainty though that I am starting to speak with an authentic voice, an integrative and dialogic voice developed and expressed through the pages of my text and one which I am continuing to track in 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 dialogue as an aggregation of all the aspects of my 'being' and inquiring into its potential to become the expression of my participation and connection with you. I am not searching for a 'new' voice. I am simply searching for ways in which I can express out loud the genuine one I already have.

Both *Isaacs* (1999) and *Bohm* (1985, 1992, 1996) have had, and will continue to have, a tremendous influence on me. I am also constantly challenged by *Marshall* (1999, 2001) to reflect on the quality of my inquiry practice and to share a responsible account of its form and activity. My own resonance with their work is encouraging me to pursue notions of 'good' dialogue and to try and understand just what this connection between dialogue and relationship can be. I want to explore the possibilities of dialogue as a counterbalance, holding together both separate, and autonomous identities and engendering the affirmation of our interdependent meaning. I need to 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.

Most importantly, I want to understand just how my own dialogic voice is emerging as the expression of the aesthetic and spiritual consciousness that sits at

the centre of my life and through its public expression understand how I might include you in its generative possibilities.

In Part 2 I begin to consider the relational capacity of this practice, exploring a range of experiential accounts that clearly test out my ability to sustain these formative qualities in my shared dialogues. I then move on, clearly marking the text as written two years later, and evidence a new certainty in my voice as I work alongside my own community of researchers in the continuing development of my understanding.

I finally contextualise this inquiry practice in Part 4, Chapter 23, focusing on a notion of a culture of inquiry (*Bentz & Shapiro 1998*) before exploring in detail the work of *Marshall (1999, 2001)*, *Isaacs (1999)*, *Grudin (1996)*, *Bohm (1985, 1992, 1996)*, *Senge & Scharmer (2001)*, *Jaworski & Scharmer (2000a)* and *Jaworski (1996)*. I consider the relative positioning of my practice vis a vis their work, acknowledging some aspects of resonance while at the same time putting forward a claim that my own creative synthesis of their work is in fact unique. And as I continue to shape the defining qualities of my practice in these subsequent chapters I know that through the development of a transformative inquiry into the presencing of 'being' I have in fact realised the emergent form of my own creative art of inquiry.