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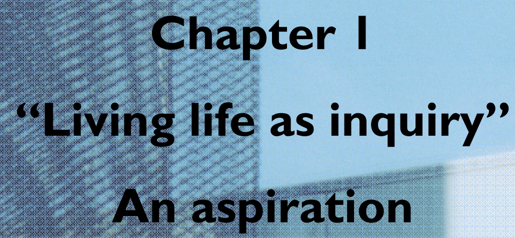

Chapter 1

"Living life as inquiry"

An aspiration

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With Mozart's Clarinet Quintet in A, K581, Allegro. The clarinet is very present in my life at the moment (I explain in the text). To be able to play extracts from the attached quintet is a life's aspiration. I may never achieve it, but I am enjoying the practice!

Frame

I have a dual purpose in choosing the title "Living life as inquiry" for this chapter. When I first came across Judi Marshall's article (1999) in which she shows how she applies notions of inquiry throughout her life space, I was taken (and perhaps taken aback) by its title. At a time I still considered my inquiry to be more narrowly focussed on my practice as a change agent. Using this title here, with the qualifier 'an aspiration', is intended as a salute to Judi, my supervisor, and as a headline of how I think my inquiry practice has developed.

In this chapter I aim to situate my inquiry under the action research umbrella and give an overview of the practices I have brought to my own brand of action research. I locate action research and my own inquiry in the ontological/epistemological arena and conclude with reviewing my research against my chosen criteria.

1.1 Action Research, a large umbrella

I embarked upon my research journey with a pragmatic intention: I was interested in developing my practice as a change agent. Action research had an immediate appeal to me because "A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives" (Reason and Bradbury 2001 p. 2).

As I started to explore the action research literature I discovered a myriad of approaches under the action research umbrella. In the 'Handbook of Action Research', Reason and Bradbury (o.c.) advise the reader that "the term is used in so many different ways that it has lost some of its original weight". According to the authors 'action research' refers to a range of approaches and practices, each grounded in different traditions, with different philosophical and psychological assumptions and pursuing different political commitments, with as common denominator that they are "participative, grounded in experience and action oriented" (Reason and Bradbury

2001). Donna Ladkin ascribes the proliferation of approaches to the fact that the notion has been developed by practitioners and theorists in a number of different fields over a considerable period (2004).

There may be no definitive definition for action research (Ladkin 2004), but there are many practical guides available for a budding action researcher. I found myself attracted to Jack Whitehead's publication with McNiff and Lomax (1996) because it appeared refreshingly accessible. They define action research as

> "(…) a form of practitioner research that can be used to help you improve your professional practices in many different types of workplaces. Practitioner research simply means that the research is done by individuals themselves into their own practices" (o.c. pp. 7-8).

This definition may appear somewhat pedestrian in comparison to McKernan's:

> "Action research is the systematic self reflective scientific inquiry by practitioners to improve practice" (1996 p. 5).

However, McNiff et al. (1996) warn the practitioner that action research is more than informal, personal enquiries (sic) undertaken by good practitioners. The authors explain that, in order for their inquiry to qualify as action research, practitioners need to put the outcome of their informal inquiries into the public domain, thus opening them up for serious challenge because action research is not only about successful action, but also about developing knowledge. The whole point of engaging in research is "to find out something what we did not already know. In this sense all research is a contribution to our own knowledge" (o.c. p.10). But research is about more than contributing to *personal* knowledge, "It implies that we have something relevant to say that others in the public arena will find useful and that we have convincing evidence to support what we claim to know" (o.c. p. 10). The authors add another qualifier to the action research label, namely that of "the intention to change events for the better" (o.c. p.12). In summary then, they see action research comprising of "systematic, critical enquiry made public; informed, committed, intentional action and worthwhile purpose" (o.c. p.13).

This seemingly straightforward definition, soon started to raise a series of questions, each coming to foreground at different stages of my inquiry:

- What does it mean to inquire systematically and critically?
- How do I know? What is the relationship between public and private knowledge? What does 'making knowledge public' entail? Who is my public? Who wants to know anyway?
- Who decides what is a 'worthwhile purpose' and worthwhile for whom?

Before addressing those questions I would like to add some further distinctions within the field of action research, namely those of action science and action inquiry. In agreement with Ladkin (2004), I see both as specific types of action research. Torbert (1991) offers the following description:

> "Action science and action inquiry are forms of inquiry into practice; they are concerned with the development of effective action that may contribute to the transformation of organizations and communities toward greater effectiveness and justice". (o.c. p219)

Developments in action science are generally credited to Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (Ladkin 2004). Seeking to advance knowledge, while simultaneously aiming to solve practical problems in organisations, they explored the extent to which human reasoning, not just behaviour, can be the basis for diagnosis and action (Argyris 1974; Argyris and Schön 1978; Argyris and Schon 1996). Action science provides strategies for framing and solving problems and links the two activities in a feedback cycle called "double loop learning". As well as making a distinction between formal professional knowledge, and the professional knowledge of enactment and interpretation, the authors distinguish "espoused theory" from "theory in use". I elaborate on their work in the next chapter.

Action scientists work collaboratively with participants to solve problems of practice in particular organizational learning contexts and encourage continued reflection and experimentation, employing a variety of methods for generating data, including observations, interviews, action experiments and participant-written cases and

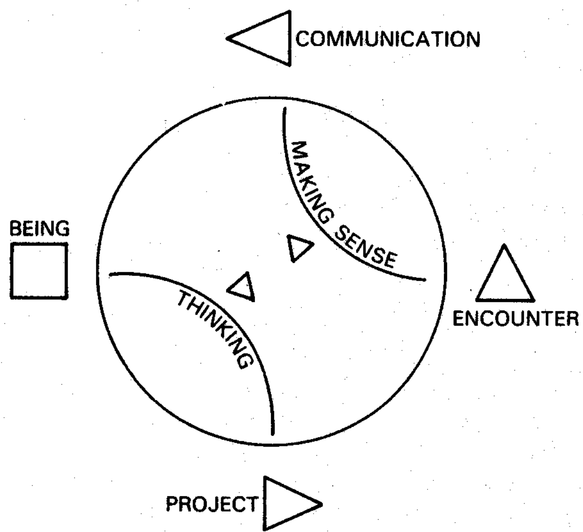

Fig. 1.1

Rowan's standard research cycle (Reason 1988 b, p 6)

accounts (Schwandt 2001).

Reason (1994) considers both action science and action inquiry as practices with the following purpose:

> "to engage with one's own action and with others in a self-reflective way, so that all become more aware of their behaviour and its underlying theories" (o.c. p. 332).

In this thesis I have used the term 'inquiry' more often than 'research'. Ladkin (2004) describes action inquiry as a specific type of action research, with a particular emphasis on the researcher's role in a situation, a definition congruent with my own, predominantly first person, inquiry (see section 1.3). Action inquiry also seemed to better capture my sense of curiosity and the way all aspects of my life seemed to become grist to the inquiry mill. Bill Torbert (1991 b) proposes action inquiry as a model for social science and social action "that is conducted in every day life (…)" rather than only within "sanitized experimental environments, survey designs, or reflective, clinical, critical settings" (o.c., p. 220l). He identifies four territories of experience: an intuitive knowing of purpose; an intellectual knowing of strategy; an embodied knowing of one's behaviour; and an empirical knowing of the outside world. He emphasises the importance for action inquirers to develop a quality of attention which enables them to see, embrace and correct incongruities amongst those four territories of human experience (1991 b; 2001).

1.2 The action research cycle

How then do action researchers develop this quality of attention, how do they inquire with rigour? Reason (1994) suggests that they must engage in both active and reflective processes. Despite the complex nature of action research, John Rowan (2001) argues that an underlying cycle can be found in this process of action and reflection, with a definite form and unavoidable stages (see fig. 1.1).

We normally start, according to Rowan, with just Being, when a disturbance, positive or negative arises, which requires us to take action. Before taking action, we get

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Fig. 1.2

An attempt at picturing my inquiry process: a messy pattern of interlocking, criss-crossing, loops and strands.

more information and process it, surveying the literature, talking to people, opening ourselves up for ideas. This is the Thinking phase, in which our research question crystallizes. At that point we invent a project, a plan of some kind, either individually or in consultation with others. At a certain point we need to stop planning and start doing something. This is the Encounter with reality, in which we open ourselves up to the possibility of disconfirmation and learning. At a certain point we need to stand back and make sense of our results. We can do that by contemplation and/or thinking, analysing and systematizing the obtained results. Eventually we arrive at something communicable that we put out in some form.

Throughout my inquiry process I had some difficulty with this concept of cycles of inquiry. I described my inquiry process as 'hop-scotching' (see fig. 1.2), a metaphor which intended to capture the following:

- I did not experience a neat sequence of being, a trigger to action, thinking, planning, acting and sense making. Instead I found myself hopping (hop-scotching) between the various moments in the cycle. Often I would reflect after an engagement with the world, my family, my colleagues my clients, without necessarily planning further action. On occasions there would not be an opportunity to plan and engage again. In chapter 5 I describe an extended reflection on an engagement with a client who subsequently summarily dismissed me and my colleague. Such reflections were nevertheless purposeful and valuable: trying to articulate the meaning I made of an encounter was part of my development as a person-in-the-world, be it in the role of family member, friend, partner, colleague or consultant.

- Reflecting in the heat of the moment was an important aspect of my inquiry. Torbert calls this reflection in action, and offers the following description: "an ongoing, facilitative, enlightening subsidiary awareness of how one is in action" (1991 (b), p. 223). This awareness, according to Torbert, is in itself an inquiry and a practice for a lifetime. In chapter 3 I compare this inquiry, in the context of a conversation with my mother, with Bohm's invitation

  "to give attention to the actual process of thought and the order in which it

happens, and to watch for its incoherence, where it's not working properly, and so on. We are not trying to change anything, but just being aware of it" (1996 p. 21). In other words, this is distinct from Rowan's "reflection in order to plan what to do next".

I describe many moments of reflection in action in my client accounts (Chapters 5 and 6).

- Nor did reflecting always generate more clarity and learning, at least not immediately. Sometimes I would only make connections much later, as I followed a cycle of reflection with yet another, working my way through my reflective diary, gradually beginning to notice patterns. Sometimes it seemed to leave me more confused, rather than clearer. In Ladkin's (2004) inquiry with action research students at Bath, one of the participants describes this as "being in fog". I described the experience as "wading through treacle" and "not seeing the wood for the trees", an indication of my occasional frustration with the seemingly confusing nature of the action research process.

- And finally, 'thinking' did not generate a clear research purpose for a long while, much longer than I was comfortable with. Indeed, in becoming an action researcher I learned that a substantial part of my inquiry needed to be invested in finding out what I needed to inquire into (Reason and Marshall 2001), what really energised me.

Discovering my research topic went hand in hand with finding a congruent research methodology. Thus I became increasingly confident in articulating my inquiry as first person research (see below).

1.3 Pathways of inquiry

In this section I aim to give an overview of my inquiry practices. In section 1.5 I examine the qualities of my research.

Torbert and Reason make a distinction between first-, second- and third-person inquiry (Reason and Torbert 2001; Torbert 2001), which Reason and Bradbury (2001 c) call ‘pathways of action research practice’. They offer one way of describing various forms of action research across the vast and diverse range of action research descriptions which I found useful to capture my various research practices.

In this section I will offer descriptions of those various pathways and situate my research practices predominantly in first and some second person inquiry, whilst exploring the potential for third person inquiry.

1.3.1 First person inquiry

First-person action research can be described as the researcher’s ability “to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act with awareness and to choose carefully and assess effects in the outside world while acting” (Reason and Bradbury 2001), and as “self-study-in-the-midst-of-action” (Torbert 2001). In “Research as Personal Process” (Reason and Marshall 1987), Peter and Judi assert that the motivation to do research is personal and expresses the need for personal development, change and learning. “It is for *me* to the extent that the process and outcomes correspond directly to the individual researcher’s being-in-the-world, and so elicits the response, ‘That’s exciting!’ – taking exciting back to its root meaning, to set in action” (o.c., pp. 112-113, italics in the text).

Like the students described by Judi Marshall (1992) I came to CARPP wanting to gain more insight into my professional practice, by exploring a topic related to organisational development. And like those students I wanted to gain personal learning in the process. In the course of my first year at CARPP I found my topic, the learning organisation, ‘dissolving mysteriously’ (Marshall 1992), as I began to explore issues of health, my personal history, myself in the context of my family. I was both energised by the possibility to inquire into what mattered for ‘my life’ as well as for my work, and deeply sceptical about its potential contribution to PhD research. But I was supported and challenged by Judi, my supervisor, and by my CARPP learning group, to engage with what was a times a deeply challenging

Bentz and Shapiro see mindful inquiry as a synthesis of four intellectual traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical social science and Buddhism (Bentz and Shapiro 1998). I experience the Buddhist practice of mindfulness as encapsulating the essence of the other three disciplines:

I associate the phenomenological call to pay attention to the nature of phenomena (Bentz and Shapiro 1998) with the Buddhist call "to probe with intense sensitivity" (Batchelor 1997), to become aware of the superstructures we have created (Beck 1989). Yet I do not consider myself a phenomenologist. Bentz and Shapiro (o.c.) state that in order to do phenomenology one must first become a phenomenologist, which requires immersion in the writings and language of phenomenology. I have not done so. But my accounts bear witness to my engaging with my own subjective experience and that of others, actively seeking to understand it through empathy and conversations, and looking for underlying patterns and structures (my account of joining ACL is a good example of that).

Buddhism seeks to alleviate suffering, leading to, as I see it, what Reason and Bradbury call "the flourishing of individual persons and their communities" (Reason and Bradbury 2001), or the equivalent of McNiff and colleagues' "worthwhile purposes" (McNiff, Lomax et al. 1996). I see it as an equivalent of emancipation and rightness, core aspirations of critical theory (Bentz and Shapiro 1998). However, I am not a critical theorist. I share with critical theory the belief that attention to the historical, political, economic and cultural circumstances in which I work is important. Choosing to engage in action research is the result of my desire to link my intellectual development with my political and social engagement. I seek to develop my practice as a consultant from the basis of my values. Contributing to 'human flourishing' (Heron and Reason 1997) is a core value in my practice.

Hermeneutic practices, I think are prevalent in my inquiry and in this thesis. In the process of writing this thesis, I have revisited texts (accounts, diaries, letters, papers), and allowed new meaning and new understanding to emerge (Bentz and Shapiro 1998). I associate this process with the Buddhist practice of attention (Beck 1989). Purists no doubt would point out that I could have paid more attention to the historical and social context of my texts. So I am not a hermeneutic practitioner in a pure sense. I am inspired by many aspects of Buddhism and aspire to continually improve my meditation practice and a quality of mindfulness as I go about my life, but it would be presumptuous to call myself a Buddhist. I draw on various disciplines of mindfulness. This action inquiry is one of them. *(Continued on page 40)*

inquiry. In chapter 3 of this thesis I explore in more detail this shift to a personal process of inquiry and the literature I drew on to help me value my inquiry as a worthwhile undertaking.

The authors of 'Mindful Inquiry' (Bentz and Shapiro 1998), wholeheartedly affirm the importance of first person inquiry: "Research is always carried out by an individual with a life and a lifeworld (…), a personality, a social context, and various practical challenges and conflicts, all of which affect the research (…)" (o.c., p.4). They further state that "your research is – or should be – intimately linked with your awareness of yourself and your world" (o.c., p.5).

Rowan's action research cycle' captures this movement between 'self' (being, thinking) and 'context' (encounter, communicating), but it is represented in a less linear way in Judi Marshall's (2001) description of her process of first person inquiry as a scanning and experiencing of 'inner and outer arcs of attention'. Judi describes inner arcs of attention as "seeking to notice myself perceiving, making meaning, framing issues, choosing how to speak out and so on" (o.c., p. 433). Thus, inner arcs of attention are concerned with awareness of 'self'. On the other hand

> "Pursuing outer arcs of attention involves reaching outside of myself in some way. (…) This might mean actively questioning, raising issues with others, or seeking ways to test out my own developing ideas. Or it might mean finding ways to turn issues (…) of inquiry in action" (o.c., p. 434).

Although Judi talks about moving between inner and outer arcs of attention, she also sees inner attentions as operating simultaneously with outer attentions. I would like to add that I experience 'inner attention', when I exercise it well, as also involving context awareness: as I explore my current sense of self, I am intrigued by the context I find myself in and its influence on how I experience and make sense of who I am in this moment.

Torbert (1991 b; 2001) points out that this first person inquiry practice is far from easy. "Not only are we individuals unpractised and unpolished in the domain of inquiry in the midst of our daily lives, but so also are our intimate relationships, our organizations, and social science itself" (2001 p. 251). Marshall (2001) reminds us

Having discovered "Mindful Inquiry" in the last year of my research, it is perhaps not surprising that my practice does not fit neatly in the categories above. Nor do I want to force-fit my practice in those disciplines. Nevertheless, I do want to acknowledge the impact Bentz and Shapiro's work had on me, and the way in which is continues to be an invitation to explore how I might further develop my inquiry practice.

Fig. 1.3: A tree as a metaphor for my first person inquiry practices.

With thanks to my sister for painting the picture.

that self-awareness is a highly contentious notion and that any self-noticing is framed and conducted by selves beyond the screen of our conscious appreciation: "The conscious self sees an unconsciously edited version of the world, guided by purpose". As well as being guided by purpose, our perspective on the world is informed by gender, social class, age, and so on, and by unresolved distress from earlier experiences, which "tends to be projected unawarely into all sorts of present situations, distorting perception of a situation and/or behaviour within it" (Heron 1988). Psychodynamic literature explores how those unresolved issues influence our behaviour and meaning making. I have found it valuable in my inquiry and return to it in the following chapters.

My first person inquiry practices

I have documented my inquiry practices extensively in the remainder of this thesis. In this chapter I do not intend to describe them again in detail, rather I give an overview.

The tree in Figure 1.3 aims to give a metaphorical representation of my first person inquiry processes. Metaphors never quite capture the full meaning of the reality they are intended to represent. I wondered about the environment in which to put my tree: a lush green pasture, a rocky surface, a city street, a sunny sky, lightening and rain, a moon lit landscape? I chose to leave the setting blank as the best way to represent its change-able character. What sort of tree would I chose: a palm tree, an ever-green, a leaf tree? Would it be flowering or bearing fruit? I am particularly fond of the large, proud oak trees in Tooting Common, a few minutes' walk from my home. But I wanted the trunk of the tree to be less straight, indicating the 'winding' nature of my inquiry processes. So I have drawn an imaginary tree. It bears flowers symbolising my sense of anticipation that my research will bear fruit. Finally, I liked the image of a living organism, indicating my intent to keep my inquiry alive.

The image of the tree, with its different branches, also intends to capture the fact that I see myself, in the words of Denzin and Lincoln (2000), as a 'bricoleur' researcher. The authors use the term to indicate a researcher who borrows from many different disciplines. In English it translates as 'potterer, jack-of-all-trades" (Cassell 1974). In

my native Flemish slang it is a somewhat derogatory term and it was often levelled against me in my childhood and adolescence with a 'master-of-none' connotation. Having internalised that criticism for a long time, it is not without pleasure that I have come to appreciate the richness that 'bricolage' can offer. Drawing on different approaches, I have tried to create my own unique blend of first person inquiry, seeking to integrate various practices at different stages of my research. They consist of what Reason and Torbert (2001) call "upstream" processes which develop mindfulness (meditation, psychotherapy, working with music and images, autobiographical writing) and "downstream" practices (critical examination of the impact of my actions on the wider world in conversations with critical friends and colleagues and in reflective writing; critically reviewing my practice from others' frameworks.

Mindfulness

I chose the roots of my tree to represent mindfulness in a Buddhist sense.
I see it as underpinning, or perhaps more accurately, suffusing all my other inquiry practices. I think of the Buddhist imperative to living mindfully (Batchelor 1997) as equivalent with Bill Torbert's (2001) call to increasingly exercise one's attention: "(…) as it evolves our first person inquiry will either become increasingly energized by a concern for the quality of our moment-to-moment experience of ourselves, (…) or it will cease to evolve" (o.c. p.251) and Judi Marshall's (2001) inner arcs of attention: "seeking to notice myself".

Meditation

Meditation has become a regular practice. As well as a nurturing experience in its own right, it is a means to develop my mindfulness as I go about my daily activities. Depending on the context, including my ability to 'sit' (Beck 1989) for a sustained period of time, it takes various forms, including Tai Chi and Chi Kung. On occasions I will punctuate my day with brief periods of turning my attention inward, attempting to quieten my mind.

Psychotherapy

The first few years at CARPP I was working intensively on a number of issues,

The clarinet was never really an instrument on my horizon. I liked early music in which the clarinet doesn't feature. I was given a clarinet by a friend (it belonged to her brother who had died) in 1990. Having learned to play the oboe, I thought I'd have a go. I didn't enjoy the experience, and the instrument was confined to the bottom of a cupboard. In November 2003, my friend Monique encouraged me to dust it off again. I was hooked. I had found my instrument. Or perhaps more appropriately, it had found me. Serendipity.

including health, in a psychotherapeutic context, as I describe in Chapter 3. Since then I have worked for shorter periods of time with different therapists. I try to remain choice-full about beginnings and endings and I imagine that I will continue to pursue this form of inquiry as I experience the need for it. Through psychotherapy I seek to explore and resolve old limiting patterns in order to become increasing able to be present in the moment and deal with the here and now (Hermann and Korenich 1997).

Working with music

Throughout this thesis I make reference to the music that accompanied my writing, and explored how it influences me in the process. I have also mentioned my brief singing practice as a means of finding my breath and my voice. As I have come to the last stages of writing this thesis I have, to my own amazement, taken up *playing* an instrument again. I have discovered and become infatuated with the clarinet. It is now a faithful companion on all my travels, a welcome meditative interlude to my writing and my work, a source of endless joy. I am gradually unlearning old music practice habits of mindless repetition and trying harder. Instead I "practice focussing" (Gallwey 2002): "being fully aware and present to the variables that matter" (p.58) whilst staying non-judgemental. I associate this focus with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness: paying full attention without judgement. It has made learning to play a new instrument an entirely novel experience.

The many years of tinkering with other instruments, with some dedication but without conviction, feel like valuable groundwork, another reason to appreciate my 'bricoleur' tendency.

At the moment I am still mainly playing from scores, but I'm gradually beginning to improvise. I am finding a new voice, or perhaps, as Judi put it during our CARPP meeting in May, 2004: "So you are allowing yourself to play your own tune".

Working with images

I have used images extensively in my inquiry and comment in various chapters on that process and how it contributes to the quality of my inquiry. My most intensive exploration of inquiring with images is captured in 'Transitions', the account of my transfer (from MPhil to PhD) experience (see chapter 5).

Action Learning

In the 1960s Reg Revans (1980; 1983) devised a method for developing managers which integrated learning and action, and which he called 'action learning'. In this, for the time, radical approach, Revans linked theory and practice by creating opportunities for managers to learn from each other by identifying issues and generating solutions in their daily work and live projects (Levy 2000).
Throughout the course of this inquiry I have been a member of an action learning set. At HPA my group consisted of health care professionals, and myself. All ACL staff are members of internal action learning sets. In my ACL learning set the main focus of our meetings is on members' practice as consultants, working with clients or as a member of the ACL community. On a number of occasions I have brought my inquiry as my topic for reflection. We seek to reflect purposefully and rigorously, through mutual challenge and support. My action learning experiences continue to be intellectually and emotionally stimulating and challenging. I tend to follow them up with another cycle of reflection in my diary writing.

Facilitating action learning sets in client organisations has become an important aspect of my work since 2004, I return to it in chapter 7.

Conversations

Conversations are at the heart of my inquiry and of my work as a consultant. Silverman (2000) reminds us that 'talk' has increasingly become recognized as the primary medium through which social interaction takes place. Torbert (2001)views "listening through oneself" as the quintessential first person inquiry method, and "speaking and listening with others" as the quintessential second person inquiry method. Throughout this thesis I explain how I have experienced conversations as a core aspect of my *first* person inquiry. As an outer arc of attention I have pursued different purposes in different kinds of conversations (Marshall 2001):

- I have already mentioned psychotherapy as a means to develop my ability to become more present in the moment, rather than to act out old responses to unresolved distress
- In conversations with my CARPP group, colleagues and critical friends I have

sought feedback on my inquiry processes. Nested in those conversations are: feedback on my writing as a process of inquiry, challenging the implicit and explicit assumptions I bring to my inquiry, other practices of inquiry (including working with images and music), my use of conceptual frameworks. I experience those conversations as a source of both depth and breadth: challenge encourages me to re-visit and critically question my inquiry practices for quality and appropriateness, at the same time I am often introduced to new avenues, new concepts and different perspectives.

- Inquiring conversations are also a way to become increasingly self-aware: CARPP, colleagues and clients are a key source of feedback on my practice as a consultant, which incorporates my conduct as a member of the ACL community as well as with actual clients (as illustrated in my accounts of my work with clients and inside the ACL community). The underlying question in those conversations centres on the extent to which others experience me as living the core value underpinning my life, my work and my inquiry: "To make a contribution to human flourishing". Another aspect of those inquiring conversations is to check my understanding of another person's contribution. I am aware that Bill Torbert (2001) considers those second person inquiry practices: "(to) publicly test with others whether they experience our actions from intent, through content and conduct, and into effect as harmonious" and "(to) publicly test whether we've heard another's words and whether our inferences and assumptions about what they mean align with their intent" (o.c. p 254). I will explain my difference in perspective in the next section.

In addition, conversations are my preferred means of developing my own thinking. I explore that conceptually in the next chapter, in my discussion of social constructionism, and on a pragmatic level in the remainder of this thesis.

Reading

The next chapter discusses in depth the conceptual frameworks I have engaged with and how I have gone about that in the course of my inquiry.

Writing

Writing has been a core inquiry practice for me, I see it as the trunk of my inquiry tree. In chapter 4 I elaborate on the various forms of writing I have engaged in (diaries, client accounts, letters, poetry and papers) and how I have used those forms as methods of inquiry.

- Writing this thesis has involved a number of inquiry cycles, which I discuss further in section 1.5.2, Sustained cycles of action and reflection.

Where extracts from previous writing (reflective diaries, accounts of client work etc.). appeared cryptic I have added comments to allow you reader to orient yourself. I have commented on the content, as well as on the process of crafting chapters, the latter being a core aspect of my writing-as-inquiry practice.

Having described my first person inquiry practices, I'd like to turn to the next pathway: second person inquiry.

1.3.2 Second person inquiry

Second person inquiry can be described as "our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern" (Reason and Bradbury 2001), and "speaking and listening with others" (Torbert 2001). Heron and Reason (2001) have written extensively about "co-operative inquiry" , a particular discipline of second-person inquiry.

Whereas Torbert (o.c.) considers "speaking and listening with others" as quintessentially second person inquiry, I have already mentioned how I consider 'conversations' as also a key form of first person inquiry. The distinction as I see it is one of purpose. If I am pursuing a personal agenda such as increasing self-awareness, receiving feedback on my practice, I think of conversations as first person inquiry, even if that agenda is ultimately in service of others (I will say more about that later). When we start from a shared agenda, I think of our conversations as second person inquiry. Thus my exploration of 'joining ACL' (in chapter 6) started as a first person inquiry. I sought to make sense of my personal experience and

invited colleagues to share their thoughts with me for that purpose. From our first meeting colleagues stated their personal interest in exploring the issue, and our inquiry became increasingly collaborative in nature. At a later stage I engaged with colleagues, and latterly with clients, inquiring into emotion work (Hochschild 1983; Mumby and Putnam 1992) and the value of relational practice in organisation consulting.

Thus, once others and I are working to a shared agenda, I think of the inquiry as second person. Whether it is participative depends to the extent it is genuinely *with*, *for* and *by* the people involved, rather than research *on* people (Heron and Reason 1997; Reason and Goodwin 1999; Reason and Torbert 2001; Rowan 2001). Colleagues assured me that they experienced our inquiry as a collaborative effort to improve the experience of joining ACL and to improve our consulting practice. Our inquiries did not, however, meet Heron and Reason's stringent criteria for a co-operative inquiry (Reason 1988(a); Heron 1996; Heron and Reason 2001) : they were less structured in nature as I found it difficult to establish a group with sustained membership, I did not initiate group members into the collaborative inquiry methodology and in some cases we did not make joint decisions about future action. Although we discussed implications of our inquiry, I carried forward some actions – jointly agreed as important – by myself (Heron 1996). I do not mean to devalue our inquiry. On the contrary: working with the situation we had, grasping the opportunity for inquiring conversations in the moment, introducing our inquiry questions in various other meetings, all added to creating a climate of sustained curiosity, to drawing other colleagues into our inquiry and ultimately to changing some of our practices in ACL, which I discuss in more detail in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Next I will put my inquiry in the context of Reason and Bradbury's (2001 c) third action research pathway.

1.3.3 Third person inquiry

Third person inquiry "aims to create a wider community of inquiry involving persons who, because they cannot be known to each other face-to-face (…), have an

June 2003

It is with a sense of irony that I notice the impact of writing this thesis on my practice as a consultant. In the midst of claiming that attention to emotions and relationality are important for (some of) us in the consulting business to flourish, I am having to limit my engagement with colleagues to an extent I am not comfortable with. Writing projects, such as the book chapter and articles are also on a low burner, if not on hold. I rarely attend conferences and workshops, and have systematically avoided speaking at conferences. I look forward to making that a priority when I have completed my thesis.

September 2004.

First occasion to fulfil my promise to myself: I am going to the "Emerging approaches to Inquiry' conference in Stroud.

impersonal quality. Writing and other reporting of the process and outcomes of inquiries can also be an important form of third-person inquiry" (Reason and Bradbury 2001 d).

As I am completing the final draft of this thesis, I cannot (yet) make many claims to third person inquiry practices. I am currently working on a chapter on 'Relational practice in consulting' for a book about Ashridge Consulting's practices, which we hope to have in press by 2005. It will provide me with a means to share the outcome of my inquiry with a larger audience.
I have introduced the concept of relational practice on the Ashridge Masters in Organisation Consulting. Participants have responded with interest and are currently exploring the implications for their practice as consultants.

Once I have completed this thesis I hope to publish in journals, and make contributions to conferences, sharing my passion for relational practice and some of the questions it raises with the wider world. In October 2004 I will contribute to a research conference for my academic and consulting colleagues in Ashridge.

1.4 On worldviews and the nature of knowing

Belenky and colleagues (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997) point out that our basic assumptions about the nature of truth, authority, evidence and knowledge profoundly affect our definition of ourselves, the nature of our interaction with the world and our conceptions of morality. Quite how important those assumptions are became increasingly clear to me in the course of my inquiry. My perspective evolved as a result of different influences. In the next chapter I explain how my naïve realism – there is a world out there, which I can know objectively - was profoundly challenged in the early 1990s, during my NLP training, and developed into a constructionist stance. I have since been influenced by Reason's participatory worldview (Reason and Goodwin 1999; Reason and Bradbury 2001), by Ralph Stacey's application of complexity theory to organisations (2000; 2001; 2003) and by social constructionism

(Shotter 1993 (2002 edition); Gergen 1999). They are relevant to my positioning as a researcher and are outlined in this thesis: Reason' participatory worldview is discussed below, I return to complexity theory and social constructionism chapter 2.

1.4.1 A Participatory Worldview

Reason and Bradbury describe the participatory worldview as

> "(…) systemic, holistic, relational, feminine, experiential, but its defining characteristic is that it is participatory: our world does not consist of separate things but of relationships, which we co-author. We participate in our world, so that the 'reality' we experience is a co-creation that involves the primal givenness of the cosmos and human feeling and construing" (2001 c pp 6-7).

The authors consider the participatory metaphor particularly apt for action research, because as we participate in creating our world we are embodied beings who are necessarily acting, and are therefore drawn to consider how to judge the quality of our action.

I am intuitively attracted to this position. Firstly, throughout this thesis, I take the view that my knowing develops in participation, in relationship with others. In the next chapter I elaborate this position from a social constructionist perspective. Secondly, in contrast to the relativism of social constructionism and its emphasis on the 'self' as constructed through language (Gergen 1991), I am reminded daily that I am a body, matter as well as mind, as I experience the world through my senses (I am currently watching the sun set over London). Thirdly, as a participating being I am necessarily acting, both in a somatic sense – to stop breathing is to stop being of this world-, and in a behavioural sense.

Reason and Torbert (2001) advocate moving beyond the 'linguistic turn' (Lincoln and Denzin 2000) (viewing reality as a human construction based in language) as an epistemological basis for action research, and taking an "action turn" in which we study ourselves in action in relation to others. The action turn places primacy on practical knowing as the consummation of the research work. Reason and Bradbury too argue that a "participatory perspective asks us to (…) see inquiry as a process of

coming to know, serving the democratic, practical ethos of action research" (2001, p. 7).

I believe the authors make a leap here from ontology and epistemology to methodology. From the ontological position that we are intricately connected with our world and each other, and that I cannot but act (Heron and Reason 1997), one can infer the importance of the experiential and of practical knowing. However, it does not, in my view, necessarily follow that methodologically my inquiry will subscribe to democratic values and increased human flourishing. Complexity theory and social constructionism too start from an assumption of connectivity, but Stacey and colleagues (Stacey and Griffin 2004) at the University of Hertfordshire argue that this does not necessarily lead to an ideological position in their methodologies. Even though they agree that value orientations are unavoidable in social research, they see the value underpinning their methodology, which they call 'emergent exploration', as "taking one's own experience seriously" and point out that this does not presuppose an ideology, but rather seeks to explore how values emerge in experience. One of my ACL colleagues is taking her PhD research at the University of Hertfordshire and we have had some intense conversations about this question. I've come to agree that, in theory, a participatory worldview doesn't necessarily lead to an emancipatory purpose in one's research. Nevertheless it is *my* purpose, and since I agree that all research is a political process (Marshall 1992) , questions about my purpose, strategy, action and outcomes (Torbert 2001) recur throughout this thesis.

1.4.2 Complexity theory and Social Constructionism

Because of the immediate influence of the complexity theory and social constructionism on my consulting practice, and my inquiry into that practice, they are discussed - somewhat inconveniently for you reader - in the next chapter and you may want to turn to that section in chapter 2 now.

Here I'd like to address the question of commensurability between the participatory paradigm on the one hand and complexity theory and social constructionism on the other. Stacey and colleagues appear to think they are not compatible. They see their

application of complexity to organisations, which they call 'the perspective of complex responsive processes', as giving very different meanings to concepts such as action, participation and relationship. They take issue with distinguishing between the individual and the social as separate levels (Reason and Bradbury 2001) but regard them as the same phenomenon, with the individual as the singular and the social as the plural of interdependent embodied persons. They understand mind as social process and think of the individual as social through and through (Stacey 2003). They question, as I explained above, the ideology underpinning action research and its values of cooperation, democracy, emancipation, human flourishing and sustainable development. Ideologies, they assert, are not pre-existing wholes, but are emerging in a process of discovery: "The negotiation of justifying action is not separate from but is rather very much part of the social act" (Stacey and Griffin 2004 p.8). I can't but notice that Stacey also considers his perspective of complex responsive process at odds with a psychodynamic one, but makes extensive use of psychodynamic concepts and frameworks.

Reason and Goodwin (1999), on the other hand, make a case for the remarkable similarities between constructionist and participatory approaches and complexity theory. Lincoln and Guba (2000) answer a "cautious yes" to the question whether it is possible to blend elements of one paradigm into another, so that one is engaging in research that represents the best of both paradigms. Lincoln (2001) points at the similarities between epistemological, ontological and axiological beliefs underpinning action research and constructivist inquiry and reassures researchers wishing to bridge those traditions that they can expect a 'relatively smooth vault'. I agree. From action research I take the commitment to action, to contributing to increased social justice, to research *with* rather than *on* people (Reason and Torbert 2001). Social constructionism, although hard to maintain in its strong form (Schwandt 2000) (see next chapter) challenges me to stay mindful that I always interpret the world through my linguistic constructions in social interaction (Shotter 1993 (2002 edition); Gergen 1999), to question my taken-for-granted assumptions and pay attention to my changing sense of self in different contexts. From both perspectives I greatly value an enriched and extended epistemology (Lincoln 2001), which I explore next.

When I was first introduced (in 1997) to Heron's extended epistemology , I was simultaneously excited and confused; excited by the possibility of validating forms of knowing other than propositional within the academy, confused by the terminology, the descriptions, and the hierarchy. And I found it difficult to locate aspects of knowing as I experience it (e.g. connected knowing) to the categories. Returning to it once more I find it easier to relate to. In the course of my inquiry I have taken a lot of trouble to understand better the various categories in many conversations with CARPP and work colleagues, to explore others' descriptions of the framework (I found Reason and Torbert's (2001) definition illuminating). I think it is also indicative of the fact that I have moved on in the way I relate to concepts and frameworks, from a rather 'received knowing' to a more 'constructed knowing' (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997). I am now comfortable with Heron's framework as one approach, rather than the (all encompassing) framework.

1.4.3 Multiple epistemologies

Action research draws on diverse forms of knowing, not just empirical and conceptual, but also experiential, tacit, presentational and aesthetic, relational and practical (Marshall and Reason 2003). Reason and Torbert (2001) provide a overview of a wide range of perspectives and invite practitioners to engage with and seek synchronicity between different modes of knowing across territories. Personally I have been inspired especially by John Heron's framework (1996), Belenky and colleagues' "Women's ways of knowing" (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997) and its sequel "Knowledge, Difference and Power" (Golberger, Tarule et al. 1996); by the social constructionist perspective and its forerunners (Mead 1967; Elias 1991; Shotter 1993 (2002 edition); Gergen 1999); and by writers reclaiming the importance of emotions in the process of knowing (Jaggar 1989; Mumby and Putnam 1992; Fineman 2000; Meyerson 2000; Sandelands and Boudens 2000; Waldron 2000; Fineman 2003) . Although I am critical of the direction the 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman 1996) literature is taking, I value the emphasis on the importance of emotion in knowing and the way this literature has managed to capture attention in the managerial arena (Goleman 1996; Fineman 2003). In the remainder of this section I describe how the above epistemological frameworks are present in my inquiry. (Frameworks on the role of emotions in the process of knowing are developed in chapter 2.)

Heron's extended epistemology framework

Heron (1996) challenges universities for considering propositional knowledge - intellectual statements, conceptually organized in way that does not infringe the rules of logic and evidence - as both pre-eminent and self sufficient. Instead he argues for a multi-dimensional account of knowledge, and of research outcomes. Propositional knowledge, he advocates, is interdependent with three other kinds:

> "(…) practical knowledge, that is evident in knowing how to exercise a skill, presentational knowledge, evident in an intuitive grasp of imaginal patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical and verbal art-forms, and

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experiential knowledge, evident only in actually meeting and feeling the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing" (o.c. pp 32-33).

According to Heron valid knowledge means that each of those four kinds of knowledge is validated by its own internal criteria, and by its interdependence and congruence with the others within a systemic whole. He sees this systemic whole as a dynamic up-hierarchy with experiential knowing at the bottom of the base of the pyramid, supporting presentational knowing, which in turn supports propositional knowing, which upholds practical knowing. Practical knowledge is the consummation of the knowledge quest, which means it takes the knowledge quest beyond the concern for validity and truth-values into the celebration of 'being' values. As Lather (1991) puts it: "(…) in our action is our knowing".

In my client accounts I have tried to capture my "participative, empathic resonance", **experiential knowing**, with others and how that influenced my actions and reflections. I also see the influence of music on my writing (documented throughout the thesis) as a form of experiential knowing. The *essence* of that knowing however, remains often tacit (Polyani 1958) and elusive of articulation.

There is considerable evidence of my experimentation with **presentational knowing**. Evidence and discussion of my purposeful pursuit of alternative forms of data representation (Eisner 1997), is most present in chapters 3 and 5.

Propostional knowing "is expressed in statements, theories, and formulae that come with the mastery of concepts and classes that language bestows" (Reason and Torbert 2001). Lincoln and Denzin (2000) point out that we are moving ever further away from grand narratives and overarching paradigms, which, according to Denzin (1996), leads to a 'legitimation crisis'. Lather (1991) invites us to think of the questioning of basic assumptions and the discrediting of a grand narrative as an opportunity, rather than a crisis. Gergen (1999) celebrates the ambiguity, diversity and new possibilities opened up by the demise of an overriding authority on what constitutes truth and knowledge. In this thesis I have critiqued 'universal recipes' for consulting and I have aimed to avoid replacing them by my own. The statements I make in chapters 4-7 about the nature of consulting, the emotion work involved in it

and the importance for of belonging to a community in which relationality and connection are valued and nurtured are tentative and intended as an invitation to dialogue. I have framed them as grounded in my personal experience.

Much of this thesis is dedicated to accounts of my **'practical knowing'** as a consultant, in my work with clients and colleagues. I have considered ways of 'showing' as well as telling, since narratives, however 'thick' (Geertz 1983), only ever give you my perspective (even if I include literal extracts of feedback, I am still the person selecting what is included). I have explored including filmed material of myself at work. In the end I decided against it – we have filmed consulting interventions, with colleagues and clients in ACL and I am aware of the extent to which it interferes with the dynamic in the group. I feel as reluctant as most of my clients claim to feel, to be on camera. Therefore the only evidence I can offer here of my practical knowing is 'secondary' in nature, except perhaps for the skill of writing itself.

Connected knowing

In "Women's ways of knowing" (WWK) (Golberger, Tarule et al. 1996; Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997), Belenky and colleagues develop the notion of voice as a metaphor for many aspects of women's experience and development. They claim that, in contrast with the visual metaphors most frequently used by scientists, which suggest a camera passively recording a static reality and encourage standing at a distance, women tend to ground their epistemological premises in metaphors that suggest speaking and listening. Speaking and listening suggest dialogue and interaction. Shotter (1993) argues that in addition to 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' there is a "kind of knowing one has only from within a social situation, a group, or an institution, and thus takes into account … the others in the social situation". It is not a knowing to be discovered, to be stored in files and journals, but arises in the process of living, in conversation. In the description of my first person inquiry practices I have discussed the importance for me of 'knowing in conversation'. In the next chapter I explore my 'knowing in connection' in the context of my dialogue with conceptual frameworks.

'Connected knowing' was a serendipitous discovery (Clinchy 1996) in the research underpinning WWK. In this research with 135 women the authors identify five epistemological perspectives, ways of knowing, which they place in a developmental sequence: Silence, Received Knowledge, Subjective Knowledge, Procedural Knowledge and Constructed Knowledge. In the sequel to WWK Goldberger addresses some of the critique levelled at the scheme as a developmental sequence (Golberger 1996). I elaborate on the sequence in the next chapter and connect 'constructed knowing' with social constructionism. Here I'd like to say that I don't take issue with the concept of a developmental sequence, but I am aware that I continue to find myself experiencing every one of the different stages. As with Torbert's developmental model (Fisher and Torbert 1995), I notice myself 'slipping back', often as a result of anxiety or re-awakened old patterns of distress. This inquiry has been a means to find more of my voice, more of my ability to be a constructed knower. It is also for that reason that I am attracted to social constructionism, which I experience as a continuing invitation to acknowledge that "different routes to knowledge have their place, their logic, and their usefulness" (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997).

Knowing in my body

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) see all knowing as held in the body: "The body dimension is important to us not just as some personal matter of fact but intellectually" (o.c., p. 45). Debold and colleagues (Debold, Tolman et al. 1996) point out that the Western tradition has authorized as knowledge the products of a mind abstracted from material reality – of the body, of human relationship, of the particulars of people's lives. They make a case for 'embodied knowing'. Bodily knowing, for me, straddles Heron's experiential and practical knowing. Mindfulness (see 'First person inquiry') too I see as an 'embodied knowing'. In my accounts of my client work (chapters 5 and 6) I show examples of the impact of an increased awareness of myself on my practice as a consultant.

Not knowing yet, not knowing any more

Judi Marshall (2001) describes her inquiring as a compelling aspect of being curious, inquisitive and open to testing self and others, as "living continually in process,

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adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question" (Marshall 1999) . Constructed knowing, Belenky and colleagues point out, requires one to overcome the notion that there is one right answer, or a right procedure in the search for truth (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997). Not knowing is also at the heart of Buddhist mindfulness: "Inquiry doesn't mean looking for answers, especially quick answers which come out of superficial thinking. It means asking without expecting answers, just pondering the questions, carrying the wondering with you (…)" (Jon Zabatt-Zinn, cited in (Bentz and Shapiro 1998).

I consider helping clients to become or stay inquiring to be at the core of my consulting practice. Mason's (1993) discussion of the danger of looking for the 'Right Answer' in a therapeutic context, was a revelation to me. Making an interesting link between looking for the 'right answer' and the concept of 'solutions', he suggests a new definition: "dilemmas that are less of a dilemma than the dilemma one had". Clients he believes, ask for help from one of two states in relation to their dilemma: unsafe uncertainty, or unsafe certainty, and are looking to find safe certainty. In our practice, he believes, we need to move towards a position of safe uncertainty, which always is in a state of flow, and is consistent with the notion of a respectful, collaborative, evolving narrative. I think his analysis and advocacy is equally applicable to my consulting practice.

In the next section I consider the qualities of my inquiry.

1.5 Is my research valuable work well done?

In the post-modern era, characterised by a loss of belief in an objective world and an incredulity toward meta-narratives of legitimation, validity is a controversial issue (Lyotard 1984). Kvale (1989) questions the wisdom of trying to fit the qualities of action research into a traditional discourse about validity whose concerns have little to do with those of action research. Wolcott (1990) advocates dismissing validity altogether. Denzin (cited in Lather (2001)) famously said in 1994: "I don't need

validity. These are the things poststructuralism and postmodernism teach me". Other authors disagree. Heron (1996) advocates that the concepts of validity and truth are too central to the integrity of everyday life and discourse to be abandoned by the research community. Lather (2001) continues the validity dialogue in order to mobilize the baggage it carries and, simultaneously, to rupture validity as a 'regime of truth'. Lincoln (2001) argues that, whatever the paradigm in which research is undertaken, it is still imperative that audiences for research understand the grounds on which it was undertaken, the methods adopted to realize the findings, and the processes which are used to create and present the findings. She suggests an ongoing dialogue about emerging criteria (Lincoln 1995).

Where do I turn for support for my claim that I have undertaken my research with quality if "validity is virtually synonymous with trouble these days" (Lincoln 2001)? If there is no longer a validity grand-narrative, what criteria do I apply to my research and how do I choose them? Lincoln's invitation to an ongoing dialogue appears particularly appropriate here: dialogue with my CARPP and ACL colleagues, dialogue with practitioners and researchers, with my clients, and with texts of the many authors who contribute to the emergence of criteria. There is an intimidating (to me at least) range of approaches to validity, all of which shed a different shade of light on the quality questions. In the remainder of this thesis I have endeavoured to demonstrate the qualities of my inquiry as it progressed, choosing to draw on particular frameworks because they seemed particularly appropriate for the inquiry practice under review, or because the questions they raised were particularly alive for me in that moment.

Kvale (1989) suggests that in a post-modern era, with its focus on local context and on the social and linguistic constructions of a perspectival reality, knowledge is validated through practice. Justification of knowledge, he argues, is replaced by application; knowledge becomes the ability to perform effective actions. The impact of my practice has been an ongoing underlying question for me. In the context of organisation consulting this question is ambivalent to say the least: effective according to whom, in service of what? What my clients, or indeed my colleagues, would see as effective consulting can be at odds with my own sense of effectiveness,

So many authors argue for the importance of values in post-modern research, that I am left with a sense of defeat, not unlike when writing acknowledgements: there is no possible way to acknowledge everyone, to acknowledge a few seems inadequate, not to acknowledge anyone not an option. I could well cite most of the contributors to the Handbook of Action Research (Reason and Bradbury 2001 a). Reason and Torbert (2001) argue convincingly that, despite the engaging sympathies between constructionist approaches and action research (Lincoln 2001), constructionist approaches do not address the moments of action when our subjective framing may be muddled, or when we are uncertain in action, rather than reflectively at rest, analyzing data. However, it appears to me that constructionist contributors to the 'Handbook of qualitative research' (Lincoln and Denzin 2000) are equally exercised by the values underpinning their research and work, and energised to contribute to a more just world.

and more problematically perhaps, with my values. Many authors in the qualitative research domain argue the importance of values in postmodern research (as opposed to the modernist 'value-free' imperative). Kvale (o.c., p. 35) elaborates his call to effectiveness: "Deciding what are the desired results involves values and ethics". Weil (2004) reminds us that in the post-positivist paradigm action research *is* social change, rather than *about* social change. Reason and Torbert (2001) argue that the purpose of inquiry is not primarily to contribute to the fund of knowledge in a field, but to forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment-to-moment personal and social action, so that inquiry contributes directly to flourishing of people, their communities and the ecosystems of which they are part.

The centrality of the 'call to action' in the CARPP community is what drew me to it in the first place. I have been energised by Reason and Bradbury's (2001 d) seemingly straightforward question: "Is it valuable work done well?", throughout my inquiry. In chapter 3 I use their supporting criteria to evaluate my first year's inquiry. Here I will assert my claim for having done 'valuable work' (1.5.1) and address some over-arching (rather than to specific facets of my inquiry) questions of its qualities.

1.5.1 Valuable work?

Earlier in this chapter I raised questions about worthiness of my purpose: "Who decides what is a 'worthwhile purpose' and worthwhile for whom?" Reason and Marshall (1987) advocate that all good research is for *me*, for *us* and for *them*": "It is *for me* to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher's being-in-the-world (…), it is *for us* to the extent that it responds to concerns of our praxis, is relevant and timely (…), it is *for them* to the extent that it produces some kind of generalizable ideas and outcomes which elicit the response "That's interesting" from those who are struggling with problems in their field of action" (o.c, pp. 112-113, italics in the original). How does the pursuit of my purpose to improve my consulting practice meet their requirements?

Of course I get critical feedback too, although not usually in writing. In chapters 3, 4 and 5 (mainly) I discuss how I have worked with critical feedback. Here I have chosen some examples of positive feedback to support my claim that I am developing my practice.

Feedback :

From a client (also consultant) in response to an article I wrote for 'Converse', the AC journal, based on my reflective diary

I have read, a little belatedly, the article on your experiences in Edinburgh. Remarkably, it brought tears to my eyes. I think this is because that's the type of consultant I aspire to be and the type of consulting I want to do.

Note: the article mentioned above is included in Appendix 1 (King 2004). It is based on my client account of my work with Strategic Solutions Partnership. I refer to it again in Chapter 5.

From a colleague. We regularly attend the same meetings, some of them facilitated by me

Poised but not 'unassailable' (willing to share your personal challenges/weaknesses/ where you fluffed it/etc.) - "appropriately vulnerable"?
At ease with yourself but willing to develop; content, but not satisfied with standing still. I was significantly impressed with your listening, questioning and 'checking' with the person speaking/sharing

From a client, after a development meeting for internal consultants which I facilitated

I too enjoyed the meeting and I was observing you at one point, feeling very impressed with your interventions about the different perspectives we held as well as the ones that might be hidden to us (the difficulty for an HR person facilitating Action Learning, the balance of power in relationships, the patterns we create etc). I was left feeling impressed with the breadth of your knowledge and energised by the thought of working in a similar way in organisations.

Is it valuable **for me**?

Through my inquiry I have improved my practice. How do I know? I know it experientially, tacitly. I am more confident, feel more present with my clients, more self-aware, and I am more successful. In the course of my inquiry I have been promoted to business director at Ashridge Consulting. The client accounts and diary extracts in this thesis illustrate *how* my inquiry processes have contributed to the development of my practice. I have also sought feedback from colleagues and clients. Examples of feedback are included in further chapters, here I include a few recent examples (from 2004) on page 76.

Recognising the importance of emotion work and of connection in my practice as a consultant has greatly contributed to the quality of my practice and to my own well-being in my role as a consultant, as I describe in chapters 6 and 7.

But my inquiry is about more than my practice as a consultant:

> "As a person increasingly adopts intentional first person research/practices, she or he is increasingly waking up to the possibility of integrating inquiry and action in the present moment, no matter what that moment be" (Reason and Torbert 2001).

As my inquiry developed so my stated purpose became more encompassing and in chapter 4, following a challenge from a CARPP colleague, I formulated it as "contributing to human flourishing". That purpose guides me from the most mundane encounters 'on the bus', to my relationships with neighbours, friends and family. Most touching for me has been the impact of my inquiry on my relationship with my immediate family (See chapter 3). Learning to look after myself has been an important aspect of that.

Is it valuable **for us**?

In this thesis I describe how I have shared my research with colleagues and how that developed in a budding second person inquiry. At the time of writing I am engaging with clients (practicing consultants in the Ashridge Masters in Organisation Consulting (AMOC) and on other programmes for consultants). They have been interested in my research in emotion work and relational practice in consulting. Some are sceptical, many are intrigued, and some have assured me it has had a

Networking for consultants

Are you an internal or independent consultant? Are you looking for support and challenge in your role?

In our work with organisations we often collaborate with internal and independent consultants. The potential loneliness of that role and the need for support in one's work and learning is a regular topic of conversation. We would like to help and have been exploring various networking options, including: workshops around specific topics, seminars, practice supervision, action learning groups and membership of our Virtual Learning Resource Centre. There is a wide range of possibilities and we would really like to hear what might be the most interesting and helpful approach for you.

Here are some of our current questions:

Would you prefer to liaise with people in a similar role to you (e.g. if you are an internal consultant would you be most interested in a network of internal consultants only?)

How much time would you want to invest over what kind of period?

What is the group size that would work best for you?

What are your key areas of interest?

If you are looking to connect with other professionals we would love to hear from you by email, phone or mail.

Please share your views with

Sarah Beart: sarah.beart@ashridge.org.uk +44(0)1442 841432,

Sally Hulks: sally.hulks@ashridge.org.uk +44(0)1442 841301 or

Kathleen King: kathleen.king@ashridge.org.uk +44(0)1442 841435.

We look forward to getting connected.

The above advert appeared in the second issue of Converse, the Ashridge Consulting Journal, in January 2004

profound impact on their thinking and their practice. One client told me she finally felt able to value her need for connection rather than to construct it as a lack of independence. She has created her own support network of peers. We are currently exploring the possibility of offering networking opportunities for independent and internal consultants at Ashridge (See advertisement on page 78).

Our inquiry in ACL into the process of joining has generated changes in the way we welcome new colleagues and in our mentoring practice, with positive results (see chapter 5).

Is it valuable **for them**?

I hope that my research will be of interest to other consultants. Issues of attachment, emotion work and relationality are rarely addressed in the mainstream consulting literature. I believe it is time we do so. For all the current literature about relationality and connectivity, from social constructionist, complexity theorist to post-modernists, , much of the consulting literature remains focussed on the autonomous, independent, self-reliant consultant. I hope to continue to make a contribution to developing an alternative perspective.

Finally, I believe that improving my practice is also valuable for my clients. As I improve my practice, I aim to better contribute to organisations where people can flourish. That often entails challenging the organisational culture and values, which can be uncomfortable and on occasions downright scary. It sometimes means I choose not to work with a client, or I lose a client in the process. It is a consequence I have to take, and I am fortunate to be supported in that by my organisation. I wholeheartedly subscribe to Patricia Maguire's (2001) warning that action research must not become a depoliticised tool for "improving practice" devoid of critical understanding of power relations and structures. Improving my practice is not about contributing to more effective exploitation or oppression.

link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/k_king.html

Kvale's (1995) anecdote about the abstract and esoteric terms validity, reliability and generalization, used to "differentiate between students who had, and those who had not, pledged allegiance to the scientific trinity of psychology" (p. 20) brought a smile to my face. I too had been plagued and bewildered by them. During my first year at the University of Louvain, the course in psychometrics was considered one means to shift the 'have what it takes' from the rest, the test being our ability to memorize enormous quantities of validity, reliability and generalisability scores of different instruments. Little wonder that I viewed academic discussion of validity with scepticism when embarking on my PhD research. But the validity discourse had moved on. It was a pleasant surprise to find authoritative authors in the field admitting their boredom with anonymised essays written "by nobody for no-one" (Ellis and Bochner 2000) and expressing concerns about their presence and voice in their text (Weil 1996). And yet, I still had/have the occasional niggling doubt. Do I need to squeeze my work in others' validity criteria in order to get acknowledgment for the quality of my work? Would I have been better off not making a bid for acceptance by the academy? Should I have written articles or a book instead? What does acceptance by the academy signify for me? Has my choice to embark on PhD research been a matter of pragmatism: join the club and then critique from within? It is the subject of an ongoing conversation with ACL colleagues. My tentative answer is that inquiring within an academic framework (at CARPP) brought a discipline and sustained quality to my work it would have lacked otherwise. Through CARPP I have also discovered new perspectives, new writing, new questions. The 'validity' challenge for me then is to exercise choice in the criteria I work with, and to work with them in dialogue so that they may further enrich my inquiry.

1.5.2 Work done well?

How would I articulate the qualities of my inquiry process?
For this chapter I have chosen, from the myriad of emerging criteria, the ones which I found most energising (vexing on occasions) and appropriate to my inquiry, whilst aiming to avoid duplication with quality discussions in the remainder of this thesis.

Sustained cycles of action and reflection

I have already explained how I don't really see my research fitting neatly in Rowan's model (2001). It has been a more messy and emergent process than the movement suggested by Rowan's image (See fig. 1.2). Nevertheless, the discipline of reflecting repeatedly on previous experiences and the meaning I made of them in the moment or shortly afterwards, has been an invaluable source of learning. In that process my research theme gradually unfolded, opening itself up as it were for further reflection, active experimentation and learning. This development in my practice and sense making, and my initial struggle with developing sustained backwards and forward loops of inquiry are, I think, demonstrated throughout this thesis, and particularly prominent in my reflections from 2003-2004 on my work for HPA and on joining Ashridge Consulting.

Crafting this thesis has involved a number of cycles. I started to draft the first chapters in the summer of 2002. Those drafts were shared with my supervisor and CARPP colleagues for feedback, which we discussed at our regular meetings. The process of choosing which feedback to follow up and which to only note was not always easy. Some comments, although thought provoking seemed to take me off at what seemed to be a tangent, and were not followed up beyond our conversation. Subsequent drafts were again shared with Judi Marshall, colleagues at CARPP and ACL and some of their feedback has been incorporated in the final version of this thesis. Sometimes the feedback I received encouraged me to explore other frameworks, or to review and change aspects of my practice. The entire process spanned a period of two years (2002-2004).

Critical subjectivity

I have already mentioned (first person inquiry, above) Peshkin's (1988) and Bentz and Shapiro's (1998) advocacy that researchers should seek out their subjectivity in the course of their research. Reason (1994 pp 326-327, italics in original) describes critical subjectivity as follows:

> "Critical subjectivity means that we do not suppress our primary subjective experience, that we accept that our knowing is from a perspective; it also means that we are *aware* of that perspective and of its bias, and we *articulate* it in our communications. Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing".

Weil (2004) and Lincoln (1995) speak of 'reflexivity' as the ability of meaningful research to heighten self-awareness and create personal and social transformation.

Reason and Torbert (2001) suggest that researchers can develop critical subjectivity through first person "upstream" inquiry practices, such as autobiographical writing, psychotherapy, meditation, martial arts, and other disciplines which develop mindfulness. My upstream processes are documented extensively in Chapter 3. They are ongoing as an essential aspect of my life and my consulting practice, and further evidenced throughout this thesis, especially through my reflective diary writing.

Voice

The metaphor of 'voice' in action research has a central place in feminist and action research (Maguire 2001). Participatory action research argues for the articulation of points of view that have traditionally been marginalised by the dominant discourse. Thus feminist activist and scholars (Miller 1986; Gilligan 1993; Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997) have been preoccupied with women speaking from an about their own experience. Lincoln (1995) offers the criterion of 'voice' as resistance to disengagement and marginalisation, and invites us to ask questions such as who speaks, to whom, for whom, and for what purpose. Those questions have implications for my first and second person inquiries. I will explore each in turn.

link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/k_king.html

Lather (1993) nurtures a 'fertile obsession' with validity, in order to create a provisional space in which a new science might take form. Seeking to position validity as "an incitement to discourse" she has developed four anti-foundational frames under the broad category of 'transgressive validity':

- Ironic validity foregrounds the difficulties in representing the social and undercuts practices of representation. It foregrounds truth as a problem.
- Neo-pragmatic validity arises through fostering difference, allowing contractions to remain in tension and refusing closure.
- Rhizomatic validity arises when the text presents multiple, contradictory voices.
- Situated/voluptuous validity concerns the quality of the voice in the text: embodied, emotional and reflective, rather than disembodied.

I had to return repeatedly to her 'Fertile obsession' to remind myself of the meaning of her different validity frames, and even then found them somewhat overlapping. Reason and Torbert (2001) offer a helpful, accessible explanation, which had informed my description above.

According to Lincoln (1995), Patti Lather's first publication of her work with women living with HIV/Aids was intended for the women themselves. I am curious about the language she has used in that publication. Despite her very interesting contribution to the 'validity dialogue' I found her terminology highly academic and esoteric on occasions. I think Lather may sometimes be at risk of falling short of the criterion of 'democratic sharing of knowledge' rather than writing for a privileged (academic) elite (Lincoln, o.c.).

***First person inquiry*.**

Susan Weil (1996) vividly describes her aspiration to construct a narrative for her PhD that had viability in the eyes of the academy, without undermining her sense of herself as a person and adult educator. Unfortunately I had been sufficiently socialised in the 'higher education' paradigm to assume a sanitised, depersonalised narrative was the price I would have to pay for crossing the ultimate academic hurdle, despite the fact that I had little interest in, or patience with such narratives. The support of the CARPP community enabled me to value others' voices in their texts initially, and subsequently to find the confidence to articulate my own.

'Voice' has different qualities in my research.

Firstly, in the early stages of my inquiry I was experimenting (and struggling) in my new role as a change agent, and in constructing a new role for myself in my family. Presenting myself in this inquiry authentically, struggles and all, facilitated, rather than inhibited my writing as a process of inquiry. I found much support in the qualitative inquiry community for this *embodied, emotional, reflective voice* (Marshall 1992; Weil 1996; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Richardson 2000), which Lather (1993) calls situated/voluptous validity. I believe my embodied voice is present throughout this thesis.

Secondly, social constructionist (Shotter 1993 (2002 edition); Gergen 1999) authors emphasise the importance of *showing the constructed nature* of one's perspective. Lather (o.c.) talks about ironic validity as 'resisting the hold of the real' (p 685). Throughout this thesis I have aimed to show how I have constructed my perspective by discussing my underlying assumptions in the text, by cycles of reflection which often surface different interpretations of a particular event, and by documenting my use of images as metaphors of constructed reality. I have continually aimed to 'own' my findings, to present them as true for me in the moment of writing, rather than as yet another meta-narrative or prescription about the nature of consulting.

Thirdly, I have sought to bring multiple first person voices into my inquiry, in a process aspiring to what Weil (1996) has called "Braiding Many Strands in a Complex Whole". I began to explore different voices purposefully in the process of writing accounts of my client work: alternating a story telling voice with a reflective voice. When words failed me I found voice in music and images. In the process of

*Paul, my colleague and mentor, recently (August 2004) pointed out to me that as well as broad, an invitation by ACL list is also a **non**-invitation, since many people ignore list mails. I argued that I was relatively new to ACL at the time and might do it differently now. At the same time it is still the best way I know to include the entire community.*

crafting this thesis, other voices were added: the voice that addresses the reader, comments, tells about my writing process; and the 'academic voice' that discusses concepts and frameworks.

Second person inquiries and voice

In the context of my second person inquiries, the criterion of 'voice' raises questions for me about the ways in which I have initiated those inquiries, for what purpose, who was invited and the voices I have included or omitted in this text (Lincoln 1995). In my initial inquiry (2000) with colleagues into the difficulties we experienced in joining ACL, I attempted to include well established colleagues as well as other 'new joiners'. In the process only the people for whom the experience was still hurting (including a colleague who had been with Ashridge for over a year) showed an interest. Finding our voice, and putting it out in the community in a way in which it could be heard (humorous, light-hearted and witty) was one outcome. The text we produced (see chapter 6 and appendix 2) was a genuine attempt at capturing each of our experiences. Others outcomes were the changing discourse in ACL about the needs of new members of staff and the responsibility of the community and an increased, ongoing to this day (2004), sense of connection.
In my diary extracts and client accounts I include voices of colleagues, on many occasions in disagreement with my own, what Lather (1993) would consider an indication of rhizomatic validity.

In the process of inquiring into 'emotion work in consulting' I bumped up against some possible draw-backs of a relational inquiry approach (Reason and Bradbury 2001 c). I had cast my net widely, inviting everyone in ACL to participate by emailing the ACL list. As a result many people expressed interest, and I found myself working with different groups of people, often with different agendas (as described in chapter 6). Not wanting to exert undue control I went with the flow. The results were interesting, but not what I had aimed for initially. Ladkin (2004) describes a similar difficulty in inviting post graduate students at Bath for an inquiry.

Aiming to ensure people's voices were done justice in my text I shared my notes with them, and again my write-up for this thesis, which led to some interesting further

reflections and inquiry with my critical readers.

Writing this thesis I have shared draft chapters with colleagues at ACL, and you will find some of their comments included in the text.

Community as arbiter of quality

With this criterion Lincoln (1995) invites us to acknowledge that new-paradigm research takes place in, and is addressed to a community. It aims to serve the purposes of the community in which it was carried out, rather than the community of knowledge producers and policy makers. At HPA, my inquiry was ultimately aimed at my clients in the organisation. However, as I discuss in chapter 4, very few of my clients, with the exception of some critical friends, were interested in my research. As a result, my inquiry went underground, only to surface at CARPP meetings. It took me some time to build enough confidence to start sharing my inquiry at ACL. The first occasion was an action learning set, where I discussed my preparations for my transfer from MPhil to PhD. The response was mixed, with some support, but much challenge about the value of a predominantly first person inquiry and my very broad inquiry question "how can I contribute to human flourishing in my consulting practice?" It was quite hard to deal with the challenge, at the same time it had the result that colleagues started to volunteer feedback about how I did/didn't contribute to their 'flourishing' in our work together. When I raised more narrowly defined topics, such as 'emotion work in consulting' colleagues seemed to find it easier to relate to my inquiry and some were keen to join, work load permitting. Since 2003 I have become more assertive in engaging colleagues in my inquiry, and more confident of its value. Recently (2004) I have started to share questions with colleagues and clients about relationality (Fletcher 1998) and advocacy and communion (Bakan 1966) in consulting, and have met with surprising (to me) levels of interest (as described in chapters 6 and 7). I aim to continue share my learning with the wider consulting community, as I described earlier.

Aesthetic Quality

Bleakley (2000) points out that "much academic writing in education can be said to lack body and image" (p 12). Richardson (2000) too makes a case for paying attention to the aesthetic qualities of our writing. This attention has taken different

forms in this thesis:

- I have attempted to write 'well'. What *well* means is of course influenced by my own experience of what 'reads well'. Thus I have attempted to be present in the text, to signpost the content both in language and by using diagrams (see chapter 5) and timelines, to create a text as engaging as I found possible, whilst meeting academic requirements
- Since I enjoy a text lit up by images I have included some of the images I worked with in my inquiry process. The images on the front page of every chapter aim to evoke the mood of the chapter, as well as to provide a refreshing pattern-interrupt of a steady flow of words.
- Finally I have carefully selected the music to accompany your reading. That has meant that on occasions I had to change the original selection (chosen because it played an important role in a cycle of inquiry captured in the chapter), as I came to realise that music to read with may well be different from music to write reflections with. I have also eventually chosen a relatively homogenous selection of classical music, rather than to include jazz or popular music, in order to not interrupt the flow. The Bulgarian choir is perhaps an exception to this. I explain my choices in every chapter.

As I draw the exploration of validity to a close, I am aware of the many possible validity criteria I have left un-addressed. Nevertheless, I have aimed to substantiate my claim that my research has been valuable work well done (Reason and Bradbury 2001 d). I continue to address questions about quality in the remainder of this thesis.

In the next chapter I share some of the frameworks that have informed my inquiry and my practice.